



DESTRUCTION OF THE LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA BY MUSLIMS: A MISTAKEN NOTION

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 8th October, 2017

Received in revised form 17th

November, 2017

Accepted 5th December, 2017

Published online 28th January, 2018

Key words:

Library of Alexandria, Caliph ‘Umar, ‘Amr bin al-‘Ās, ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī, Maqrīzī, Ibn al-Qiftī

ABSTRACT

The grand library of Alexandria was one of the largest and most significant libraries of the ancient world and part of a larger research institution called the Mouseion. It was the largest library of its time and a major center for learning and scholarly research, particularly in the fields of astronomy, geography, mathematics, and medicine. Caesar and Cleopatra, Erastosthenes and Euclid, Archimedes and Alexander the Great are just a few of the famous people connected to its story. The fate of the library has been deplored by Europeans in language which leads one to believe that the library was burnt down and destroyed by ‘Amr bin al-‘Ās by the order of second Caliph ‘Umar (634-644 AD). This subject has aroused vehement controversies among historians during the last two centuries. The pertinacity with which they have insisted on this story is surprising to extreme. They quote ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī, Maqrīzī, and Ibn al-Qiftī without challenging their authorities. The present paper attempts to make a critical analysis of the allegation on caliph ‘Umar of burning down the library of Alexandria.

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INTRODUCTION

Located on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt, Alexandria has achieved a symbolic resonance far beyond its size and economic importance. Alexandria, one of the greatest cities of the ancient world, was founded by Alexander the Great after his conquest of Egypt in 332 BC. After the death of Alexander in Babylon in 323 BC, Egypt fell to the lot of one of his lieutenants, Ptolemy. It was under Ptolemy II that the newly-founded Alexandria came to replace the ancient city of Memphis as the capital of Egypt. This marked the beginning of the rise of Alexandria. Yet, no dynasty can survive for long without the support of their subjects, and the Ptolemies were keenly aware of this. Thus, the early Ptolemaic kings sought to legitimize their rule through a variety of ways, including assuming the role of pharaoh, founding the Greco-Roman cult of Serapis, and becoming the patrons of scholarship and learning (a good way to show off one’s wealth, by the way). It was this patronage that resulted in the creation of the great Library of Alexandria by Ptolemy. With conquest of Egypt in 639 AD under the command of ‘Amr bin al-‘Ās with a force of 4000 troops, Alexandria fell into the hands of Muslims.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

In this paper historical, descriptive and critical methods have been used.

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Library of Alexandria

The Royal Library of Alexandria in Alexandria, Egypt, was once the largest library in the world. It is generally thought to have been founded at the beginning of the 3rd century BC, during the reign of Ptolemy II of Egypt. It was likely created after his father had built what would become the first part of the library complex, the temple of the Muses - the *Musaion* (from which is derived the modern English word *museum*). Initially the library was closely linked to a "museum," or research centre, that seems to have focused primarily on editing texts. Libraries were important for textual research in the ancient world, since the same text often existed in several different versions of varying quality and veracity. The editors at the library of Alexandria are especially well known for their work on Homeric texts. The more famous editors generally also held the title of head librarian. Some of the famous among them were:

- Zenodotus of Ephesus (late 3rd Century BC)
- Aristophanes of Byzantium (early 2nd Century BC)
- Aristarchus of Samothrace (early-mid 2nd Century BC), often considered the most prominent Homeric scholar of antiquity.
- Didymus (first century BC), Grammarian.

Over the centuries, the library of Alexandria was one of the largest and most significant libraries in the ancient world. The great thinkers of the age, scientists, mathematicians, poets from all civilizations came to study and exchange ideas. As many as 700,000 scrolls filled the shelves. However, in one of

the greatest tragedies of the academic world, the library became lost to history.

