

Sigrid Hunke - Allahs Sonne über dem Abendland Unser Arabisches Erbe [Allah's Sun over the Occident: Our Arabian Heritage]

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This book was written by a German author, Dr Sigrid Hunke in 1963, and later translated into Arabic (Cairo & Beirut: 1964), French (Paris: 1963), Turkish (Istanbul: 1972), and Persian (Tehran: 1981). The title of its Persian version can be translated as *The Culture of Islam in Europe*. This is the primary source for this book review, while the quoted sentences have been extracted from the original German using a virtual translator. The original German title – *Allahs Sonne über dem Abendland Unser Arabisches Erbe* – can be translated into English as *Allah's Sun over the Occident: Our Arabian Heritage*.

Sigrid Hunke (1913-1999) was a German scholar who studied philosophy, psychology, and religions under Martin Heidegger, Eduard Spranger, Karlfried Graf Durckheim, Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss (her PhD supervisor), and Hermann Mandel. Her Tangier residence and government-sponsored excursions to several Arabic countries helped her gain a good knowledge of the Arabic language and Islamic culture. She believed that Europe owed Muslim civilisation a debt of gratitude for their successful achievements in science and technology in the modern era. During the old days, the east was more prosperous than the west, such that people in the West will be waiting for pilgrims and travelers from the east so as to ask for the gifts, goods, and graces of the East (p.26). In the book's introduction, the author underlines the Western world's lack of knowledge of Islamic civilisation, and she attributes much of this ignorance to Western historiography and the underestimation of the achievements of Islamic civilisation (p.9). In 1988, Hunke was honoured by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak for her scholarly work on the relationship between Islamic and European cultures and civilisations.

The work's original German language version is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter, entitled "Spice of Everyday," begins with examples of popular words in Europe that have their roots in the Arabic language, and then addresses Europe's global trade weakness in comparison to the Islamic Empire. The author then describes Venice and the great presence of Eastern culture in the

form of spices and other Asian commodities in the prominent European cities of the time. She then portrays Westerners imitating Eastern lifestyles and the collection of technologies that slipped from east to west.

In the second chapter, she discusses the significant influence that the knowledge transfer of mathematics and arithmetic from east to west had on various spheres of life. Following an introduction to the origins of Hindu-Arabic numbers, the book goes into great depth about this numerical system. It then discusses the history of Eastern numeral systems through religious organisations and trade, as well as the early obstacles that Western bureaucracies encountered when dealing with these new methods.

Chapter three describes several major branches of the natural sciences in the Islamic world, namely astronomy, mechanics, mathematics, as well as the influence of Muslim successes on Europe's tremendous scientific achievements and breakthroughs. Hunke gathered the contributions of Musa bin Shakir – a 9th century highwayman, astronomer, and later a scholar at Caliph al-Ma'mun's court - and the achievements of his three sons in mechanics, astronomy, and mathematics. The fourth chapter is on medicine and remedies, providing detailed explanations of Muslim physicians' remarkable successes in curing ailments, as well as Muslim pharmacists' progress in producing efficient medicines. In the fifth chapter, the author discusses the causes of Arab cultural flourishing, emphasising the role of translation in that expansion. In chapters six and seven, the author recounts in detail developments in Sicily and Spain, two regions of Europe that were governed by Muslims for centuries. She believes that scientific and technological developments in Europe were based on earlier developments by Muslims in these fields. She discusses the bridges to the Occident through Sicily and Spain, and mentions Frederick II, who reunited East and West. She also discusses the development of various other disciplines in Europe, such as art, music, and literature.

The major theme of the book, as the title implies, is the Islamic world's supremacy over the West during the Middle Ages. The title seems to be politically driven, but in reality the reader will discover that the aforementioned dominion does not originate from violence. Instead, Hunke points to the richness of knowledge, culture, and civilisation attained by a well-developed Muslim community, which was later accepted by other groups, not through force or violence, but from a sense of need and desire. This contrasts with the traditional Orientalist perspective that has long dominated the West. To this end, the book begins by highlighting some common words in the West, such as sugar and alcohol, mentioning the Islamic roots of these terms (p.13). She exposes Western vulnerabilities during its Dark Ages in comparison to the situation of Islam during that period. In referring to the paper industry, for example,

the author uses the phrase “illiterate Europe” to reflect a lack of early paper production in the West as compared to the Islamic world (p.28). The author also mentions several goods brought to the West by Muslims, ranging from clothing to food and agricultural equipment.

After presenting some general aspects of the Islamic impact on the West in terms of cultural assets, the book delves deeply into the Islamic world’s scientific disciplines and their contributions to the West. These scientific disciplines include mathematics, mechanics, astronomy, and medicine. When she discusses medicine and its achievements in the Islamic world, she mentions novel techniques for treating ailments, advanced hospitals, and famous doctors, such as al-Razi.

Hunke states that the cornerstone of the scientific method, experimentation, was not discovered by Bacon, Galileo, Da Vinci, or other Western scientists, but by Muslims (p.84). In this regard, she describes Muslim attempts to establish the concept of doubt in science, which is mistakenly regarded as a Western accomplishment (p.211). The author mentions the significance of learning in Islamic culture, as well as how Muslims’ interests and perspectives on learning and knowledge influenced Westerners. She highlights the Prophet’s advice to acquire knowledge, even from a distance region (p.188). Hunke also criticises the Church’s antagonism towards Greek science, including their burning of the rich scientific, philosophical, and literary resources of classical Greece (p.183). She refers to the religious tolerance of Muslims, considering them pioneers in inter-religious dialogue, a trend she links to the hospitality of the pre-Islamic Arabs (p.185).

Reading this book gives the impression that its author is a devoted Eastern Muslim, while in fact she is a German Unitarian. This can be seen at the end, when the author mentions that any separation between West and East is trivial, and what needs to be emphasised is the intercultural relationship and quest for common interests. As Goethe says in his *West-East Divan*: “one who knows himself and the others knows as well that East and West are inseparable.”