

# Thousand Years of Missing History

Summary of a Lecture delivered at the  
Madrid Conference of Fundacion Le Huella Arabe on  
"La Deuda Olvidada de Occidente"

21-26 October 2003

**Author:** Professor Salim T S Al-Hassani  
**Production:** Tamanna Rahman

**Release Date:** January 2004  
**Publication ID:** 4060

**Copyright:** © FSTC Limited, 2003 2004

#### IMPORTANT NOTICE:

All rights, including copyright, in the content of this document are owned or controlled for these purposes by FSTC Limited. In accessing these web pages, you agree that you may only download the content for your own personal non-commercial use. You are not permitted to copy, broadcast, download, store (in any medium), transmit, show or play in public, adapt or change in any way the content of this document for any other purpose whatsoever without the prior written permission of FSTC Limited.

Material may not be copied, reproduced, republished, downloaded, posted, broadcast or transmitted in any way except for your own personal non-commercial home use. Any other use requires the prior written permission of FSTC Limited. You agree not to adapt, alter or create a derivative work from any of the material contained in this document or use it for any other purpose other than for your personal non-commercial use.

FSTC Limited has taken all reasonable care to ensure that pages published in this document and on the MuslimHeritage.com Web Site were accurate at the time of publication or last modification. Web sites are by nature experimental or constantly changing. Hence information published may be for test purposes only, may be out of date, or may be the personal opinion of the author. Readers should always verify information with the appropriate references before relying on it. The views of the authors of this document do not necessarily reflect the views of FSTC Limited.

FSTC Limited takes no responsibility for the consequences of error or for any loss or damage suffered by readers of any of the information published on any pages in this document, and such information does not form any basis of a contract with readers or users of it.

**FSTC Limited**

9 Conyngham Road, Victoria Park, Manchester, M14 5DX, United Kingdom

Web: <http://www.fstc.co.uk> Email: [info@fstc.co.uk](mailto:info@fstc.co.uk)

## THOUSAND YEARS OF MISSING HISTORY

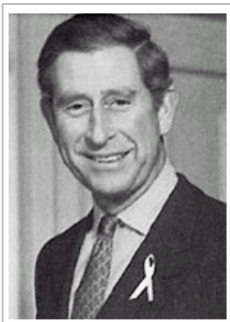
A Summary of the Lecture delivered at the Madrid Conference of Fundacion Le Huella Arabe on "La Deuda Olvidada de Occidente" at the Archeological Museum 21-26 October 2003) by:

Professor Salim T S Al-Hassani (Mechanical Engineering, UMIST, Manchester-UK)

Hon. Chairman Foundation for Science, Technology and Civilisation, UK

Website: [www.MuslimHeritage.com](http://www.MuslimHeritage.com)

Email: [info@fstc.co.uk](mailto:info@fstc.co.uk)



HRH Prince Charles

"If there is much misunderstanding in the West about the nature of Islam, there is also much ignorance about the debt our own culture and civilisation owe to the Islamic world. It is a failure, which stems, I think, from the straight-jacket of history, which we have inherited. The medieval Islamic world, from central Asia to the shores of the Atlantic, was a world where scholars and men of learning flourished. But because we have tended to see Islam as the enemy of the West, as an alien culture, society, and system of belief, we have tended to ignore or erase its great relevance to our own history."

HRH Prince Charles in a speech "Islam and the West", Oxford, 27th October 1993.

There are many instances of distorted history, and many works have given attention to this matter.<sup>1</sup> In this presentation focus will be on the other manner by which history is distorted: that is, the suppression of centuries from educational curriculum and associated history books, especially those aimed at the general public. The focus on this issue is to alert communities as to the particular significance of Muslim civilisation and its historical role in giving birth to much of modern science and technology. The following words by a famous lady describes this civilisation well:



Mrs. Carleton Fiorina  
CEO, HP Company

"There was once a civilization that was the greatest in the world. It was able to create a continental super-state that stretched from ocean to ocean, and from northern climes to tropics and deserts. Within its dominion lived hundreds of millions of people, of different creeds and ethnic origins.

"One of its languages became the universal language of much of the world, the bridge between the peoples of a hundred lands. Its armies were made up of people of many nationalities, and its military protection allowed a degree of peace and prosperity that had never been known. The reach of this civilization's commerce extended from Latin America to China, and everywhere in between.

