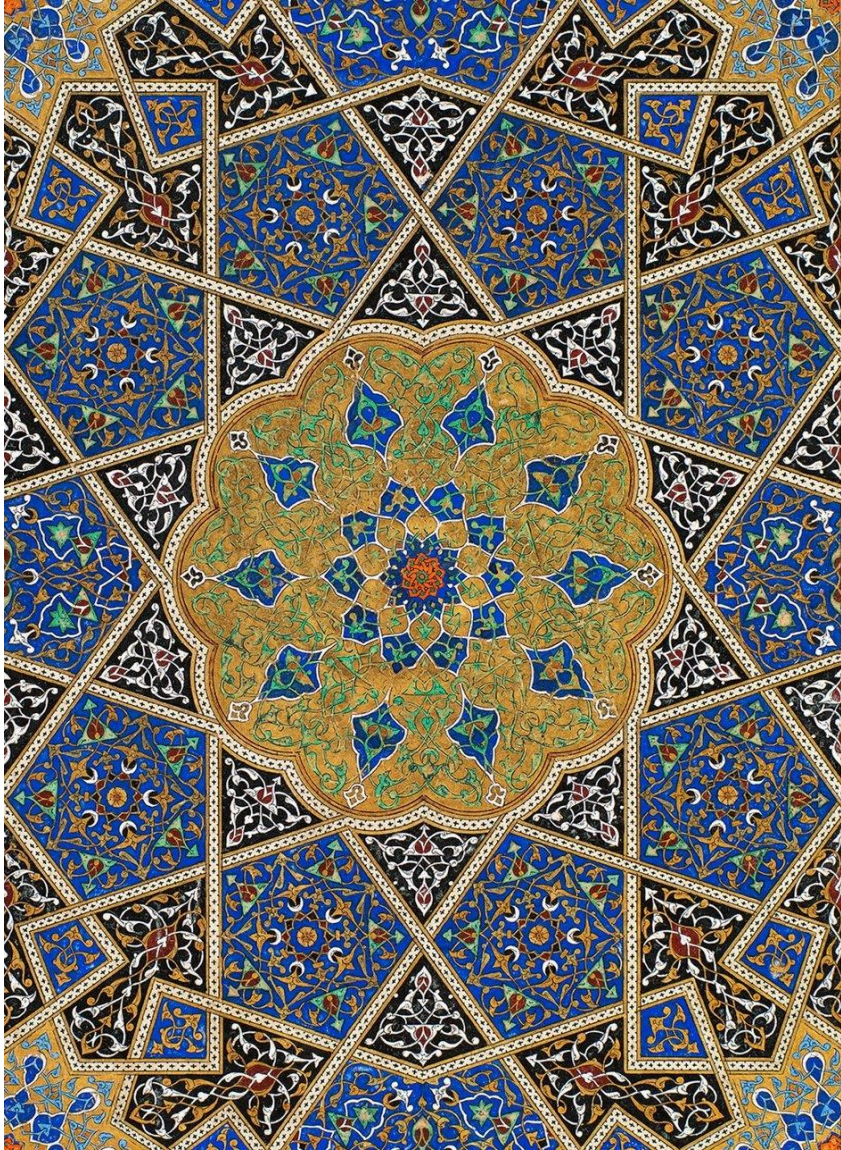




ISLAMIC RESPONSES TO EMPIRE

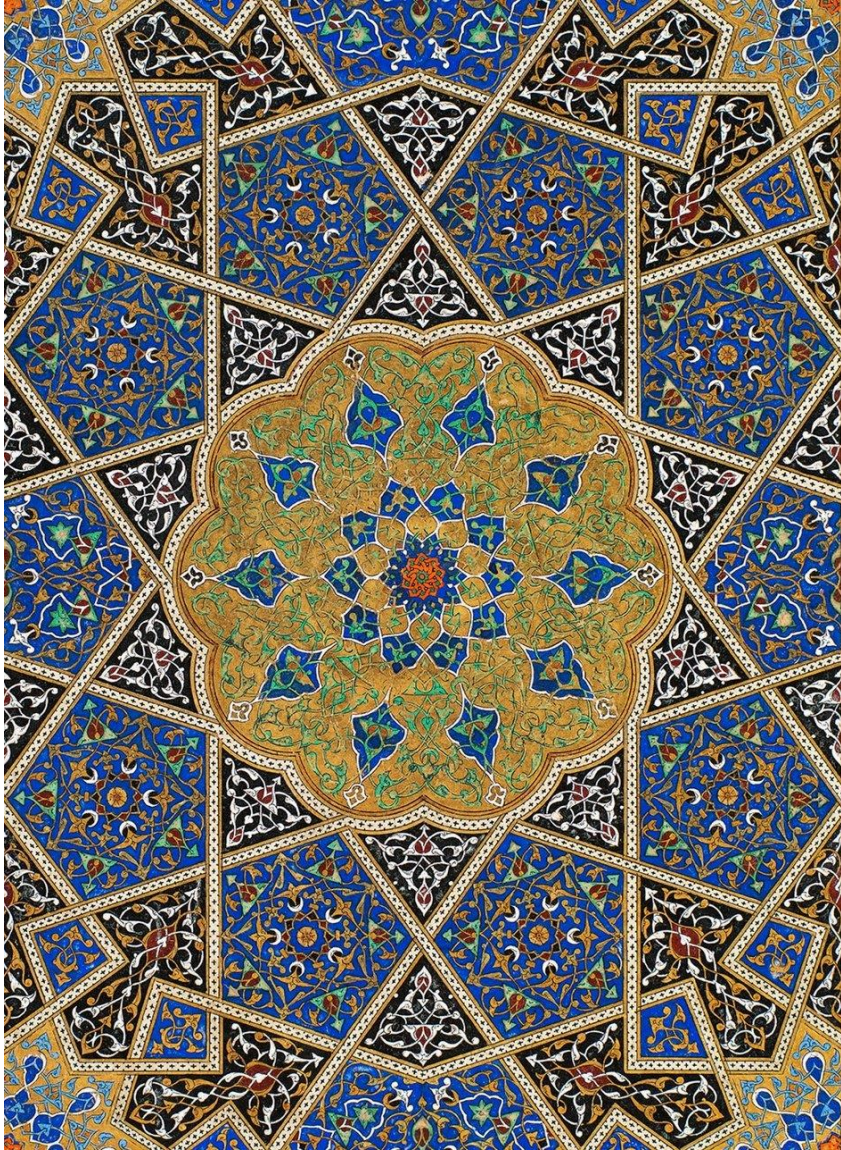


ISLAMIC RESPONSES TO EMPIRE

In this section of the module, I want us to take a look at some of the historical responses to Empire that emerged from within the Islamic context.

In doing so, we will set up the historical situation for a number of Islamic empires and investigate the changing fortunes for each in the context of relations with the West.

In doing so, I want us to understand the complicated inter-relationship between the West and East and between Christianity and Islam that emerges and to learn a little about the variety of different responses to the colonial project that occur.



THE RISE OF EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM



THE RISE OF EUROPE

One of the most important periods that we will cover in this section occurs between 1354AD and 1492AD.

This is because this period is the fulcrum on which the shifting fortunes of the Christian and Islamic communities can be seen to turn.