Destruction of the Library

Ancient and modern sources identify following four stories for the destruction of the library:

1. Caesar's conquest 48 BC
2. the attack of Aurelian in the 3rd century AD
3. the decree of Theophilus in 391 AD, and
4. the Muslim conquest in 642 AD or thereafter.

Each of these has been viewed with suspicion by other scholars as an effort to place the blame on particular actors. Moreover, each of these events is historically problematic. In the first and second case, there is clear evidence that the library was not in fact destroyed at those times. The third episode has had some strong supporters, including Edward Gibbon, but still many dispute this and in the fourth case it has been alleged that this grand library was burned down by 'Amr bin 'As at the behest of the second Caliph, 'Umar. Let us discuss these stories one by one.

Destruction by Caesar

Plutarch's *Lives*², written at the end of the first or beginning of the second century AD, describes a battle in which Julius Caesar³ was forced to burn his own ships, which in turn set fire to the docks and then the Library, destroying it. This would have occurred in 48 BC, during the fighting between Caesar and Ptolemy XII. However, there is no corroborating evidence that the library was in fact destroyed at this time. Only 25 years later Strabo saw the library and worked in it. Thus, any damage sustained by this battle was probably slight. This story is explained in Encyclopaedia Britannica as:

In 48 BCE Julius Caesar became involved in a civil war in Egypt between Cleopatra and her brother Ptolemy XIII. Caesar sided with Cleopatra and was soon besieged by the Ptolemaic forces by land and sea in the great harbour. He realized that his only chance lay in setting fire to the enemy fleet, and it was by that drastic measure that he managed to gain the upper hand. Yet he is remarkably silent regarding the extent of the destruction caused by the fire in the city itself. Subsequent authors, however, provide details of the ensuing destruction. Most explicit is Plutarch, who, after a personal visit to Alexandria, explained that "Caesar was forced to repel the danger by using fire, which spread from the dockyards and destroyed the Great Library." Equally indicative is a statement by Strabo who, during a long stay in the city (c. 25–20 bce), expressed in an indirect manner his regrets over the loss of that great library that had once supplied Eratosthenes and Hipparchus with the original reports of earlier discoveries, sources that were no longer there for him to consult."⁴

During Aurelian's invasion

It was during the time when Alexandria was the scene of a ferocious war between the emperor Aurelian⁵ (270-275 AD) and Queen Zenobia.⁶ During the course of the civil war, most of the district known as 'Bruchion' was destroyed. It was the quarter where the old palace was located, inside of which was the Great Library.⁷ The story is mentioned in Encyclopedia Britannica as:

"The daughter library, protected by the Serapeum, subsisted up to the 4th century as long as paganism survived. But when

Christianity became the one and only religion acknowledged throughout the empire, Emperor Theodosius I in his zeal to wipe out all vestiges of paganism issued a decree in 391 sanctioning the demolition of temples in Alexandria. Empowered by the imperial decree, Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, led an attack on the Serapeum, and he himself gave the first blow to the cult statue of Serapis. His frenzied followers ran amok in the temple, destroying and plundering. When the destruction was complete, Theophilus ordered a church to be built on the site. Several testimonies written by contemporary or near-contemporary eyewitnesses testify to the fact that the devastation was extensive. One Theodoret claims that "the temple was destroyed to its foundations."⁸

While commenting on the incident Delia says

In A.D. 272, the entire royal district was ravaged during Aurelian's invasion, which aimed at recapturing the city occupied first by the army of the Palmyran queen, Zenobia, and subsequently by the supporters of the usurper, Firmus. It is unlikely that the Museum complex survived this catastrophe unscathed. If it was reduced to ruins, the remnants of its collection that had not been preempted by private collectors would have been transferred to the Serapeum, Kaisareion, and Claudianum annexes. Twenty-three years later, in the summer of A.D. 295, Diocletian visited Alexandria in response to widespread disaffection in Egypt. The city was taken by storm and sacked; citizens were slaughtered and their private book collections confiscated and burned. The reinscription of a Museum monument by a private individual at this time suggests the reign of Diocletian as a terminus ad quem for its demise and of the library housed within it. Further damage was caused by an earthquake in the summer of 365.⁹

