

The Romans as Viewed by Arabic Authors in the 9th and 10th Centuries A.D.

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Abstract The question whether Muslims of non-Arab origin were culturally superior to the Arab Muslims was hotly debated within the society of the Baghdad Caliphate from the middle of the eighth century A.D. onwards. Various groups that aimed at remoulding the political and social institutions and the direction of the Islamic culture brought in the subject of the characteristics of the pre-Islamic and the contemporary civilized nations, their virtues and vices as well as their cultural history. It is in this context that Arabic authors present their views about the Romans, their origin, their characteristics, their political and cultural history and their connection with other neighbouring nations. Such views are reflected in the works of three distinguished Muslims authors who lived and wrote in Arabic during the period of the 9th and early 10th century A.D. This study aims at presenting the views of the chosen three Arabic authors and the arguments they advanced as regards the history and culture of Romans.

Keywords: Romans, Arabic literature, *al-Jāhīz*, *al-Yaʿqūbī*, *al-Masʿūdī*.

1. Introduction

Of the peoples that the Arabic authors of the 9th and 10th century showed special interest were the Romans (*rūm*). The Arabic word *rūm* which occurs in various texts of the Arabic literature appears to refer not only to the ancient Romans (Latins) but also to the Byzantines as well as to the Christians, especially the Melkites, both inside and outside the lands of the caliphate. In the Arabic writings of the early Islamic period, the word *rūm* most often refers to the contemporary Greek speaking Byzantines who were Christians. This meaning of the word *rūm* is justifiable, because the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants, and generally all those in power in the Eastern Roman Empire contemporary with the Muslim Caliphate, were Greek speaking Christians who called themselves Romans (*rūm*). However, today we use the term “Byzantine” in order to distinguish the late Eastern Roman Empire from the ancient Western Roman Empire, especially after the transfer of the capital from Rome to Constantinople in A.D. 330. In this paper I shall look into Arabic accounts on the ancient Latin speaking Romans.

2. Al-Jāhīz (A.D. 776-868/9)

As far as one can judge on the basis of the medieval Arabic literature, the early Arabic writers did not know much about the ancient Latin speaking Romans nor did they bother to know about their history or culture. It was in the early ninth century that Arabic authors dealt with the question of the ancient civilized nations and their relation with Islam. Al-Jāhīz (A.D. 776-868/9), the most famous and great prose-writer of the times of the early Abbasids, was one of the earliest Arabic authors who dealt with this question and wrote in favour of the Arabs. He does not distinguish between the ancient Latin speaking Romans and the Greek speaking Byzantines. In a passage where he discusses the civilized nations, al-Jāhīz classifies the *rūm* (=Romans and Byzantines) among the four civilized nations of the world. His very words are as follows:

“... the nations (*umam*) which have ethical practices (*akhlāq*), culture and literary traditions (*ādāb*), wisdom (*ḥikam*, pl. of *ḥukm*) and science (*‘ilm*) are four, namely the Arabs, the Indians, the Persians and the *rūm*.” (Al-Jāḥiẓ, 1998: 1.384).

In this quotation al-Jāḥiẓ names the four civilized nations, namely the Arabs, the Indians, the Persians and the Romans. He also states four characteristics essential for a nation to be classified as civilized, namely ethical practices (*akhlāq*), literary traditions (*ādāb*), wisdom (*ḥukm*) and science (*‘ilm*). Therefore, it is the excellences these nations possess that make them distinct and pre-eminent over others. Regarding the literary traditions, it appears that al-Jāḥiẓ has in mind the literary traditions of these nations which had been translated into Arabic from the 9th century onwards. He himself knew and read various works translated into Arabic from the Syriac, Persian, Indian and Greek languages (Endress, 1987: 402ff; Gutas, 1998: 20ff). These translations were introduced into the literary circles of the caliphate and were slowly integrated in the new Arabic culture which was then under formation. Clearly, al-Jāḥiẓ believed that the wisdom of all nations was transmitted into the Arabic literary culture in a slow process from nation to nation and from generation to generation, when he writes:

“The books of the Indians, the wisdom of Greece and the literature of the Persians have all been translated. Some have gained in charm while others lost nothing ... These books were transmitted from nation to nation, from era to era and from language to language, until they finally reached us and we were the last to inherit and examine them ...” (Al-Jāḥiẓ, 1965-69: 1.38, translation by Khalidi, 1994: 108).

