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THE ARABS AND THE IDEAL OF MEDITERRANEAN  
UNITY.

An Address delivered by Enrico Cerulli at the Centre d'Etudes de Politique Etrangere, Paris, on 8 July 1950.

To a historian open-minded enough to observe the present world situation with the same dispassionate detachment with which one may study the history of past ages, this present epoch would appear as one of the most interesting in the whole course of human experience.

A great historical period was brought to a close in 1914. We are now witnessing and, alas, feeling the brunt of the convulsive throes announcing the birth of a new epoch. The entire world is reeling under the impact. So vast a crisis had not been recorded since the fall of the Roman Empire. Whether our troubled century has produced leaders able to meet so formidable a crisis, is a question that cannot be usefully dealt with here. Let us be optimistic as possible, and hope for the best; for, ~~regards~~ as regards the recent past, I can only say that during the various international conferences I have attended, on whose deliberations hung the fate of millions of men, I was frequently moved to imagine Politics addressing Wisdom with that fine verse an Arab poet once sent to his beloved one: "I should be satisfied with very little and even less than a little of you."

It is, to my mind, the duty of all informed persons to contribute with their experience and their practical knowledge to the task of making this period of tragic instability the starting-point of a happier period, re-establishing justice in a peaceful world.

May I, momentarily, turn the reader's attention from current happenings. I should like briefly to refer to a page of history which takes to the remote past, namely, the MIDDLE AGES. It is my belief that our troubled century, with its boasted material achievements, has much to learn from our medieval ancestors. Let us recall that moment in history when two different civilisations were facing and fighting each other along the shores of the Mediterranean.

Was there nothing in common between the Arab and the Christian worlds, whose respective religious, political and social organisations were poles apart, Was there an "iron curtain" lowered between the two? Contrary to superficial judgements based on ancient misconceptions, modern research has proved that there was a steady exchange of cultural and artistic values between East and West

by which the general trend of European civilization was powerfully and fruitfully affected.

The influence of Arab philosophy on European thought was, as we know, very great, even though its actual effects should not be exaggerated. European thought had already undergone a prolonged travail towards the end of the XI century, and was now fully conscious of its origin and development. It is enough in this connection, to recall the mighty stream of Augustinian thought, and such names as those of John Scotus, Erigena, St. Anselm of Aosta, Pierre Abelard, and others. European thought was far from being inert, nor did it lack the stimulus of scientific curiosity. It is, nevertheless, true that the entry of Arab Aristotelianism into the field of European philosophy marked the beginning of revolutionary changes. Avicenna, Averroes, and the rest were welcomed with joy by such men as William of Auverne, who averred that the Arabs "tanquam duces philosophiae sequendi et imitandi sunt"; or Roger Bacon, who expressed his satisfaction at the arrival of Michael Scot's translations from Palermo, with the words, "nunc magnificata est philosophia Aristotelis apud Latinos".

It was early in the XIII century that Arab thinkers first became known at European Courts and centers of learning, such as Palermo, Bologna, the Sorbonne and Oxford. Their doctrines soon acquired a dynamic driving power which was to last two hundred years, and well into the Renaissance period. Recent research in the field of eschatology has disclosed how European thinkers chose to explain the contrast between the Arab philosopher's idea of the life hereafter and the sensualistic heaven believed in by the great majority of Mahomedans.

Mahomed's paradise, as described by Avicenna and Averrois, is not, they say, the place of purely sensual pleasures imagined by the vulgus pecus. Some, as William of Auvergne, Bishop of Paris, went so far as to contend that Mahomet could not be held responsible for the errors of his followers. "Absurda et ridiculosa plurima", he said. "quae in lege eius inveniuntur (ipsum) non dixisse nec scripsisse nes sensisse (puto)"; the absurd and ridiculous features being the alleged results of interpolations made by ignorant or negligent disciples.

There was a philosopher, probably from Sicily, early in the XII century, who spoke of "legum latores justi. sapientissimo, alios salvare curantes, super quos cecidit lumen Dei et eius cognitio et eius verbum super linguas eorum, sicut Moises et Mahomet et Christus", merely improving on this extraordinary statement by adding that "Christus fuit potentior his duobus". We could not be further removed from the atmosphere of mutual repugnance and water-tight compartments <sup>n</sup>facied by some writers; on the contrary, we have come dangerously

near, in this case at least, to admiration wavering on the verge of heresy.

