

## EUROPE AND ISLAM:

### HISTORIC DYNAMICS

#### PROLOGUE TO A COMPARATIVE HISTORY

How can we justify a comparative study between one idea that is originally essentially geographical and another that is essentially religious? If, on another hand, we examine the two terms on the basis of their currently accepted meaning, and the two realities on the basis of their present content, such a comparison may not become more comprehensible. But in reality, Europe has expanded beyond its physical boundaries: in this sense it is the matrix and historical point of reference both for America and Australia, and even for Russia. With reference to scientific and technical civilization, its inventions and attainments coincide with the modern strata of activity of all contemporary societies. On the contrary, politically it crouches within its West-European nucleus, trying to construct a new identity, limited and distinct, based on specificities that should distinguish it from everything it has projected outside, and from everything it has subjected and denied. This suggests the multiplicity of levels and perspectives. We observe the same kind of complexity with regard to Islam. As a political, economic, cultural and religious unity, the term

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Islam would be valid only for a short length of time (800-850 A.D.). Actually, Islam was hardly ever able to coincide to the same extent the different parts making up its unity. At the apex of its cohesion as a political empire—under the Omayyads—Islam was no more than the religion of the Arab conquerors. Most of society had neither been converted, nor had Islamic principles and culture penetrated into it. At the apex of its cohesion as a culture, faith and community—from the 10th to the 12th centuries—Islam was crumbling politically, experiencing a more and more marked revival of local traditions. Like Europe, Islam left its original, central axis to spread its faith, and to a great extent, the way of life associated with it—in Indonesia, China, the northern part of the Indian peninsula, Asia Minor, the Balkans, and even in Africa. Iran itself, that in the past was deeply involved in the elaboration of classic Islamic culture, detached itself from Islam's destiny before the Safevids—without repudiating the religion, but giving it its own particular form. Today the Arab world claims the Islamic heritage as its own, intimately linking it to its historic consciousness. It plays the role that contemporary Western Europe plays, not only as the cradle of Islamity (in Europe we would speak of Europe-*anity*), but because it differentiates itself *de facto* from other *exterior* or *peripheric* Islamic groupings. The Arab world has taken possession of the historic idea of Islam, setting it up as the center of its perspectives. The ancient *Umma* thus brings about a transferring and shrinking more from the entire Islamic area into the single Arab area, acquiring an emotional, politico-ideological content.

We find that while the shrunken and banal contemporary Europe can scarcely be compared to the one Arab world, Europe as a historical culture and great civilization finds its equal in the great Islam—both its community and its civilization—or in the Chinese world, which was another cultural matrix that had expanded outside of its boundaries, becoming the model and reference point for a vast territory. The fact that contemporary Islam has no more in common than pure faith, and that the type of civilization of European origin—from New Zealand to the United States—can in no way lay claim to any kind of concrete entity, relegates both of them to a pure historical finality. Our one fundamental reservation is that we are not dealing with dead

cultures, but with still living historical subjects. A historical philosophy like Spengler's would find no difficulty in aligning on the same comparative map Antiquity, the Ancient Orient, Islam, Europe, and the American Indian civilization. On the other hand, geopolitics, limiting its range and vision to the modern horizon, and neglecting the depth of the historic field, would be able to divide the world into seven, eight or ten regions, or politico-economic units, placing Europe equidistant to America as well as to South East Asia. Yet while it is true that no civilization actually dies in its deepest essence, the "dead civilizations" are certainly dead on a conscious level, as they are in each of their particular manifestations. The best response to the an-historic position of geopolitics is not only to bring to light all that moves men on an ideologico-cultural level, but to oppose the idea of historic continuity to that of its discontinuity, and to oppose the infinite rebirth of action in the framework of the past to the sense of the absolute newness of modern times.

There is a serious obstacle to our analysis which, however, does not deal with the definition of terms or the envisaged perspective. What clearly illustrates the similarity between their destinies and justifies making the effort of a comparative study is that Islam and Europe are both living historical civilizations, with universal outlooks, that have undergone ruptures and metamorphoses, and that possess both a center and a periphery. However, the European adventure, that is so limited in time to its four centuries of creativity, though its attainments are so questionable, has proved to be decisive and exemplary for all of present and future humanity. We are told that it cannot be compared to any other present or past civilization, except perhaps the neolithic one. We cannot dismiss this kind of opinion by accusing it of Eurocentrism, since Europe's attainments actually have abundantly surpassed all that ancient civilizations have ever created. Besides which, worshippers of non-European historic civilizations never challenged the very privilege connected with Europe's creations, but rather their stifling excess that tomorrow will perhaps prove to be mortal. They oppose a humanity that respects nature and loves God to a rational and destructive Euro-American humanity, the former being like Europe's past, or its negative. In this respect the singularity of Europe's destiny would render it incomparable to any other society, or would

put it in opposition to all. Under these conditions, how can we justify a comparative study?