In this quotation al-Jāḥiẓ plainly states that the new Arabic culture which was then under formation had embraced all that the previous nations had created in all fields of human activity. It cannot be concealed that by this claim al-Jāḥiẓ aimed at justifying the pre-eminence of the Arabs and their culture. Thus al-Jāḥiẓ claims superiority for the power of the Arab aristocracy and seeks to glorify their achievements over all other nations.

One should bear in mind that, since Greek works possessed by the Christians of the Middle East, had been among the books translated into Arabic, it is justifiable that the word *rūm* is taken to refer to the contemporary Greek speaking Christian Romans, i.e. the Byzantines. Besides, the Melkite Christians, who lived in the Muslim lands, were called *rūm*. However, al-Jāḥiẓ does not distinguish between the ancient Latin speaking Romans and his contemporary Greek speaking Romans, i.e. the Byzantines. Having become acquainted with Arabic translations of Greek philosophical and scientific works, al-Jāḥiẓ came to distinguish between the Greeks (*yūnāniyyūn*) and the Romans (*rūm*), i.e. the Byzantines. Thus he writes:

“Had the common people but known that the Christians (*naṣārā*) and the Romans or Byzantines (*rūm*) have neither wisdom nor clarity [of mind] nor depth of thought but are simply clever with their hands in wood-turning, carpentry, plastic arts, and weaving of silk brocade, they would have removed them from the ranks of the literati and dropped them from the roster of philosophers and sages because works like the *Organon*, *On Coming to Be and Passing Away*, and *Meteorology* were written by Aristotle, and he is neither Byzantine nor Christian; the *Almagest* was written by Ptolemy, and he is neither Byzantine nor Christian; the *Elements* was written by Euclid, and he is neither Byzantine nor Christian; medical books were written by Galen, who was neither Byzantine nor Christian; and similarly with the books by Democritus, Hippocrates, Plato, and on and on. All these are individuals of one nation; they have perished but the traces of their minds live on: they are the Greeks (*yūnāniyyūn*). Their religion was different from the religion of the Byzantines, and their culture was different from the culture of the Byzantines. They were scientists, while these people [the Byzantines] are artisans ...” (Al-Jāḥiẓ, 1926: 16-17, translation by Gutas, 1998: 87 with slight modifications.)

This quotation is taken from a treatise al-Jāḥiẓ wrote probably at the time when the caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. A.D. 847-861) issued an edict against the Christians and other heretics in an attempt to assert the political power of the caliph, control the influences various sects exerted in the Muslim society and suppress rebellious factions. It appears that, in this passage, al-Jāḥiẓ aims at belittling the achievements of the Romans or Byzantines and refuting the claims of superiority of various Christian circles within the caliphate. It seems that there was confusion among the people whether the Greek authors mentioned in this passage were Romans (*rūm*) or Greeks (*yūnāniyyūn*). While al-Jāḥiẓ knows that they were Greeks, yet he claims that the ancient Greeks were a nation perished by his time. Thus he denies that there was any connection between the ancient Greeks and the Romans. It is very likely that the question of the relation of the Romans or Byzantines to the ancient Greeks was hotly debated in the literary circles of the caliphate. In any case, al-Jāḥiẓ did see a difference between the ancient Greeks (*yūnāniyyūn*) and the contemporary Greek speaking Byzantines (*rūm*), but he did not distinguish between the ancient Latin speaking Romans and the Greek speaking Romans, i.e. the Byzantines in any way. Although al-Jāḥiẓ did not write about the ancient Latin speaking Romans, later Arabic writers showed interest in the name, the origins and history of the *rūm*. So they came to distinguish between the ancient Romans, who had a different language and religion, and the later Romans, i.e. the Byzantines, who were Christians. The earliest Muslim Arabic writers to give short accounts of the history of the ancient Romans and the Byzantines were the historian and geographer al-Ya'qūbī (d. c. A.D. 905) and the geographer, historian and man of letters al-Mas'ūdī (A.D. 893-956).

3. Al-Ya'qūbī (d. c. A.D. 905)

The history of the historian and geographer al-Ya'qūbī is the first surviving comprehensive universal history in Arabic. In his account, he distinguishes between the Greeks, the Romans and the Byzantines, although he uses the same name *rūm* both for the ancient Romans and the Byzantines. His information though limited is to a large extent accurate. It appears that al-Ya'qūbī must have had access to good sources. As he himself names some of his sources, it is evident that among his sources were Greek works translated into Arabic as well as Syriac chronicles used in other contexts either from some Arabic translation or through someone who translated for him from Syriac. For he seems not to know Syriac himself.