As a result of recent studies, it has been ascertained that what information reached Europe, generally through Spain, with regard to Mahomedan ideas on the life hereafter, was widely divulged and sometimes translated into more than one language, as were the "Livre de l'Echelle de Mahomet" (into Castillian, Latin and French), the fourth part, on Islam, of ~~the~~ "Le Livre del Gentil" by Raymond Lulle (into Catalan, Castillian, and French, the latter translation with the changed title "Le Livre de la loi au Sarrazin"), the "De Statu Saracenorum et eorum lege" by William of Tripoli (into Latin and French), etc. It was thus that the bulk of this literature on Mahomet's paradise and hell and the Prophet's journey through the realms of the hereafter reached Tuscany in Dante's time; and who knows but that the Poet may, directly or indirectly, have drawn some inspiration therefrom,

As regards Arab influence on European literature and art, let us see, first of all, whether and how far lyric poetry was affected. Beginning with William of Poitiers, late in the twelfth century, lyric poetry flourished mostly in Provence, whence it spread throughout the Western world. It ~~was~~ not poetry of the people but, rather, a highly cultivated form of art, ~~born~~ in Court circles. Should we bow to the fact that this exquisite flower first came into bloom in Arab Spain? As we have learnt from <sup>L</sup>Lois Ribera's work, published in 1912, Provencal prosody was directly influenced by the Arabic-Andalusian poetry of the time. It is really interesting to remark, however, that the Arabian-Andalusian ~~poetry~~ type of poetry to which allusion has been made was entirely of the people both in inspiration and <sup>c</sup>content and far below the serene region of classical literature. This means that the Provencal stanza had its humble origin in the folk songs of Andalusia, the zadjal; it was not, indeed, the legatee of a literature comparable to what it created. Apart from all this, it would be very to deny that the Provencal idea of "amor courtois", and the whole atmosphere surrounding it, were not immune from contacts with similar ideas then permeating the Courts of Spain and, later those of Sicily and the Latinized Near East, where the Western and the Arab worlds merged even while they were at war. No more striking witness to this contradictory situation could be invoked than an illumination in a manuscript of the "Cantigas de Santa Maria", once the property of Alphonse the Sage, king of Castily, showing a Christian juggler standing by the side of an Arab singer; or, better still, another illumination in a manuscript by Pierre d'Eboli, showing Roger the Norman, king of Sicily, on his death-bed, with an Arab astrologer to his right and an Arab "medicus hachim" to his left.

Medieval epic poetry chose the wars between the peoples of the West and the Arabs as one of its favorite subjects (Chanson de Roland, the Cid, etc.) The story of those conflicts, however idealized by epic poets, necessarily contains references to Mahomedan social life, customs, views; but we should also consider to what an extent epic subjects adopted by Western poets were influenced by Eastern models. Although I do not wish to anticipate the conclusions I have reached in a work still to be published on this subject, I may point out to the certain fact that a number of Arab tales did inspire Western poets in France, Germany and Italy late in the XII century. Those tales, moreover, were not borrowed from Arab classic literature but from popular legends and humble literary sources. The tales relating to the chivalrous exploits of Saladin the Great were followed by other stories gathered in the market places where Christians and Arabs met and fraternized during intervals of truce. At the same time, through Spain and the ~~Middle~~ <sup>Middle</sup> East, all Europe was listening to the petty legend of the king Al-Mutamid of Seville and his glorious love affairs; or to that of the beautiful Rumayqiyyah, the Sultan's wife, or to the adventures of Sinbad the Sailor, and the sage sayings of al-Kaham, the great Caliph of Cordova. We are not surprised to find the heroine of the French epic by Galeran de Bretagne, learning from her patrons at Court "all Arab as well all French and Guascon songs". Arab art had become fashionable.