We shall therefore set forth two main reasons that involve a classical problematic that has already become obsolete, and a basic postulate that is less so. Why did Islam—or China—fall apart where Europe took off like a bullet: in the realm of science, of thought, and finally in that of technology? This is even more true in the case of Islam than of China, because while China represents the absolute alternate, Islam has aspects in common with Europe, and was even involved in the roots of its growth. On the other hand, we postulate that Europe's conquests are the result of the efforts of all contemporary and past humanity: Greco-Roman Antiquity, Jewish Palestine, Islam, China, and the Americas. We feel that the idea of a "coalition" set forth by Lévi-Strauss,<sup>1</sup> is more useful and valid than the purely internalist thesis which was the most commonly accepted one until then; the latter being a fundamental principle rich in potential and developing itself. Nevertheless, the internalist hypothesis should not be entirely rejected, since some of its theories are still valid. The importance of its relation to the outside in Europe's rise, causes us to be more attentive to the evolution of the other great cultures that initially nourished its growth, then, in a second stage, bore up and suffered its expansion, and live on to take up the challenge of modernity that it has engendered.

For a long time Moslems have been fascinated and disoriented by the "success" of machinist, imperial, and, for some people, humanist and liberal Europe. Successively, reformists, nationalists, and modern intellectuals forged for themselves an image of Europe deeply imbibed in their preoccupations over self-defense, their rejection, or mimicry of it. The terms of the old issue have been entirely superseded by the past political, and present economic emergence of the Moslem world, the distance that the Euro-American area has taken over its own creations by the impetus of evolution—challenging its own rational basis—and finally by the increasingly audacious synthesis working within the heart of Islam between its historic-cultural consciousness and the objective acquisition of modern instruments. Intellectuals of

<sup>1</sup> *Anthropologie Structurale*, II, Plon, 1973, pp. 365 and ff.

Moslem origin may go to the the Western world with all due feelings of sympathy, not to steal its secrets, but to understand it from the inside, question it about its essence, trace the high point of its attainments, with both an involved and objective mind. While Europe carves out its place in the world, forgetting its history and tiring itself out, the admirable substance of old Europe unveils itself before people from the outside with all the vividness of a first glance.

By the same process, the uneasiness over the once foreseen collapse of Islam has died down. Today, the idea of a plurality of cultures, the development of the idea of the equal potentiality of human societies to realize themselves, all that which is now accepted by more open-minded people, enables Moslems to confront their being more objectively. Islam no longer crouches in a position of self-defense: neither Westernization nor Marxism seem to be able to injure its cultural foundations. A historical-critical vision can therefore put everything in a new perspective, from the very inside. "Islamic" intelligentsia is distinguishing itself from normative Islam: it demystifies its past, but without an act of self-accusation. A gap is thus opened in the adhesion of self to self, or, at least, should more strongly appear, since it is the condition for any kind of truth.

Europe is just beginning to come out of its self-contemplation as center of the world, axis of civilization, end of all history. Challenged and relativized, Europe is starting to think about its origins. This self-examination that can immediately be perceived in the heart of the political scene signifies a doubt, a disorder: it might prelude an autoglorification of despair. Europe can no longer ignore the outside world, and still less the humbleness of its origins. Neither can Islam indefinitely ignore Europe's intimate source, its substance, and its aims: and still less can it continue to regard itself in a monolithic and mythical way. Today we are advancing in the direction of a confrontation of civilizations such as has never been seen before. Both the weights and interests that agglomerate the great human groups around their axis, are going to resort to modern ideologizations as well as to ancient crystallizations. The more united the world becomes, the more it tends to differentiate itself, to structure itself, to become articulated into dominant poles. The role to be assumed by a certain generation of "non-European" men, to use

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Laroui's expression, is therefore clearly assigned—it is that of mediator.

Their task is to carry back to their world, not technology's conquests, but the conquests of critical historic and philosophic intelligence. It is not necessarily—at first—to contribute to challenge European categories of rationality, but to open up the field of European experience to other norms, other values, and maybe to other categories of rationality. This is the price to be paid in order to construct a future universality, that would neither be utopistic, nor destructive, but a creative synthesis.