The pre-islamic part of al-Ya'qūbī's universal history is a long one and covers one third of the whole surviving work. It is here that he gives an account of the ancient nations. The account on the Greeks and the Romans is structured as follows: Having given a long account of Greek works on medicine, mathematics, astronomy and philosophy that were translated into Arabic in a section of his history entitled "The Greeks" (*al-yūnāniyyūn*), al-Ya'qūbī starts another section entitled "The Kings of the Greeks and the Romans (*mulūk al-yūnāniyyīn wa-l-rūm*)" (Al-Ya'qūbī, 1883: I.106-161, on the Greek sciences and I.161-164 on the Greek kings). Then, he proceeds and adds a sub-section entitled "The Kings of the Romans (*mulūk al-rūm*)" and another one entitled "The Christian Kings of the Romans (*mulūk al-rūm al-mutanaṣṣira*)" (Al-Ya'qūbī, 1883: I.164-177). The list of the Kings is drawn upon Ptolemy's *Canon of Kings*, as he himself says (Al-Ya'qūbī, 1883: I.161). Therefore, one may infer that al-Ya'qūbī probably had either direct access to some Arabic translation of the Ptolemy's list or to that commented by Theon of Alexandria, or probably found this list incorporated in some Arabic Christian chronicle. Al-Ya'qūbī's information complies more or less with Ptolemy's list of the Roman Kings (cf. Wachsmuth, 1895: 304-306).

Now, al-Ya'qūbī starts the sub-section on the ancient Romans with a genealogy which aims firstly at identifying the ancestor after whom the Romans were called and secondly at placing their ancestor in relation with the biblical account which goes back to Abraham (Al-Ya'qūbī, 1883: I.164). He states that their ancestor was called '*rūm*'. Then he proceeds by saying that the Romans defeated the Greeks and ruled over them. The Romans spoke the language of their people which was called *rūmī* (for the term see Bouyges, 1947-48: 119-129). He adds that the Romans studied the Greek language and all the best of the wisdom of the

Greeks. After this short introductory remarks, al-Ya'qūbī gives a list, first of the kings of the ancient Romans and then a list of the Christian Romans, i.e. the Byzantines. Thus he distinguishes between two series of kings: those of the ancient Romans who were pagans, and those of the later Romans, i.e. the Byzantines, who were Christians. With respect to the list of the pagan Roman Kings, it should be said that al-Ya'qūbī gives the name of each king, the years of his reign and sometimes adds few short remarks as to a distinguished person that lived in that time or an event which was thought of being important. The list of the ancient Roman Kings starts with Gaius [Julius Caesar] and ends with Constantine the Great (Al-Ya'qūbī, 1883: I.164-165). The list of the succession of the Roman kings is followed by a short account of the metaphysical beliefs and practices of the kings and of various groups of people during the early Roman period. The source of this information is not stated. Most probably it derives from some doxography written either during the Hellenistic or Roman period and was available in Arabic translation at the time al-Ya'qūbī wrote. Of course, one cannot exclude the possibility that al-Ya'qūbī found this information quoted in some other Christian chronicle or Arabic source. The account of the religious, philosophical and scientific beliefs of the groups mentioned is longer than the account of the list of the Roman Kings. This reflects his interest in the general cultural history of other peoples. It may be summarized as follows: Al-Ya'qūbī says that the kings of the Greeks and the Romans held different world views. Similar was the case with the various groups of people. Some maintained the religion of Sabians (*ṣābi'ūn*) and they were used to be called *ḥunafā'*" (cf. Watt, 1971:165a-166b). Among the other views that are mentioned in this section are the cosmological and metaphysical beliefs of the followers of Zeno, i.e. the Stoics; then those of the so-called *dahriyya*, which are thought to refer to materialists or philosophers of nature who do not accept metaphysical principles; then the cosmological doctrines of those who follow Empedocles and Anaxagoras; and last the cosmological and metaphysical beliefs of the followers of Aristotle (Al-Ya'qūbī, 1883: I.166-171). Generally speaking, this section presents some philosophical and scientific views held by the ancient Greek thinkers and their followers during the early Roman period.

On the whole, al-Ya'qūbī's account about the Romans is based on Ptolemy's *Canon of Kings* and some Hellenistic doxography, coverings thus aspects of their political and cultural history with a genealogy which places them in relation to the ancient Greeks and especially the biblical genealogy which goes back to Abraham.