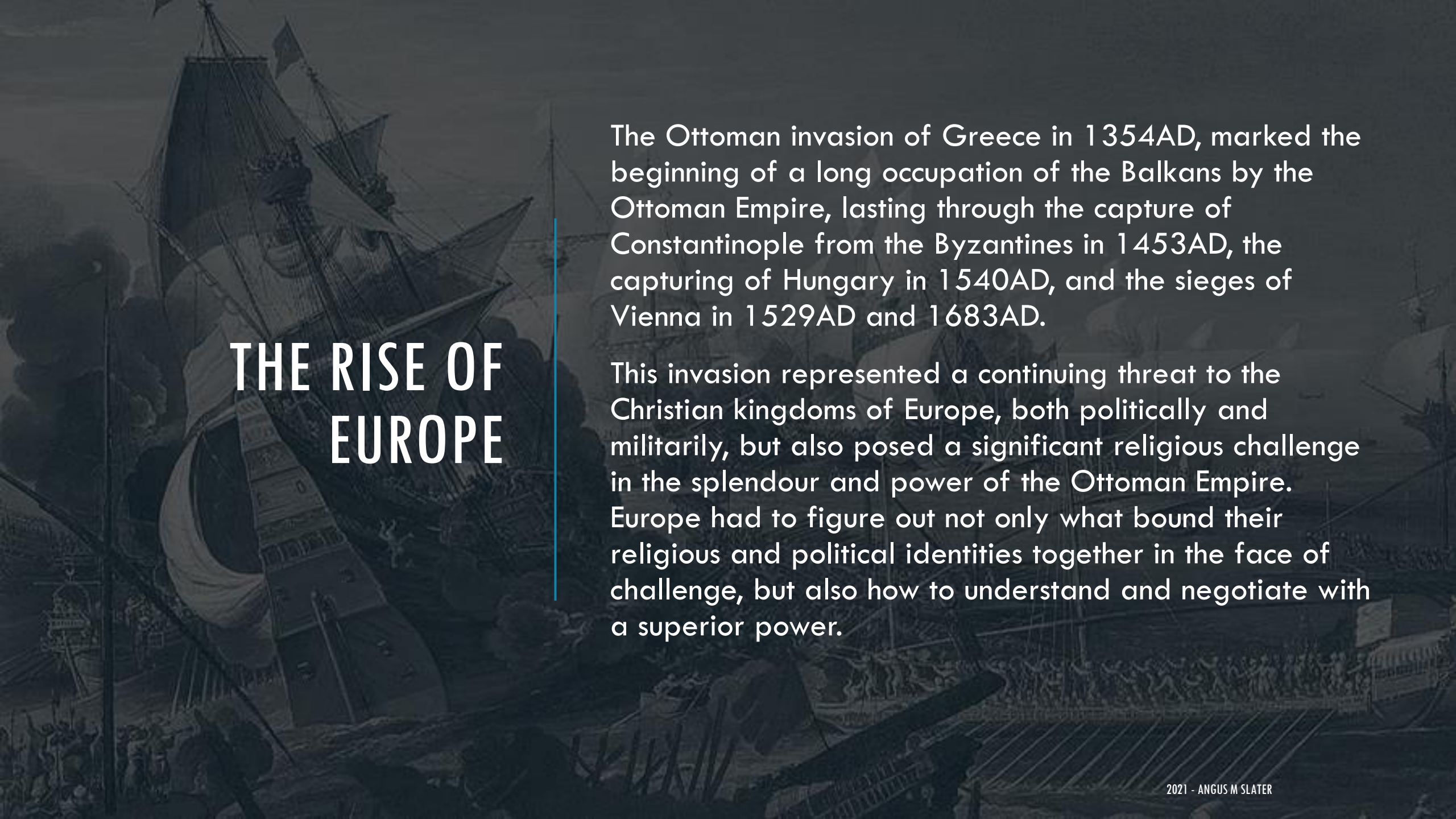
It is at this point that the power dynamic seen during the period of the Crusades and after, begins to invert, with the rise of European power and the decline in Muslim fortunes.



THE RISE OF EUROPE

They tell the story of the apogee of Muslim power in Europe and the beginnings of European extension beyond the confines of a binary relationship with Islam.

They also tell a story of a reversal of political and imperial fortunes that is deeply profound and continues to play a role in the concept of international relations and inter-religious dialogue until today.



THE RISE OF EUROPE

The Ottoman invasion of Greece in 1354AD, marked the beginning of a long occupation of the Balkans by the Ottoman Empire, lasting through the capture of Constantinople from the Byzantines in 1453AD, the capturing of Hungary in 1540AD, and the sieges of Vienna in 1529AD and 1683AD.

This invasion represented a continuing threat to the Christian kingdoms of Europe, both politically and militarily, but also posed a significant religious challenge in the splendour and power of the Ottoman Empire. Europe had to figure out not only what bound their religious and political identities together in the face of challenge, but also how to understand and negotiate with a superior power.



THE RISE OF EUROPE

However, we also see significant exchanges of ideas happen among populations in the Balkans where Christians, Jews, and Muslim lived side by side, as well as a growth in Christian-Muslim trade in the Mediterranean – especially after the Christian victory over the Ottoman fleet at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571AD.

Increased trade contact along the Silk Road with Christians in places like Venice, Genoa, and Pisa, brought further knowledge to the West not only about Islam, but also about other religious traditions further afield.



THE RISE OF EUROPE

Yet, in 1492AD / 1497AD, we already see the beginnings of a seismic shift in the tenor of relations and the field on which they take place.

1492AD marks the fall of the last Muslim state on the Hispanic Peninsula to the *Reconquista*, the Christian (and crusader influenced) reclamation of Spain under the 'catholic monarchs' Ferdinand and Isabella.

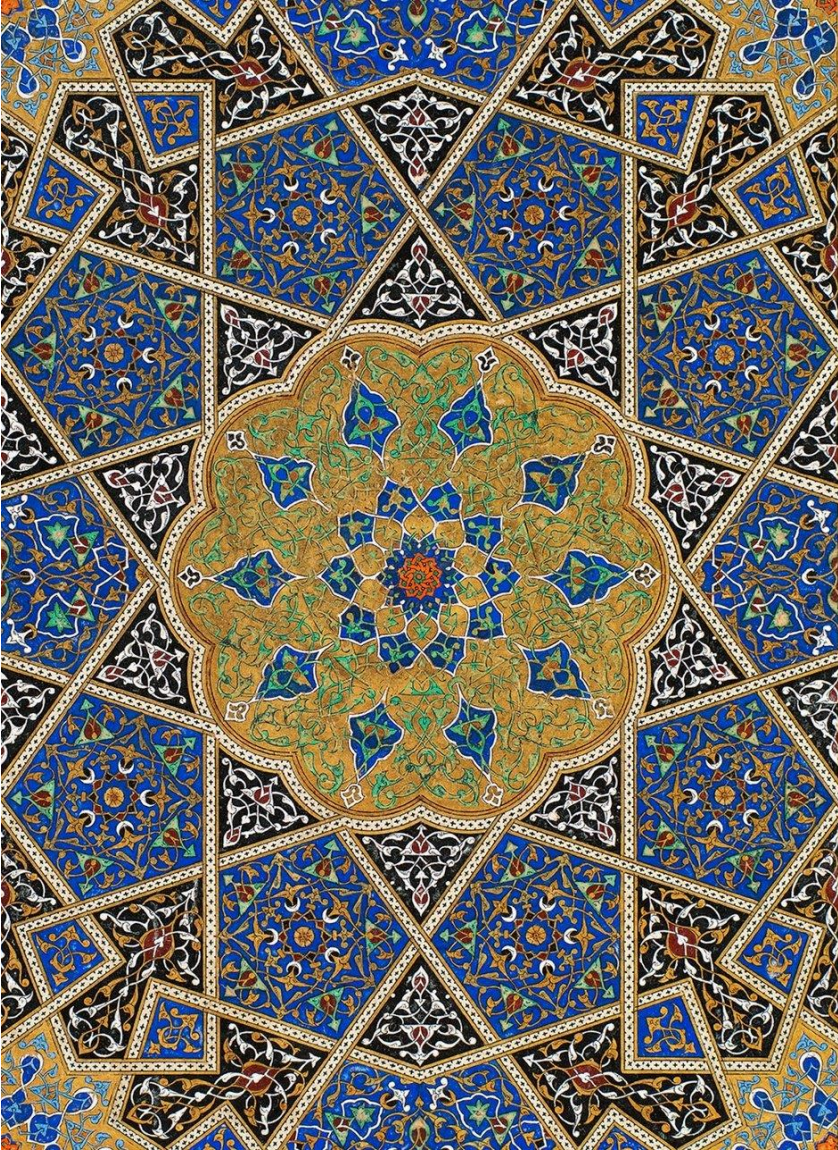
Meanwhile 1492AD and 1497AD are important dates as they mark the discovery of the Americas on behalf of the Spanish Crown by Christopher Columbus, and the passage of Vasco da Gama into the Indian Ocean around the Cape of Good Hope, on behalf of the Portuguese Crown.



