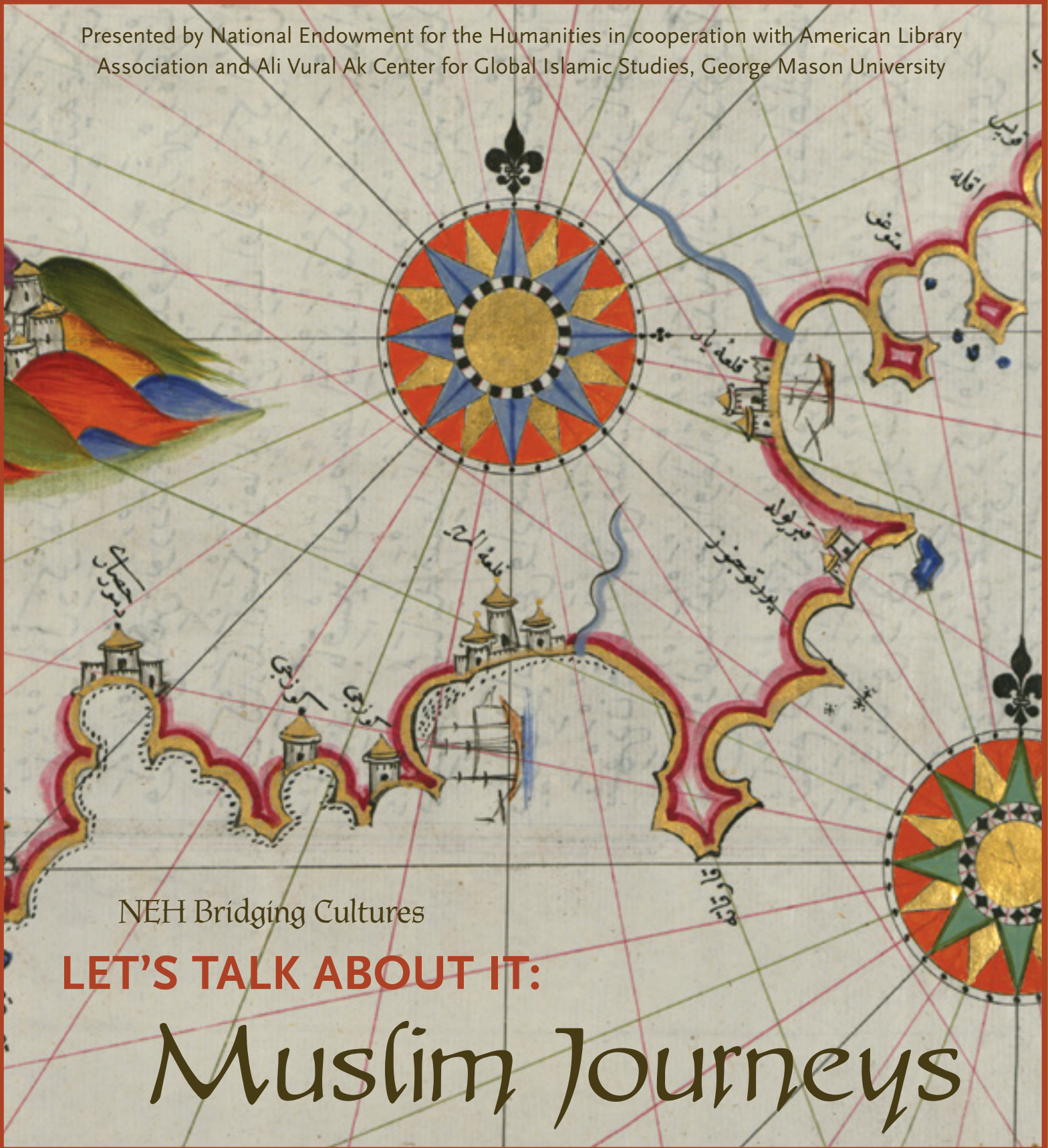


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NEH Bridging Cultures

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

Muslim Journeys



Connected Histories
Giancarlo Casale · University of Minnesota

Connected Histories

by Giancarlo Casale



Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi or "Iklim-i Cedid," Ms. 4969, fol. 70 verso.
Courtesy Bayezit State Library, Istanbul, Turkey.

