

'ISLAM' AND THE DECLINE OF CIVILIZATION:  
DECONSTRUCTION OF HISTORIOSOPHY OF OSWALD  
SPENGLER AND HENRI PIERENNE

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The decline of the Roman Empire, in general, and the loss of its Western parts, in particular, to the Germanic Barbarians in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, was one of the most significant transformations throughout the whole of human history and always the focus of historians. Several scholars have investigated the causes of the failure that led to the decline of that most powerful Empire and its civilization. These few lines aim at deconstructing the descriptions of Oswald Spengler and Henri Pirenne whose conclusion is that the spread of Islam was the cause of the decline of the classical Roman Empire and its civilization.

Spengler in his discussion of the decline of Roman civilization in his book entitled *The Decline of the West* examines thoroughly the spread of Islam under the subtitle "Problems of the Arabian Culture". His historic pseudo-morphoses analysis depicts clearly that the decline of classical European culture and civilization was because of the emergence of his so-called "Arabian culture". For him, the struggle of Rome and Greece that came was not an issue, but the issue was the unborn Arabian Culture that was opposed to iron-grey Classical Civilization, and lay between Principate and Caliphate. He concludes that had Antony achieved victory at Actium, he would have freed the Magian soul; his defeat drew over its lands the hard sheet of Roman Imperium. He compares this event in the history of the West to the battle between Tours and Poitiers, AD. 732. He declares:

Had the Arabs won it and made Frankistan into a caliphate of the Northeast, Arabic speech, religion, and customs would have become familiar to the ruling classes; giant cities like Granada and Kairawan would have arisen on the Loire and the Rhine; the Gothic

feeling would have been forced to find expression in the long-stiffened forms of Mosque and Arabesque; and instead of the German mysticism, we should have had a sort of Sufism.<sup>1</sup>

In the first place, the term "Arabian Culture" in the Spengler discussion refers to Islam and its civilization. If this is correct, it means that Spengler missed an important factor in his analysis, which is, that the essence of Islam as a religion and as a root of Muslim civilization is broader in its sense than to be termed "Arabian Culture". For Islamic civilization is an amalgam of different cultures that constitute its civilization, such as Asian, African, European and American with their peculiarities which are compatible with Islam. Arabian culture before Islam was filled with tribal wars and many kinds of atrocities that go against Islam. When Islam emerged, it corrected these incongruities in line with Islamic principles. Therefore, Arabian culture is among these diverse cultures which constitute Islamic civilization.

Spengler believes that the Magian soul, through which an old European culture and religion emerged and occupied space and time, was murdered by the Arabian Culture which is also from the same soul, but rebelled against it. He states:

Islam ... is to be regarded as the Puritanism of the whole group of early Magian religions, emerging as a religion only formally new, and in the domain of southern Church and Talmudic Judaism. It is this deeper significance, and not merely the force of its warlike onslaught, that gives the key to its fabulous success.<sup>2</sup>

The success that Islam brought to itself as a universal religion was not achieved by waging war and using force against its opponents as Spengler views it. Rather Islam employed its moral elements such

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<sup>1</sup> Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York, 1928, pp.191-192.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.260