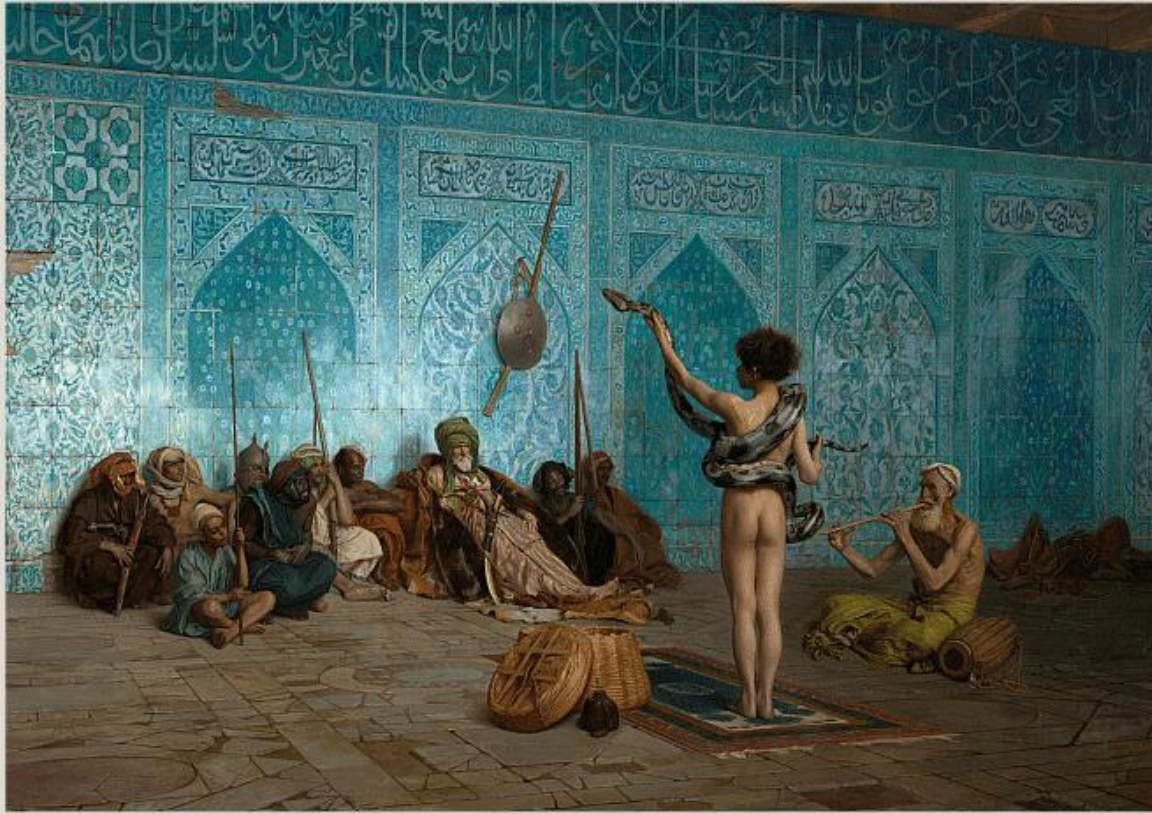
THE RISE OF EUROPE

Both voyages not only showcase the increasing confidence of the Hispanic kingdoms, but also reshaped the geo-political nature of Christian-Muslim relations – no more did Christendom / Europe feel surrounded by Muslim lands, instead with increasing European influence in South East Asia and the Far East, Muslim communities instead began to feel encircled by European influence.

In addition, no more were Muslim lands the only route by which the riches of Asia could flow to and be exploited by the rapidly growing and industrialising countries of Europe – direct contact could be made and the political and economic influence exerted by Muslim nations declined sharply.



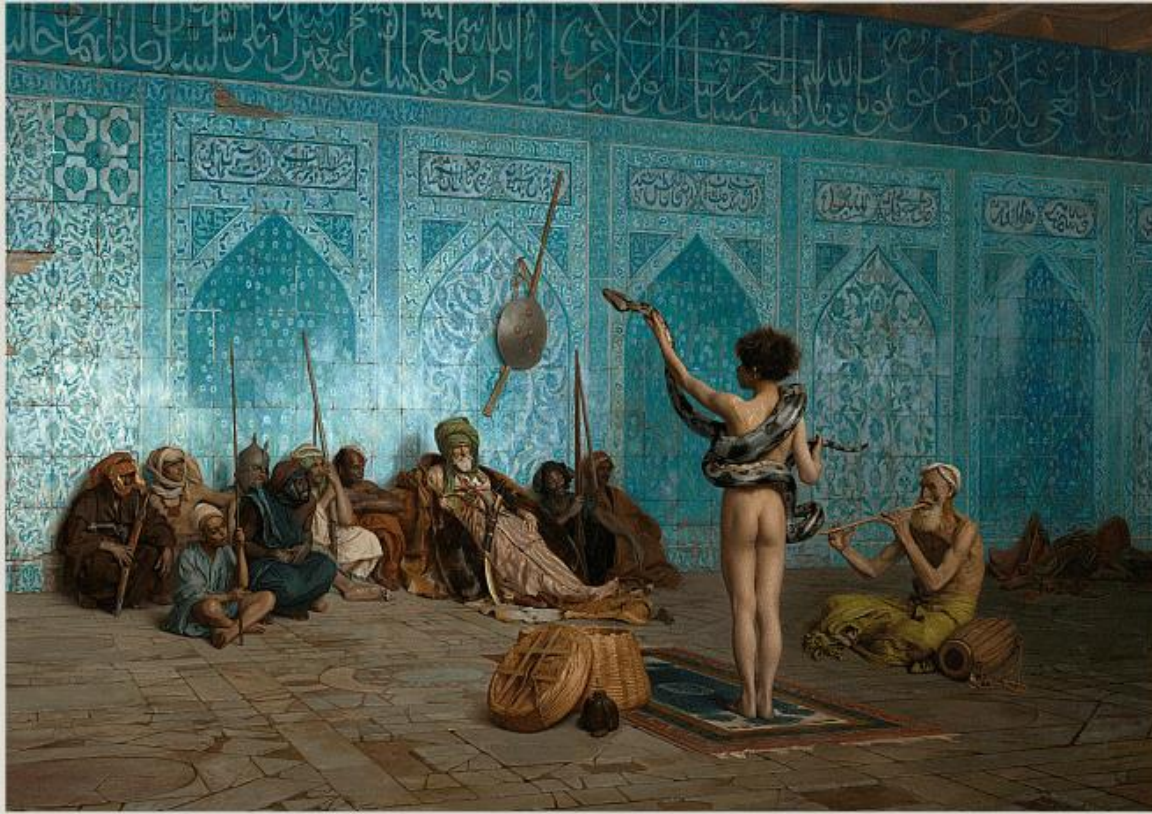
IMPERIALISM, COLONIALISM, AND MUSLIM REACTION (AND MAPS!)



IMPERIALISM, COLONIALISM, AND MUSLIM REACTION

During this period of increased Western / Christian presence in Islamic lands, the gradual change in the balance of political and economic power between the West and the East accelerates further with the rise of colonialism and imperialism by the European powers.

This interaction is not just one of political domination, economic exploitation, or geographic expansion – it is driven, at least partly, by a number of religious and theological beliefs, and seeks in its expression to deliver on those beliefs.