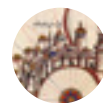
As the first step on our journey through Connected Histories, let us start with a painting. More precisely, it is an illustration, found within the pages of a famous sixteenth-century illuminated manuscript known as *The History of the West Indies*. As its title implies, this was a book about the ongoing Spanish exploration of the New World—an understandably popular subject for writers of the time—and the theme of our painting is one typical of such works: a group of Spanish conquistadors surveying

an exotic landscape somewhere in the Americas.

Uncertain of their surroundings but eager to know more, two of these adventurers hold torches in their hands, shedding light on the unfamiliar terrain and its strange flora and fauna. A third, bolder than his companions, marvels at a parrot perched comfortably on his arm, as another flies serenely overhead. Meanwhile, in the foreground, our eyes are drawn to a school of outlandish creatures gathering at the shoreline. With bull horns and cow udders, cloven hooves and mermaid tails, they are at once fish and beast, male and female.

How do we interpret this painting, and the otherworldly animals that serve as its centerpiece? Does the artist truly expect us to accept this scene as real? Perhaps. But another way to understand it is metaphorical rather than literal—as a representation, through fantasy, of the Spaniards' extraordinary good fortune in having stumbled upon this luxuriant new world of almost limitless potential. When the painting is seen from this perspective, virtually the only possibility the artist seems to exclude is the presence of any *people* other than the Spanish themselves. And in this sense, for all its exuberance, his painting conveys an image of history that is anything *but* connected, one in which Europeans are the only real protagonists, and the world exists only for them to explore—and, eventually, to conquer.

But look again—for this painting, much like history itself, holds many lessons to uncover, some obvious at first glance and others scribbled in the margins or hidden



just beneath the surface. To begin with, look at the unfamiliar writing at the top of the page. It is obviously not Spanish. Nor is it Arabic, although it might seem so at first glance to the untrained eye. Instead, it is Ottoman Turkish—the language of the only sixteenth-century ruler who could legitimately vie with the king of Spain for the title of “World Emperor.”

In other words, *The History of the West Indies* was a work produced not in any Western capital, but in the imperial workshops of Istanbul’s Topkapı Palace, where it was prepared in 1584 for the reading pleasure of the Ottoman sultan, Murad III.

This unexpected provenance helps to explain the painting’s distinctive visual style, itself the product of a long history of cultural influence that began not in the West, but, rather, far to the East. For during the sixteenth century, the artists of the Ottoman Empire had fallen under the spell of a particular style of miniature painting perfected in neighboring Persia (the Persians being the acknowledged artistic masters of the Islamic world in much the same way that the painters of Renaissance Italy were regarded as standard-bearers by their European contemporaries). But in one of history’s many twists, this Persian style of painting was, in turn, heavily influenced by the artistic traditions of China—a direct consequence of the Mongol conquests of an earlier age, when both China and Iran were incorporated into the transcontinental empire established by Genghis Khan. By the sixteenth century, this empire had faded into distant memory. But in our painting, its cultural legacy can still be seen in the sweeping zigzag of the landscape, and the angular energy of the rocks and trees—both features highly evocative of Chinese visual styles.

Such details helped to ensure that our painting would appeal to Sultan Murad, a famously generous patron of the arts with the tastes of a connoisseur. But why, from the comfort of his palace in Istanbul, would the sultan have been interested in a book

about Spanish America in the first place? The answer is to be found not in the painting itself, but in the sweeping political events of that moment in world history.

Specifically, in 1578—just a few years before *The History of the West Indies* was composed—the dashing but reckless King Sebastian of Portugal had fallen in battle while on a crusade in Morocco. Because Sebastian was a young man and left no children, his death paved the way for King Philip II of Spain, his closest living relative, to inherit both Portugal and its many new colonies in India. And since Philip, already the most powerful sovereign in Europe, was Sultan Murad’s most feared Western rival, his accession to the Portuguese crown was a matter of the utmost concern in Istanbul—raising the specter of Spanish attacks not only from the Mediterranean, but from the Indian Ocean as well.

This brings us once more to *The History of the West Indies*, whose author introduces his work in a most unexpected way: with a proposal to build a Suez canal, which would enable the Ottomans to send a fleet from Istanbul directly to the Indian Ocean and seize control of the Portuguese colonies there before the Spanish could do so. Indeed, it is this proposal that gives meaning to the rest of the book, which outlines the activities of the Spanish in the New World in order to convince the sultan of the global reach of King Philip’s power—and of the consequent necessity of building a canal across more than a hundred miles of Egyptian desert.