"And this civilization was driven more than anything, by invention. Its architects designed buildings that defied gravity. Its mathematicians created the algebra and algorithms that would enable the building of computers, and the creation of encryption. Its doctors examined the human body, and found new cures for disease. Its astronomers looked into the heavens, named the stars, and paved the way for space travel and

exploration. Its writers created thousands of stories. Stories of courage, romance and magic. Its poets wrote of love, when others before them were too steeped in fear to think of such things.

“When other nations were afraid of ideas, this civilization thrived on them, and kept them alive. When censors threatened to wipe out knowledge from past civilizations, this civilization kept the knowledge alive, and passed it on to others. While modern Western civilization shares many of these traits, the civilization I’m talking about was the Islamic world from the year 800 to 1600, which included the Ottoman Empire and the courts of Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo, and enlightened rulers like Suleiman the Magnificent.

“Although we are often unaware of our indebtedness to this other civilization, its gifts are very much a part of our heritage. The technology industry would not exist without the contributions of Arab mathematicians. Sufi poet-philosophers like Rumi challenged our notions of self and truth. Leaders like Suleiman contributed to our notions of tolerance and civic leadership. And perhaps we can learn a lesson from his example:

“It was leadership based on meritocracy, not inheritance. It was leadership that harnessed the full capabilities of a very diverse population—that included Christianity, Islamic, and Jewish traditions. This kind of enlightened leadership — leadership that nurtured culture, sustainability, diversity and courage — led to 800 years of invention and prosperity.”

Mrs. Carleton Fiorina, CEO HP Company. 26September2001

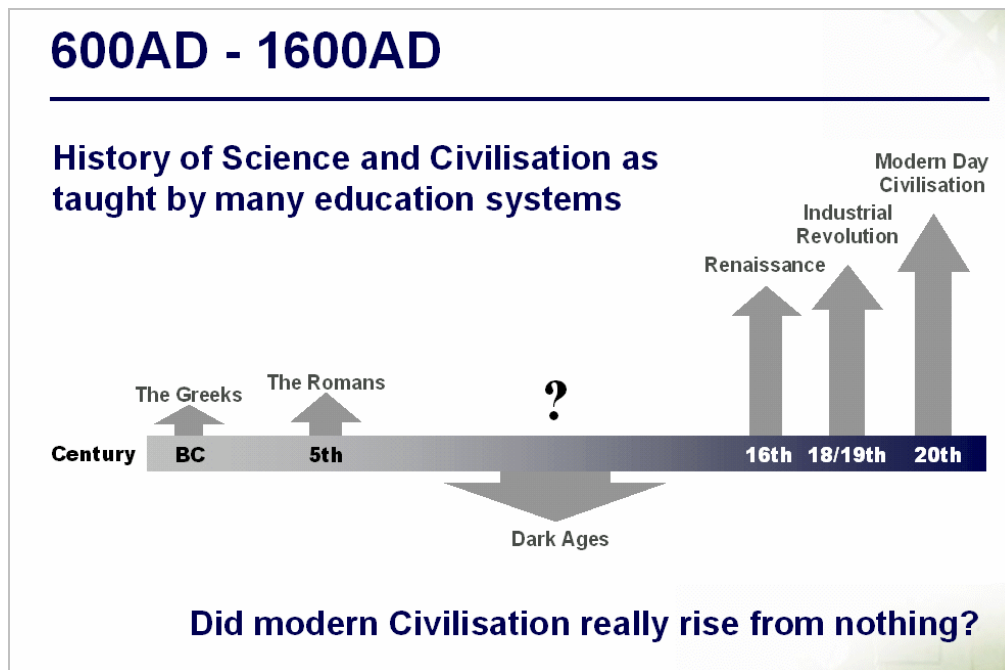
Source <http://www.hp.com/hpinfo/execteam/speeches/fiorina/minnesota01.htm>

There is nothing better than to resort to John Glubb here who, in his ‘History of the Arab People’, tells us:

