

PROJECT ON ISLAM AND CLASSICAL HELLENISM

IN WORLD HISTORY

The appearance of sufficiently strong political organization in human societies and the consequent formation of excess capital as a result of human activity coordinated on a higher level of convergence and purposefulness, ushered Man into the stage of higher civilization. These events, themselves caused by the consolidation of processes associated with the Neolithic Revolution, first happened on a significant scale in the fertile basins along the great rivers of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Since then history has been determined by developments in a Central System which starting from the Middle Eastern Fertile Crescent kept expanding by successive steps so as to include into the fold of High Civilization broader geopolitical spaces: Asia Minor, Iran, the Aegean System, Italy, the entire Mediterranean basin with its hinterland, Inner and Northern Europe, Arabia, Central Asia, and finally in Modern Times, the Americas, all of Asia, Africa and Oceania. The network of deepening connectivity among all parts of the world that defines our present day condition of globalization represents the end result of that process of expanding acculturation which is the essence of human history. The Central System of History has finally become truly universal, encompassing the whole world. The Roman Empire, as the integral of the (then) significant and interrelated Oecumene, represents the first major step and achievement in the macrohistoric process towards broader and deeper connectivity in human existence, coexistence and activity. Now the human system is on the verge of taking the second step in the same direction, becoming literally ecumenical, the global nexus of mankind.

The gradual expansion of the Central System was caused and accompanied by shifts in the focuses of political, military, economic and cultural power. Typically, a peripheral entity, (usually along the marginal grey areas of the Civilized Zone and anyway in loose contact with the Great Society of the Central System as it existed at each time), started to gain in importance by capitalizing on some high-powered comparative advantage that it discovered and cultivated, and then intervened, reenergized and reordered (often through creative destruction of the obsolete in the beginning of the new phase) the destabilized and enfeebled Central System when this had entered into a period of deteriorating internal condition and general decline. New ideas, new values, new people and new lands were thus entering from time to time into the Central System, expanding and revitalizing it, at the critical junctures of its development.

One such major transformation of the Central System happened with the eruption of Islam and the Arab expansion.

The Roman Empire was the concluding phase of a megahistoric cycle that lasted from around 1000 B.C. to about 700 A.D. Its end was marked by the descent of the Teutonic peoples from the North and the ascent of the Arabs from the South into the Central System. The Islamic Revolution incorporated vast areas of the East into the Central System creating a tremendous bow of affinity from Indonesia and beyond to Morocco and the Atlantic shores. It also created new far-reaching conditions for the overall shape and destiny of the Central System in its religious, cultural and geopolitical dimensions.

A crucial factor and the main form in the intellectual and valuational framework of the Central System of History is Classical Hellenism as an archetypal embodiment of the spirit and might of the Revolution of Reason, the other most important event in the history of mankind beside the Neolithic Revolution. Articulative developments in the Central System have been determined by

positive or negative engagement of the various parameters with Classicism.

Enormous debate has been conducted, and thorough work done, on the relationship of particular aspects of modern European history to Classicism as a constant of reference in understanding them. Less consideration has been devoted to, and systematic research spent on, the relevance of Classicism to the essential character and progress of European history as a whole. While corresponding fundamental issues with regard to the Arab world and Islam have been left practically unattended. And yet classical Hellenism is a constitutive common thread that runs through the make up of Western Christianity, Byzantine Empire and the Chalifate in the Middle Ages; or of the European System and the Ottoman Empire as complementary parts of the Central System in Modern Times. That thread is there weaving the fabric of history even when it is rendered invisible by superstructures which nevertheless relate to it even in antagonizing it.

The Geographical Pivotal Axis of History (in the development of the Central System and its present day globalization) is a line that transverses the surface of the Earth roughly as a latitudinal parallel passing through the United States, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Sinic "Mesopotamia". Islam is extended along a significant part of this Axis. Its geopolitical centrality and other locational importance brings it again to the foreground of historical developments in the new century. The impact of Islam's engagement with the forces leading the advancement of humanity in this Era of the Great Transformation in World-History that we are experiencing will be determined naturally in the end neither by the reactionary fundamentalism of sects impoverishing Muslim cultural heritage, nor by adherents of blind extremism who undertake to realize in act that impoverishment in mind, nor by regimes failing in their primal responsibility to promote their people's spiritual patrimony and material well-being, and thus turning directly or indirectly supportive of restrictive and enfeebling fundamentalism and extremism as a way of hiding their failure. On the contrary, Islam's role in the new world that is being shaped by the human powers of progress in this momentous period in history will be as great as the true wealth of its contribution to the fullest development of human nature spiritually and materially. And this wealth is in fact fabulous.

On the other hand and simultaneously, the cultural (conceptual and valuational) centrality of Classical Hellenism in the world-history as it revolves around its Pivotal Axis makes the in-depth study of the relationship between Islam and Greek Classicism a primal desideratum for adequately understanding past history in our core area (centering on the geopolitical region of the Balkan-Asia Minor and Middle- Eastern fields and thence expanding to cover a world district from central Europe to Iran and from the central Asian steppes to Sahara) and, consequently, for making accurate and safe predictions about its future and the role it will play in global history.

I propose to embark on a project that will concentrate on a systematic investigation of all aspects of that relationship in their interconnection. The first part of this investigation will focus on the significance of Neoplatonic Philosophy (as the last phase of the ancient Greek way of thinking and evaluating) for Islamic Theology, especially in its formative era, and as the consolidation of a major worldview at the beginning of the current historical megacycle (700AD to today and further into the future).

The general title of the project will be:

THE GRECOISLAMIC VECTOR OF THE PIVOTAL AXIS OF HISTORY

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And the title of the first phase of the project will be:

ATHENS AND MECCA

GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND ISLAMIC THEOLOGY:

THINKING AND BELIEVING IN THE EASTERN CRESCENT OF THE CENTRAL SYSTEM OF HISTORY

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