In the Latin Near East, "La Chanson des Chetifs", an epic poem by a French troubadour living in Syria, described the odyssey of a group of Crusading Knights who, having been taken prisoners by an Arab Emir, fought for him against his Sultan, finally regaining the European camp after many adventures. A similar tale, let us remember, is the subject-matter of the episode of Manuel, the strategist, in the Greek epic by Digenis Akritas inspired by the frontier wars between the Byzantine Emperor and the Arabs; yet another frontier which did not prevent poetry stepping across from one camp to the other.

With regards to Christian-Arab converts, it has been proven that a complete series of tales of the Virgin's miracles, a series well-known, in the XI century, throughout France and more especially around the sanctuaries of Laoh, Soissons, Chartres and Rocamadour, and embellished with remarkable contributions from Italian and Spanish poets, somehow emigrated to Syria during the Crusades and was there translated into Arabic, early in the XIII century; All such tales coming from France, Italy, Spain, once they were turned into Arabic, became part of the literature of Christian Arabs in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. They eventually reached as far as Ethiopia, where a cycle of tales by the pilgrims visiting Chartres, Santiago de Compostella and the Basilicas of Rome, was translated from Arabic into Ethiopian under the Negus Dawit I.

A movement in the opposite direction took place from the Christian Near East to Europe. We know, for example, that the legend of the image of the Holy Virgin in the convent of Saydnaya, near Damascus, was imported into Europe through the agency of the Knights Templar. In times of truce, the Templars were wont to provide armed escorts for pilgrims from Christian Near East wishing to visit the shrine of the Holy Virgin at Saydnaya, Mahomedan Syria. Thus, they were able to spread the fine Arabic-Syrian legends all over Europe, where translations were issued in Latin, French, Italian, etc. Another point worth remembering has reference to the fact that Mahomedan pilgrims also went to worship at the Saydnaya shrine and left records of the miracles performed by the sacred Image in the favour of "Mahomedans who had faith." The story of the blind Sultan who was cured of his blindness by the blessed oil found at Saydnaya, is one of the cases on record.

There was a continuous intercourse with the West both by Mahomedans and Arab converts, nor was the exchange of ideas confined to the domain of literature alone. The most wonderful example of Arab medieval painting still extant, is the series of frescoes on view in the Palatine Chapel at Palermo. Those paintings are of exceptional interest in the history of art. They represent the main episodes in the Court life of an Eastern Prince. It has recently been confirmed that the "model" who sat, so to speak, for the figure of the Prince, came from Persia, where the Sassaride dynasty held power at that time. But the Prince, as depicted in the Palermo frescoes, lives amid surroundings whose realistic features faithfully reproduce local conditions. A dozen or so of singers and dancers who are supposed to amuse the Prince play on the lute, a Typically European instrument. On the strength of some valuable indications, it seems that the Arab painters of the Palermo Frescoes came from the province of Edessa, and if this was so we may conclude that this series of Persian-inspired paintings came to Sicily from the Latinized Near East. In any case, the frescoes in the Palatine Chapel, with their wealth of details portraying the life of luxury led by Eastern potentates, throw much light on the cultural relations then binding East and West in spite of their fundamental differences.

One must not draw the totally erroneous inference that the differences alluded to were more or less obliterated by cultural affinities or sympathies. No reconciliation was possible between those two heterogeneous worlds, even though this could not prevent ideas, traditions, scientific and artistic notions from surmounting the dividing barrier. Thus a dialectic of contraries developed, which soon became a real factor in the progress of civilisation.

It is in this sense that the magnificent expansion of culture in the XII-XIII centuries

centuries may be accepted as a result of the cultural unity that was established between the peoples living on the shores of the Mediterranean, even though they were enemies fighting each other to the bitter end. Regardless of the hatreds and horrors of the battlefield, men on either side of the barrier were busy laying the foundations of the future; for we must admit that those new elements of cultural progress, filtering through from the Arab East, gradually added new splendour to human civilisation, being assimilated through the slow work of generations of thinkers and artists.