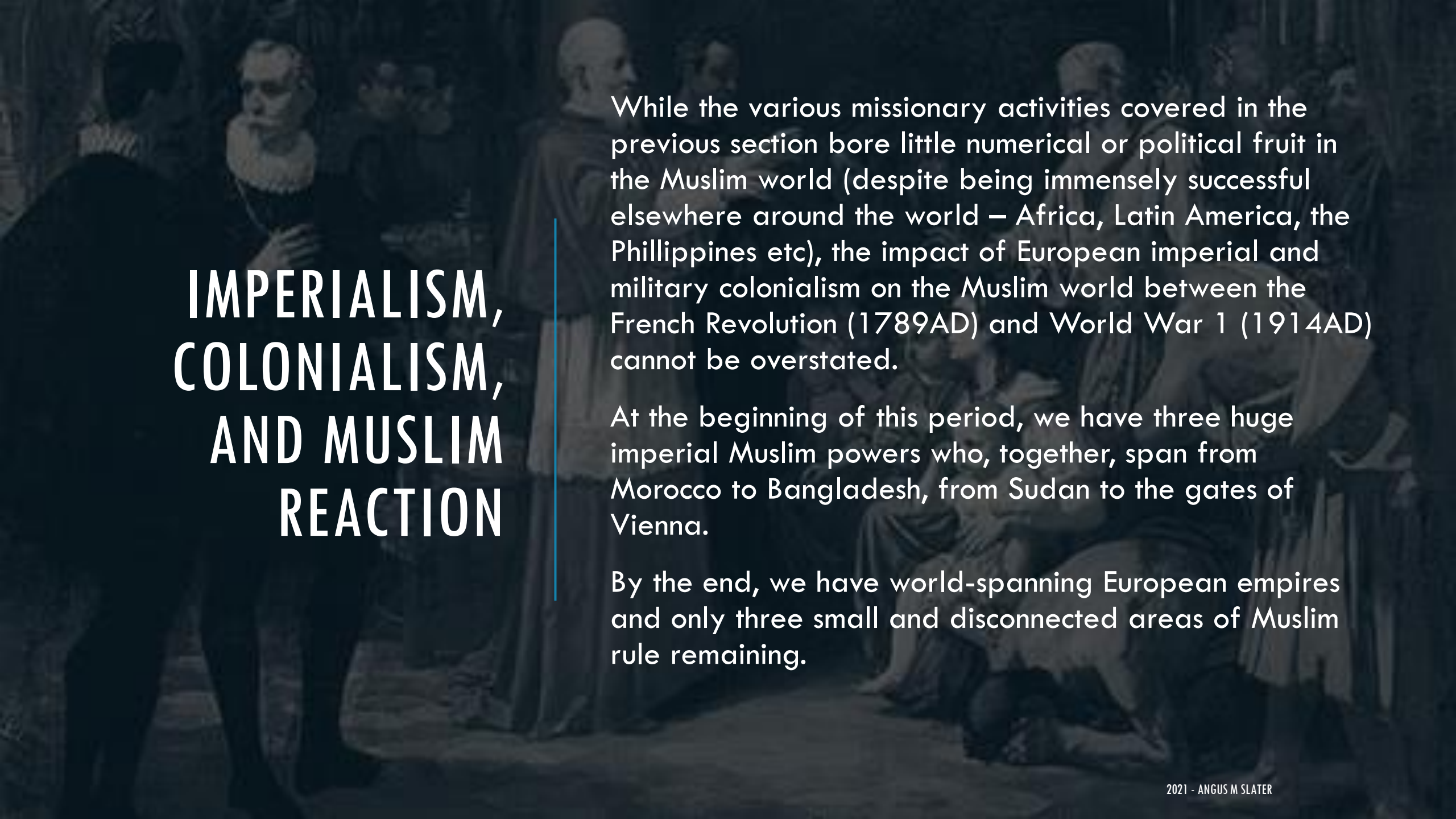


IMPERIALISM, COLONIALISM, AND MUSLIM REACTION

Colonialism and imperialism in this period go hand-in-hand with aspects of religious identity, missionary commitments, and broader theological beliefs about the superiority of western (Christian) civilization.

In turn, the impact of colonialism and imperialism engenders significant responses from Muslim communities which take a variety of forms.

You will have covered some of this emerging intellectual dynamic in the previous section on Orientalism – the construction of ontological, epistemological, and ethical knowledge about the East by the West.

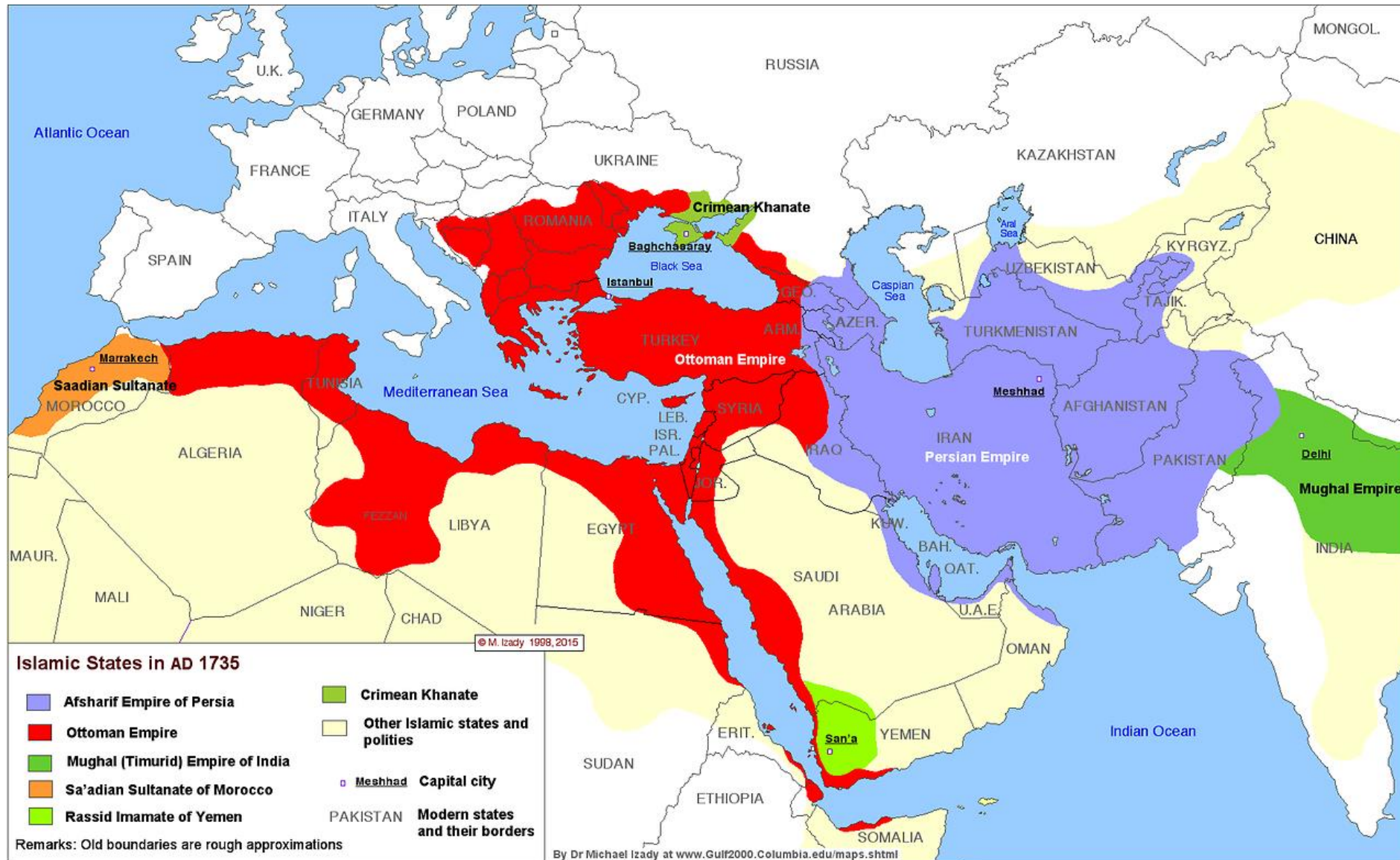


IMPERIALISM, COLONIALISM, AND MUSLIM REACTION

While the various missionary activities covered in the previous section bore little numerical or political fruit in the Muslim world (despite being immensely successful elsewhere around the world – Africa, Latin America, the Phillippines etc), the impact of European imperial and military colonialism on the Muslim world between the French Revolution (1789AD) and World War 1 (1914AD) cannot be overstated.