Burning on the orders of the emperor Theodosius

Delia giving the following details of the burning of Library of Alexandria under the Emperor Theodosius explains as:

"Aphthonios,, who visited Alexandria around 315, noted that, although a library still existed in the Serapeum complex, only those alcoves containing philosophical works were accessible, and the stacks associated with the cult of pagan deities had been closed. In 391, the emperor Theodosius I banned pagan rituals.' That same year, a Christian mob led by the patriarch of Alexandria, Theophilus, gutted and sacked the Serapeum. Within a generation, when a throng of angry Christians brutally murdered the pagan neo-Platonic mathematician-philosopher Hypatia, the Kaisareion had already been transformed into a church. Even had the cult of the Muses survived into the fourth century, it is inconceivable that it survived similar reprisals. Writing at the beginning of the fifth century A.D., Eunapius describes the pagan temples at Alexandria as "scattered to the winds," in terms of their cult ceremonies. The actual buildings, in many cases, had been converted into Christian churches. His contemporary, the presbyter Orosius, proffers an eyewitness report that Christians had thoroughly plundered the contents of Alexandrian libraries."¹⁰

Heather Philips while giving the details of its destruction says: "Yet another story of the Great Library's destruction says that it was destroyed by religious riots in 391 CE. By this time, Christianity has been declared the official religion of the Roman Empire. The holdings at the Mouseion and at the Serapeum were both on the precincts of pagan temples. While

this had previously lent them a measure of protection, in the days of the Christian Roman Empire, it placed them in a certain amount of danger. As one author put it, "Early Christians threatened Alexandria's scholarly culture; they viewed pagan philosophers and learning with suspicion, if not enmity". In the days of the Emperor Theodosius, when Alexandria was under the authority of the fanatic Bishop Theophilus, their danger became critical. In 391 CE, Emperor Theodosius issued a decree sanctioning the destruction of all pagan temples in Alexandria. Inspired by this decree, Theophilus lead a mob to the entrance to the Serapeum, where, reputedly, he struck the first blow against the temple. His frenzied cohorts followed suit, eventually demolishing the entire Temple of Serapis. When the devastation of the temple was complete, Theophilus ordered a church to be built on the site of the ruins..... Another story of the Great Library's destruction begins with strife between the sizeable Jewish and Christian populations of Alexandria. In 415 CE, violence broke out between the factions, and the Christian prefect of Alexandria, Cyril, directed the Jews to leave. Renowned teacher, astronomer and mathematician Hypatia, who is often known as the last great scholar associated with the Great Library, protested. Cyril ordered her execution. The story recounts that she was then murdered by a mob of Cyril's followers, who then sacked the Great Library and burned it to the ground."¹¹

The library seems to have been maintained and continued in existence until its contents were largely lost during the taking of the city by the Emperor Aurelian (270–275 AD), who was suppressing a revolt. The smaller library located at the Serapeum survived, but part of its contents may have been taken to Constantinople to adorn the new capital in the course of the 4th century. Socrates Scholasticus provides the following account of the destruction of the temples in Alexandria in the fifth book of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, written around 440: "At the solicitation of Theophilus bishop (385-412 AD) of Alexandria, the emperor issued an order at this time for the demolition of the heathen temples in that city; commanding also that it should be put in execution under the direction of Theophilus. Seizing this opportunity, Theophilus exerted himself to the utmost to expose the pagan mysteries to contempt. And to begin with, he caused the Mithreum to be cleaned out, and exhibited to public view the tokens of its bloody mysteries. Then he destroyed the Serapeum, and the bloody rites of the Mithreum he publicly caricatured; the Serapeum also he showed full of extravagant superstitions, and he had the phalli of Priapus carried through the midst of the forum. Thus this disturbance having been terminated, the governor of Alexandria, and the commander-in-chief of the troops in Egypt, assisted Theophilus in demolishing the heathen temples."¹²