As might be imagined, this proposal ultimately left Sultan Murad unpersuaded. He had already chosen, instead, to sign a general armistice with King Philip, an eminently wise decision that, by luring Philip into a false sense of confidence, would soon lead to the Spanish monarch’s undoing. Almost immediately, in fact, Philip began to move his forces out of the Mediterranean and into the Atlantic. In 1588 he would use them to launch his infamous Spanish Armada, a fleet doomed to destruction at

the hands of the upstart English navy of Queen Elizabeth I. Thereafter, with Spanish sea power left in tatters, the door to the New World was open to the English, who, within a generation, founded Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in North America.

So, with the help of just one painting, we have been able to establish a direct connection between the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire and the birth of the United States. In the process, we have discovered that the painting itself, which at first seemed to tell a simple, even one-dimensional story—of the Spanish exploring the New World—is something truly extraordinary in its interactive complexity: a picture of the Spanish in the New World, yes, but one appearing in an Ottoman manuscript, painted in the distinctive style of Persia, inspired by the artistic traditions of China, and designed to convince a sultan in Istanbul to build a canal in Egypt in order to invade India!

If there is one image that encapsulates the revolutionary ability of *Connected Histories* to transform our understanding of the past, it would be this one. For, much as we did in our first encounter with this painting, until recently historians made it their standard practice to view the past exclusively through the lens of Western Civilization, and to assume that everything we needed to know about the origins of our own global age was contained within the confines of the West's unique historical experience. In this view, World History, *per se*, did not really begin until the sixteenth-century Age of Exploration, when Europeans crossed the oceans, discovered foreign lands, and created a unified world for the first time.

By contrast, *Connected Histories* sees the sixteenth century not as the *beginning* but as the *culmination* of a much larger, thousand-year story of adventure, discovery, and cross-cultural interaction across the Old World. This first global age, much like our own, was a time when long-distance travel was routine, and when ideas, technologies, faiths, and

commercial products moved as easily as people, from Europe to China, from Africa to India. Moreover, this was an age when Islam occupied the world's intellectual, economic, and political center, serving as a catalyst for global integration and, in the process, laying the foundations of our own interconnected present—including many of the elements of what we understand today to be Western Civilization itself.

Inevitably, the dimensions of this new history are vast, as it focuses not on a particular place or people but on the connections between them. In consequence, there is no single approach, perspective, or authorial voice that can capture all of its complexity. With this in mind, the books in this list have been chosen precisely for their diversity. Some are novels, others historical studies, still others something in between. Some are grand narratives that cross continents and span centuries; others tell their stories through the life experience of just one person. But through this diversity, all remain intimately connected—in delightful, surprising, and sometimes confounding ways that even their authors may not always have intended.

What follows is a brief synopsis of the five books in this list, designed as a set of guideposts to help the traveler navigate through their many intertwined stories. To this end, they are presented in a specific order to guide your reading from one title to the next. Each of the books stands magnificently on its own merits, and, in addition, will take on different shades of meaning when placed in conversation with each of its companions as you journey through the world of *Connected Histories*.



When Asia Was the World: Traveling Merchants, Scholars, Warriors, and Monks Who Created the “Riches of the East”

by Stewart Gordon

Stewart Gordon’s *When Asia Was the World* is at once the most accessible and the most wide-ranging of our five titles, and therefore serves well as a point of departure. It begins in a time that was once imagined—in the old way of seeing things—as the Dark Ages, a period marked by barbarian invasions and the collapse of empires in both the Western world and East Asia. But as Gordon shows, it is equally possible to describe these centuries as a time not of darkness but of brilliant light, ushering in a new age in which the world’s great proselytizing religions—Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam—would replace empires as the driving force of human history. And because faiths, unlike empires, are rarely contained by boundaries of any kind (ethnic, political, or even environmental), the world was destined to become a much smaller place than it had ever been in the glory days of Rome or imperial China.

This basic insight, which lies at the conceptual heart of *Connected Histories*, is one that requires us to reorient our understanding of the past in profound and sometimes unsettling ways.