At the beginning of this period, we have three huge imperial Muslim powers who, together, span from Morocco to Bangladesh, from Sudan to the gates of Vienna.

By the end, we have world-spanning European empires and only three small and disconnected areas of Muslim rule remaining.





OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Perhaps the pre-eminent example of this change is to be found in the Ottoman Empire, which as we have seen, posed a significant threat to the Christian order of Europe from its initial Siege of Vienna in 1529AD and as recently as the Siege of Vienna in 1683AD.

At this point the Ottoman Empire spans almost the entirety of North Africa, Egypt and most of the Red Sea coast, Syria and large parts of Iraq, Anatolia and the Caucasus, and the all of the Balkans and Crimea across the Black Sea.

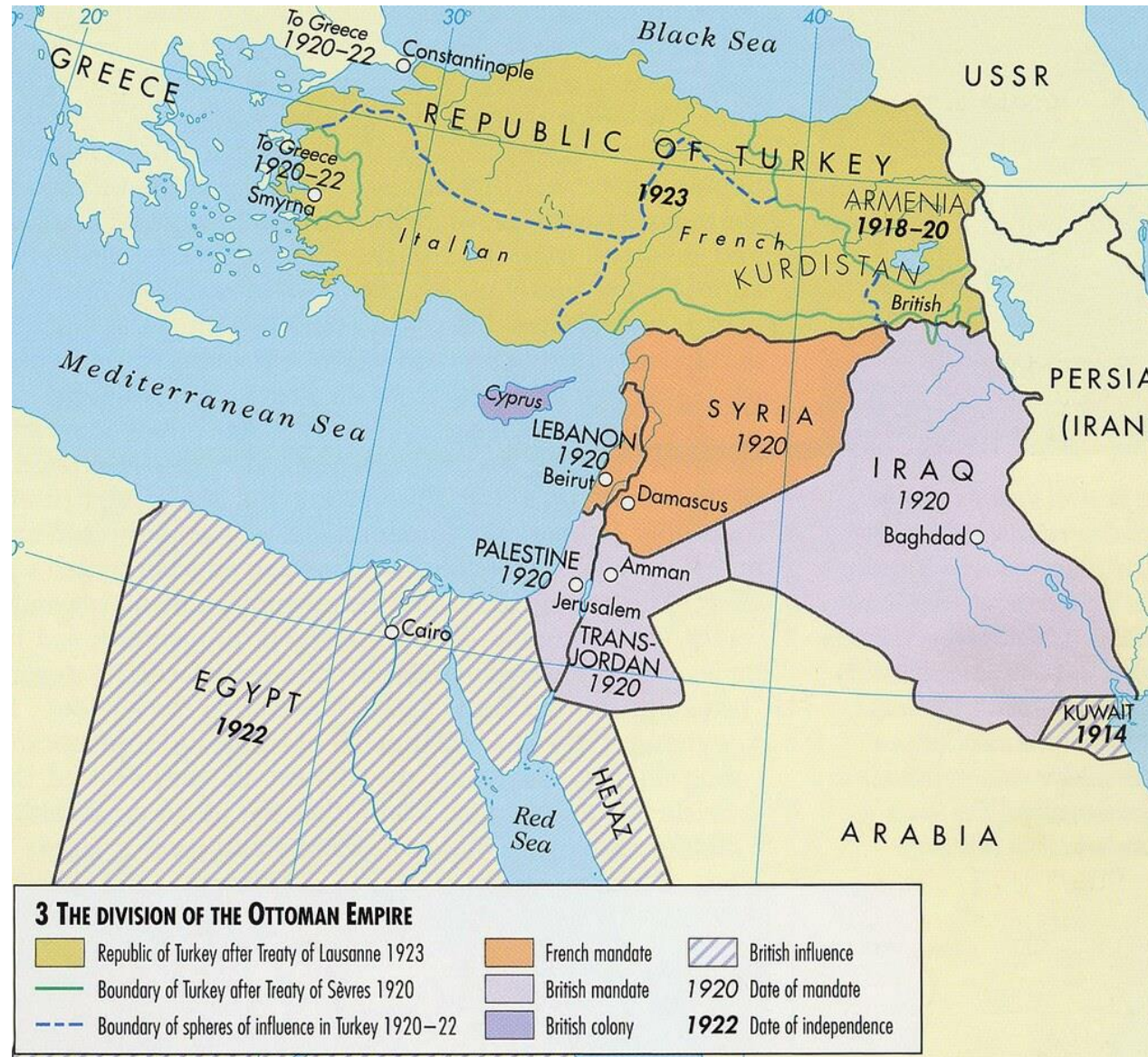


OTTOMAN EMPIRE

However, the increasing military power of the Christian West and its ability to extend this power across the globe, led to a swift reversal of this state of affairs, with the Ottomans forced to cede Hungary to Austria in 1699AD, Crimea to Russia in 1774AD, Algiers to France in 1830AD, Aden to the British in 1839, Tunisia to the French in 1881AD, Egypt to the British in 1882AD, Libya to the Italians in 1912AD, and Morocco to the French in the same year.

Despite attempts to ape western forms of military and political organization, by 1914AD and the outbreak of WW1, the Ottoman Empire barely extended beyond Anatolia and Arabia, with further partition, colonisation, and the toppling of religious authority following the resolution of the war.







SAFAVID EMPIRE

The second of these examples is the Safavid / Qajar Empire, located in Persia and spanning across contemporary Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan.

Over this time period, we see increasing British influence in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, as well as increased Russian influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This influence, in addition to the modernising reforms of the Qajar government prompted the de-stabilisation of the Persian state, and revolution in 1905AD.

This de-stabilisation and the Great Power rivalry between Britain and Russia and between those two and Germany in the lead up to WW1 weakened the ability of the Persian state to resist foreign influence.



