

Alleged Book Burnings in Iran and Egypt: A Study of Related Facts and Fiction

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Refutations of accusations against Muslim armies that entered Iran and Egypt in early Islamic history.

Alleged Book Burnings in Iran and Egypt: A Study of Related Facts and Fiction

By Martyr Murtadha Mutahhari–quddisa sirruh

Translated front the Persian by Dr. Wahid Akhtar

This article, entitled “*Kitabsuzi–ye Iran wa Misr*” was added as the last chapter to Part One of the 8th edition of the book *Khadamat–e mutaqahil–e Iran Islam wa Iran* (‘The Mutual contributions of Islam and Iran’).

It was also published separately as a booklet. It was written in the atmosphere of the nationalistic and anti-Islamic propaganda of the Pahlavi era in Iran, and although the old rumours it discusses have ceased to be of much relevance today, it is still of interest due to the light it throws on their origin and the motives that lay behind them.

Late Dr. Wahid Akhtar had translated it years ago while translating Part One of the book which was published in several parts in *al-Tawhid* (vol. 6, No. 2 and vol. 8, No. 2).

Among topics relating to the reciprocal relations of Iran and Islam one issue that needs to be discussed is of the alleged burning of libraries by Muslim conquerors of Iran. During past half a century this issue has been so vehemently propagated that it is now taken as a recognized fact.

The textbooks of secondary and higher secondary schools and universities must contain only such material that is definite and avoid mentioning anything dubious and misleading to the immature minds of school and university students regularly mention this story in their contents.

If this incident were historically true and Muslims did set fire to a library or libraries in Iran and Egypt, there could be some excuse for saying that Islam had a destructive character and not a constructive one. At least it could be said that although Islam did create a civilization and culture it was also responsible for destroying other cultures and civilizations: Hence as against the services it rendered to Iran it also inflicted losses on the Iranian culture, that if it were a blessing from one angle, from another it was also a catastrophe.

So much has been said and written on the topic that there were libraries and educational institutions in Iran—such as primary and higher secondary schools and universities—and that all of them were destroyed by Muslims, that some Iranians who are not experts in this field have gradually come to believe it as an established fact.

Some years ago I happened to receive one copy of the journal *Tandarust*, which is purely a medical journal. It contained the summary of a speech by an eminent Iranian physician which was delivered in a certain university in the West. In that speech, after referring to Sa'di's famous verse:

بني آدم اعضاء يك پيكرند

Mankind are like members of one body

and stating that for the first time in history this Iranian poet had developed the idea of an international society, he goes on to make the following remarks:

Ancient Greece was the cradle of civilization and had great philosophers like Socrates..., but what may be compared to a modern university was the one that was founded by Khusro, the Sassanian king. A large academy named “Gundi-shapur” was established at Shush, then the capital of Iran... This university flourished for a long time until the invasion of the Arabs who destroyed it like all our other institutions.

Although the sacred religion of Islam lays great emphasis on knowledge and requires one to seek

knowledge even if it were to be found in China, the Arab conquerors set fire to the great national library of Iran in gross violation of the dear commandment of the Prophet (S), and destroyed all our academic institutions. From that day Iran remained under Arab yoke for two centuries. 1

This is just an example out of many utterances and writings that make similar allegations without mentioning any historical document or evidence. Before embarking on a historical study of this issue and examining the so-called arguments advanced in its support, I would like to make some remarks in answer to this respected physician who has so categorically expressed these views before an international medical audience, which, as a rule, could not have been better informed on historical issues than the speaker himself.

Firstly, following the Greek era and before the establishment of Jundi-shapur in Iran, there existed the great academy of Alexandria which was incomparably superior to Jundi-shapur. From the 2nd/8th century onwards, or, to be more precise, since the last decades of the 1st/7th century, Muslims began translating foreign sciences into Arabic, and they benefited to a large extent from Alexandrian works, details of which are to be found in relevant books.

Secondly, the academy of Jundi-shapur, which was largely a medical centre, did not suffer the slightest harm at the hands of the Arab conquerors. It continued to flourish till the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th century. After the establishment of the great academy at Baghdad, the importance of Jundi-shapur was overshadowed and it gradually disappeared. Before the establishment of the academy at Baghdad, the Abbasid caliphs employed the services of physicians and astronomers from Jundi-shapur at their courts. The likes of Ibn Masawayh and Bakhtayshu' in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries were products of this academy. Hence the claim that Jundi-shapur was destroyed by the Arab invaders is based on a total ignorance of facts.

Thirdly, the Jundi-shapur, academy was run and managed by Christian scholars who had close ties, from the viewpoint of creed and race, with the Byzantium (Antioch), and the spirit of this institution was Christian-Byzantine, not Zoroastrian-Iranian. Of course, it was geographically situated in Iran and was a part of Iran in the political and civil sense. But the intellect that had created this university was a different one which derived from the association of its authorities with a non-Zoroastrian milieu abroad.

Similarly, other centres of education situated in Transoxiana had come into existence under Buddhist influence. Of course, the spirit of the Iranian people was one that was characterized by fondness for knowledge, but the regime of the *mu'bads* that ruled over Iran in the Sassanian period was anti-academic, and wherever it ruled this spirit strangled all possibilities of growth of sciences.

For this reason, the schools and sciences could flourish in the south-west and north-east of Iran *which* were distant from the influence of the religious spirit of the *mu'bads*, *while* in *other* places where this spirit was dominant scholarship had no chance of growth.

Among the compilers of literary, historical and geographical texts for higher secondary schools, who

generally repeat the above-mentioned view in the manner of an official circular, the late Dr. Rida-zadeh Shafaq, who was a scholar and one not devoid of academic justice, has done some justice in this regard. In the textbook on the history of [Persian] literature, written for the fourth year, he writes:

“During the Sassanian period, books on literature, theology, sciences and history, both original works and translations, were in abundance. It may also be inferred from reports concerning court poets and singers that versified literature (poetry) also existed during that era.

Despite this it may be concluded from historical evidence that the literature of that time was not very extensive and was mainly confined to the courtiers and priests. As in the last phase of the Sassanian rule, the life and morality of these two classes, the courtiers and the priests, had degenerated due to rampant corruption and intrigues at the court and the emergence of various sects, it may be said that the literary situation in Iran at the time of emergence of Islam was not bright and literature, too, was in a state of decay due to the corruption of these two classes.”

Fourthly, it would have been better if this honourable physician, who, like the others, repeats in a parrot-like manner that “the Arab conquerors burnt our national library and destroyed our academic institutions,” had pointed out where that national library was situated. Was it in Hamadan or Isfahan, in Shiraz or Azarbaijan? Was it at Nishabur or at Tisfun, in the sky or under the ground? Where was it? How is it that he and others like him who go on repeating this statement, know about the burning of a national library but have no information about its location?

Such an incident is not recorded in any historical document, and although the details of Muslim conquests of Iran and Rome are on record, there is no mention anywhere in historical documents of any such library having existed in Iran, regardless of whether it was burnt or not. On the other hand, the records reveal what is contrary to this statement. The records show that there was no interest in academic pursuits in regions under Zoroastrian influence.

Al-Jahiz, although an Arab, is free from Arab prejudice, for he has written a lot against Arabs, and we shall soon quote from him. In his book *al-Mahasin wa al-addad*,² he writes: “The Persians were not much interested in writing books; they were more interested in buildings.” The *Legacy of Persia*, by a group of orientalist,³ mentions in unambiguous terms the absence of interest in writing in Zoroastrian religion during the Sassanian period.

Researchers are unanimous in stating that even the copying of the Avesta was subject to restrictions and prohibitions. Apparently no more than two manuscripts of the Avesta were in existence when Alexander invaded Iran, one of which was at Istakhr and it was burnt by Alexander.

Considering that in the creed of the *mu'bads* teaching, education and instruction were exclusively confined to the courtiers and the priests and all other social classes and occupational groups were prohibited from education, learning and writing had naturally no chance to grow. Scholars and writers usually arise from the deprived classes, not from the affluent class.

It is the children of shoemakers and potters who become such figures as Ibn Sina, Biruni, Farabi and Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi, not the offspring of nobles and courtiers. Besides, as the late Dr. Rida-zadeh Shafaq has written, these two classes had become corrupt during the Sassanian era and scholarly works and cultural accomplishments are not to be expected from a degenerate class.

Undoubtedly, there did exist some literary and academic works in the Sassanian era, and many of them were translated into Arabic during the Islamic period and survived. Also there is no doubt that many of those works vanished, but not due to any book burning or some other accident of this kind.

That happened rather in the natural and normal course, for whenever there is a change in a people's ideas and beliefs and a culture overwhelms another and engages the minds of the people, due to an immoderate attitude which is harmful, the old culture is neglected and the literary and scientific heritage of the old culture gradually perishes due to the people's neglect and their lack of interest.

An example of this process is observable in our own time, in the invasion of Islamic culture by Western culture. The Western culture became a fashion in Iran, and the Islamic culture went out of fashion. For the same reason no effort is being made to preserve and protect the Islamic heritage.

Rare and precious manuscripts in the fields of natural sciences, mathematics, literature, philosophy and theology, which were in personal libraries until a few years ago have disappeared and nobody knows what has happened to them and where they have gone.

Probably they made their way to groceries or were allowed to perish. According to Prof. Jalal al-Din Humai, the precious manuscripts collected by the Late Majlisi in his library, with the means that he had at his disposal, from all over the Muslim world, were sold as waste paper some years ago.

Similarly, at the time of the Arab conquest of Iran there existed books in personal libraries some of which must have been precious manuscripts. Perhaps they continued to be preserved for two or three centuries even after the conquest of Iran.

But following the Iranians' conversion to Islam and the prevalence of Arabic script and the falling of the Pahlavi script into disuse, the old books became unusable for the majority of people and gradually disappeared. But that there existed a national library or libraries and academic institutions that were destroyed deliberately by Arab conquerors is no more than a fiction.