### EUROPE AND UNIVERSALITY

It would certainly confuse a project of comparative historic reflection to consider the parallel Europe-Islam as a rivalry, or even as a race towards the realization of the industrial era—successful here and aborted there. Industry is only one of Europe's many facets, the result of initially imperceptible movements. It is true that it is the most universalisable element. Around 1830, when Hegel reflected upon the European miracle, and launched into a philosophy of history that still remains of the greatest interest, was he truly conscious of the industrial revolution that was slowly taking place beneath his eyes?<sup>2</sup> According to him, Europe's superiority was based on the concepts of culture and spirituality, i.e. on the emergence of new rational and human principles. The entire *Aufklärer* generation, and later the generation of German ideologists before Marx, so conscious of Europe's ascension, true measure of humanity, was more strongly attached to its intellectual, moral and civilizing conquests than to the starting up of the industrial machine that was going to devour the world. This does not indicate intellectual snobbery, but rather, behind the occultation of the industrial phenomenon in the thinking of universality, there is the fact that the European civilization already existed before industry. The present identification of the two, therefore, becomes abusive and limiting, and

<sup>2</sup> It seems that the aging Kant had foreseen that European technology would end up by submerging continents, but he was more reticent with regard to the expansion of humanism. In this connection, see Hannah Arendt, *Vies politiques*, Gallimard, 1974.

this is not a purely culturalist presupposition. European power and imperialism had already embraced the world in the 16th century, possibly beginning with the Crusades. The impression that industrialization brought about a break in Europe's destiny, a point of departure or even a phase of flowering is historically unjustified.

Industry, a quantitative category, did not bring about a new specific relationship with the world—as science did—nor an original structuring of civilization, but rather it subjected the natural world, on the most intense scale it has ever known. In the 19th century, its content—what it produced—its geographic and human framework originated from previously established structures. If today, and only today, we can be somewhat justified in speaking about an “industrial civilization,” it is because this type of production has penetrated, after more than a century of perseverance, into the deepest levels of the European social scene, has modeled the way of life and behavior, and is beginning to have its effect on mentalities. Nevertheless, France, Germany and England still exist, i.e. states and nations, languages and national or sub-national cultural traditions too as well as political systems issuing from English parliamentarianism and the French Revolution. Industry as a quantitative category has not yet, except to some degree, changed into a qualitative category of civilization. Such a change can be nothing less than radical.

In order for industry to be considered a fundamental trait of the European being, it is necessary that all other aspects of Europe become pulverized in it. In order for it to become the measure of a new historic era, it must deeply spread into all of the inhabited world. This process is gradually taking place, but it is far from being accomplished as yet. To tell the truth, in non-Europe it is only in the beginning stages.

Since Europe's essence cannot be exhausted in industry alone, recourse to history is still meaningful: the European historic being takes shape as a singularity. Since industry promises to shape all human destiny, any reflection on Europe's history acquires world dimensions. On the other hand, if industry is the only truly exportable product of Europe's genius, the other great living civilizations, as existing human and cultural groups, and to the extent that they have not given up their historic consciousness, again become significant in the light of universal history.

What makes up Europe's universality? If it has considered man as a supreme value, when we examine the facts, in its triumphant imperialism, it takes the shape of banal, even violent domination—contradicting its own idea of man. Its mercantile and political conquests have truly spread, *de facto*, throughout the entire world, but isn't this the result of the strength of its means? If we reread the epic of Alexander or of the Arab conquest, we would see that there was no less audacity, endurance or crude energy involved than in the European enterprise of world domination. Will Europe finally integrate the other human cultures into its universalist aim? Undoubtedly the thirst for knowledge has never led to the exploration of so many horizons as in the case of Europe. However, never has an imperial civilization less consciously been open to penetration by external influences: neither Chinese knick-knack, nor African art, nor the influence of Japanese prints on Impressionism suffice to demonstrate a true syncretism under the banner of the European spirit. Certainly Medieval or Renaissance Europe received more influences from the outside world—Islam, China or Antiquity—even though it was in less direct or less familiar contact with these worlds. More self-assured, and having consolidated its acquisitions, modern Europe has proven to be more reluctant to influences. Its initial humbleness was at the root of its development. The externalist theory could therefore only be associated with that first Europe, the stuttering Europe, not to the later one, that was the one to claim universality. Besides this hypothesis should in no case be confused with the idea of a Europe heir to all past civilizations, as if these civilizations had given all they could to Europe, and only to it.