For this reason, what is so appealing about Gordon’s book is that he has found a way to simplify an immensely complex story by telling it through the eyes of individual travelers, each of whom has left for posterity a unique account of his journey.

Gordon begins with Xuanzang, a seventh-century Buddhist monk who traveled from China, the land of his birth, to India, the birthplace of his faith. His voyage was full of danger—the greatest threat of all posed by his own sovereign, who had

forbidden travel to the West under pain of severe punishment. But as might be expected in this interconnected age, the pull of faith proved far too strong to be restrained by the will of kings. After more than a decade of trials and tribulations, Xuanzang was successful in his quest, and returned home to find both a hero’s welcome and the emperor’s blessing.

Remarkably, the years of Xuanzang’s voyage, undertaken between 629 and 645 CE coincides with the birth of Islam several thousand miles to the west (the year “one” of the Muslim calendar marking the Prophet Muhammad’s flight from Mecca in 622 CE). Islam thus emerged as the youngest of the world’s great religions. It spread fast and far, such that all of the subsequent chapters of *When Asia Was the World* tell the story of lives touched in some profound way by the Muslim faith: a Baghdadi envoy sent to the untamed steppes of Central Asia as a representative of the caliph; a Jewish merchant from Islamic Cairo, with business interests stretching from India to Tunisia; a Muslim bureaucrat from southern China, who traveled to the heartland of the Islamic world on the famed “Treasure Ships” of the early Ming dynasty; and many others.

Pay close attention to these stories, and to the individuals whose life experiences they reflect. For in almost every case, as you read through the remaining books on our list, you will have occasion to meet them again. When you do, you will have the feeling of running into an old friend in an unexpected place. And when on a journey through strange and distant lands, what is more delightful than catching sight of a familiar face?

The House of Wisdom: How Arabic Sciences Saved Ancient Knowledge and Gave Us the Renaissance

by Jim al-Khalili

If the individual stories in *When Asia Was the World* present the human side of Connected Histories, Jim al-Khalili's *The House of Wisdom* explores one of its most important intellectual legacies: the foundations of modern science. His particular focus is Abbasid Baghdad, an almost magical place that, over the course of a few decades, rose from a mud field on the banks of the Tigris River to become one of the world's great metropolises. It was here that Islam was transformed from an inspired but still rudimentary religious community into a full-fledged civilization—with Baghdad serving as its “cultural Mecca” in the same way the real Mecca served as its spiritual home.

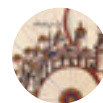
Central to this story is the singular reign of Caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833 CE), a man of nearly boundless ambition who, appropriately enough, inherited an empire stretching from Morocco in the west to the borders of China in the east. Al-Ma'mun's great gift to posterity was to redirect the enormous resources of his empire toward a different kind of conquest—one of the pen rather than the sword, designed to ennoble Islam by bringing it into direct conversation with the great intellectual traditions that had preceded it. The result was the famed House of Wisdom, an institution of higher learning that, through al-Ma'mun's patronage, became the seat of the greatest translation movement the world had ever known.

As al-Khalili shows, the secret to this movement's vibrancy lay in the cosmopolitan character of Baghdad itself. For the vast empire that called Baghdad its capital had by this time grown to encompass most of what had once been the Roman Empire, all of the

ancient realm of Alexander the Great, and, in between, the entirety of the Holy Land of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It was home not only to Muslims but also to the vast majority of the world's Christians and Jews, as well as to Zoroastrians, Manicheans, and a plethora of other peoples and faiths, some known to us today only by name.

By the ninth century, members of all of these communities had begun to learn Arabic and to convert to Islam in large numbers—something that, perhaps surprisingly, had not necessarily been encouraged by earlier Muslim rulers. But now, under al-Ma'mun's tutelage, a path was opened for all of these peoples to find an authentic Islamic voice all their own, as they translated by the thousands the great classics of their respective intellectual traditions—from Greek, Persian, Syriac, even Sanskrit—into Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. By bringing these disparate traditions together and making them available in one language, this polyglot group of scholars began to reconfigure ancient knowledge in ways the ancients themselves had never dreamed of. This process led to the development of an entirely new set of methodological approaches to understanding both the natural and rational sciences, of which optics, algebra, spherical trigonometry, anatomy, clinical pharmacology, and natural philosophy are only some of the most prominent examples.