Ibrahim Pur Dawud, whose bias is evident and who, in the words of the late Qazwini, is hostile to Arabs and everything that is associated with them, made efforts to collect 'circumstantial evidence' from the nooks and comers of history, citing them, often with interpolations, as 'proof' of the alleged book burning in Iran by Arab conquerors and destruction of its academic institutions. After him a number of individuals—some of whom, at least, were not expected to be misled by such an unfounded story—followed in his footsteps.

The late Dr. Men was one of them.⁴ In *Mazdayasna and Persian Literature*, while dealing with the consequences of the Arab invasion of Iran, he refers to this matter repeating for the most part the views of Pur Dawud. Following is what he cites as evidence in this regard:

1) Sir John Malcolm has referred to this incident in his history.

2) During the *Jahiliyyah* the Arabs were illiterate. According to al-Waqidi only seventeen persons among the Quraysh were literate at the time of the Prophet's ministry. The last Bedouin poet, Dhu al-Rummah, used to conceal his literacy, and he would say, Amongst us literacy is considered a sign of being uncultured.⁵

3) Al-Jahiz, in *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin*, writes that one day one of the chieftains of Quraysh saw a boy reading a book of Sibawayh. He shouted at him, saying: "Shame on you! What you are doing is the occupation of teachers and beggars." In those days, teaching—that is instruction of children—was regarded as a mean job, for a teacher's pay was not more than sixty dirhams and that was a petty income in their opinion.⁶

4) Ibn Khaldun, in the chapter "On the Rational Sciences and their Kinds" (*al-'ulum al-'aqliyyah wa asnafuha*) of his *Muqaddimah*, says: "At the time of the conquest of Iran many books of that country fell into the hands of the Arabs. Sa'd ibn Abi al-Waqqas wrote to 'Umar ibn al-Khattab asking his permission to have them translated for Muslims.

'Umar wrote to him in reply that he should cast them into water, "for if what is written in those books is guidance, God has given us a better guide; and if that which is in those books is misleading, God has saved us from their evil." Accordingly those books were cast into water or fire, and the sciences of the Iranians that were contained in them were destroyed and did not reach us.⁷

Abu al-Faraj ibn al-'Ibri in *Mukhtasar al-duwal*, 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi in *Kitab al-ifadah wa al-i'tibar*, Qifti in *Ta'rikh al-hukama'*, in the account of Yahya al-Nahwi, Hajji Khalifah in *Kashf al-zunun*, and Dr. Dhabih Allah Safa in *Ta'rikh-e 'ulum-e 'aqli dar Islam*, have mentioned the burning of the library of Alexandria by the Arabs. (This means that if it is proved that Arabs burnt the library of Alexandria, it would indicate that they could also have burnt down libraries anywhere that they found them. Hence it is probable that the library in Iran suffered a similar fate at their hands.)

However, Shibli Nu'mani, in his treatise *Kitabkhaneh-ye Iskandarivyah*, which has been translated into Persian by Fakhr Da'i, and also Mujtaba Minawi in an article published in the journal *Sukhan* (No. 74, p. 584), has refuted this allegation (concerning the burning of the library of Alexandria by Muslims).

5) Abu Rayhan al-Birdui, in *al-Athar al-baqiyyah*, writing about Khwarizm, says: "When Qutaybah ibn Muslim reconquered Khwarizm after the apostasy of its inhabitants, he appointed Iskajmuk as its governor. Qutaybah destroyed and eliminated everyone who knew the Khwarazmi script or had some knowledge of its people and their sciences. He dispersed them in different parts of the world, and so—

their traditions and conditions have remained unknown, to the extent that after the advent of Islam there remains no means to learn about the facts concerning them.”⁸

Also Abu Rayhan writes in the same book: “When Qutaybah ibn Muslim destroyed their scribes (i.e. of the Khwarizm), and killed their priests (*hirbads*) and burnt their books and writings, the people of Khwarizm were reduced to illiteracy. They were compelled to rely upon their memory in things that were needed by them. In the course of time they forgot all details pertaining to their differences and preserved in their memory only the general matters on which there was agreement among them.”⁹

6) The story of book burning at the hands of ‘Abd Allah ibn Tahir, which has been mentioned in *Tadhkirat al-Shu’ara’* by Dawlat-Shah Samarqandi.

These make up the bulk of the so-called evidence that Dr. Mu’im has advanced to prove the alleged book burning in Iran by the Arabs. Among these, only the fourth one cited from Ibn Khaldun, along with the story of book burning in Alexandria mentioned by Ibn al-Ibri, al-Baghdadi and al-Qifti, along with what Hajji Khalifah has written, need to be examined critically.

There is also a seventh argument which Dr. Muin does not mention, but which is mentioned by Jurji Zaydan and is often repeated by certain Iranian writers. That is also cited as evidence of the Arab's hostility toward books, writing, and scholarship. According to it the second Caliph vehemently prevented the writing and compilation of books and proscribed writing and compilation with the slogan “The Book of God suffices us, considering it a crime.”

This prohibition remained in force until the 2nd/8th century, when it was ignored due to the pressure and needs of the times.

It is obvious that a people that do not permit themselves to engage in writing and compilation for at least one century would not, within that period, tolerate the existence of books belonging to vanquished peoples.

Presently, first we shall examine the arguments forwarded by Dr. Mu’in—excepting the fourth one—and then examine the seventh one. Later on we shall take up in detail the fourth argument of Dr. Mu’in.

The first argument, that is, the statements of Sir John Malcolm, were already cited by us in the context of our review of *Mazdayasna wa adab-e Parse* and their baselessness has been made clear.

Apparently, Sir John Malcolm lived in the 13th/19th century, and his statements concerning an incident that purportedly took place thirteen centuries earlier cannot be accepted as reliable historical evidence.

Besides, he shows such an open hostility to Islam that no credence can be attached to any of his statements. He claims that ‘the followers of the Arabian Prophet razed Iranian towns to the ground’ (a lie—as the saying goes—that is not to be found in any apothecary's store!). It is amazing that—Dr. Mu’in should have quoted Sir John Malcolm's consistently incoherent nonsense in support of his assertions.

But as for the issue of the Arabs' illiteracy, the Qur'an itself has mentioned it. Yet what an argument is it? If the Arabs of the *Jahiliyyah* were illiterate, is it a proof that the Arab Muslims habitually burnt books? Besides, in the period of a quarter century that elapsed between the *Jahiliyyah* and the conquest of Iran a wonderful literacy campaign had been launched by the Noble Prophet (S) in Madinah.

The Arab of the *Jahiliyyah* embraced a faith whose Prophet told some of his prisoners of war to buy their liberty by teaching a certain number of Muslim children to read and write. The prophet of that creed encouraged some of his companions to learn foreign languages such as Syriac, Hebrew and Persian. He himself had twenty secretaries, each of whom, or several of them, were responsible for some secretarial job.¹⁰

The Arab of the *Jahiliyyah* embraced a faith whose scripture swore by the pen and writing¹¹ and whose revelations began with the mention of reading and teaching.¹² Didn't the attitude of the Prophet (S) and the Qur'an in glorifying reading, writing and acquisition of knowledge inspire a sense of respect for books, writing, scholarship and education in the Arab of the *Jahiliyyah*, who came to be passionately attached to the Qur'an and the Prophet (S)?

As for the story concerning the contempt that the Quraysh and other Arabs had for a teacher's occupation, it is interpreted to imply not only that the Quraysh and Arabs in general considered the teacher's job as mean, but that they rather looked down upon literacy as such.

First of all, it is mentioned in this account itself (given by Fahiz) that the teacher's job was regarded as mean due to its low income. It is the same as in our own country today where teachers, clerks and clergymen belong to low-income groups of society, and for the same reason some of them occasionally change their profession.

If a young teacher, clerk, or clergyman asks for the hand of a girl in marriage and she also receives proposals from some merchant, contractor, or real-estate dealer, the girl's family prefers to give their daughter in marriage to the merchant or contractor, though he should be illiterate, rather than to a teacher, clerk or clergymen.

Why? Is that because they have a contempt for learning and intellectual abilities? Of course not. It has nothing to do with contempt for learning. To marry one's daughter to someone from such a class requires a spirit of sacrifice, and there are few who are ready to make it.

It is also strange that from a derisive remark made by an Arab belonging to the *Quraysh* about a child reading a book, it is construed that all Arabs were absolutely opposed to learning and writing and that they burnt books wherever they found them! It is precisely like saying that all the people of Iran are generally enemies of learning and literary, that they favour buffoonery and minstrelsy and that they burn books wherever they come across them because 'Ubayd Zakani (d. 722/1322), the Iranian poet and man of literature, has said:

ای خواجه مکن تا توانی طلب علم کاندر طلب راتب يك روز بمانی

رو مسخرگی پیشه کن و مطربی آموز تا داد خود از مهتر و کهتر بستانی

Don't seek knowledge so far as you can,
As, in this deserted path, you will beg your daily bread.
Make buffoonery your calling and learn the minstrels art,
And receive applause from the high and low

Or it is like saying that as Abu Hayyan Tawhidi, disgusted with poverty and hardship, burnt all his books, therefore his countrymen are enemies of knowledge and learning.

As for Biruni's account concerning Khwarizm, though it is not documented and Biruni has not cited any source, it is not improbable. Aside from his other merits, Biruni is a historian of integrity and he does not make any baseless statements. Also, he was close to the date of the incident, for he lived in the second half of the 4th/10th and the first half of the 5th/11th and Khwarizm was conquered by Muslims about the year 93/711–2 during the reign of Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik. Moreover, he himself came from Khwarizm.

However, firstly, Biruni's report pertains to Khwarizm and the Khwarizmian language, not to the Pahlavi or Avestan languages.