3. Al-Mas'ūdī (A.D. 893-956)

A more detailed account about the ancient Romans we find in the two surviving works of al-Mas'ūdī. The material which al-Mas'ūdī gives on the Greeks and Romans differs in its nature and its method of presentation between the two works. He has different sections on the Greek Kings, the ancient Roman Kings who were pagans, and the later Roman Kings (i.e. the Byzantines) who were Christians, in both of his two surviving works. Some of the differences between the two works may be explained by the fact that the book entitled *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf* was written towards the end of his life. Therefore, it is justifiable that some of his earlier views have been corrected by himself, since he had come across new and accurate information. As regards his sources, these seem to range from chronicles of ancient history, astronomical tables, to philosophical and scientific works, to literary traditions and popular stories. Apart from historical works of earlier Muslim authorities, he derives information from Christian chronicles and from non-historical works translated from the Greek, of which he cites Ptolemy's *Geography*, and his *Astronomical Tables*, as handed down by Theon of Alexandria; and medical and philosophical works by Galen and Aristotle. This kind of material not only supplied him with details on aspects of the intellectual history of the Graeco-Roman world, but also assisted in his attempt to establish a chronological point, to identify a personage, or verily other historical details. For example, by using chronological evidence from the works of Claudius Ptolemy, al-Mas'ūdī is able to prove that the author of *Almagest* was not a Ptolemite monarch after all, but a scholar who

flourished in the reign of the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius (A.D.138-161) (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1893: 114-115 and 129-130).

In dealing with the ancient Romans, al-Mas'ūdī attempts to present a general picture of their history. First, he records various views on the name and identity of the Romans. Some scholars of his time claimed that the Romans were named after the name of the city of Rome, while others after the name of their ancestor. Then, he presents some of the different views concerning the origins of the Romans, which link them with biblical genealogy and are thought to be descendants of Abraham (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1962-79: § 715 and Al-Mas'ūdī, 1893: 123). He also refers to the relation of the Romans (*rūm*) to the Greeks (*yūnāniyyūn*). He seems to have the opinion that the belief that the Romans and the Greeks had a common ancestor is wrong (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1962-79: § 664 and Al-Mas'ūdī, 1893: 115). He distinguishes between the Greeks and the Romans and states that this confusion is due to the fact that the Romans imposed their domination over the Greek people and incorporated them in their empire in such a way that the name of the Greeks was effaced without being mentioned any more, while all that was Greek was attributed to the Romans themselves. In turn, this fact led to the question whether 'Pythagoras, Thales, Empedocles, the Stoics, Homer, Archelaus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Themistius, Hippocrates, Galen and the other philosophers and medical doctors' were Romans (*rūm*) or Greeks (*yūnāniyyūn*). Al-Mas'ūdī then says that he has proved that all the names of the philosophers and scientists just mentioned were Greeks on the basis of their writings (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1893: 115). As said earlier, the question of the historical connection between the *yūnāniyyūn* and the *rūm* was a problem which seems to have interested Arabic literary circles of the 9th and 10th century A.D. A modern scholar says that 'al-Mas'ūdī, who seems to conform to current literary traditions as far as the end of the Greek political power was concerned, does not, however, support the equally voiced notion that the Greeks had perished as a people too' (Shboul, 1979: 229 and 261). As far as this issue is concerned we may point out that, although the Greeks as a people did not perish, al-Mas'ūdī believed not only that the Greeks had lost their political power and their independence but he also held the view that the Greek philosophical and scientific edifice was destroyed and the sciences neglected, when Christianity carried the day. For he writes:

"During the time of the ancient Greeks [*zaman al-yūnāniyyīn*], and for a little while during the Roman kingdom [*mamlakat al-rūm*], the philosophical sciences kept on growing and developing, and scholars and philosophers were respected and honored. ... The sciences continued to be in great demand and intensely cultivated until the religion of Christianity appeared among the Romans [*fī-l-rūm*]; they then effaced the signs of philosophy, eliminated its traces, destroyed its paths, and they changed and corrupted what the ancient Greeks had set forth in clear exposition." (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1962-79: § 741, translation by Gutas, 1998: 89 slightly modified.)