“Modern oriental studies have proved the falsity of this historical propaganda (the Idea of the 16th –17th century Renaissance, and that nothing happened between the 450s (the fall of the Roman empire, and such Renaissance), although the latter is still widely believed by the general public. Unfortunately, a great part of the educational world still adheres to these ancient taboos and the period of some five or six centuries, which separates the decline of Rome from the Norman invasion of England, is omitted from school curricula and from public examination. As is always the case, this falsification of history for propaganda purposes has injured us more than anyone else, and has largely been responsible for the many political errors, which our governments have committed in the Middle East in the last sixty years. The history of ‘progress’, the rise of man from a primitive state to his modern condition, is a fascinating story. The interest is lost, however, when the continuity is concealed by the omission of periods of several centuries and the presentation of bits and pieces of history, gathered from here and there, in accordance with our own emotional prejudices or our national vanity.”<sup>2</sup>

Of course Glubb only tells of those centuries up to 1066 (the time of the Norman invasion), but the whole period 450-1492, in fact is passed over as Dark Ages, and is altogether ignored as far as science and civilisation are concerned, termed as ‘a middle age’ an intermediary period, a uniform bloc, ‘vulgar centuries’ and ‘obscure times’ as Pernoud says.<sup>3</sup> One challenges any audience to pick ten history books, look into them to find that in at least nine, if not the eleven of them (the numerical exaggeration is on purpose to highlight the case), the presentation of scientific achievements jumps from some Greek names of the late Antiquity, whomsoever it is, whether Ptolemy, Archimedes, or Galen, straight to Galileo consequently ignoring scientific and technological events of the period, between 1000 and 1500 years, as if it were a sterile period. And the same holds with respect to curricula at schools and colleges. More

disastrously, even, as the curious audience can gather, from universities, too.<sup>4</sup> How is it that higher learning institutions teach that nothing happened over a thousand years is not just beyond comprehension, but academic rules of rigorous questioning. It makes no sense. Students, who are trained to think critically, suddenly face a sudden darkness of ten centuries, and then are told things appeared, as if by miracle, all at once in the Renaissance. It defies logic. Things, as any scientist knows, do not appear by chance. Continuity is basic especially in the birth and rise of sciences; it is almost so in every other field of study.

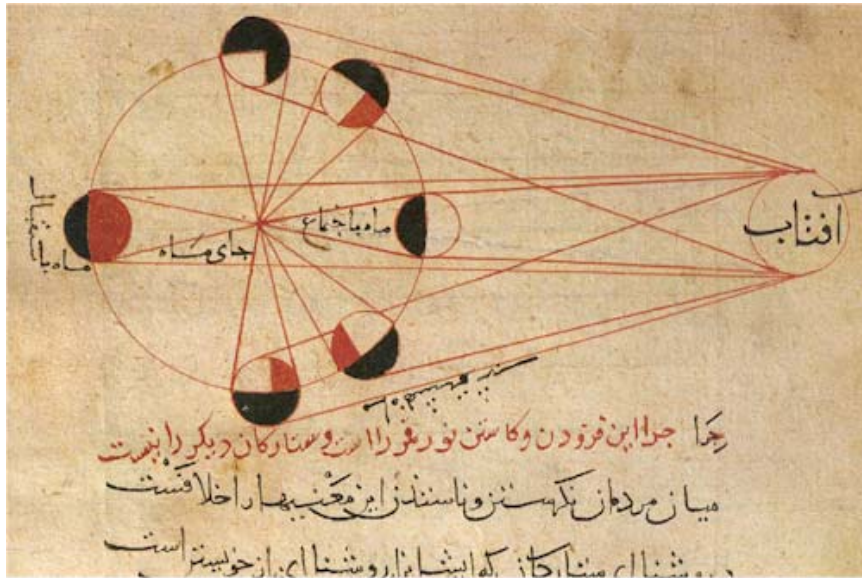


How did we get many of the symbols of our modern life? By chance? Out of nowhere? Certainly not. This period of ten centuries set aside as 'vulgar and dark' and given scant notice in books, curricula and at universities is actually the period when the grounds of modern science were mapped out and amplified. It is the period when appeared the ten decimals (the Arabic numerals our 1, 2, 3.. as a much easier way than the Latin i, ii, iii. in handling calculations). And the birth of algebra was from this period, derived from the title Al-jabr wal Muqabala of Al-Khwarizmi; his name giving us the term 'Algorisms'.<sup>5</sup>