Secondly, Biruni himself, in the introduction to his, *Saydah*, or *Saydanah*, which is still unpublished, discusses the ability of various languages as a medium for discussing scientific subjects and prefers Arabic to Persian and Khwarizmian. Especially concerning the Khwarizmian language he remarks that 'this language is in no degree capable of expressing scientific conceptions, and someone desiring to express a scientific theory in this language is like one who wants to see a camel emerge from a drainpipe.¹³

On this ground it may be said that if some books of an academic value existed in the Khwarzmian language, Abu Rayhan would not have described it as being so inadequate for academic purposes. The books referred to by Abu Rayhan could not have been anything beyond a few historical works. Qutaybah ibn Muslim's treatment of the people of Khwarizm, which pertains to the reign of Walid ibn 'Abd al-Malik not the period of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs if the story is true and free from exaggeration¹⁴ was certainly inhuman and un-Islamic.

It was radically different from the behaviour of other Muslim conquerors that conquered Iran and Byzantine, who were mostly Companions of the Prophet (S) and under the influence of Islamic teachings. Hence, this conduct of Qutaybah, which pertains to the worst period of Islamic caliphate (the

Umayyad era), cannot be taken as a criterion of the general behaviour of Muslims who conquered Iran in the early period of Islam.

In any case, the probable sites of academic institutions of Iran were Tisfun, Hamadan, Nahawand, Isfahan, Istakhr, Rey, Nishapur or Azarbaijan, and not Khwarizm. The probable language in which the academic works might have existed was Pahlavi and not Khwarzmian. Iranian books that were rendered into Arabic—such as the *Kalilah wa dimnah*, by Ibn al-Muqaffa', and a part of Aristotle's Logic, by him or his son—were in Pahlavi, not in Khwarzmian or some other regional dialect.

Chirstensen writes that 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan ordered a certain book to be translated from Pahlavi into Arabic.¹⁵

That an invasion should result in the destruction of all works of academic worth of a language and in reducing a people to a state of complete illiteracy with total ignorance of their past history—that could be a consequence relating specifically only to a local language. Obviously a local language cannot develop into an academic language with varied kinds of books in medicine, mathematics, natural sciences, astronomy, literature, and religion.

If a language attains such a degree of development that it possesses a library of various sciences, the people speaking it cannot be reduced to complete illiteracy as a result of a single invasion. No invasion has ever been more terrible than that of the Mongols.

Mass-scale massacres, in its literal sense, took place in the wake of the Mongol invasion; books and libraries were burnt; but this attack could not wipe out all the academic legacy in Persian and Arabic or sever the links of the post-Mongol generations with the pre-Mongol culture. For the academic heritage in Arabic and Persian was too wide-spread to be annihilated even as a result of several mass massacres by the Mongols.

Hence it is clear that what was destroyed in Khwarizm was no more than a number of religious and literary Zoroastrian texts whose contents are known to us. Abu Rayhan also does not say anything more than this. A careful examination of Abu Rayhan's statements indicates that he is referring to books on history and religion.

As for the story of book burning by 'Abd Allah ibn Tahir, it is an interesting episode and it is amazing that Dr. Muin should have cited it as an evidence of book burning in Iran by Arab conquerors. 'Abd Allah was the son of Tahir Dhu al-Yaminayn, the famous Iranian general of al-Ma'mun's era who, supporting al-Ma'mun, commanded the Khurasan army in the battle between al-Ma'mun and al-Amin, sons of Harun al-Rashid (Ali ibn 'Isa commanded the Arab army supporting al-Amin). He defeated al-Amin's forces, conquered Baghdad, killed al-Amin, and secured the caliphate for al-Ma'mun.

Tahir himself was personally hostile to Arabs. He awarded thirty thousand dinars or thirty thousand dirhams to Allan al-Shu'ubi, who worked in Harun's Bayt al-Hikmah, for compiling the *Mathalib al-'Arab*,

a book describing the vices of the Arabs.¹⁶ His son, 'Abd Allah, who is held guilty of the book burning, was the founder of the Tahirid dynasty; that is, it was through him that Khurasan attained political independence for the first time and an independent Iranian state came into existence.

'Abd Allah, like his father, had a strong bias against Arabs. Nevertheless, it is one of the wonders of history and Islam that the same anti-Arab Iranian who had attained so much power as to declare himself independent from the caliph of Baghdad burnt all pre-Islamic Iranian books on the ground that all that literature was useless in the presence of the Qur'an.

It is said that one day a man came to the court of 'Abd Allah b. Tahir (died 844 C.E.) in Nishapur and presented an old book containing 'The Romance of Wamiq and Adhra.'¹ When asked as to what book it was he said that it was an absorbing tale compiled by wise men and dedicated to King Anushirwan (531–579 C.E.).

The emir ordered its destruction, saying that the Qur'an and Traditions of the Prophet ought to suffice for good Muslims, and added, "This book was written by Magians and is accursed in our eyes" The book was cast into water and he issued a decree ordering that throughout his domain any book found in Persian and written by Magians was to be destroyed.¹⁷

Why did he do that? I don't know. Most probably it was a reaction inspired by the Iranians' hatred of Zoroastrians. In any case this act was committed by 'Abd Allah ibn Tahir, an Iranian, not by an Arab. May we blame all Iranians for the action of 'Abd Allah, and claim that basically such was their thinking that they burnt any book other than the Qur'an that they found? Again the answer will be No.¹

This act of 'Abd Allah was blameworthy. But it proves what we have said earlier, that whenever a culture is invaded by another, the champions and advocates of the new culture adopt an extreme and harmful attitude of indifference toward the old culture. The Iranians who were greatly impressed and inspired by Islamic culture, did not show any sign of attachment towards their old culture. Rather, they deliberately pushed it into oblivion.

There are numerous examples of a conduct similar to that of 'Abd Allah ibn Tahir on the part of Iranians, who while detesting the chauvinism of the Arabs, who as a race wished to impose themselves upon other peoples, had a pro-Islamic bias which they employed against the Zoroastrian heritage.

If the reference to the book burning by 'Abd Allah ibn Tahir is meant to show that such acts have precedents in history, there is no need of it. History has witnessed such scenes and continues to witness scenes of book burning. In our own times Ahmad Kasrawi celebrated a book burning festival. Christians cast eighty thousand books into flames at the time of the fall of Spain when Muslims were massacred on a mass scale.¹⁸

Jurji Zaydan, a Christian writer, concedes that the crusaders burnt three millions books during their invasion of Syria and Palestine.¹⁹ The Turks burnt books in Egypt²⁰ and Sultan Mahmud Ghaznawi

burnt books in Rey.²¹ The Mongols burnt the library of Marv.²² The Zoroastrians burnt the books of Mazdakians in the Sassanian period.²³ Alexander burnt Iranian books,²⁴ and Romans cast the works of Archimedes, the renowned mathematician, into fire.²⁵ Later on we shall come to the burning of the library at Alexandria by Christians.

George Sarton, in his *History of Science*, says: "Protagoras, the Greek Sophist, in one of his books, while dealing with the problem of reality and truth, said: As for gods, we can neither say that they exist, nor that they don't. There are many things that prevent us from understanding this issue. First of them is the darkness surrounding the subject itself, and, second, the brevity of human life."²⁶

Sarton says: "These views led his books to be burnt at the city square in the year 411 B.C., and it is the first instance of book burning recorded in history."²⁷

As to the story of the prohibition on writing of books in the Muslim world, which was announced by the Second Caliph and continued for about a hundred years, this story is also noteworthy, although we shall discuss it in the third part of the present book relating to the contribution of Iranians to Islam, particularly in the section relating to culture and historical beginnings of writing and compilation. However, here it is necessary to point out that the prohibition ascribed to the Second Caliph related specifically to writing of the Prophet's traditions (*hadith*).

Since the early era of Islam there was a difference of opinion concerning the recording and compilation of the Prophet's *hadith* between two groups with Umar and some Companions on one side and Imam Ali ('a) and some other Companions on the other.

The first group led by 'Umar considered it permissible to hear and narrate *hadith*, but undesirable to record and compile it. Their excuse was that *hadith*, if written and compiled, might be mistaken for the Qur'an and it was feared that involvement with *hadith* might divert attention from the Qur'an. But the other group led by 'Ali ('a) encouraged people to write and compile *hadith*.

The Sunnis ('ammah) following the line of 'Umar abstained from compiling *hadith* for a century, but after one century they also followed the view of Ali in this matter and 'Umar's view was abandoned. For this reason the Shi'ah were a century ahead of the Sunnis in compilation of *hadith*.

Hence the truth is that writing and compilation was not totally banned in all fields among Arabs and therefore it is wrong to say that a people who did not allow them to write and compile had greater reason for destroying written works belong to other peoples. The prohibition on writing, or its undesirability, was confined, firstly, only to *hadith*, and secondly, it pertained only to the Sunnis, while the Shi-'ah never adopted that approach concerning compilation of *hadith*. In any case, this issue has no bearing on the matter of books and writing.

Jurji Zaydan, in his history of Islamic civilization, and Dr. Dhabihullah Safa, in *Ta'rikh-e 'ulum-e 'aqli dar Islam*, have expressed certain views that require critical examination. Dr. Safa says:

Like all other Muslims, the Arabs believed in the dictum:

الإسلام يهدم قبله

Islam demolishes what has been before it.

For this reason the belief became rooted in their minds that they should not pay attention to anything except the Qur'an, for the Qur'an had abrogated all other scriptures and Islam abrogated all previous religions. The religious leaders had banned the study of all other books other than the Qur'an including even religious texts.

It is said that one day the Prophet (s) saw a leaf of the Torah in the hands of 'Umar. He was so upset that signs of anger were manifest in his face. He said to 'Umar:

الم آتكم بها بيضاء نقيه و الله لو كان موسى حياً ما وسعه الا اتباعي

Didn't I bring you a bright and pure *shari 'ah*? By God, had Moses himself been alive, he would not have had any choice but to follow me.

For the same reason the Prophet (S) said:

لا تصدقوا أهل الكتاب و لا تكذبوهم و قولوا آمناً بالذي أنزل علينا و أنزل إليكم
و آلها و إلهكم واحد

Neither affirm nor negate what the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*) say in the name of religion, and say: 'We have faith in what is revealed to us and what was revealed to you, and our and your God is one.