Even as we marvel at the outcome of this great translation project, however, it is important not to idealize the impulses that lay behind it. For al-Ma'mun, his many accomplishments aside, was a notoriously autocratic ruler, and like all such men was motivated less by a dispassionate love of knowledge than by a naked thirst for power. Meanwhile, his fiercest critics and principal adversaries were the so-called Muslim traditionalists, a group of theologians and legal scholars who hoped to temper the many excesses of the caliph's reign through strict enforcement of sharia—Islamic law as derived from the Qur'an. Against this background,



al-Ma'mun's interest in natural science, rational philosophy, and the pre-Islamic foundations of knowledge must be understood, at least in part, as a self-serving attempt to use reason to undermine the faith-based principles of his main political opponents—just as the anti-science bias of these traditionalists must, in turn, be understood as a logical reaction to al-Ma'mun's despotic tendencies.

Even so, one of the hallmarks of any truly grand civilization is the capacity to disagree. And in this sense, what is most important about the great debate between faith and science initiated in the House of Wisdom is precisely that it raised more questions than it could settle. Once set in motion, this spirit of inquiry took on a dynamic and self-reinforcing character that was destined to rapidly outgrow al-Ma'mun's self-serving designs, and to spread to the farthest corners of the Muslim world. It is one such frontier, a place where the seeds sown by al-Ma'mun flourished as in no other, that is the subject of the next book on our list.

The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Christians, and Jews Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain

by **María Rosa Menocal**

The focus of María Rosa Menocal's sparkling book, *The Ornament of the World*, is a place called al-Andalus, a once-thriving and now-vanished corner of Western Europe. Its modern namesake, Andalusia, is a large province in the south of Spain, famous in our own day as the home of bullfighting, flamenco dance, and the architectural jewels of Córdoba, Seville, and Granada. But al-Andalus is something more than this, an idea and an age as much as a place, whose essence no single English word can fully convey. In the most material sense, however, it refers to a constantly shifting constellation of kingdoms

and city-states—which at one point encompassed nearly all of Spain and Portugal—in which Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived together and shared a common history for eight glorious centuries.

Tellingly, the history of al-Andalus begins with a journey, and is inextricably linked to the founding of Baghdad some three thousand miles to the east. Before there was Baghdad, the seat of the caliphate had been the city of Damascus, ruled for several generations by a dynasty of Arab nobles known as the Umayyads. They held power until 750 CE, when a rival dynasty known as the Abbasids—the ancestral family of al-Ma'mun—raised the banner of rebellion and defeated the Umayyads in battle. Thereafter, the Abbasids claimed the title of caliph for themselves, occupied Damascus, and began hunting down the remaining males of the Umayyad dynasty.

Only one member of the family survived this massacre: a young man named Abd al-Rahman. He took flight across the Mediterranean Sea, stopping only when he had reached its far western shore. From this remote refuge, he declared himself independent, founding a capital for his tiny new realm in the Spanish city of Córdoba. Despite the great distance and the huge imbalance in power that separated al-Rahman from his rivals, he unsettled the Abbasids enough to prompt a grand gesture in response. This came in 762 CE, when Caliph al-Mansur (literally “the victorious”) left Damascus and announced the construction of his own new capital in Baghdad, a city designed to be so magnificent that it would permanently eclipse all living memory of the Umayyads and their rule.

Thus, for the first time, the Islamic world became home to not one but two capitals, in earnest competition with each other. As political rivals they were hardly evenly matched, Córdoba surviving only because of its remoteness. But if there was one area in which the Andalusians could hope to compete as equals, it was in the realm of culture. And so, as Baghdad began its rapid rise to the status of a

world city, the rulers of Córdoba did their best to follow suit: sponsoring splendid works of art and architecture, following the latest scholarly trends, and enticing the greatest minds of the East to make the journey to their court.

This great cultural flowering soon outgrew Córdoba and its ruling dynasty, passing to smaller courts throughout Iberia. Eventually, as Christian princes from the north began to reconquer significant portions of Spain and Portugal, they too became players in this game of cultural one-upmanship, erecting churches and palaces in the same monumental style preferred by their Muslim rivals, and enlivening their courts with music and poetry directly inspired by Arabic models. Taking a page, perhaps unwittingly, from the playbook of al-Ma'mun, they even sponsored their own translations—this time from Arabic to Latin—of the great works of Islamic science, philosophy, and medicine, thereby allowing this corpus of knowledge to percolate north to Paris, London, and the other centers of learning of the Christian West.

