

DZIEKAN, Marek M. *Cywilizacja Islamu w Azji i Afryce*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 2007. 464 p. (in Polish). ISBN 978-83-05-13504-7.

The Islamic world is a neuralgic point of the contemporary world, if it is possible to use the word "point" to the waste area stretching from China and Indonesia in the East up to Morocco in the West. The book under review shows the diversity of the Islamic civilization in a historical perspective, beginning from the rise of Islam in Arab peninsula in the seventh century through its expansion to Asia and Africa until our days. Islam is presented as a religion and a civilization covering all aspects of civilization both spiritual and material and this is what distinguishes it from all other cultures. Islamic civilization developed and flourished in very different languages and within numerous nations. It is not exclusively an Arabic, Turkish or Iranian culture. In what degree belong the black Africa or India or China to the Islamic world, are difficult questions asking for answers of scholars.

The Islamic civilization, in whichever sense we take the word, is not uniform in its several fields, either as regards its character or its chronological limits. Professor Dziekan tried to trace some of the great unifying lines which run through the manifestation of Islam as a religion and a civilization. There is, to begin with, the thinking of the Arabs which manifest itself in the Arabic language, a thinking which is essentially analogical and not analytical. This shows itself in the casuistical method of religious law, in the atomist theory of theology, in the structure of Arabic lexicography, in the contents of the works of "adab" that is the Arabic belles-lettres, and even in the nature of Arabic decorative arts.

The rapidity of the spread of Islam, noticeably through extensive provinces which had long been Christian, is a crucial fact of history which has naturally engaged the speculative attention of many critical investigators. Certainly, the Christendom was in desperate disarray, torn asunder by dogmatic quarrels, submerged by waves of pagan invaders, fatally weakened by external wars. The military triumph of the martial Arabs sure of the justice of their cause, is not so difficult to understand. That they could hold they wide conquests, and govern them efficiently despite dynastic squabbles and a succession of internecine wars, is less easy to explain, except when it is remembered that the converted peoples had been used for centuries to produce and submit to competent and resourceful administrators. When all military, political and economic factors have been exhausted, however, the religious impulse must still be recognized as the most vital and enduring.

There exists a conflict between the values of Arab Bedouin society and the values of Islam. This conflict is already clearly stated in the Koran, and the second half of the first century of Islam (A.D. 670 – 720) saw a resurgence of ancient Arab beliefs and practices from which neither Islamic theology nor Islamic religious law were ever able completely to free themselves. The search for a balance between the two elements remained a feature of the whole intellectual life of the Muslims for a long time. In the modern period, this had been replaced by the search for a balance between the values of nationalism (or any other political ideology) and the values of Islam. Generally speaking, the same great problems confront the Islamic thinkers in the modern period as confronted them in the first and second century of Islam (seventh and eighth centuries

A.D.) There are many unresolved tensions all through the history of Islam, mostly arising from the fact that the religious ideal cannot be realized in the world as it is.

The decline of Islamic civilization threatened utter ruin even before the advance of European imperialism. It is against such a background, of abject degradation after imperial glory, that the passionate struggle for national independence through the world of Islam is to be viewed and understood. The political rebirth was heralded in the nineteenth century and after by a cultural renaissance. The main stimuli which started this movement of revival were external: the French revolution, and British liberal idealism. The literary and artistic models, the scientific, technical, even the political examples, were to a great extent furnished by the West. The very impulse to study Muslim civilization, and to appraise the cultural achievements of medieval Islam – chief sources of pride and inspiration to the new generations of fervent nationalists – this too had its origins in western orientalism. These facts go a long way to account for the love-hate relationship which characterizes the attitude of many Muslims today towards the West.

The book of Professor Dziekan is divided into five chapters. In the first, named "Islam as a religion" the author deals with the Arab peninsula before Islam, then with the essentials of Islam, then with the inner differentiation of Islam and finally with the revival of Islam in 19 and 20 centuries. In the second chapter, named "Islam in time and space – the Muslim heartland" the author gives a comprehensive outline of the seventh century developments, the Muslim conquests and the first Muslim nations, the Arabs, the Iranians and Turks. In the third chapter, named "The symbolic culture" the author dwells on Arab language and writing, on other languages and alphabets of the Islamic world, on Arabic, Persian and Turkish literature in the era of Islam, on Arabic-Muslim philosophy and on science and education. The fourth chapter, named "Material culture" is dedicated to the sacral and secular architecture and to other artistic streams and fields. The fifth chapter, named "The culture in the periphery of the Islamic world" gives an outline of the situation in the East and West Africa, in the Malayan peninsula, in India, in the Maldives and in China.

The notable Polish Arabist, Professor Marek Dziekan, made a valuable contribution to the understanding of the civilization of Islam. The book is undoubtedly the result of many years of a successful symbiosis of the author's teaching and research work at the university. This book is vital reading for anyone interested in the subject it addresses, mainly those who are in a good command of Polish. It is written with imagination, understanding, profound insights, and scholarly detachment. This book should be read and studied by all those interested in this field, especially the students of Arabic. More generally, it should be of great interest not only for all those interested in contemporary socio-political developments in the Islamic world because it provides the background for deeper understanding of many complex problems.

*Karol Sorby*