Let us now return to our own time and politics. Some useful lessons may, in fact be learned from the fine page of history we have been recalling to mind:

(1) That the function fulfilled by Arab peoples and their culture in the Mediterranean region was, in its various manifestations, important enough to be recognized as a positive factor in the history of European culture. As Europeans, we cannot deny our debt to Arab culture, just as the Arabs themselves cannot but acknowledge their indebtedness, first, to ancient Greece, from which they borrowed the vital notions of Hellenic culture, and, in modern times again, to Western Europe, many products of whose culture were absorbed into the spiritual patrimony of the Arabic peoples. This common tradition, which remains to this day an essential feature of the history of our civilisation, derives from century-long mutual contacts. Is it too much to hope that it be still recognized at the present time as a solid foundation upon which reciprocal cooperation and comprehension between West and East may be built?

(2) As a matter of fact, the glorious record of Arab culture is still one of the factors which determine current political relations between the peoples of the Near East and those of Europe. Arab-Mahomedan cultural unity, which has been instrumental in shaping contemporary Arab policies, still exerts a very weighty influence with regard to both regional groupings and political alliances. The Arab peoples are well justified in being proud of their past history, now freed from the mists of prejudice and ignorance thanks to modern research. A cultural movement recently promoted by the Spanish School of Arabic Studies has created a most favourable impression throughout the Near East and the Arab world has been the main object of the Spanish school's attention. As a result, the cultural and artistic achievements of Mahomedan Spain have been openly extolled as representing a valid title of national glory. It was, indeed, due to Spain acting as a vehicle, that the exchanges between East and West became a steadily progressive factor, to the advantage of Europe at large.

We Italians are in the best position to appreciate medieval Spain's contri-

bution, because we lived side-by-side with the Arabs in Sicily for over three centuries. But the stock of cultural values we have in common with the Arab peoples does not exclusively belong to past history. On the contrary, our present-day relations with Near-Eastern countries should be influenced by the common recollection of our mutual cultural contacts in the past. We do not wish to close our eyes to current reality. And it is in a realistic spirit that we want to make it perfectly clear that in our relations with Near Eastern countries we have nothing to demand, ask, or expect beyond a friendly solidarity, such a should naturally exist among peoples who are alike interest in developing a great Mediterranean civilisation by their joint efforts.

Needless to add, all efforts on the part of Near Eastern countries to assert and secure their independence claim our sincerest sympathy. I believe however that our sympathy should be turned into action. I mean to say that the countries of Western Europe ought to adopt a policy of cooperation towards the new independent States of the Near-East - a policy which should aim at making their independence an effective and permanent reality.

But a friendly policy towards the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean presupposes, on the part of the Western Nations, a common plan of action agreed upon in all details. It would be pointless to disguise that the old postulating that world peace is indivisible remains truer than ever, since there is at present no single sector of the world the fate of which can be taken into consideration regardless of the general world situation. Self-seeking schemes, which disregard the needs of international cooperation, are fast becoming an impossibility. And this is why I welcome this opportunity to start a friendly exchange of ideas with our French neighbours, in the hope that a cordial discussion may open the way for satisfactory results. We are strong believers in a firm understanding between Italy and France. Such an entente should not only come into force, but should be so framed as to secure the possibility for both to act together, side by side, whether in Europe or elsewhere, in the defence of their policy and of the ultimate interests they have in common.

May we add that such an understanding should be applied to the general policies of both countries. And let me repeat that there are no water-tight compartments isolating different sectors of the world. Near East problems, for example, cannot be dealt with separately by one <sup>Nation</sup> ~~Nation~~ regardless of its own and its neighbour's general policies.)

Given this situation, what is the opinion prevailing in Italian non-official circles, among men of learning as well as among men of action, with regard to Near Eastern problems? I have stated already what, in our opinion, the new platform

for a policy of cooperation with the Arab States should be. A few words will be sufficient to summarize the policy we venture to advocate, namely, that whatever may help towards strengthening and securing both the independence and the peaceful development of those States, will always obtain whole-hearted support and sympathy from Italy; and that any agreement or other means calculated to consolidate both domestic and foreign peace among the States of the Near East will in all cases find Italy willing and ready to assist.

These considerations of a general order good, hold good for all the Near Eastern Mediterranean. Italy would view with the utmost satisfaction an equitable solution of all problems relating to them.

As to the North Africa, we have, as you know, accepted and supported both the solutions which have been proposed, namely, the independence and the unification of Lybia. This means, of course, that we consider the presence of an Italian population in Lybia not indeed as a possible cause for friction but rather as a welcome opportunity for consolidating our friendly relations with the local Arab population on the basis of our common interests.