If we now examine what the triumphant Europe has exported of itself, we are struck by its omnipresence. Doesn't each city of non-Europe have its European double? Doesn't each country have its own language plus a European one? And doesn't each nation, within a historic unity, have its own ancient past, plus a specifically colonial past? Africa is at least as united by its Africanness as it is divided into two sectors, an English-speaking one and a French one. Even the individual ego is divided into an autochthonous substratum and a European patina. Thus Europe is penetrating throughout the world at the same time it retires from it. If, by some disaster, the space actually occupied by Europe



were to sink into nothingness, maybe another Europe would arise from its ashes to survive in the spirit and heart of those whom it so ruthlessly ignored. What makes up Europe's universality is what it has sown here and there as if by accident. In the realm of creations it is indeed the least European part of Europe: science, critical thought, certain philosophic questions, ethical choices. If Europe's material civilization has impregnated a large part of the world, it is not by virtue of its singularity, but of its rationality. But isn't it rather disconcerting that some of Europe's least European creations, like science, derive, to some extent, from the European *ethos*?

Certainly, high levels of European culture have aimed at the universal, but this universal was more of an aim than a reality. Because of an unfortunate fatality, it remained enclosed within its local historic roots, and in addition, found itself constantly exposed to the periodic upheaval of the most particularized forces, such as nationalism. Only reason is, by definition, universal, but on what barbaric and violent grounds has it flourished in its successive waves? Cartesian thought had to germinate in fear and silence, *Aufklärung* critical thought in an obsolete political system, and dialectic thought in a savagely unjust social system. One must therefore always raise the question of the antinomy between the particular and the universal in Europe's intellectual conquests. One cannot, in fact, deny the universal reach of the rational categories that sprung up in Europe because of their manifest Europeanism, nor can one forget the constant presence of this Europeanism. This explains the difficulty involved in transplanting a kind of rationality that is so deeply enmeshed in a historic tradition. The problem thus arises of the relationship between history and reason, history and value, history and universality.

To what extent and by what means does a civilization become surpassed by its own creation, but also to what extent is the creation prisoner of the civilization? Without going so far as to say that the *European creation* will not truly live until Europe dies, we can say that Europe cannot continue hiding behind its creation. If we can postulate the obstinate survival of other civilizations, there is no reason to deny it to Europe. However Europe, detached from its creation, will be no more than the beneficiary of an enterprise that will surpass it, that will belong

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to all of humanity, no longer, therefore, determined by Europe, but, through its diversity and conflicts, by a concrete universality based on a truly communal experience.

### EUROPE AGAINST EUROPE

In spite of the historic link we described above, what will survive of Europe as a possible basis for universality, is what will have been rejected, denied and hidden by concrete and empiric history. Marxism, for example, was not successful in its country of origin, but it profoundly shook great extra-European societies (Russia, China), and, through them arrived at a theoretical renewal in Europe. What does Marxism represent in the history of 19th century Europe?—One of several critical currents of the germinating industrial society, the birth and development of this society being the major element of the 19th century.

Just at the same time that the bourgeoisie stepped forward as European history's leading class and main subject, Marx opposed to it the proletariat, to which he confided a mission that the bourgeoisie was in the process of filling. Marx's vision becomes an inverse hope. It is not therefore surprising that it was taken up in a country where the bourgeoisie did not have a solid base. Like Jesus, Marx preached to his people about an imminent kingdom. Like Christianity, Marxism, the outcast, prospered in countries far from its native one. Neither its militarism, nor its industry, nor an imperialism entirely directed towards the European area, has led Germany into the circle of universality, but rather its philosophical vigor and the critical method of its scholars, transmitted throughout the whole world by the French relay system. Nevertheless, how many of its creators were recognized by their society? We must remember Hölderlin's despair, that of the whole romantic generation, of Nietzsche who died in a state of madness. Are the Boeotians less numerous? On the other hand, Iqbâl in Lahore read and meditated upon Nietzsche's writings, Hegel and Marx are discussed by the intelligentsia of the entire world. Certainly the aim of a living culture is to bequeath itself to posterity. It is not always rejected by actual history, but history manifests itself in its own time, and fulfills its mission. Nevertheless, in Europe's case, presenting