One of the well-known traditions in that period was:

كتاب الله فيه خير ما قبلكم و نبأ ما بعدكم و حكم ما بينكم

The Book of God contains the reports of those who have gone before you and prophecies of your future and the judgement governing you.

The words of the Qur'an, which states that:

وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ ۚ وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ
وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبَّةٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْأَرْضِ وَلَا رَطْبٍ وَلَا يَابِسٍ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ
مُبِينٍ

And with Him are the keys of the unseen treasures-- none knows them but He; and He knows what is in the land and the sea, and there falls not a leaf but He knows it, nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green nor dry but (it is all) in a clear Book. (6:59)

This naturally strengthened this belief, and the result was to make the Muslims confine themselves to the Qur'an and *hadith* to the exclusion of all other books...28

I am really amazed at the words of these learned men. Didn't they know that the phrase

الإسلام يهدم قبله

“Islam demolishes what has been before it” only meant that the advent of Islam annulled all older norms, customs and laws?

All Muslims, from the very inception of Islam to the present, have not understood anything *from this* statement but that Islam invalidated all the past religious customs and practices of the Jahiliyyah, including the *jahiliyyah* of the idolators and the *jahaliyyah* of the *Ahl al-Kitab*, and that it did not refer to anything other than the religious precepts and traditions. It is similar to the saying:

الإسلام يهدم قبله

which means that Islam conceals all that was before it and that it does not hold anyone guilty for his pre-Islamic conduct, such as a crime which requiring retribution or compensation if committed by a Muslim; but if the same was committed by a man before embracing Islam during his pagan days, Islam did not hold him liable for his past guilt.

All Muslims have understood these sentences to signify this sense of amnesty. See, how great is the distance between this meaning and that which is imputed to the statement by these writers.

Similarly, the *hadith* relating to ‘Umar clearly indicates that what the Prophet (S) meant was that the revelation of the Qur’an and the ultimate *Shari’ah* abrogates the Torah and the Law of Moses. Hence he did not prohibit the study of other books even religious books. He forbade the study of the revealed scriptures of the past which have been abrogated so that Muslims should not mix the abrogated laws with the *Shari’ah* of Islam and therefore he forbade them from studying the Torah.

The Prophet's statement “Neither affirms nor negate that which is said by the *Ahl al-Kitab*” also referred to the religious legends and commandments. With this statement the Prophet (S) made them understand that truth was adulterated with falsehoods in the creed of the *Ahl al-Kitab*, and as they did not possess the ability to distinguish between them, it was advisable for them not to affirm them, for thereby they might endorse a falsehood, and not to negate them, for thereby they might negate a truth unknowingly.

Similarly, the tradition stating that the Qur’an contained “the reports of the past, news of the future and the judgement governing your differences,” which is also found in the *Nahj al-balaghah*, also refers to religious accounts, eschatology and religious laws, and it means that Muslims have no need of any other revealed book with the revelation of the Qur’an.

The most ridiculous of all is the reference to the Qur’anic verse:

وَلَا رَطْبٌ وَلَا يَابِسٌ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُّبِينٍ

... There is naught in land or sea but it is recorded in a clear Book. (6:59)

So far as I know no commentator of the Qur’an has considered this verse as referring to the Qur’an. All exegetes have interpreted it as referring to the preserved Tablet (*law mahfuz*)

Muslims have never understood this verse and those traditions, quoted above, to signify what these gentlemen have presumed, that the verse and the traditions fashioned a mentality amongst Muslims to destroy every book except the Qur’an.

Now it is the turn to examine the fourth argument advanced by the late Dr. Muin. He quotes Ibn Khaldun as if he has mentioned the incident of book burning in Iran with certainty, and as if the accounts given by Abu al-Faraj Ibn al-‘Ibri, ‘Abd al-Latif Baghdad, al-Qifti and Hajji Khalifah were unproblematic.

Although he was certainly aware that recent European scholars have established clearly and conclusively the baselessness and falsity of the story of book burning by Muslims in Alexandria, yet he contented himself with citing only the denials of Shibli Nu’mani and Mujtaba Minawi, ignoring the conclusive arguments forwarded by the European scholars.

Here we shall give a brief summary of the views of various scholars concerning the book burning in

Alexandria, with the addition of certain points that occur to my mind. Hereafter I shall embark upon a critique of what Ibn Khaldun and Hajji Khahfah have said concerning book burning in Iran.

Most of the claimants of book burning by Muslims in Iran base their argument on the book burning in Alexandria.

Obviously, if the illiteracy of Arabs during the *Jahiliyyah*, the expression of contempt for the teacher's profession by an individual belonging to the tribe of Quraysh, the book burning by 'Abd Allah ibn Tahir, an Iranian, and the book burning by Qutaybah ibn Muslim in Khwarizm one hundred years after the first Muslim conquests, can provide evidence for burning of libraries by Arab conquerors of Iran, the book burning in Alexandria by an 'intelligent and wise man' like 'Amr ibn al-'As (who, according to the report, associated with a philosopher of those days in Alexandria) and that, too, not on his own accord, as done by Qutaybah ibn Muslim in Khwarizm, –but at the direct order from the person of the Caliph himself at the capital in Madinah, can with greater reason serve as a proof of the burning of the library in Iran!

Hence this group of scholars always mentions the book burning in Alexandria with great fanfare.

As a prelude to this discussion, it ought to be mentioned that the history of the Muslim conquests, both in general and in particular that is, accounts of the conquests in a particular region– have been recorded since the last decades of the 2nd/8th century, and these works are accessible to us. In the specific case of the conquest of Alexandria, beside Muslim historians, some Christians have also given detailed accounts of the fall of this city to the Arab conquerors.

No source compiled before the Crusades; Islamic or Christian, Jewish or some other; mentions the book burning in Alexandria or Iran. It was for the first time at the end of the 6th/12th and the beginning of the 7th/13th centuries that 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdad, a Christian, refers to it in his book entitled *al-Ifadah wa al-Nibar fi al-umur al-mushahadah wa al-hawadith al-mu'ayanah fi 'ard Misr* (the subject of the book is the events and conditions observed personally by the author, and is in fact, a travel account).

In it while describing a 'tower' ('amud) known as *'Amad al-Sawari*, the previous site of the library of Alexandria, he writes: "It is said that this tower is one of the several on which was erected a theatre, where Aristotle used to lecture and which was an academy, and here stood the library of Alexandria which was burnt by 'Amr ibn al-'As at the Caliph's order."

All that 'Abd al-Latif intended to say, without himself endorsing it, is that there was such a rumour among the people (perhaps among his fellow Christians), for he begins his statement with the expression "*yudhkaru*," which means "it is said" or "it is rumoured." We know that if a reporter has some authoritative source in reporting some historical event or tradition, he cites his source or sources, as is done by Tabari, for instance, among historians and most of the traditionists (*muhaddithin*).

The best reporting is of this kind, which gives the reader the opportunity to investigate the truth or falsity of the report, which he accepts if the source is credible. In case the narrator does not refer to a source,

there are two alternatives. Sometimes he reports an incident as something which is generally known to have happened for certain, for instance, he may say that such and such an incident occurred in such and such a year.

Sometimes he says, "It is said" or "It has been said." In case the report is in the first form, it means that the narrator believes in what he reports; however, others do not rely upon such reports which are not accompanied by a source or authority. The scholars of *hadith* do not consider such narrations as reliable.

European historians also do not consider historical reports unsupported by documents and sources as credible and consider them unreliable. At the most it is said that so and so has cited such and such a report in his book without citing any authority or source; that is, it has no credibility as a historical report.

But in case an event is reported in the second form, that is, the reporter himself records it with the words "It is said" or "It has been said" and the like (in a passive voice), it indicates that the reporter himself is not sure of the credibility of what he narrates. Some experts are of the view that the word *qila* (it is said) indicates that the narrator himself does not believe the report to be credible.

'Abd al-Latif has reported this incident in the third form mentioned above, which is, at least, an indication that he himself did not regard the report as credible. Besides, it is improbable that 'Abd al-Latif was so ill-informed that he did not know that Aristotle never put his foot on the soil of Egypt and Alexandria, to say nothing of his lecturing in that place.

Alexandria was actually founded after Aristotle's death and after Alexander's invasion of Egypt. The city was planned in Alexander's time and probably its building was started at that time but it took the form of a city gradually in the course of time. Aristotle was a contemporary of Alexander.

Hence, whether 'Abd al-Latif believed in the truth of the report or not, the report itself is incredible in respect of its content; that is, it contains a statement that is definitely false historically, which is the story of Aristotle's lecturing in the library's theatre. If a report consists of certain statements some of which are definitely false, it is indicative of the falsehood of its other statements also. The burning of the library of Alexandria by Muslims has the same degree of credibility as the report of Aristotle's lecturing there.

Hence, the report of 'Abd al-Latif is weak in respect of source as well as content, as it lacks a source and authority in addition to containing an obvious falsehood. It is also weak in respect of the style of reporting; for it is reported in a way that suggests that he did not regard the story as credible.

Apart from all this, had 'Abd al-Latif lived in the age of Arab conquest of Alexandria (first/seventh century) or at least during the period of the historians (2nd/8th to 4th/10th century) who compiled, on the basis of the narrations of others, the chronicles of the Islamic conquests, including the conquest of Alexandria, there was a probability of his having met persons who were direct or indirect witnesses of the events and who might have narrated them for 'Abd al-Latif, whereas, it could be said, others had not

chanced to meet such persons.

But 'Abd al-Latif compiled his book at the end of the 6th/12th century and the beginning of the 7th/13th.²⁹ That means he lived six hundred years after the event which took place in the years 17/638 or–18/639–. In the course of these six centuries no historical work and no historian, Muslim, Christian or Jew, has mentioned this incident.

It appears suddenly after such a long time for the first time in the book of 'Abd al-Latif: These considerations bring 'Abd al-Latif's report even lower than one lacking source and authority, and reduce it to a report whose falsity is confirmed by external evidence.