Now, al-Mas'ūdī's account on the early Roman emperors before Constantine the Great shows similar characteristics to that of al-Ya'qūbī. However, there are divergences, even if the list of the ancient Roman Kings seems based on the same types of sources. One of those sources was the *Astronomical Tables* (*zīj*) of Theon of Alexandria, i.e. Ptolemy's *Canon of Kings* as handed down by the mathematician and astronomer Theon of Alexandria (fl. c. A.D. 364) (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1893: 136). Apart from the obvious possibility of direct borrowing from an Arabic translation of Theon's book or al-Ya'qūbī's history, al-Mas'ūdī was also based on some Christian chronicles, as he himself says (cf. Al-Mas'ūdī, 1893: 146-155). His list of the ancient Roman Kings begins with Gaius Julius Caesar and ends with Constantine the Great. Although he is not aware of constitutional changes in Rome, yet al-Mas'ūdī points out that despite the lack of information in chronicles and tables of rulers the Romans had earlier kings (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1893: 123). He also knew that Rome was built long before Caesar and gives the figure 400 years, which does not represent a correct reckoning (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1962-79: §717). As far as we know, he is also the earliest Muslim author to mention the legend of Romulus

and Remus, the “twin-sons of the she-wolf”, with whom tradition has connected the founding of Rome (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1893: 123). His list of the ancient Roman kings contains not only the names of the kings and the years of their reign but also short pieces of information on various persons and events. Some of this information is of philosophical and scientific interest, as al-Mas‘ūdī takes account of the scientific and philosophical achievements in this period. Thus he mentions the geographer Marinus, the neo-Pythagorean Secundus, the mathematician and great astronomer Claudius Ptolemy and the medical doctor and philosopher Galen, commentator of many of Hippocrates’ writings (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1893: 127, 128, 129-130 and 129-131 respectively). However, most of this additional information is mostly concerned with religious and other ecclesiastical events. As his account is determined by Christian sources, al-Mas‘ūdī gives more details on early Christian history and the fates of Christians under each of the early Roman emperors (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1893:154-155).

On the whole, al-Mas‘ūdī gives a more detailed account of the ancient Romans, their Emperors and their dates, while he adds some information concerning religious and cultural events. He also not only underlines the continuity of the Greek heritage in the Roman period, but also points out to the scientific and philosophical decline at the time when the Romans and their kings adopted Christianity as their religion. It should be stressed that his acquaintance with Greek science and philosophy, and his contacts with Christian and the Sabian scholars of Harran seem to have enabled him to form a more historical view of the ancient Romans and their culture.

5. The Historical Context

The reason why Muslims authors of the 9th and 10th century A.D. dealt with the history and culture not only of the Romans but also of other ancient and contemporary nations is related to the social, political and cultural circumstances of their age. In the early stages of the integration of various people in the new Muslim society, the Arabs formed exclusively not only the military force but also the new social and political élite. The non-Arabs had to attach to an Arab family as clients (*mawālī*, sing. *mawlā*) even in the case they had embraced the new religion (Crone, 1990: 874a ff). This fact led to grievances and finally to open conflict. The internal struggle for equality and political supremacy was unceasing among the different peoples and the various groups that constituted the new Muslim society. During the early period the arrogance and monopoly of power by the Arab aristocratic élite created resentment in the subject peoples and especially the *mawālī*, i.e. the non-Arab Muslims. Nevertheless, the Arabs managed to keep the monopoly of power for over a century. They claimed that their superiority was based on the assumption that the *quranic* revelation, which was the only source of all true knowledge, was given to an Arab prophet (Rosenthal, 1947: 69).

Other peoples and especially the non-Arab Muslims put forth and insisted upon the superior character of other older civilizations. Such is the case of the Persian Ibn al-Muqaffa‘, who in the introduction of his work entitled *Adab al-kabīr* claims that true civilization was found only in pre-Islamic times, especially among the Persians. Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ was of noble Persian origin, started a career as a chancery secretary (*kātib*) and won for himself unprecedented renown as a master of Arabic literary prose (Gabrieli, 1971: 883a ff). The views and attitudes of Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ and of all those writers that followed this line of thought are part of the ideas adopted by the so-called *shu‘ūbiyya* movement (Enderwitz, 1997: 513b-516a). The origins of this movement are thought of as going back to the discontents that arose in the early Arab conquests in the second quarter of the seventh century, but it became a fashion in thought during the time of the early Abbasid caliphate, especially during the period of the ninth century. The *shu‘ūbiyya* movement is regarded as an assertive movement in Arabic cultural history and literature which represented a powerful backlash amongst the subject peoples against the Arabs. The different races, mostly Persians and Aramaeans, in the Muslim society denied any privileged position of the Arabs and to some extent succeeded to ‘hold their own and to distinguish at least between Arabism and Islam’ (quoted in Norris, 1990: 31. Cf. Enderwitz, 1997: 514a-515b). Within this framework, various factions that arose among the religious minded people felt that events