Once an independent Lybia is established by the United Nations, Italians resident in Lybia will be considered in the country of their origin as nothing more than Italian-speaking citizens of a foreign country. They will have interests of their own to uphold, and ideas of their own to defend within the framework of the newly built State, but this they will do as Lybians and not as Italians. We find in present-day Lybia a situation similar to that of millions of American citizens of Italian-<sup>origin</sup>~~born~~ immigrants origin settled in the United States or in South America. These Italian-born immigrants are loyal citizens of the new State. This policy of ours is conditioned only by the fact that we must regard the Lybian question as closely related to their wider one of our friendly relations with the Arab world in general.

I know that a real effort has been made by the French authorities to adapt their North African policy to present circumstances. Since the Brazzaville declaration and the founding of the Union Française, French policy has been playing a part well worthy of its high traditions. France is, therefore, in a position fully to appreciate and, I hope, approve our ideas.

Allow us, then, to consider a policy of cooperation between the Mediterranean peoples, be they the descendants of the Roman world or the products of the ~~gene-~~ <sup>great</sup> Eastern Culture, as a possibility pregnant with hope for the future of civilisation.

ENRICO CERULLI

Italian Ambassador at Teheran; well known for his studies on Ethiopian civilization



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There was a continuous intercourse with the West both by Mahomedans and Arab converts, nor was the exchange of ideas confined to the domain of literature alone. The most wonderful example of Arab medieval painting still extant, is the series of frescoes on view in the Palatine Chapel at Palermo. Those paintings are of exceptional interest in the history of art. They represent the main episodes in the Court life of an Eastern Prince. It has recently been confirmed that the "model" who sat, so to speak, for the figure of the Prince came from Persia, where the Sassanide dynasty held power at that time. But the Prince, as depicted in the Palermo frescoes, lives amid surroundings whose realistic features faithfully reproduce local conditions. A dozen or so of singers and dancers who are supposed to amuse the Prince play on the lute, a typically European instrument. On the strength of some valuable indications, it seems that the Arab painters of the Palermo Frescoes came from the province of Edessa, and if this was so we may conclude that this series of Persian-inspired paintings came to Sicily from the Latinized Near East. In any case, the frescoes in the Palatine Chapel, with their wealth of details portraying the life of luxury led by Eastern potentates, throw much light on the cultural relations then binding East and West in spite of their fundamental differences.

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Let us now return to our own time and politics. Some useful lessons may, in fact be learned from the fine page of history we have been recalling to mind:

(1) That the function fulfilled by Arab peoples and their culture in the Mediterranean region was, in its various manifestations, important enough to be recognized as a positive factor in the history of European culture. As Europeans, we cannot deny our debt to Arab culture, just as the Arabs themselves cannot but acknowledge their indebtedness, first, to ancient Greece, from which they borrowed the vital notions of Hellenic culture, and, in modern times again, to Western Europe, many products of whose culture were absorbed into the spiritual patrimony of the Arabic peoples. This common tradition, which remains to this day an essential feature of the history of our civilisation, derives from century-long mutual contacts. Is it too much to hope that it be still recognized at the present time as a solid foundation upon which reciprocal cooperation and comprehension between West and East may be built?

(2) As a matter of fact, the glorious record of Arab culture is still one of the factors which determine current political relations between the peoples of the Near East and those of Europe. Arab-Mahomedan cultural unity, which has been instrumental in shaping contemporary Arab policies, still exerts a very weighty influence with regard to both regional groupings and political alliances. The Arab peoples are well justified in being proud of their past history, now freed from the mists of prejudice and ignorance thanks to modern research. A cultural movement recently promoted by the Spanish School of Arabic Studies has created a most favourable impression throughout the Near East and the Arab world has been the main object of the Spanish school's attention. As a result, the cultural and artistic achievements of Mahomedan Spain have been openly extolled as representing a valid title of national glory. It was, indeed, due to Spain acting as a vehicle, that the exchanges between East and West became a steadily progressive factor, to the advantage of Europe at large.