itself to the whole world as Galileo, Descartes, Voltaire and Hegel's native land, what a gap there is between its pretensions and the mediocre place it so often relegated to its creators, who have become its mediators in the eyes of the rest of the world. This is what constitutes the difference that must be noted between empiric, or even historic Europe, and creative Europe, founder of modern universality. In this perspective, the few hundred men who elaborated the concepts of scientific and philosophic thought, who defined the values or aesthetics of the modern world, *are not an example of European history, but rather the history of Europe becomes the framework and support of their activity.* If industrial Europe can be considered a *model*, then the Europe of conceptual bases, of intelligence, reason, a new aesthetic—in the Renaissance and in the 18th century, must be considered both as the founder of modern universality and as a moment of universal history. Since it could be a model for all of non-Europe only to the extent (that is quite unlikely) that the latter had the ambition to provide the future world with another, radically new course. In this case, at the moment that its creative spirit is imitated, Europe itself would be negated.

#### ISLAM AS UNIVERSALIZING HISTORIZING AND MEDIATING AGENT

A period of creative enthusiasm does not necessarily have a universal significance in fact. If modern Europe can claim universality, it is because it conquered the world, and if it was able to conquer the world, it is because of its preparation, and the structure of the modern historic period permitted its conquest. Would its dynamism have been successful in the world if it had taken another direction than that of a totally azimuth rationality? It is noteworthy that the blossoming of European energy came about at one particular historical moment and not another. The first point throws light on both the internal and the external spheres (influences, recoveries, etc.); the second only throws light on the realm of universal history. Since it is a civilization based upon itself, evolving according to its own logic, linked to a certain quantity of determinations, it can be subject to a historico-anthropological comparison to the Islamic civilization. The two cultural dynamics can be put on a parallel, as well as the two

types of totalization, leaving aside their concrete duration, or rather substituting it with transchronical correspondences in the manner of Oswald Spengler. We shall return to this theme in another study. For now, let us examine the structure of universal history. The latter cannot be defined as a collection of determined historic organisms, each evolving in its own sphere, nor from a theatrical viewpoint whereby historical agents successively occupy the forestage, nor still less as a purely political pretension to a world empire. It is clear that universality is linked to the actual process of universalization, as it is equally evident that if we agree that we are heading in this direction today, it was never achieved in the past. Universal past history should therefore be conceived of as a solid construction, like a long underground tunnel, from which the modern age would spring forth. All of history cannot be put in one plate on the balance of time, and European history beginning with the great discoveries on the one, but rather, on one side can be put the first pre-universal, neolithic civilization (the Orient, Greece, Rome), and on the other side the second universalist, post-neolithic historical period—founder of the modern world in which we live. This historical period was certainly not unified on all levels, since each of its components—Europe, Islam, China, India—considered itself as a complete world, an end in itself. But these differences, far from contradicting the converging factors, prove to be a primordial condition for the progressive march of civilization. *Consequently, the emergence of Europe cannot be conceived of outside of this whole.* What else constitutes Europe's expansion? It cannot be measured in terms of a content that can at any moment be relativized, but by a global context by which at a given time it surpassed and dominated its companions.

*Modern Europe was the last moment, perhaps therefore the most decisive one, of a basic historic era of incubation in mankind's history,* inaugurated by Islam's birth and expansion. Why Islam? Because an analysis of it reveals it to be the axis around which the world system was to revolve. Neither the fall of the Western Roman Empire, and the subsequent birth of a multitude of barbaric kingdoms, nor the formation of a united Chinese empire in the 2nd century B.C., nor the slow and confused emergence of India constitute a stable, clear and consistent point of departure. It was in relation to Islam that the

other civilizations became defined as part of a system—not certainly by means of their own cultural bases. Thus the inhabited world expanded, technical conquests progressed, and the future's people awakened to the meaning of their destiny. We are, in every fibre of our being, the children of this age, whose end points toward the universal becoming. Our duty is therefore not to accord any priority or any special value to any one of the civilizations, no more to Islam than to Europe or to China. If the latter period has been somewhat privileged, and within it the last sub-period, (the industrial era), it is because the modern world is tied to it by a direct line. As to the intimate and abyssal realm of the historic being, it remains, in an inverse sense, connected to the inaugural time—by which the Moslem is Moslem, the Chinese Chinese, and the European European.

Only a West-centered view of history could consider the Middle Ages a gigantic parenthesis between Antiquity and the Modern Age: a dark period, a great blemish. The concept of West, that includes Europe, thus refers to a historic tradition starting with the Greeks, continuing throughout Roman times, and, hidden during the Middle Ages, surfaces again in the Renaissance. This ideology plays an important part (as a dynamizing illusion) in Europe's aesthetic and intellectual renewal. Today it is a simple nostalgic remainder and last bastion of a feeling of privilege bestowed by the magical hand of history, and it speaks to us as follows.