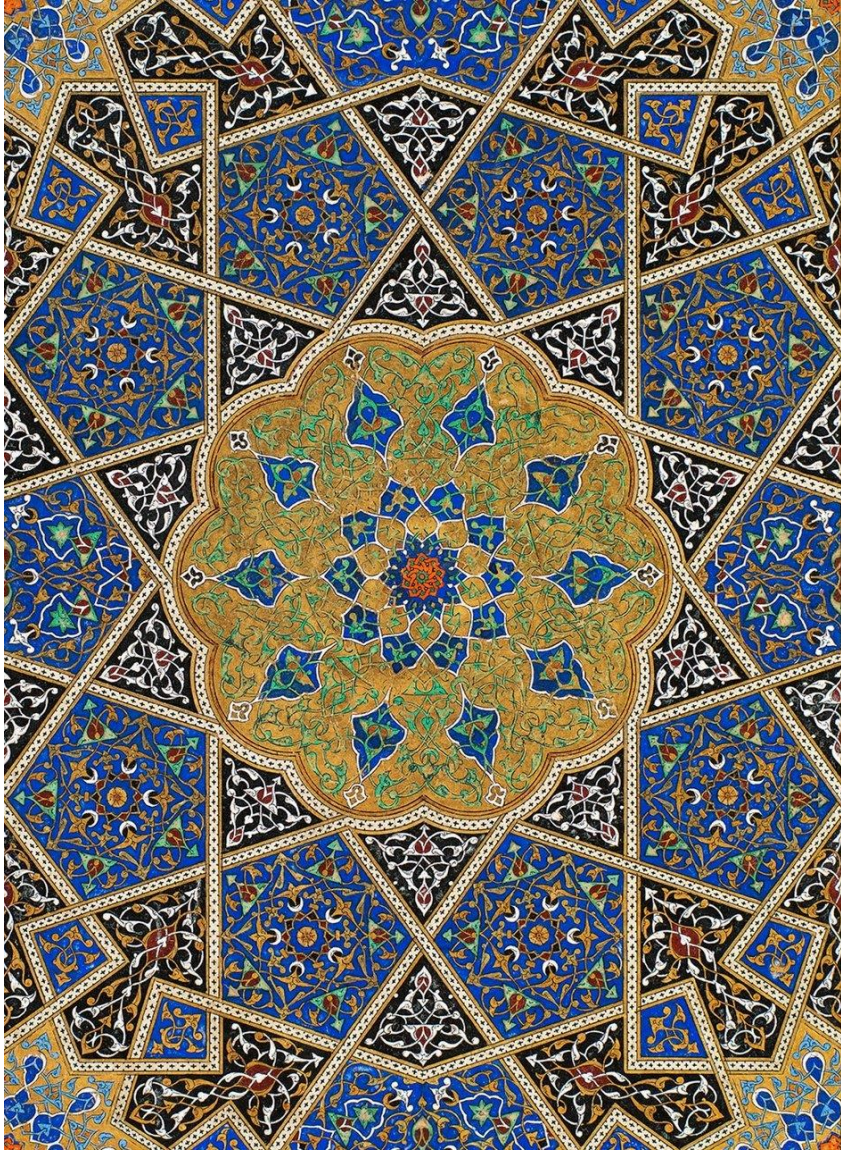
SAFAVID EMPIRE

Ultimately, the Persian state was divided into British and Russian spheres of influence in the south and north respectively, with a buffer zone between. The Persian state was not involved in this division of the country and was only informed after the terms between Britain and Russia has been agreed – a betrayal of expectations that had a lasting impact on the development of anti-western and anti-Christian attitudes within Iranian nationalism that persists even to this day.

In this period of history, we also see an increased focus on the failure of liberal, secular, reforms in defending aspects of 'traditional' Islamic society and belief – the revolution of 1905 in Iran is heavily influenced by reformist tendencies of the Qajar monarchy, but also liberal secular ideas from the West, yet is unable to preserve the independence of the Persian State.







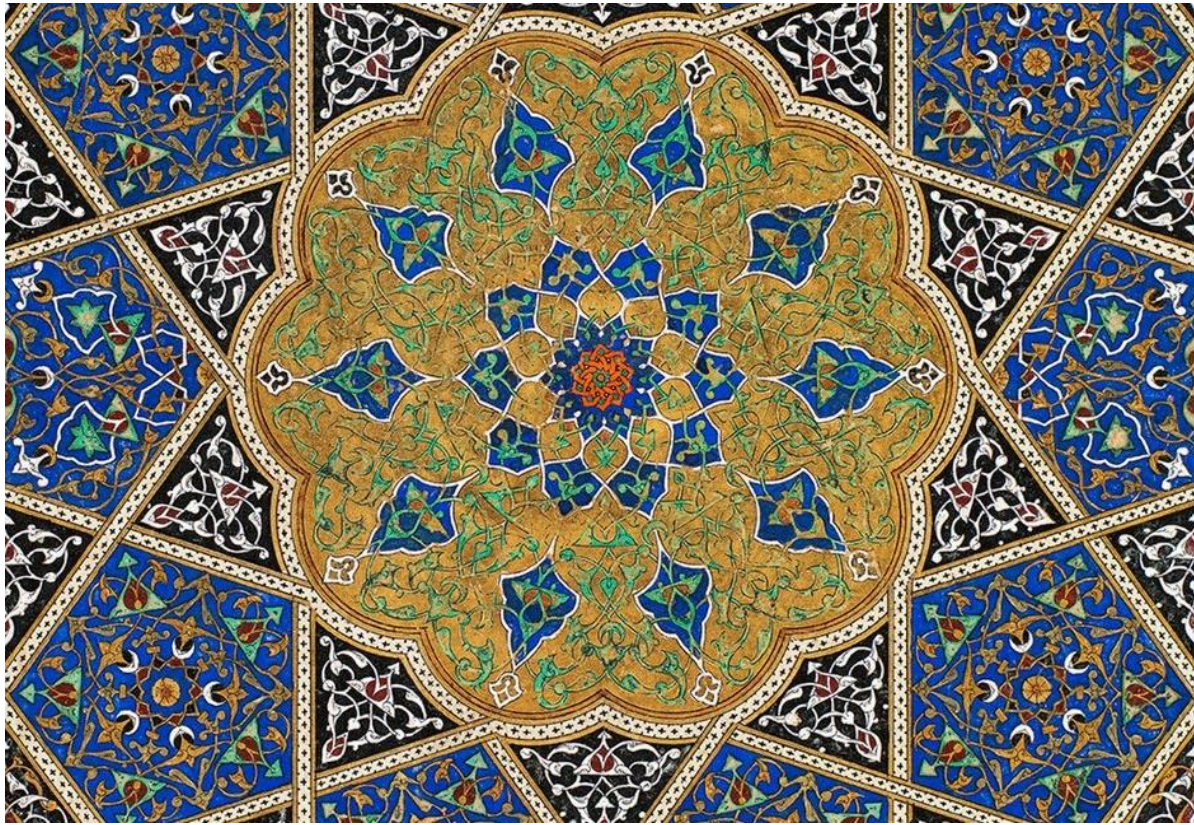
INTELLECTUAL RESPONSES



JAMAL AL-DIN AL-AFGHANI
(1839-1897AD)

The almost cataclysmic fall of these three significant Muslim empires in such a short period of time provoked a number of responses from Muslim intellectuals and civil society. One of the most prominent and influential figures was Jamal al-din al-Afghani (1839-1897AD) who travelled across the Islamic world and articulated an attempted response to the ravages of Western imperialism based on the adoption of western scientific knowledge and the deployment of Islam as an effective and efficient way of mobilising the Muslim population against further encroachments.

This fusion was based on an understanding of Islam as fundamentally rationalist in its legal and theological bases, and therefore compatible with the scientific basis of western technology, while also provided the disparate and disconnected Muslim communities with a pan-Islamic forms of identity around which to cohere.



JAMAL AL-DIN AL-AFGHANI (1839-1897AD)

For the later part of his life, al-Afghani lived and worked as a teacher in Cairo where he strongly influenced a generation of scholars like Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905AD) who gained prominence as part of the reformist tendency within Islam.

In general terms, al-Afghani and Abduh sought to produce an interpretation of Islam that emphasised the modernisation of technology and education along western lines, while also encouraging a strict adherence to Islamic social and ethical principles.



JAMAL AL-DIN AL-AFGHANI (1839-1897AD)

As he wrote:

'It is not the religious beliefs, whether right or wrong, which are opposed to culture and material progress, but that belief which prohibits learning of sciences, earning one's livelihood and the ways of culture. I do not believe that there is any religion in the world which opposes these things' (Moazzam, 1984)

Al-Afghani did this not just through teaching, but also by engaging in direct political activism against British colonial rule, producing newspapers and pamphlets, and public speaking across the Muslim world. In a rather peculiar manner, his influence has come to now extend into both liberal reformist and authoritarian conservative streams of thought in the contemporary Muslim world.



**MUHAMMAD ABDUH (1849-
1905)**

Muhammad Abduh, a student and co-publisher with Al-Afghani, extended the work of his mentor relating to issues of relation between the West and Islam.

In doing so, he stressed the need for a re-appraisal of the interpretative framework of Islamic belief in the light of technological progress – but that this reinterpretation sprung from the Islamic tradition itself.

He stressed the internal rationality and independence of will available within the Islamic tradition – and that the application of these principles would allow for resistance to forms of western imperialism more successfully than a retreat to religious dogmatism.



MUHAMMAD ABDUH (1849-1905)

Abduh is also well known for his attention to matters of religious plurality, particularly the relation and position of the Christian minority within Islamic societies as inherent aspects of their history and character.