In *The Ornament of the World*, Menocal repeatedly emphasizes the uniquely tolerant and cosmopolitan culture of al-Andalus as a driver of this extraordinary story. But for a full understanding of what this means, a broader perspective can be helpful. Frequently, the tolerant atmosphere of medieval Spain is brought into starkest relief in Menocal's prose when compared with the austere and fundamentalist tendencies of Spain's Muslim neighbors just across the sea in North Africa. But within the larger framework of Islamic history, it is worth remembering that it was North Africa, rather than al-Andalus, that was unusual for its *intolerance*, ranking as one of the few places in the Muslim world where Christianity completely disappeared shortly after the first Islamic conquests. Elsewhere, from Cairo to Baghdad, from Isfahan to Samarkand, one would instead have found virtually the same heterogeneous mix of Christians, Muslims, and Jews

as in al-Andalus—living in the same neighborhoods, speaking the same languages, and sharing many of the same cultural values and intellectual traditions so characteristic of medieval Spain.

On the other hand, what does make al-Andalus truly unique is its status as a *European* society. For, in contrast to the Muslim world, in the medieval Christian West the traditions of tolerance for other faiths were exceedingly weak. Indeed, until well into the modern period, it was a punishable offense, legally akin to treason, to be a practicing Muslim almost anywhere in Western Europe. As a result, medieval Spain is one of the few places where, at least for a time, it was possible for Muslim Europeans to live as the loyal and legally recognized subjects of a Christian overlord—a happy accident of history whose benefits we continue to reap today.

Leo Africanus

by Amin Maalouf

One of the great ironies of Spanish history, poetically evoked in the closing chapters of *The Ornament of the World*, is that the very moment marking Spain's dramatic emergence onto the world stage—1492—also marks the definitive end of al-Andalus both as a place and an idea. In January of that fateful year, the armies of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella entered the walls of Granada, the last independent Muslim city of Iberia. Six months later, from the gates of Granada's Alhambra Palace, the two monarchs issued the notorious edict demanding the forced conversion or immediate expulsion of all the Jews of their realm—an event commemorated in the very first line of Christopher Columbus's diary. Granada's Muslims, at least for the moment, were given a reprieve. But within a decade, they too would be presented with the same brutal choice of conversion or exile.

It is this dark page of history that serves as the starting point for Amin Maalouf's *Leo Africanus*, an



adventure story that is at the same time a literary meditation on the death and lingering afterlife of al-Andalus. This is a tale of historical fiction, told with some measure of artistic license. But its protagonist, Hasan al-Wassan, is a very real figure, better known to the West as “Leo of Africa.”

Despite this nickname—and the sometimes racialized portrait of al-Wassan—Leo was a native not of Africa but Granada. Born there a few years before the Spanish conquest, he left for exile in Morocco while still a small boy. Subsequently, as a young man with a gift for language and a penchant for travel, he would find work as a diplomat for the Sultan of Fez, traveling throughout North Africa, then across the desert to Timbuktu, and finally across the sea to Cairo and Istanbul in the service of his new sovereign. It was during the return leg of this last and most ambitious trip, however, that he would suffer the misfortune—surprisingly common for a traveler in that violent age—to be captured by Christian corsairs and sold into slavery, ending up a prisoner of the pope in the dungeon of Rome’s Castel Sant’Angelo.

For a Muslim captive in sixteenth-century Europe, life presented depressingly few options for improving one’s lot, and virtually none that did not require conversion to Christianity. So in short order, al-Wassan made the only practical choice: accepting baptism, and taking the name Leo in honor of his godfather and new life patron, Pope Leo X. Thereafter, through the sheer force of his own intellect, Leo Africanus became a sort of House of Wisdom unto himself, studying European languages, becoming immersed in the culture of Renaissance Italy, and maturing into an author and scholar of no small importance. His known works, all produced within a decade of his arrival in Italy, include an Arabic-Latin-Hebrew dictionary, an Arabic grammar for Latin speakers, and a Latin-language encyclopedia of Islamic authors and their works. By far his greatest contribution to scholarship, however, was the *Description of Africa*, a monumental

geographic treatise based in part on Leo’s travels as a young man that for the first time introduced European audiences to the culturally diverse and economically vibrant Islamic societies of the African continent.