It was during this period that the modern observatory was born, in Samarqand, in particular, just as Sayili, Sedillot, Dreyer and Hetherington show us.<sup>6</sup> It was during these centuries that the majority of our stars were given the Arabic based names, and the first true understanding of the planets was made.<sup>7</sup> It was during this period that we have the beginning of the modern institutions, Parliament and the exchequer, which were subject to great Islamic influence.<sup>8</sup>

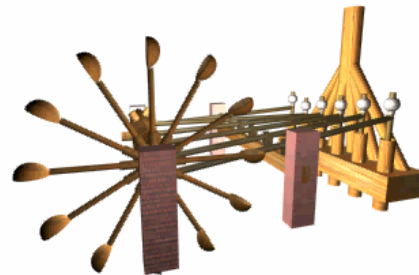
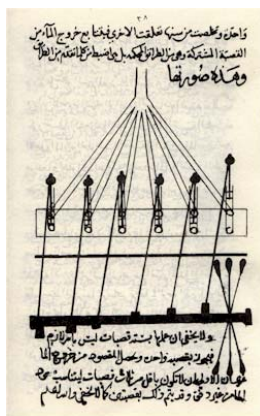
It is during this period we have the birth of the universities, again thanks to Islamic influence" Castro and Ribera highlighting for us the cultural legacy of the Muslims, but also of the Jews and Christians working together in Muslim Spain, Al-Andalus.<sup>9</sup> It is during this period we recognise the beginning of naturally based medicines and hospitals, again with Islamic influence through the encouragement of doctors and physicians, as was the Islamic custom, from all faiths and groups.



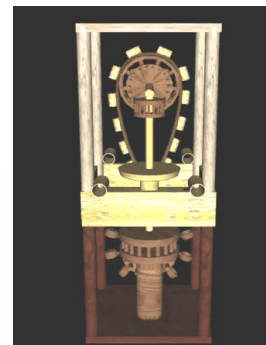
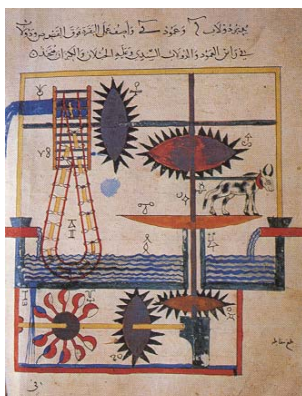


Al-Biruni's Diagram Describing the Eclipse

And the birth of the Gothic in architecture; and the beginnings of modern musical theory also belong to this so-called Dark Ages.<sup>10</sup> It was then when the carpet was brought to England by Princess Eleanor from Spain to enhance her new English home. It was during this period that we have the birth of many of our engineering devices, and modern technology, as the works by Al-Jazari testifies.<sup>11</sup> How else, and from where, indeed, do many of our mechanical devices come from if that period was dark? They certainly did not appear by chance in the 15th century.

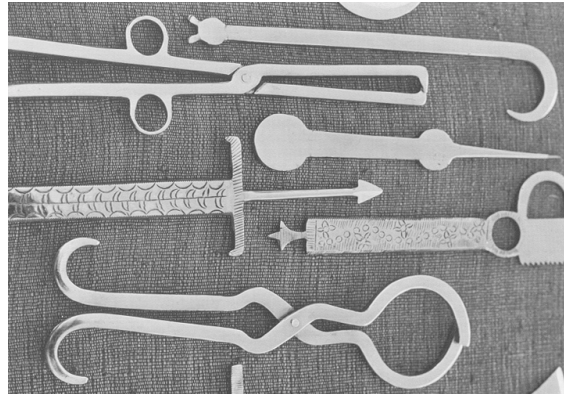


Left: Manuscript of Taqi Al-Deen's Pump 1551AD  
Above: 3D Model of Taqi Al-Deen's Pump recreated by FSTC



Left: Manuscript of Al-Jazari's Water Raising Machine 1206 AD  
Above: 3D Model of Al-Jazari's Water Raising Machine recreated by FSTC Limited.