of the distant past needed to be known, since it was thought that they had a bearing on the origins and development of the new religion, the times of the Prophet Muhammad, the conquests and the creation and consolidation of the Muslim Empire (Lichtenstadter, 1974: 52). Similarly, other groups of non-Arab Muslims, members of the urban middle class, and especially members of the secretary class (*kuttāb*) in the administration of the caliphate, sought to justify their claims for power and pre-eminence in the records of the past. Thus the internal struggle for political power and social advancement added a practical incentive to intellectual curiosity for any kind of knowledge. For, 'if it could be proved that one particular people or civilization was intellectually superior to the others, the claim of that people or civilization to political supremacy also seemed to have been established' (Rosenthal, 1947: 69).

Again, there was interest in the question of the indebtedness of Muslim civilization to previous and other civilizations especially to the civilization of the Greeks, the Persians, the Indians and other peoples. The significance of previous and other civilizations for Islam acquired a sense of urgency in the 9th century. The transmission of knowledge from one nation to another had a special significance for the Muslim community. The knowledge which originated with some other nations was the foundation upon which the Muslims had to build. This explains the emphasis laid on science and wisdom in the accounts of the authors examined.

Also the relation of the pre-Islamic era to the Islamic one was an old question. The message of the Prophet Muhammad and the hints in the Qur'ān about the early history of mankind had to be worked up into coherent story. Muhammad's message, then, gave greater depth to the historical consciousness of the Arabs by extending their past back to Abraham and through it to the time of the Creation of the world. Thus, later Arabic historians had a basis on which could build and expand in order to explain the message of their prophet and bring out the historical significance of the past peoples for Islam.

Again, the Muslims were faced with 'the spectacle of many great nations, ancient as well as contemporaneous, who rose to heights of glory without having an Islamic heritage' (Khalidi, 1975: 82). So the Muslim authors of the 9th and 10th centuries had to explain this fact both for answering the claims of various groups within their own society as well as in justifying the ideology of Islam and the ruling class.

From the above analysis, it is clear that there were social, political, religious and cultural factors which motivated the Arabic authors of the 9th and 10th century to deal with the history and culture of other ancient or contemporary nations and especially the Romans. This knowledge served not only to answer the questions raised by members of various factions within the Muslim society but also to reveal the principles that govern the progress and decline of nations.

6. Concluding remarks

The information we reviewed above shows the growing interest of the Arabic writers of the ninth and tenth century in the political history, the literary traditions and the philosophical and scientific culture of the Romans (*rūm*). However, the picture one forms is not a satisfactory one. It appears that the knowledge about the "other" which the three Arabic authors produced aimed at belittling the achievements of other peoples and at glorifying their own. Although it may be thought of as being a mirror one uses to see his own self, the knowledge they produced aimed at enhancing the Muslim identity.

Again, this knowledge served the various factions, especially the non-Arabs, Persians or Aramaeans, Muslims or non-Muslims, in their struggle for power and pre-eminence within the Muslim society. For such groups of people sought to justify their claims and drew arguments to defend their position in the social and political hierarchy from their inherited culture, their expertise and skills. Thus it may be said that the works written by the three Arabic authors reflect the questions discussed in the literary and religious circles of the Muslim society in the 9th and 10th century. The answers they provided show the direction towards which Islam was to advance. For the appearance of Islam set in motion the creation of a new culture in the Arabic language. This orientation of the new Muslim culture was to distinguish between Islam and Arabism, as seen in the later developments.

Furthermore, the Arabic authors of this period seem to have endeavored so as to have the political, social, cultural, religious, linguistic, geographical and historical boundaries clearly drawn. Thus, it may well be said that such knowledge aimed at creating a mental map in which the division of the world into the realm of Islam and the realm of war had to be justified. This division, though it does not appear in the Qur'ān, was to prevail in medieval times from the ninth century onwards.

Finally, it also should be said that the description of the Romans our three authors presented aimed at shaping the popular views, offering help to the official propaganda in the manipulation of the masses and thus serving the ruling élite.

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