What is more significant is that histories bear testimony that the library of Alexandria had been devastated and burned several times before Alexandria was conquered by Muslims. Basically, at the time of the Muslim conquest the library did not exist in its earlier form. There were only some books in the possession of individuals from which Muslims benefited during the period from 2nd/8th to 4th/10th century.

Here the famous proverb fits the present situation. Someone said: "Jacob, an Imam's descendant, was torn to pieces by a wolf at the top of a minaret." He was told: "That was a prophet's son, not that of an Imam. Moreover, his name was Joseph, not Jacob, and he was not at the top of a minaret, but at the bottom of a well. Moreover such an episode never happened, for Joseph was not attacked by any wolf!"

We may listen at this juncture to Will Durant, the author of *The Story of Civilization*. He rejects 'Abd al-Latif's report for the following reasons:

- 1) A large part of the library had been destroyed by Christian ardor under the Patriarch Theophilus in 392 [about 250 years before the Muslim conquest of Alexandria];
- 2) The remainder had suffered such hostility and neglect that "most of the collection had disappeared by 642;"
- 3) In the 500 years³⁰ between the supposed event and its first reporter no Christian historian mentions it, though one of them, Eutychius, Archbishop of Alexandria in 933, described the Arab conquest of Alexandria in great detail. The story is now generally rejected as a fable. In any case, the gradual dissolution of the Alexandrian Library was a tragedy of some moment, (for it was believed to contain the complete published works of 'Eschylus, Sophodes, Polybius, Livy, Tacitus, and a hundred others, who have come down to us in mangled form; full texts of the pre-Socratic philosophers, who survive only in snatches; and thousands of volumes of Greek, Egyptian, and Roman history, science, literature, and philosophy).³¹

Will Durant has described the gradual stages of the destruction of this library at the hands of Christians in *The Story of Civilization*. Those who are interested may refer to its sixth, ninth and eleventh volumes

(the Persian translation). Gustav Lebon, in *The Arab and Islamic Civilization*, says:

“The burning of the library of Alexandria is attributed to the Muslim conquerors. It is very amazing that such an imaginary tale should have survived for such a long time and that it should be generally believed. But today the falsity of this story has been established. Now it is proved that before the Islamic era Christians themselves burnt and destroyed the said library in the same manner that they took great care to demolish all the temples and deities of Alexandria, so that by the time of the Muslim conquest nothing of its collection of books remained to be cast into flames.

From the time of its foundation, which took place in 332 B.C., until its invasion by Muslims, for one thousand years the city of Alexandria was counted among the great and important cities of the world.

In the age of the Ptolemies, all scholars and philosophers of the world had gathered in this city and they founded schools and large libraries. But these advancements in knowledge did not last long, for in 48 B.C. the Roman invasion under Caesar inflicted a severe blow to its academic life. Though it made considerable progress again under Roman domination and gained in importance, but this progress was transitory. For the madness of sectarian conflict arose among its citizens and continued to get fiercer day by day despite cruel suppression by Roman emperors, until Christianity was declared the state religion. Then Theodore ordered all the temples, statues of gods, and the libraries of idolators³² to be razed to the ground.”³³

The city of Alexandria, which is still one of the important cities of Egypt, was founded by Alexander in the 4th century B.C. and for the same reason was named Alexandria. Alexander's successors in Egypt, who were called the Ptolemies, built a museum and library and in fact an academy that grew to become a great centre of learning. Many scholars of Alexandria may be ranked with the great figures of Greece and are among the world's most famous scholars.

The school of Alexandria was started in the second and third centuries B.C. and flourished until the fourth century C.E.. Under the rule of Alexander and his successors Egypt was completely under the political domination of Greece. Afterwards, with the decline of Greek civilization and war with Romans, whose capital was the city of Rome in Italy, as a result of which Greece was defeated, Egypt and Alexandria also came under the political domination of Rome. Around the fourth century C.E. the Roman Empire was divided into the Eastern Empire with Constantinople (present Istanbul) as its capital, and the Western Roman Empire with its capital at Rome.

The Eastern Roman Empire embraced Christianity, which had a negative impact both on the Greek and the Roman civilizations. The Western medieval ages, which mark –a period of decline in the West, begin nearly about this time (the division of the Roman Empire into the Eastern and the Western).

After the conversion of the Eastern Roman Empire to Christianity, which considered the teaching of sciences and philosophy to be against the tenets of the Christian faith –and regarded scholars and philosophers as heathen and heretics who also misled others, the school of Alexandria fell under the

shadow of Christianity. Once again, after the earlier attack of Caesar (48 B.C.), this library began to be subject to repeated plunder, attacks and conflagrations.

Constantine I is the first emperor of Eastern Rome who converted to Christianity. Justinian, his descendent in the sixth century C.E. officially closed down the academy of Athens. The school of Alexandria had been closed down or had undergone dissolution earlier in the fourth century C.E.

The closure of the Athenian school took place in 529 C.E., which is forty-one years before the birth of the Prophet of Islam(S), eighty-one years before his mission started, ninety-four years before his migration to Madinah, and one hundred and five years before his death, and one hundred twenty and odd years before the conquest of Alexandria by Muslims.

From what has been said it is clear that this library was established by polytheists and was destroyed by Christians. However, after the crusades, which continued for two hundred years (5th/11th and 6th/12th centuries), the Christians, on the one hand, became acquainted with the Islamic culture and civilization, which enlightened them, and, on the other, as a result of their final defeat by Muslims they nursed a strong enmity against Muslims in their hearts and launched a war of nerves against them.

They concocted and spread so many rumours against Islam, the Qur'an, the Pophet (S) and Muslims that it comes as an embarrassment to modern civilized Christians, and we see that some of them have written books in "Apology to Muhammad and the Qur'an" to compensate for the lapses of the past.³⁴

The book burnings attributed to Muslims are among these rumours which have occasionally been repeated by unsuspecting Muslim writers since the 7th/13th century with such words as "It is said" or "It is related that," without knowing that the story was one fabricated by Christian crusaders with the motive to malign Muslims.

During the last century when Western colonialism came to give top priority in its programme to instigating the national sentiments of Muslims against Islam and Muslims of the early era, the likes of Pur Dawud gave it the shape of a historical incident by giving prominence to such reports as that of 'Abd al-Latif, and it was taught as genuine history to the students-of Iranian schools and universities.

So far we have examined the report of 'Abd al-Latif: Let us now turn our attention to the statements of Abu Al-Faraj ibn al-'Ibri.

Abu al-Faraj was a Jewish physician, born at Malatya (Asia Minor) in 623/1226. His father had renounced the Jewish faith and embraced Christianity. Abu al-Faraj's education started with learning the tenets of Christianity. He was well-acquainted with Syriac and Arabic, and compiled a detailed history in Syriac based upon Syriac, Arabic and Greek sources. In that history there is no mention of any book burning by Muslims in Alexandria.

He also prepared a condensed version of it in Arabic under the title *Mukhtasar al-duwal*. It is said that all

its manuscripts are incomplete and defective. The strange part of it is that though it is a condensation of his detailed history in Syriac, it contains certain things that do not exist in the original Syriac history, and among these is the story of the book burning of Alexandria by Muslims.

Mukhtasar al-duwal was edited and published by Pocock, a professor at Oxford and one of those who have played an active role in spreading lies against Muslims. He also translated this book into Latin. Since then through this book and this man the false story of the Muslims' book burning of the library of Alexandria was circulated in Europe until it was refuted in recent centuries by European scholars like Gibbon, Krale, Gustav Lebon and others.³⁵

The story of the book burning is narrated in *Mukhtasar al-duwal* in the following form:

In those days Yahya al-Nahwi, who was known as Grammaticus in our language, enjoyed fame among Arabs. He was a resident of Alexandria and a Jacobite Christian who ascribed to the Savari creed. In his last days he renounced the Christian faith, and all Christian scholars of Egypt gathered around him and advised him to recant, but he did not. When the scholars were disappointed they stripped him of all the offices that he held. He lived in that condition until 'Amr ibn al As (the Muslim commander of the army conquering Egypt) entered Egypt.

One day Yahya went to see him. 'Amr came to know about his learning and scholarship and he paid him great respect. He began a discourse on philosophical issues which were unknown to Arabs: His speech made a deep impression on 'Amr and he became fond of him. As 'Amr was an intelligent, wise and thoughtful man, he made Yahyaa his companion, never parting his company.

One day Yahya said to 'Amr, "Whatever there is in Alexandria is in your control. As to things that are useful for you we have nothing to do with them, but as to those which you may not need, my request is that you favour us by putting them at our disposal, for we deserve them more than anyone else." 'Amr asked him what they were. He said: "They are the books on wisdom and philosophy that are stored in the state library"

'Amr replied that he could not decide the matter himself but had to seek the Caliph's instructions in this regard. Accordingly, he informed the Caliph of the matter and asked for instructions. The Caliph wrote: "If those books are in agreement with the Qur'an, we have no need of them; and if these are opposed to the Qur'an, destroy them."

After receiving the reply 'Amr began dismantling the library. At his orders, the books were distributed among the public baths of Alexandria. Thus in a period of complete six months all the books were burnt and destroyed. Believe it, and do not be amazed.³⁶

I am sorry that with or without amazement one cannot accept this counsel and suggestion of Abu al-Faraj (if it was really he who has given this account) or that of Prof Pocock. Aside from what we have already said in refutation of 'Abd al-Latif's statements that a historical narration devoid of a source and

authority is not acceptable on any account, especially if the narration lacking source or document surfaces for the first time six hundred years after the alleged event, without anyone else having reported it earlier.

Even without a source or authority—in the view of researchers it has been established that basically there had remained nothing of the library of Alexandria at the time of the Muslim conquest of the city and therefore the story is totally baseless. In addition there are some points that may be mentioned as evidence of its falsehood.