We Italians are in the best position to appreciate medieval Spain's contribution

bution, because we lived side-by-side with the Arabs in Sicily for over three centuries. But the stock of cultural values we have in common with the Arab peoples does not exclusively belong to past history. On the contrary, our present-day relations with Near-Eastern countries should be influenced by the common recollection of our mutual cultural contacts in the past. We do not wish to close our eyes to current reality. And it is in a realistic spirit that we want to make it perfectly clear that in our relations with Near Eastern countries we have nothing to demand, ask, or expect beyond a friendly solidarity, such a should naturally exist among peoples who are alike interest in developing a great Mediterranean civilisation by their joint efforts.

Needless to add, all efforts on the part of Near Eastern countries to assert and secure their independence claim our sincerest sympathy. I believe however that our sympathy should be turned into action. I mean to say that the countries of Western Europe ought to adopt a policy of cooperation towards the new independent States of the Near-East - a policy which should aim at making their independence an effective and permanent reality.

But a friendly policy towards the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean presupposes, on the part of the Western Nations, a common plan of action agreed upon in all details. It would be pointless to disguise that the old postulating that world peace is indivisible remains truer than ever, since there is at present no single sector of the world the fate of which can be taken into consideration regardless of the general world situation. Self-seeking schemes, which disregard the needs of international cooperation, are fast becoming an impossibility. And this is why I welcome this opportunity to start a friendly exchange of ideas with our French neighbours, in the hope that a cordial discussion may open the way for satisfactory results. We are strong believers in a firm understanding between Italy and France. Such an entente should not only come into force, but should be so framed as to secure the possibility for both to act together, side by side, <sup>its neighbour's general policies.</sup> whether in Europe or elsewhere, in the defence of their policy and of the ultimate interests they have in common.

Given this situation, what is the opinion prevailing in Italian non-official circles, among men of learning as well as among men of action, with regard to Near Eastern problems? I have stated already what, in our opinion, the new platform of both countries. And let me repeat that there are no water-tight compartments isolating different sectors of the world. Near East problems, for example, cannot be dealt with separately by one Nation <sup>Nation</sup> regardless of its own and its neighbour's general policies. Given this situation, what is the opinion prevailing in Italian non-official circles, among men of learning as well as among men of action, with regard to Near Eastern problems, I have stated already what, in our opinion, the new platform ...

for a policy of cooperation with the Arab States should be. A few words will be sufficient to summarize the policy we venture to advocate, namely, that whatever may help towards strengthening and securing both the independence and the peaceful development of those States, will always obtain whole-hearted support and sympathy from Italy; and that any agreement or other means calculated to consolidate both domestic and foreign peace among the States of the Near East will in all cases find Italy willing and ready to assist.

These considerations of a general order good hold good for all the Near Eastern Mediterranean. Italy would view with the utmost satisfaction an equitable solution of all problems relating to them.

As to the North Africa, we have, as you know, accepted and supported both the solutions which have been proposed, namely, the independence and the unification of Libya. This means, of course, that we consider the presence of an Italian population in Libya not indeed as a possible cause for friction but rather as a welcome opportunity for consolidating our friendly relations with the local Arab population on the basis of our common interests.

Once an independent Libya is Established by the United Nations, Italians resident in Libya will be considered <sup>as</sup> in the country of their origin as nothing more than Italian-speaking citizens of a foreign country. They will have interests of their own to uphold, and ideas of their own to defend within the framework of the newly built State, but this they will do as Lybians and not as Italians. We find in present-day Libya a situation similar to that of millions of American citizens of Italian-<sup>origin</sup>~~immigrant~~ origin settled in the United States or in South America. These Italian-born immigrants are loyal citizens of the new State. This policy of ours is conditioned only by the fact that we must regard the Libyan question as closely related to the <sup>our</sup> wider one of our friendly relations with the Arab world in general.

I know that a real effort has been made by the French authorities to adapt their North African policy to present circumstances. Since the Brazzaville declaration and the founding of the Union Francaise, French policy has been playing a part well worthy of its high traditions. France is, therefore, in a position fully to appreciate and, I hope, approve our ideas.

Allow us, then, to consider a policy of cooperation between the Mediterranean peoples, be they the descendents of the Roman world or the products of the great Eastern Culture, as a possibility pregnant with hope for the future of civilisation.

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