This made him critical and suspicious of attempts to delineate religious belief as a token of eastern or western identity – that Christians were western for example – and a strong proponent of intra-Muslim unity between Sunni and Shia groups.

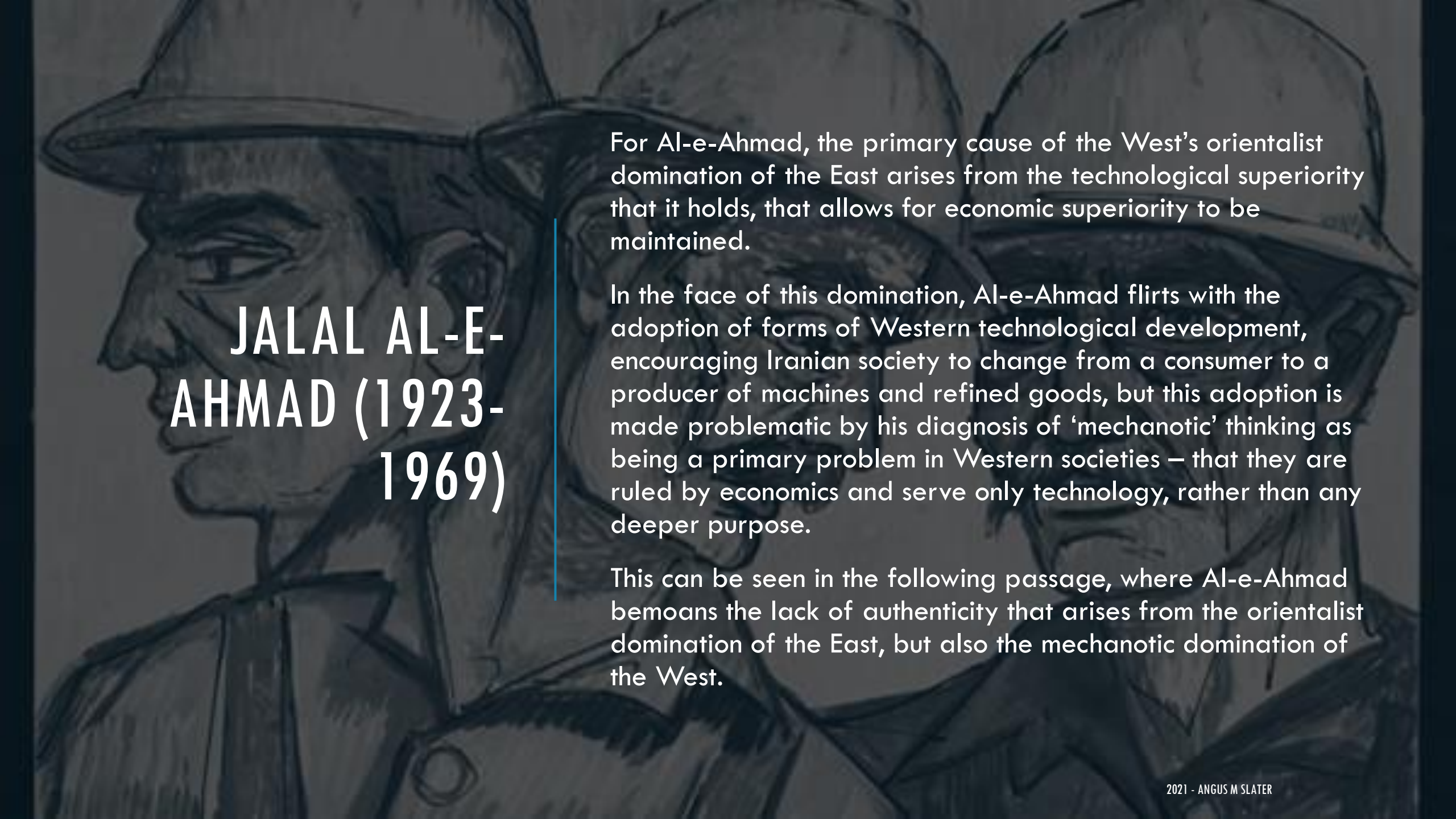


JALAL AL-E- AHMAD (1923- 1969)

"I speak of "occidentosis" as of tuberculosis. But perhaps it more closely resembles an infestation of weevils. Have you seen how they attack wheat? From the inside. The bran remains intact, but it is just a shell, like a cocoon left behind on a tree. At any rate, I am speaking of a disease: an accident from without, spreading in an environment rendered susceptible to it. Let us seek a diagnosis for this complaint and its causes-and, if possible, its cure.

Occidentosis has two poles or extremes - two ends of one continuum. One pole is the Occident, by which I mean all of Europe, Soviet Russia, and North America, the developed and industrialized nations that can use machines to turn raw materials into more complex forms that can be marketed as goods. These raw materials are not only iron ore and oil, or gut, cotton, and gum tragacanth; they are also myths, dogmas, music, and the higher worlds.

The other pole is Asia and Africa, or the backward, developing or nonindustrial nations that have been made into consumers of Western goods. However, the raw materials for these goods come from the developing nations: oil from the shores of the Gulf, hemp and spices from India, jazz from Africa, silk and opium from China, anthropology from Oceania, sociology from Africa"
(Al-e-Ahmad, 1984, 1)