Firstly, the main character of the story is Yahya al-Nahwi, the famous philosopher; who, according to recently uncovered evidence, had died about a hundred years, before the conquest of Alexandria, and his meeting with ‘Amr is a fiction.³⁷

It is strange that although Shibli Nu’mani writes that he was one of the seven scholars who migrated to Iran from the Roman empire due to Justinian's persecution— and they were well received by Khusro Anushirvan, yet he has affirmed the very story of Yahya's meeting with ‘Amr. He has failed to notice that there was a gap of more than one hundred and twenty years between the migration of the *philosophers from Alexandria* and the city's fall to Muslims. Normally, it is not possible that Yahya who was a renowned thinker about 120 years before the conquest of Alexandria should have lived on until those times to become an intimate companion of ‘Amr. On this ground the reports that mention Yahya's meeting with ‘Amr are baseless, even though they may not make any reference to the library.

Abu al-Faraj's report concerning Yahya's meeting with ‘Amr falls in the category of ‘Abd al-Latif's story of Aristotle's lecturing at Alexandria. The fabricators of these stories did not pay attention to their consistency with historical facts.

Secondly, it is stated in the story that after the order came from the Caliph to destroy the books, ‘Amr had them distributed among the baths of Alexandria, and that these made the fuel for the baths for six months. At that time Alexandria was one of the largest cities of Egypt and one of world's biggest cities. ‘Amr himself, in a report sent to the Caliph concerning the city, writes with much wonder:

In this city there are four thousand baths, four thousand edifices, forty thousand Jews who pay the *jiyyah*, four hundred public places of amusement, twelve thousand grocers who sell fresh vegetables.

From this we are to suppose that these books formed heating fuel for four thousand baths for six months, which means that there were so many of them that they could serve as heating fuel for one bath for seven hundred thousand days, or two thousand years. What is more astonishing is that according to Abu al-Faraj's account all of them were on philosophy and not on any other subject.

Now it is good to think over this matter for a while. Have there ever existed so many books on philosophy since the dawn of civilization till this day when the printing industry has been active for centuries and is producing books at a stupendous rate to make fuel of four thousand hot baths for six

months?

Moreover, what might have the dimensions of a library that could accommodate so many books?

The books were not kept in piles like grain or straw, but were arranged in an orderly manner on shelves, for they were used by people. Hence a report by a Christian priest of the fourth century C.E., who was sent to the city by the emperor with the task of destroying the library, states: "At that time I found bookshelves entirely empty of books."³⁸ Not a hall that was seen by 'Abd al-Latif, not even the area of a city could accommodate such a library.

Nowadays there exist in the world, and especially in the United States and the Soviet Union, very large libraries and this is due to the advancements made in printing technology and other facilities unprecedented in human history. At the same time, there exist today large cities that had no parallel in human history. I do not believe there exists in any modern city even today any library big enough to serve as heating fuel for its entire baths for six months.

All these points indicate the fictitious character of the story whose likes may be found only in the world of fiction. It is said that someone once made exaggerated claims about the largeness of the city of Herat in former days. He said, 'There was a time when Herat was an extraordinarily large city.' 'How large?' he was asked.

He said, 'At one time there were in Herat twenty-one thousand one-eyed cooks named Ahmad selling head and totters stew' Now imagine, how many men there must have been in that city, as all of them were not named Ahmad and all those who were named Ahmad were not one-eyed and all the one-eyed Ahmads were not cooks that made head and totters stew, Hence if only the number of one-eyed Ahmads who cooked heads and totters stew was twenty-one thousand, just imagine how many other people there must have been? The entire earth would hardly *suffice to* accommodate the population of Herat!

The story narrated by Abu al-Faraj is like the story of one-eyed cooks named Ahmad who sold heads and totters stew. Hence, the contributors of an English encyclopedia, as mentioned by Shibli Nu'mani, have considered the story of Abu al-Faraj as belonging to humorous literature.

Thirdly, As Shibli Nu'mani and some Western scholars have written, in those days books were made of parchment which was unsuitable for the purpose of fuel and hence it was absurd to use them for that purpose. Shibli Nu'mani cites a writer Monsieur De Pierre as having stated: "We are certain that those who ran the baths of Alexandria would not have used books written on parchment as long as other kinds of fuel were available, and what is significant is that most of the books were made of parchment."³⁹

Fourthly, if there had been such a library in Alexandria, 'Amr would have definitely mentioned it in his report to the Caliph concerning the city, which is recorded in histories. In that report he mentions theatres and public places of amusement and groceries, but does not mention anything about any

library.

Fifthly, Alexandria concluded a peace treaty with Muslims after its conquest by 'Amr ibn al-'As, and its people were considered *dhimmi*s treated in accordance with the rules of a *dhimma*h pact. Accordingly, their lives and properties, honour, and even their places of worship and freedom of religion had the protection of law and the Islamic government was obliged to safeguard them.

In his treaty with the people of Egypt 'Amr ibn al-'As wrote: "This is a pact of amnesty vowed by 'Amr, promising the people of Egypt the security of their lives, properties, houses and all their other matters." As cited in the *Mujam al-buldan* it is explicit that 'The lands of Egyptian people, their properties and capital all belong to them and nobody has any right to interfere with them.'⁴⁰

In general, we know that the behaviour of Muslims vis-a-vis the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*) followed a set pattern: they were brought under the *dhimma*h pact after the conquest of their territory, charged *jizyah*, and, in turn for the levy of *jizyah*, the Muslims were responsible for protection of their lives, property, honour and places of worship. The same modus operandi was followed in Alexandria also.

Had Abu al-Faraj written in his history that during the conquest of Alexandria the Muslims had done such a thing before concluding the peace treaty, it might have been acceptable to some extent. But his report states that this incident took place long after the fall of Alexandria as a consequence of Yahya al-Nahwi's conversation with 'Amr. It is contrary to the general conduct and character of the Muslims to have committed such an act after the conclusion of the peace treaty.

Sixthly, what we know about the characters of 'Amr and 'Umar does not conform to this description. So far as 'Amr is concerned, he was a shrewd man of an independent temperament. If he had any plans in any matter; somehow or another he was capable of convincing 'Umar to accept it.

The histories write that 'Umar was not much keen to conquer Egypt, but 'Amr al-'As made him yield to his views, to the extent that, as recorded, 'Umar's permission had arrived. Had the case been as stated in the narration, that 'Amr was so much impressed by the wisdom and learning of Yahya al-Nahwi that had made the latter his permanent companion and intimate friend, in his letter to 'Umar he would have taken care to report the matter in such a way as to preserve the library sought after by his philosopher friend.

It was not his type to simply seek the Caliph's permission and to carry out his instructions as soon as he received them without writing to him a second time and to set fire to books that were dearer to his scholarly friend than his own life.

Apart from this, 'Amr's conduct after conquering Egypt was that of a man who was interested in reform, development, and the welfare of the people, and not that of a tyrant and oppressor such as Qutaybah ibn Muslim.

Will Durant writes:

‘Amr administered Egypt competently. Part of the oppressive taxation financed the repair of canals and dikes, and the reopening of an eighty mile canal between the Nile and the Red Sea;41 ships could now sail from the Mediterranean into the Indian Ocean (This canal was again choked with sand in 732, and was abandoned.)42

A person whose social awareness was so high could not believably have set fire to a library.

As for ‘Umar, though he may have had a harsh character, but no one can doubt his shrewdness and farsightedness. In order to avoid taking full responsibility on his person and also to make use of others' ideas he always consulted others concerning important issues, and particularly in the matter of his foreign policy he would hold consultations with others as is recorded in books of history.

Two such instances are referred to in the *Nahj al-balaghah*. One does not find in any history that 'Umar ever held a consultative session or sought counsel from anyone concerning the library of Alexandria. It is improbable that he might have taken this decision without holding any council. Besides, had he been of the view that there was no need of any book except the Qur'an, he should have also believed that there was no need of any place of worship other than mosques.

If so, why did he tolerate the existence of churches and synagogues and even fire-temples in his treaties and pacts, even considering their protection and security as the duty of the Islamic government in return for the provisions of *dhimmah*?

Seventhly, if supposedly ‘Amr did issue such an order, how one can one believe that the Christians and Jews of Alexandria received the books, which were the products of their culture and history, as fuel and burnt them without showing any reaction and without even making any attempt to save some of them by hiding them away secretly?

As for al-Qifti's report, it is the same as the story narrated by Abu al-Faraj and all objections to which Abu al-Faraj's report is open apply also to his report. As Abu al-Faraj did not mention this story in his detailed history written in Syriac but in the *Mukhtasar al-duwal*, its summary in Arabic, it is similarly amazing that al-Qifti too does not make any mention of this strange incident in his history of Egypt,43 but in his book *Ikhbar al-‘ulama' bi akhbar al-hukama'*, which gives biographical accounts of philosophers.

He has narrated this story under the account of Yahya al-Nahwi without referring to any source. In al-Qifti's story also, Yahya al-Nahwi is one of the two main characters of the incident, and all the books burnt were in philosophy and *hikmah* and made fuel for four thousand baths for six months.

Al-Qifti claims that Yahya al-Nahwi was a sailor in the early period of his life. At the age of forty-five he was captivated by the love of knowledge and became a philosopher as well as physician and writer. He also attained to the bishopric of Alexandria.

There is, however, some ambiguity about Yahya al-Nahwi in history.

What is certain is that there was a philosopher and bishop by this name in the pre-Islamic period who wrote a refutation of Proclus and Aristotle and a book in defence of the tenets of Christianity.

Ibn Sina, in his well known letter to Abu Rahyan al-Biruni, has accused him of being insincere in his writings, alleging that his purpose thereby was to deceive Christians on the other hand, Ibn al-Nadim, in *al-Fihrist*, mentions him and his meeting with 'Amr ibn al-'As without mentioning the library of Alexandria.