The Serapeum housed part of the Library, but it is not known how many books were contained in it at the time of destruction. Notably, Paulus Orosius admitted in the sixth book of his *History against the pagans*: "Today there exist in temples book chests which we ourselves have seen, and, when these temples were plundered, these, we are told, were emptied by our own men in our time, which, indeed, is a true statement." Some or all of the books may have been taken, but any books left in the Serapeum at the time would have been destroyed when it was razed to the ground.

Destruction of the Royal Library of Alexandria by Muslims

The tale of the Muslim destruction of the library comes from several Alexandrian historians, writing several hundred years later. The legend has it that the caliph 'Umar posed to commander 'Amr bin al-'Ās the following dilemma: "Touching the books you mention, if what is written in them agrees with the Book of God, they are not required; if it disagrees, they are not desired. Destroy them therefore." The tale goes on to say that the books fuelled the city's bath-houses for the next six months.

The earliest Arabic source was by the Muslim physician and traveler, 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdādī who visited Egypt in 595 A.H./1200 A.D.; he mentioned that he saw some of the monuments in Alexandria, including what he believed to have been the library, "set up by Alexander when he founded his city," and that it was the place where "Aristotle and his successors taught." He continues to mention in a brief statement that it was, "the book-store which was burnt by 'Amr, by order of Caliph 'Umar." This report cannot be taken seriously as it is undocumented, besides stating inaccurate historical fact 13. More important with regard to the story of the destruction of the Ancient Library of Alexandria, is the account given by Jamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Qiftī who lived during the Ayyubid era and died in the year 646. A.H./1248 A.D. He came from a family of *Qadis* (judges), his father was appointed judge for Jerusalem and Jamāl al-Dīn himself, was at one time, judge in Aleppo; he is also the author of an alphabetically arranged biographical lexicon. In his lexicon, *History of Wise Men, (Ikhbār al-'Ulamā bi-Akhhbār al-'Hukamā)* Ibn al-Qiftī mentions the end of the old library when he presents the biography of John the Grammarian (Yahia al-Nahwī) who was identified as John Philoponus. He mentions that Yahyā was a Jacobite, Coptic priest and a disciple of Severus (Shawary) but that he was deprived of his office owing to his rejection of the dogma of the Trinity. He lived and saw the capture of Alexandria by 'Amr ibn al-'Ās. Ibn al-Qiftī goes on to narrate how 'Amr was impressed by the erudition and intellect of Yahyā and listened with admiration to his logical arguments concerning the Trinity, as well as his other philosophical opinions that were as yet unknown to the Arabs. Emboldened by 'Amr's favor, Yahyā one day remarked, "You have examined the whole city and have set your seal on every object of value. I make no claim for aught that is useful to you, but things of no use to you, may be of service to us." He then mentioned the "books of wisdom" in the Royal treasuries which the Arabs had no use for, while he could make use of. 'Amr's reply was that he could not dispose of the books without asking for permission from the Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb. A letter was dispatched, and the answer soon came, "Touching the books you mention, if what is written in them agrees with the Book of God, they are not required, but if it disagrees, they are not desired. Destroy them therefore." Accordingly, 'Amr ordered the books to be distributed among the baths of Alexandria and used as fuel for heating. It took six months to consume them. "Listen and wonder" concludes the writer.¹⁴ Subsequent Arab writers like Abū al-Faraj, known as Ibn al-'Ibrī (Barhebraeus), Abū al-Fidā and al-Maqrīzī, repeated the account of Ibn al-Qiftī either in full or abridged. Therefore to get the full story of the burning of the Alexandria library by 'Amr, as related by the Arabs, one has to turn to Ibn al-Qiftī who was the first to relate it in full. As mentioned above, the story first appeared in Ibn al-Qiftī's