Written in Italian and first published (posthumously) in Venice in 1550, *Description of Africa* quickly gained international renown, and was subsequently translated into multiple European languages. In 1600 it was even published in an English-language edition—an event which, in a sense, brings us full circle on our own journey through Connected Histories. Having begun our travels with *The History of the West Indies*, a book written in Ottoman Turkish about the Spanish exploration of the New World, we have crossed four continents and a thousand years only to return to another book from the same time: this one written for Europeans about the Muslim exploration of Africa. But to arrive back at the beginning by no means implies that our travels must come to an end—only that, as we take to the road once more, we will be ready to choose a more ambitious itinerary the second time around.

In an Antique Land: History in the Guise of a Traveler’s Tale

by Amitav Ghosh

For those uninitiated into the world of Connected Histories, Amitav Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land* is an undeniably challenging book. But for the seasoned traveler, it is more akin to a beckoning oasis—a destination so inviting that it fittingly serves as the final halting place for our journey together. At once a memoir, a detective story, a travel narrative, and a work of history, it is, at its heart, the tale of two men who, across the distance of an ocean and a span of centuries, find one another and become friends.

The first of these is Ghosh himself. Today a world-famous novelist, Ghosh has worn many different professional hats, and counts as a native of many places. Born in Calcutta, he spent parts of his childhood in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Iran, as well as India. As a young adult he moved to England to study social anthropology, and from there traveled to Egypt to learn Arabic and to research village life in the rural hamlet of Lataifa.

It is during this stay in Egypt that Ghosh is introduced to Abraham Ben Yiju, a twelfth-century Jewish merchant whose life story has been preserved thanks to a remarkable accident of history: the survival of his personal letters in the Cairo Geniza, an enormous cache of documents found hidden behind the walls of a medieval Egyptian synagogue. As a result of this discovery, Abraham—an ordinary person by the standards of the twelfth century—has become the focus of an inordinate amount of recent historical research, to the point that he is now a veritable superstar of Connected Histories. In fact, he is a man with whom we are already acquainted, having first encountered him in the pages of Stewart Gordon's *When Asia Was the World*. But Ghosh notices something that earlier scholars have missed: a chance reference in one of Abraham's letters to his Indian slave, a man known only as "Bomma," who, like Ghosh himself, once traveled from India to Egypt to begin a new life.

What follows is a journey of intellectual discovery, as we accompany Ghosh on his quest to find out more about this illusive, almost forgotten man in whom he sees his own reflection. It is a story with many twists and turns through both time and space, leading to ancient shrines and modern archives, to medieval Yemen and the contemporary United States. Eventually, it takes Ghosh so far as to learn the long-forgotten, hybrid language in which Abraham Ben Yiju's letters are composed: an archaic dialect of Egyptian Arabic, written in Hebrew script, which served as a sort of lingua franca for the Jews of the medieval Indian Ocean region.

For all his efforts, Ghosh never finds more than fleeting shadows of Bomma as he follows in his footsteps and searches through his master's many letters. But this, in a sense, is beside the point, for *In an Antique Land* is a book meant less to solve particular mysteries of the past than to explore history's astonishing power to explain the realities of the present.

Like all of us, Ghosh inhabits a world of radical change and unsettling complexity that can seem disconnected even from its most recent past. More to the point, it is a world for which the West is now but one of many possible reference points, in which the most transformative scientific discoveries, economic innovations, and cultural movements are as likely to emerge in China or India as Europe or the United States—or perhaps in all of them at once. A man whose own life trajectory embodies the spirit of this dynamically cosmopolitan present, Ghosh makes his greatest discovery in the meaning he unexpectedly finds in the remote past: an age before there was simply the *West*, an age whose many connected histories chart a course to the equally connected future that we are all destined to share.



Giancarlo Casale holds a PhD in History and Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University, and is currently associate professor of the history of the Islamic world at the University of Minnesota, where he has taught since 2005. He is an expert in Ottoman history, early modern empires, and the history of geography and cartography. His book, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, was awarded the Cundill Recognition of Excellence prize in 2011.

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Cover: Fifteenth-century map by Piri Reis of the coastline of Andalusia and the city of Granada.
Photo ©The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.



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