In his book, *Sawan al-hikmah*, Abu Sulayman al-Mantiqi writes that he was seen in the period of 'Uthman and Mu'awiyah. Hence either the reports of Ibn al-Nadim and Abu Sulayman are baseless or the man known as Yahya in the age of 'Amr ibn al-'As and Mu'awiyah was someone other than the one who wrote many commentaries on the works of Aristotle and other thinkers and was the bishop of Alexandria.

It is not improbable that in inventing this story its fabricators made use of the mention of Yahya al-Nahwi in the works of Ibn al-Nadim and Abu Sulayman. However, it is definite that Yahya al-Nahwi the philosopher, physician and commentator of the works of Aristotle and the famous bishop of Alexandria was not alive during the times of 'Amr ibn al-'As and Mu'awiyah.

As to Hajji Khalifah, he belongs to a much later period and lived in the 11th/18th century. He was a bibliographer and not a historian. His famous work *Kashf al-zunun* is a bibliography and a valuable work in the field.

The statement cited from him consists of two parts: Firstly, he remarks that in the early period of Islam the Arabs were interested in three disciplines, language, laws of the *Shari'ah*, and medicine, of which they had some knowledge from earlier days and which was needed by them. But they did not study other subjects, for they did not want alien sciences to spread among the people before the foundations of Islam were strengthened.

This far the statement of Hajji Khalifah is correct. We shall deal with the beginning and development of sciences in Islam in the next part of our book relating to contribution of Iran to Islam. The Islamic sciences began to develop with *qira'ah*, *fiqh* and grammar (of Arabic), and in the first phase no attention was paid to mathematics and philosophical or natural sciences, which drew the attention of Muslims only gradually. The second part of Hajji Khalifah's statement is as follows: "It is even said that at the time of conquering cities, the Arabs burnt all books that fell in their hands."

We see that though Hajji Khalifah is not a historian, yet he observes the care taken by the narrators of traditions in his remark. He does not say that Arabs burnt books on conquering cities, which might have been taken as his opinion and assertion in this regard. He says, "It is said that " which indicates that such a thing was commonly said in the time of Hajji Khalifah during the 11th/7th century. For four centuries

this story had been on lips, naturally gaining greater currency with every century that passed.

It is like our own saying today that it is said, and very often, that the Muslims of the early era burnt books wherever they found them. If today we say these words we do not tell a lie, for we have seen that it started since the time of 'Abd al-Latif, Abu al-Faraj and al-Qifti.

Hence, not only Hajji Khalifah does not refer to any source and authority but also does not add anything new to the rumour current in his days, and he reports the matter in a manner that suggests his uncertainty regarding it.

Following 'Abd al-Latif, others repeated his words in their books. As we know that they reproduce 'Abd al-Latif's statements, they need not be discussed and examined. For instance, al-Maqrizi in *al-Khitat*, his history of Egypt, while giving as a historian the account of the conquest of Alexandria, does not mention the incident of book burning, but when he describes the Amud al-Sawari ('Abd al-Latif's famous statements also occur under its description) he merely repeats 'Abd al-Latif's statements word by word.

This is in itself an indication that al-Maqrizi did not give the slightest credence to this story, otherwise he would have referred to it in his account of the fall of Alexandria introducing it at least with the words "it is said that"

Now it is the turn of Ibn Khaldun's statements concerning the book burning in Iran to be critically examined. If we do not refer to the original passage in Ibn Khaldun's history and believe the words of Pur Dawud cited by Dr. Muin, we might say that Ibn Khaldun's statement cannot be compared to that of 'Abd al-Latif, who was a physician and wanted to write an account of his travels, or that of Abu al-Faraj, who was also a physician, or that of Hajji Khalifah, a bibliographer, or even with that of al-Qifti, the compiler of a history of philosophers.

For Ibn Khaldun was a historian and author of a general history. Hence, if he expresses his view in a definite and conclusive manner on some matter even without referring to any source, one might believe that he had some authority or source.

However, Ibn Khaldun also does not express any opinion. He mentions the matter in passive voice with the words "*wa laqad yuqalu*" (And it has been said...). Moreover, he has prefaced his statement with another assertion that weakens the matter further. After stating his general principle of sociology (which is not accepted by others), which states that with the expansion of a state and its population and prosperity rational sciences also spread and develop automatically, he infers that in Iran where the state and prosperity had expanded greatly it is impossible that rational sciences should not have been highly developed.

Thereafter, he states, "It is said that these sciences reached Greece from the Persians, when Alexander killed Darius and conquered Persia, getting access to innumerable books and sciences developed by them. And when Iran was conquered (by Muslims) and books were found there in abundance, Sa'd ibn

Abi Waqqas wrote to 'Umar...."

As we know, no history has recorded that Alexander carried away books from Iran after his conquest of the country and that it was thus that the Greek were introduced to new sciences. This claim is baseless. Pur Dawud has committed an act of deception here by not mentioning that Ibn Khaldun's statements begin with the phrase "It is said that" and also deleting the fictitious story of the transfer of books and sciences from Iran to Greece. And after these significant omissions he goes on to draw conclusions from them.

The rumour referred to Ibn Khaldun [concerning book burning in Iran] has apparently a different source from that of the rumour relating to the book burning in Alexandria. The former was fabricated by Christians with the purpose of shifting the blame of burning books to Muslim. But the source of the rumour referred to by Ibn Khaldun were apparently the *Shu'ubiyyah*.

The slogan of the *Shu'ubiyyah* was, 'All genius belongs exclusively to Iranians," and perhaps it may be inferred from Ibn Khaldun's remarks that they wanted to claim that all Greek sciences were borrowed from Iran. We know that Alexander attacked Iran in the age of Aristotle, when the Greek civilization and culture was at its peak.

Another point to be noted is that the statements of Ibn Khaldun referred to so far are made in his *Muqaddimah*, which is a philosophical and sociological work. We have not come across anyone who might have cited these remarks from his history itself, *al-'Ibar wa diwdn al-mubtada' wa al-khabar*. Had Ibn Khaldun believed in its historical value, he would have cited this story in his history.

Unfortunately I do not have access to the history of Ibn Khaldun at present, but I am sure that had there been a mention of this story in it, it is very improbable that the protagonists would have remained unaware of it. They would not have referred to the *Muqaddimah* instead of the history itself. One should refer to Ibn Khaldun's history in this regard.

As for the library of Alexandria, in addition to the absence of any source and the narrators' reporting the story in passive voice which discloses their own uncertainty about the report, there are certain external evidences of the story's false character, including the historical reports that the said library had ceased to exist centuries before the advent of Islam.

There is also some external evidence concerning the book burning in Iran. First of all, basically no history has reported the existence of a library in Iran, as against the case of the library of Alexandria, whose existence between the period extending from the 3rd century B.C. to 4th century C.E. is historically established.

Had there been libraries in Iran whose burning had not been recorded, their very existence at least should have been reported somewhere, especially considering that the incidents and events of the history of Iran were recorded in Islamic histories by Arabs as well as Iranians in greater details than

about any other country.

Secondly, there appeared a certain movement among the Iranians which requires that if such an event had taken place it would– have been definitely recorded and projected with great fanfare. This was the movement of the *Shu'ubiyyah*. The *Shu'ubiyyah* was originally a sacred Islamic movement directed at the pursuit of justice and against discrimination. But later it changed into a racist, anti–Arab movement.

The Iranian *Shu'ubis* wrote books dedicated to the vices (*mathalib*) of the Arabs, highlighting and publicizing with much hue and cry every weakness of the Arabs that they could find. They would scan the pages of history to search out the details concerning Arabs and would not overlook anything.

Had there been such a major weak point in Arab history, that they had set fire to libraries, particularly a library in Iran, it was impossible that the *Shu'ubiyyah* should have failed to mention this matter, for the *Shu'ubiyyah* attained the zenith of their influence in the 2nd/8th century with the full support of the Abbasid who pursued an anti–Umayyad and anti–Arab policy due to political expediency and publicized their weak points making a mountain out of a mole hill. This is itself a definite proof of the fictitious character of the story of book burning in Iran.

Our discussion of the issue of book burning in Iran and Alexandria concludes here. To sum it up, it should be said that until the 7th/13th century, for six centuries after the conquest of Iran and Egypt, no mention was ever made in any Muslim or non–Muslim source of any such book burning by Muslims.

For the first time, the issue was raised in the 7th/13th century, and even then those who raised it did not cite any source or foundation, and hence such reports are not reliable. Had these reports possessed no other shortcoming except this one, it was sufficient to undermine their credibility.

Moreover, with the exception of Abu al–Faraj and al–Qifti all have referred to it as a rumour current among the people and not as an incident that may have occurred. According to the rules of narration and historical reporting, if instead of reporting an incident a historian refers to it as something rumoured, that is, if instead of stating that such and such an incident has occurred says “it is said that such and such an incident has occurred” it indicates that the narrator himself is uncertain of its occurrence.

In addition, all the 7th/13th century reports which form the basis of all other reports—that is the reports of ‘Abd al–Latif, Abu al–Faraj and al–Qifti—contain definitely false statements which establish their unreliability.

Besides, there is external evidence in regard to the reported incidents, both relating to Iran and Alexandria, which undermines the credibility of these reports, even if, supposedly, these reports had been free from the shortcomings of historical reporting and inner content.

Possibly, it may occur to the mind of the respected reader that I have prolonged my discourse on this issue more than was required and carried my criticism to an excessive degree, that this summary given

here at the end would have sufficed, at the most with some additional details.

I agree that if the issue of these book burnings were only a matter relating to some historical event pertaining to mere historical research it would not have required these details. But the respected reader will note that this story has crossed the limits of historical research and has been used as a weapon of propaganda. For impartial scholars, both Muslims and non-Muslim, the baselessness of this story is definite, but the groups who want to exploit these stories for their vested interests make use of it in various ways for propaganda purposes. The story of book burnings in Iran and Alexandria has gradually assumed the form of a strategy for attacking Islam.