And the same with surgery; when the fundamentals of the instruments, such as the forceps, the catgut suture and the palletising of pharmaceutical granules we have today were designed and made by that great mind of the age Abul'Qassim Al-Zahrawi. <sup>12</sup>



Al-Zahrawi and surgical tools

And in the same period, too, chemistry used the first modern laboratory; and the experimental method was born and extensively used in accordance with Islamic antecedents as the sources cited herein can demonstrate. <sup>13</sup>



It was during the period of the so-called Dark Ages, most of all, that the largest cultural exchanges between East and West took place. <sup>14</sup>

Trade and pilgrims brought together Muslims-Christians-Jews-Chinese and Hindus in great exchanges of ideas and learning. <sup>15</sup> The translators did the same, too, especially in the great Spanish city of Toledo and in Sicily. <sup>16</sup> The Crusaders went east and brought many trades, skills, and aspects of learning back to the West as Prutz superbly explains. <sup>17</sup> Sarton, in his large 'Introduction', shows us how science in that period was so universal, in fact more universal, by harnessing the skills of so many races and faiths as never had been the case. <sup>18</sup> Islamic science itself involved the largest number of faiths and ethnic groups in a shared experience that has never been equalled even in our very modern world.

Is it logical and credible to describe these missing centuries therefore as the Dark Ages, we should ask?

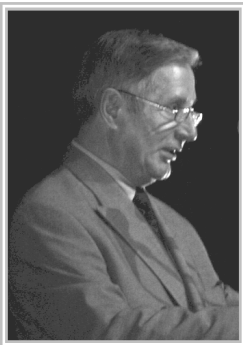
In the West it has inevitably been the tradition to highlight Eurocentric culture based on endorsing and attributing all exclusively and solely to the Roman and Greek cultures. Even until quite late in the twentieth century grammar schools in the UK taught history from the Roman perspective, not unnaturally since Latin and Attic Greek with their literary contributions were *de rigueur*.

The historian Sarton beautifully describes continuity in science and technology as a 'stately chariot', stopping to change horses in the neighbourhood of an inn: "The old Muslim postillions are being thanked and new ones are taking charge. The chariot is stopped, but the fresh horses are pawing the ground impatiently... It is the same old chariot, but the horses and postillions are changed from time to time, and the people riding in it change, too, one by one.... It is a chariot that never comes back. It goes on and on as the spirit of mankind moves it; it has been driven by the Greeks, by Romans, by people of all kinds, lately by Muslims, now by Jews and Christians."<sup>19</sup>

Why ignore and leap over these centuries and thus the true origins of our modern civilisation?

Why obscure the vital fact that all races and faiths are equally gifted, and that instead of hostility and strife, we can all live together taking the best from each other as the history of civilisation and learning has shown.

It is prudent to conclude with an extract from a speech delivered by The Belgium Minister of Culture Van Grembergen, delivered at the Congress of UMIVA on: "Treasures of Islam". Held in Antwerp, Belgium on 22 March 2003



Belgium Minister of  
Culture Van Grembergen

"These Islamic values that are reflected by the great Islamic civilisation have contributed to the progress and development of our Western society. Knowledge is clearly the key to development. Thanks to the knowledge and the intellect of the Muslim scientists, we were able to benefit from mathematics, philosophy, anatomy, chemistry, astronomy etc...The great writer Ibn Khaldun, who built the foundation for sociology and anthropology with his work 'muqadima' in the 14th century, is one example. His method is still being discussed in our universities. Contemporary astrologers base a great deal on the exact calculations of Ibn Umar Al-Sufi to orientate in the universe. It was Al-Khawarizmi who made a breakthrough in mathematics in the 11th century. His calculations and formulas are nowadays still taught as the well-known algorithms. Also, our word "cijfer" originates from the Arabic word: 'Sifr'. The great European explorers and geographers used to base their expeditions on the exact and complete works of the North Africans Al-Idrisi and Ibn Batuta. Thanks to the noble dedication of Harun Al-Rashid who translated Greek works in Baghdad in the 9th century and also thanks to the analytical mind of Averroës (Ibn Rushd) in the 12th century, we were able in Europe to rediscover an enriched Greek philosophy. In other words, thanks to Islam, knowledge was preserved, further developed and passed on and this is without any doubt one of the important treasures of Islam."