biographical lexicon. When compared with other biographies of the time written by Ibn Khallikān, al-Sāfādī, Ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, al-Dhahabī and others, it is of second-rate value due to summarized material and inaccurate information. But these two parts of the story are irrelevant to the subject of the fate of the Library, even though Ibn al-Qiftī has made them an integral component of his account. The third part is the important one, as it attributes the destruction of the Ancient Library of Alexandria to the Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb and his governor in Egypt, ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās. It is noteworthy that this part was written as a dialogue between Yahia and ‘Amr covering several days and this bears the marks of fiction rather than actual history. It is most probable that the author heard it as part of an oral tradition then prevalent. Furthermore, the first appearance of the Arabic story of the fate of the library occurred in the late sixth and early seventh centuries A.H. (twelfth & thirteenth centuries A.D.) whereas the Arab conquest of Egypt and Alexandria took place six centuries earlier. It is highly unlikely that such eminent historians as Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam (d. 253 A.H.), al-Baladurī (d. 279 A.H.), al-Tabarī (d. 310 A.H.) and al-Kīndī (d. 350 A.H.) should have ignored the existence of such a famous library and its fate. These historians and their successors reported the details of the Arab conquest of Egypt and Alexandria; but no mention was made of what ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī, Ibn al-Qiftī and Ibn al-‘Ibrī reported about the destruction of the library by ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās. Moreover, the Coptic historian John, Bishop of Nikiu, who lived the greater part of his life in the second half of the seventh and the early eighth centuries A.D., was a near contemporary of the Arab conquest and recorded many of its events, but he did not mention or even hint at such an event happening, despite his obvious hostility towards the Muslims.¹⁵ In fact, none of the contemporary Byzantine historians did that either. What is most probable is that the Royal library was destroyed during the war of Alexandria in the year 48 B.C., as El-Abbadi argued, when Julius Caesar burnt some fifty ships in the harbour of Alexandria and the flames spread to the shore and burnt down the Royal library.¹⁶ But the Daughter Library, a branch of the Royal Library that formed part of the Serapeum, survived until the year 391 A.D. when Emperor Theodosius the Great (379–95 A.D.) proclaimed Christianity the formal and sole religion of the Roman Empire. In fulfillment of the terms of the decree, Bishop Theophilus launched an onslaught on the Serapeum that completely destroyed it.¹⁷ In view of these developments it becomes self-evident that when the Arab conquest took place, neither the Royal library nor the Daughter Library, were there. It also explains the reason why early historians, Arab and non Arab, who dealt with the conquest of Egypt, made no mention what so ever of any events concerning a library. The story as reported by Ibn al-Qiftī has repeatedly been criticized, but there is little doubt that A. J. Butler, himself an eminent Arabist, was the best qualified scholar to do so. One of his strongest arguments against the credibility of the story is that he was able to identify John the Grammarian (Yahyā al-Nahwī) with John Philoponus who lived and wrote around 540 A.D. It would therefore be impossible that he should survive and be active one hundred years later at the time of the Arab conquest.¹⁸ One major question needs to be answered. Why should al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-Qiftī make up the story about ‘Amr’s burning of the ancient library of Alexandria at the order of Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb? El-Abbadi argued that after Saladin overthrew the rule of the Fatimids, he found

himself in dire need of money to carry on his campaigns against the Crusaders and to pay off those who had co-operated with him and served him. He therefore donated as well as offered for sale many of the treasures he had confiscated; we know that among these treasures, were great public libraries of the Fatimids. To conclude, the Arabic story of the destruction of the ancient library of Alexandria, whatever was the true motive behind it, is an obvious example of the abuse of history for political purposes; in the past as well as in the present.