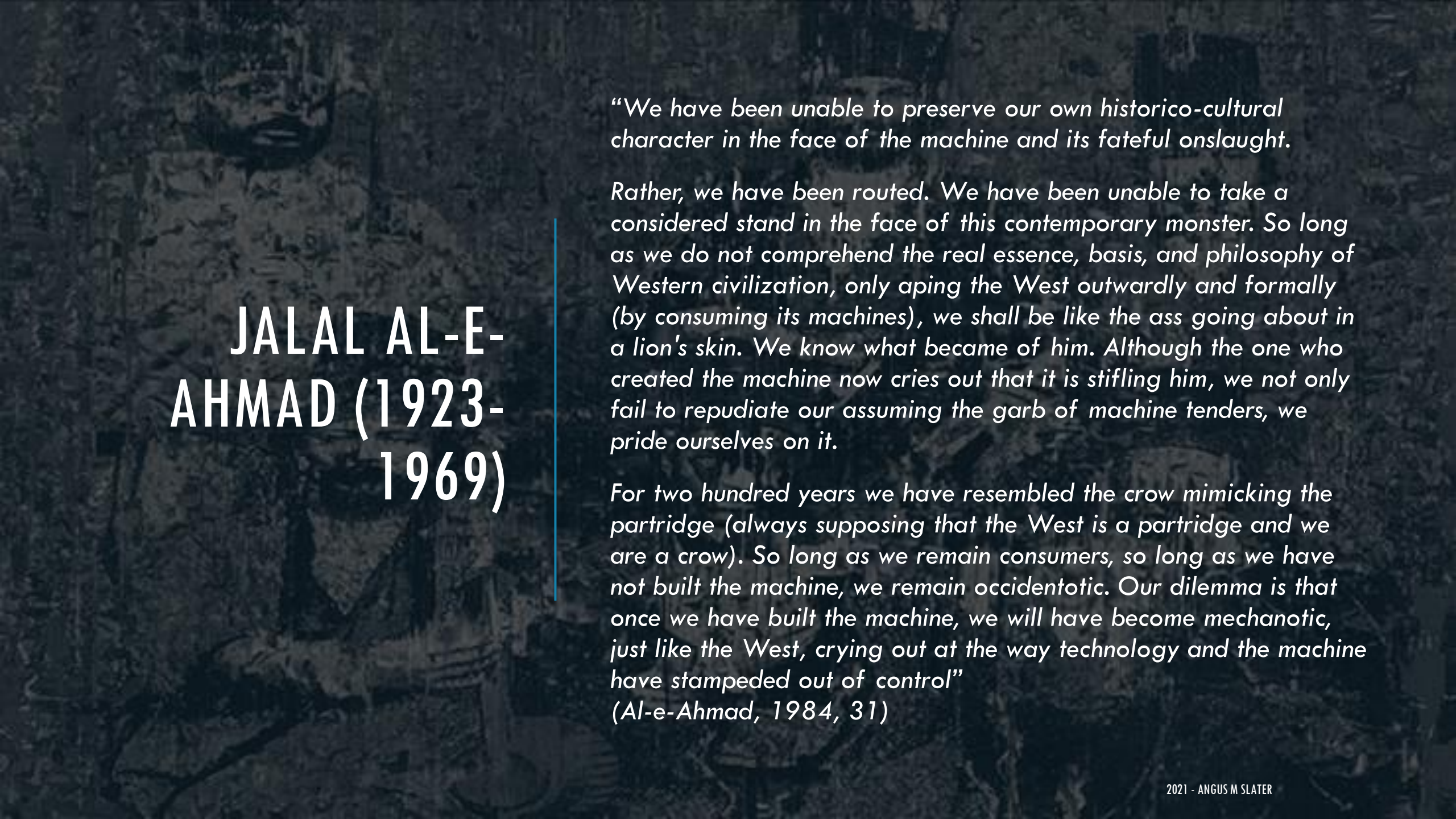


JALAL AL-E-AHMAD (1923-1969)

For Al-e-Ahmad, the primary cause of the West's orientalist domination of the East arises from the technological superiority that it holds, that allows for economic superiority to be maintained.

In the face of this domination, Al-e-Ahmad flirts with the adoption of forms of Western technological development, encouraging Iranian society to change from a consumer to a producer of machines and refined goods, but this adoption is made problematic by his diagnosis of 'mechanotic' thinking as being a primary problem in Western societies — that they are ruled by economics and serve only technology, rather than any deeper purpose.

This can be seen in the following passage, where Al-e-Ahmad bemoans the lack of authenticity that arises from the orientalist domination of the East, but also the mechanotic domination of the West.

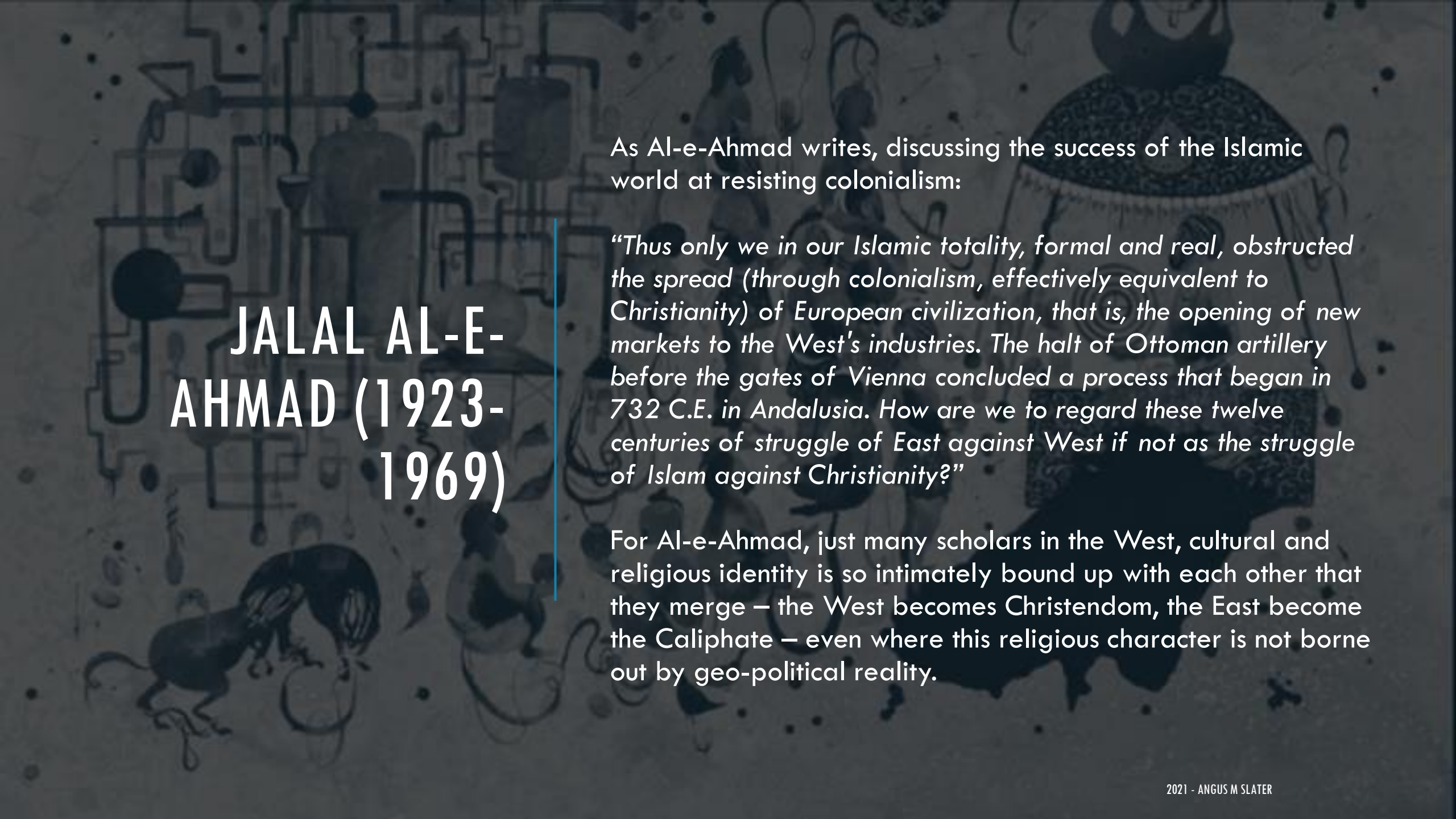


JALAL AL-E- AHMAD (1923- 1969)

“We have been unable to preserve our own historico-cultural character in the face of the machine and its fateful onslaught.

Rather, we have been routed. We have been unable to take a considered stand in the face of this contemporary monster. So long as we do not comprehend the real essence, basis, and philosophy of Western civilization, only aping the West outwardly and formally (by consuming its machines), we shall be like the ass going about in a lion's skin. We know what became of him. Although the one who created the machine now cries out that it is stifling him, we not only fail to repudiate our assuming the garb of machine tenders, we pride ourselves on it.

For two hundred years we have resembled the crow mimicking the partridge (always supposing that the West is a partridge and we are a crow). So long as we remain consumers, so long as we have not built the machine, we remain occidentotic. Our dilemma is that once we have built the machine, we will have become mechanotic, just like the West, crying out at the way technology and the machine have stampeded out of control”
(Al-e-Ahmad, 1984, 31)



JALAL AL-E-AHMAD (1923-1969)

As Al-e-Ahmad writes, discussing the success of the Islamic world at resisting colonialism:

“Thus only we in our Islamic totality, formal and real, obstructed the spread (through colonialism, effectively equivalent to Christianity) of European civilization, that is, the opening of new markets to the West’s industries. The halt of Ottoman artillery before the gates of Vienna concluded a process that began in 732 C.E. in Andalusia. How are we to regard these twelve centuries of struggle of East against West if not as the struggle of Islam against Christianity?”

For Al-e-Ahmad, just many scholars in the West, cultural and religious identity is so intimately bound up with each other that they merge – the West becomes Christendom, the East become the Caliphate – even where this religious character is not borne out by geo-political reality.

SOME QUESTIONS

What are some of the key motivating aspects for Islamic considerations of modernity / colonialism / empire?

Why and how are these concepts (modernity / colonialism / empire) bound up in Islamic responses?

What are their distinguishing characteristics and differences?

Where do we see differences being drawn by different thinkers?

How and why is Islam such a central factor in responses to western colonialism?

What is the relationship between colonialism and Christianity in its experience by Muslim societies?

Why might this be?

How do these themes continue to impact our contemporary world?