## Endnotes:

1. 1. D.H. Fischer: *Historians' fallacies*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.  
J. Fontana: *The Distorted Past*, Blackwell, 1995.  
G.Fisher: *The Barbary Legend*; Oxford; 1957.  
P. Geyl: *Use and Abuse of History*, Yale University Press, 1955
2. John Glubb: *A Short History of the Arab Peoples*; Hodder and Stoughton, 1969. pp 289-90.
3. Regine Pernoud: *Pour en finir avec le Moyen Age*: Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1977.; p.17.
4. As can be gathered at [http://www.man.ac.uk/Science\\_Engineering/CHSTM/bshs/bshscour.htm#warb](http://www.man.ac.uk/Science_Engineering/CHSTM/bshs/bshscour.htm#warb)
5. A.Djebbar: *Une Histoire de la science Arabe*; Le Seuil; Paris; 2001.
6. A. Sayili: *The Observatory in Islam*, Turkish Historical Society, Ankara, 1960.  
B. Hetherington: *A Chronicle of Pre-Telescopic Astronomy*; John Wiley and Sons; Chichester; 1996.  
J.L.E. Dreyer: *A History of Astronomy from Thales to Kepler*; Dover Publications Inc, New York, 1953.  
L.Sedillot: *Memoire sur les instruments astronomique des Arabes*, *Memoires de l'Academie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres de l'Institut de France* 1: 1-229; Reprinted Frankfurt, 1985.
7. P.Kunitzsch: *The Arabs and the Stars: texts and traditions on the fixed stars, and their influence in medieval Europe*; Varorium; Aldershot; 1989.
8. C.H. Haskins: *Studies in the history of Mediaeval Science*; Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. New York. 1967 ed.
9. A.Castro: *La realidad historica de Espana*. 2ed. Edited by Paulino Garagorri with additions and corrections from Castro's papers. Madrid: Alianza-Alfaguara, 1974.  
A.Castro: *The Spaniards. An Introduction to their History*. trans. Willard F. King and Selma L. Margaretten. Berkeley, The University of California Press, 1971.  
J. Ribera: *Disertaciones Y Opusculos*, 2 vols. Madrid 1928.
10. T. Burckhardt, 1972, *Moorish Culture in Spain*, George Allen & Unwin, London.  
M. S. Briggs: *Architecture*, in *The Legacy of Islam*, edited by T. Arnold and A. Guillaume, Oxford University Press, first edition, 1931, pp 155-79.  
M. Brett: *Marrakech in Dictionary of the Middle Ages*; op cit; vol 8; pp 150-1.  
T.Burckhardt: *Fez City of Islam*; The Islamic Text Society; Cambridge; 1992.
11. D. Hill: *Islamic Science and Engineering*; Edinburgh University press; 1993.
12. D.Campbell: *Arabian medicine, and its influence on the Middle Ages*; Philo Press; Amsterdam; 1926; reprinted 1974.
13. E.J. Holmyard: *Makers of Chemistry*; Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1931.  
J.Ruska: 'Al-Rasi (Rhasas) als Chemiker', *Zeitschrift fur Angewandte Chemie* 35, 1912, pp 719-24.  
J.Ruska: 'Die Alchemie ar-Razi's', *Der Islam* 22, 1935, 281-319.
14. C. Burnett: *The Introduction of Arabic Learning into England*; The Panizzi Lectures, 1996; The British Library; 1997.  
W. Durant: *The Age of faith*, Simon and Shuster, New York; 6th printing; 1950.
15. D.Abulafia: *The Role of Trade in Muslim-Christian contact during the Middle Ages in The Arab Influence in medieval Europe*; Edited by D.A. Agius. R.Hitchcock. Ithaca Press, Reading, 1994. pp 1-24.  
M.Amari: *I Diplomi arabi del reale archivio Fiorentino*, Florence, Lemonnier, 1863.
16. Constantine the African and 'Ali ibn Al-Magusti: *The Pantegni and related texts*, eds C. Burnett and D. Jacquard, Leiden, 1994.  
N.Daniel: *The Arabs and medieval Europe*; Longman Librarie du Liban; 1975.
17. H. Prutz: *Kulturgeschichte der kreuzzuge*; Berlin, 1883.
18. G.Sarton: *Introduction to the History of Science*; 3 vols; The Carnegie Institute of Washington; 1927-48.
19. G. Sarton: *Introduction to the history of science*, 3 vols, Baltimore, The Williams and Wilkins Co. 1927-48, vol.2; p.109.