“Only one basic course, this of the civilizations centered on man, has shown itself to be fertile; all the others were only able to lead to an impasse. What do China, Islam, India represent? Mere blossomings without a tomorrow as they were without a future.”

Such a conception did not manifest itself in the past, whereby the consciousness of a profoundly human cultural tradition essentially expressed a newly emerging passion of civilization, progress and development—that emerged from the era immediately preceding it.

The fact that Medieval Europe—weak link in a state of latence—played a modest part in the construction of the future world, is not reason enough to obscure this preparatory era. The

barbarization that spread its shadow over the unshaped and fragile Europe of the 7th century synchronized with the impetuous Arab conquest; the emptiness of the 10th century corresponded to the fullness of the 4th Hegerian century—sumnum of Islamic classicism. What was considered regression here (a pseudo-notion still referring to Antiquity as its model) was there—not at the ends of the earth but at its center—expansion, organization and growth. A regression never takes place in general history, but rather it can affect particular historic organisms and only them. The motor centers migrate from one point to another and raise the preceding human attainments to a higher level. The Great Regression, of which Malraux speaks, extending it from the Narbonnaise to the Iransoxian area, was certainly the end of a specific world, but it was in addition a period of gestation at the end of which the entire human organism of two millenia onwards was to assume its place in history. A new Orient—Islam and China—gave the starting spark to a gigantic explosion of creativity, organization and civilization.<sup>3</sup> It was one of the most fertile periods, and not a middle age; there was an opening up of new spaces and a deepening of human knowledge; an expansion of peoples coming from unknown parts of the world, and fundamental technical conquests. Above all, in spite of ideological opposition, civilization's cloister was broken open: there were nothing else but human communities involved in a common adventure of which they were, however, unaware. Modern Europe can be considered the daughter of this age and Islam the parent.

Medieval Christianity, more than a particularity in relation to Byzantium, or an imperial reminiscence, represented the expression of Europe's mobilization in front of Islam, culminating in the Crusades—a counter-attack that drew it out of itself, a pouring of its energies, a school of civilization for Europe. The Iberic peninsula, that plays the first part in the world's subjection to Europe, existed and was defined, during the long adventure of the *Reconquista*, only inasmuch as it was involved in a duel with Islam. Usually, the technical and cultural borrowings are emphasized. We feel that *the political dialectic between the self and the world* is much more important, by which Europe conceived of

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Lombard, *Espaces et réseaux du haut Moyen-Age*, Paris, 1972.

itself as an entity, again raising the question of its own genesis. Seen from this point of view, Pirenne's and Lombard's theories are not in opposition, but complete each other. For Europe, Islam was both a threatening military power, and a dynamizing economic realm. Later on it also became an ideological enemy and philosophical model. In short, Europe's entering into history was accomplished by the way of Islam: first by a defensive reply, and later by an offensive explosion.

In addition, almost all known peoples became conscious of themselves or made their entry onto the historic stage by means of some kind of contact with Islam. Even the Chinese civilization, though so autonomous, owes its introduction into the circle of world exchange to Islam. India was deeply shaken by the conquests of Qutayba b-Muslim, and later by that of Mahmûd the Ghaznevid. As for the black African world, that was totally unknown and isolated in Antiquity, its relative and still hesitant entry onto the historic scene was also due to Islam. What about the Russians (in Arabic Rûs), the Bulgars of the Volga, the Turcoman people? How many barbaric peoples underwent their apprenticeship into civilization through Islam, undoubtedly at the price of its cohesion as a political power, but at the same time making up the Islamic civilization as *their common work*? If Europe, the head of Asia, survived and then asserted itself, wasn't it because it benefitted of a millenia of peace stretching from the end of the Hungarian invasions until the holocaust of the "Thirty Years War"<sup>4</sup> (1914-1945)? It was Islam that assumed the role of *protective shield* against the great invasions, Islam that absorbed the shock of the Mongolian hordes like a fatal poison, and it was Islam that finally stopped the Timurid wave. A wave at least as destructive if not more so than the first one, that will not erase or justify the conversion of the invaders to Islam, any more than will magnify Islam the mausoleums of Samarkand, built upon its already accomplished ruins...

<sup>4</sup> Georges Steiner, *La Culture contre l'homme*, Seuil.