Shibli Nu'mani, in his booklet on the topic of the library of Alexandria, writes:

European scholars of renown, such as Gibbon, Carlyle, Hector, Renan, Siedlu and others have considered most of the vain stories prevalent in Europe concerning Islam and Muslims as baseless and have expressly rejected them. But in popular writings and traditions they have not lost their popularity. It is to be noted that the story of the burning of the library of Alexandria is one of such popular rumours.

It is truly amazing how Europe has propagated this issue giving it a strange and terrible form. Books on history, fiction, religion, logic, philosophy and other subjects—none have been free from this propaganda (in order to establish it as a fact in the minds of the people, with some pretext or another, this story has been inserted in all kinds of books, including even books on logic and philosophy).

So much so that once in an annual examination of the Calcutta University in India (which was under the control of the Britishers) in the question paper on logic, which was printed in thousands a question was framed asking students to resolve the following fallacy: "If books are in agreement with the Qur'an, they are not needed. If they are not in agreement with the Qur'an, burn them."⁴⁴

Thereafter, Shibli Nu'mani poses this question: What policy is behind all this? Is it on account of regret for the books that were lost, or is there some other motive involved? If that which is involved is concern and regret for books, why is this concern not expressed in relation to definite and much more terrible occurrences of book burnings at the hands of Christians in their conquest of Spain and during the crusades?

Shibli himself answers the question, remarking that the real cause lies in the fact that the Christians themselves had destroyed that library before the advent of Islam, and now they try to impress on the people that Muslims destroyed that library. The real motive is to hide their own guilt.

The reason mentioned by Shibli is only one of the reasons that too apply only to the library of Alexandria. There are other causes at the work in this regard, and the main one is imperialism. Political imperialism can succeed only when cultural imperialism has succeeded. The essential condition for the success of cultural imperialism is to shake a people's faith in their own culture and history. Imperialism has found out the truth and tested it that it is Islam which is the source of the culture relied upon by

Muslims and it is the ideology they are proud of.

All other things are mere words that never go beyond the walls of conference halls, festivals and seminars and do not influence the minds on the masses. Hence the Muslim masses are to be brain-washed so that they lose their faith and conviction in their ideology and culture and are prepared to be moulded according to the Western pattern.

What is a better way of making a people lose faith in their culture and ideology and their standard bearers than impressing it upon the minds of the young generations that the figures whom they consider to be the emancipators of humanity and leaders on the path of felicity, who invaded other countries in the name of human liberation and overthrew the ruling regimes, themselves committed the most barbaric acts? And here was one example of it.

Accordingly, the respected reader should not wonder why for setting a question concerning the resolution of a logical fallacy the examiner of the annual examination of the Calcutta University, which was under the control of the Britishers, could find no example or material other than the fictitious story of the book burning.

Similarly, an Iranian writer compiling a book on elements of logic for the sixth year of higher secondary schools, a text of which tens of thousands of copies are printed and placed in the hands of unwary and simple-minded Iranian students, could not, while discussing the exceptional syllogism, and despite straining his mind, find any example other than the one that occurred to the English paper setters of Calcutta University and he was compelled to pose the issue in these words: "It is possible that the exceptional syllogism may simultaneously be both disjunctive and conjunctive, that is, a compound syllogism. The example of such a type of syllogism is the famous statement attributed to an Arab leader.

When he wanted to rationalize and justify his act of setting fire to the Sassanian library, he argued in the following manner: 'These books are either in agreement with the Qur'an, or are contradictory to it. If they are in agreement with the Qur'an, their existence is superfluous. Also, if they are contradictory to the Qur'an, their existence is harmful and superfluous. Therefore, in both the cases the books should be burnt.'"45

Several years ago I spoke in the Husayniyyeh Irshad on the topic of the book burning in Alexandria, making its baselessness plain. I remember well that after my lectures I received a letter from some sanctimonious person. He had written: "Why should you bother to prove this story as false? Even if it is false, let the people believe it, for it serves the purpose of propaganda against 'Umar ibn al-Khattab and 'Amr ibn al-'As!"

This sanctimonious man had imagined all that fuss and clamour that was raised from Europe to India, the books that were written and the novels that were composed on this theme, which was inserted into question papers and books of logic and philosophy—all these were inspired by sentiments against 'Umar or 'Amr ibn al-'As, or with the motive of seeking nearness to God, and to serve the cause of the Shi'ah

and humiliate the opponents of Amir al-Mu'minin Ali ('a)!

These kinds of people do not realize that in the mental climate in which these matters are raised that which is at stake is Islam. They do not know that in the present world the most effective weapon against a faith and a religion is not theological debating or arguments based on logic. The strongest weapon in favour of or against a faith or creed in our age is the manner in which the followers of that faith have encountered the manifestations of culture and civilization in the course of their history.

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1. Majalleh ye Tandrust, year 24, no. 2.
 2. Al-Jahiz, Kitab al-mahasin wa al-addad, p. 4.
 3. Tamaddun-a Irani, Persian trans. by Dr. Behnam. p. 187
 4. Dr. Win was alive and suffering from paralysis at the time of the compilation of the present book (1349 H. Sh./1969-70), and now that this chapter on book burning is being appended to this book (1357 H. Sh.) it is seven years that he has passed away May God forgive him.
 5. Tajalliyyat-e Irani, pp. 36-37.
 6. Dr. Suratgar, Ta'rikh-e adabiyat (Intisharat-a Mu'assaseh-ye Wa'z, wa Khitabeh), p. 10
 7. Pur Dawud, Yashtha, vol. ii, p. 20
 8. Ibid., vol. ii, pp. 21-23; cf. Muhammad Qazwini.
 9. Al-Biruni, al-Athar al-baqiyah (Lieden), p. 30
 10. See Murtada Mutahhari, Payambar-e Ummi.
 11. This is a reference to the opening verse of the Surat al-Qalam which reads:
"Nun. By the Pen, and what they write!" (68: 1)
 12. A reference to the opening verse of Surat al-A'laq which reads:
"Read, in the Name of thy Lord who created; created Man from a clinging mass. Read, and thy Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the Pen, taught Man what he knew not." (96: 1-5)
 13. Mujtaba Minawi, "Barrasiha-yi dar bareh-ye Abu Rayhan-a Biruni," Nashriyyeh Danishkadeh Ilahiyat wa ma'arif-a Islami.
 14. Dr Zarrinkub, Karnameh-ye Islam, p. 36. He considers the story as such to be dubious.
 15. Christensen, L'Iran sous les Sassanides, Persian trans. Iran dar zaman-e Sdsaniyan, p. 86
 16. Ahmad Amin, Duha al-Islam, vol. i, p. 64
 17. Browne, E. G., A Literary History of Persia, vol. i, p. 12; cf., Pesian trans. By Ali Pasha Salih, vol. i, p. 510; cf., Dawlatshah Samarqandi, Tadhkirah.
 18. Jurji Zaydan, Ta'rikh-e tammadun-e Islami, Persian trans.vol. iii, p. 65; Dr. Muhammad Ibrahim Ayati, Ta'rikh-e Andalus.
 19. Jurji Zaydan, Ta'rikh-e tammadun-a Islami, Persian trans.vol. iii, p. 65.
 20. Will Durant, A Story of Civilization, Pesian trans., vol. xi, 224.
 21. Jurji Zayadan, op.cit., iii, 66.
 22. Will Durant, op. cit., xi 315
 23. Christensen, op. cit., p. 385; Tamaddun-e Irani, by a group of Orientalists.
 24. Ibn al-Nad-un, al-Fihrist (Cairo), p. 351.
 25. Ibid., p. 386.
 26. George Sorten, History of Science, Persian trans. by Ahmad Aram, Ta'rikh-e 'Ilm, p. 271.
 27. Ibid.

28. Dr. Dhabih Allah Safa, Ta'rikh-e 'ulum-e 'aqli dar Islam, p. 32; Jurji Zaydan, op. cit. iii, pp. 54–55.
29. Shibli Nu'mani, Fath-e Iskandariyyah, p. 28. According to Shibli, al-Baghdadi completed this book in 603/1206–7.
30. Or rather about six centuries.
31. Will Durant, op.cit., vol. xi, 219
32. The library of Alexandria was established by those who are considered to be polytheists.
33. Jurji Zaydan, Ta'rikh-e tamadun-e Islam wa Arab, Persian trans. (4th ed.), pp. 263–265.
34. Devanport's book bearing the same title (An Apology to Mohammad) was translated into Persian by Ghulam Rida Sa'idi. In that book (p. 22) Devanport mentions the story of book burning at Alexandria and rejects it in strong terms.
35. These details are cited from Shibli Nu'mani's Kitabkhaneh yi Iskandariyyah, Persian trans. by Fakhr-e Da'i, pp. 14–15, 38.
36. Ibid., pp. 16–18
37. Amazing is what Dr. Dhabih Allah Safa writes, in Tarikh-e 'ulum-a 'aqli dar Islam, p. 6. He says: "Yahya Nahwi was one of the eminent figures of the Alexandrian school during the last decades of the 5th and the first half of the 6th centuries C.E." (one hundred years before the Prophet's hijrah). Again on page 18 of the same book he says: "It is said that he was alive until the conquest of Egypt by 'Amr ibn al-'As (641 C.E.). But according to historical evidence he was one of the figures of the last decades of the 5th and the first half of the 6th century C.E., and his being alive till this time is contrary to reason and the normal course of nature."
Nevertheless, he has reproduced a summary of the story whose main characters are Yahya Nahwi and 'Amr ibn al-'As, and cites it as an evidence of the book burning at Alexandria!
38. Shibli Nu'mani, op. cit., p. 50.
39. Ibid., pp. 53–56.
40. Ibid.
41. I am not certain, but apparently this waterway is the same that was opened again in recent times and is called the Suez Canal.
42. Will Durant, op., cit., vol. ii, p. 220.
43. Jurji Zaydan, Ta'rikh-e tamadun-e Islam, (Persian trans. vol. iii, p. 64.)
44. Shibli Nu'mani, op. cit., p. 6.
45. Dr. Ali Akbar Siyasi, Mabani ye falsafeh, p. 256.

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