Dr. Muhammad ‘Alī al-Sallabī quotes scholar ‘Abd al-Rahīm Muhammad ‘Abd al-Hamīd’s extensive work on this false story “The claim that the Muslims burnt the library of Alexandria” as:

‘We did not find any text or indication that ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Ās burned the library of Alexandria. All there is, is a text by Ibn al-Qaftī, quoting from Ibn al-‘Ibarī (d. 685 A.H./1286 C.E.) which says: ‘Yahyā al-Nahawī-who was from Alexandria and lived until the city of Alexandria was conquered by ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Ās-went to see ‘Amr. He was known for his knowledge, so ‘Amr honoured him and heard from him philosophical words with which the Arabs were not familiar.’ Ibn al-Qaftī completed the story by saying: ‘Amr said to him, ‘What do you want from us?’ He said, ‘The books of wisdom that are in the royal stores’... forty-five thousand, one hundred and twenty volumes. ‘Amr thought that what Yahyā had mentioned was too much, and he said, ‘I cannot issue such an order without asking permission from the caliph.’ He wrote to ‘Umar and told him what Yahyā had said, and ‘Umar wrote back, saying: ‘As for the books which you have mentioned, if what is in them is accordance with the Book of Allah, then we should be content with the Book of Allah. If what is in them is contrary to the Book of Allah, then we have no need of them. So go ahead and destroy them. ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Ās started distributing the books to the bath-houses of Alexandria, where they were burned in the stoves, and I was told the number of bath-houses at that time, but I forgot. They said that it took six months to burn them all, so listen to what happened and be amazed.... But this story of the book-burning was narrated before Ibn al-Qiftī and before al-‘Abarī. ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī (d. 649 A.H./1231 C.E.) said: It was a house of knowledge that was built by Alexander when he built the city, in which were stored the books that were burned by ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Ās with the permission of ‘Umar Ibn al- Khattāb.’¹⁹

But if we study these reports, we must note the following points:

- i. There is no connection between these three reports or between their narrators, even though they lived in a similar time frame.
- ii. There is no *isnād* to which these reports can be attributed; rather they reflect assumptions that are made by their authors.
- iii. These reports were written at a time that was distant from the conquest of Egypt and the time of ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Ās. So we may say with all certainty that this story is obviously fabricated and the following criticisms may be made.
- iv. The story of the burning of the library of Alexandria is not mentioned by those who wrote the history of Egypt and its conquest, who lived many centuries before those who wrote this story.

- v. This story is not mentioned by al-Waqidī, al-Tabarī, Ibn al-Athīr or Ibn Khaldun, let alone Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, and it is not mentioned by Yāqut al-Hamawī in his description of Alexandria.
- vi. This story can be traced back to the time of the Crusades, through al-Baghdādī, who may have fabricated it under pressure, or it may have been fabricated later on and attributed to him.
- vii. If this so-called library ever existed, then we may say that the Byzantines who left Alexandria could have taken it with them and they probably did do that.
- viii. ‘Amr could have thrown the books into the sea within a very short time, instead of burning them, which supposedly took six months. This points to the purpose behind fabrication of this story. We can say without any hesitation that ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattāb and ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Ās are innocent of what has been attributed to them in this fabricated story, which stems from the imaginations of people who love to exaggerate, so they imagined things that did not happen.”²⁰

It would not go out of place here to mention the significant inferences by the orientologists on the same event. Famous historian Edward Gibbon rejects the allegations and the tradition of Abu al-Farj. He says:

“I should deceive the expectation of the reader, if I passed in silence the fate of the Alexandrian library, as it is described by the learned Abulpharagius. The spirit of Amrou was more curious and liberal than that of his brethren, and in his leisure hours the Arabian chief was pleased with the conversation of John, the last disciple of Ammonius, and who derived the surname of Philoponus from his laborious studies of grammar and philosophy. Emboldened by this familiar intercourse, Philoponus presumed to solicit a gift, inestimable in his opinion, contemptible in that of the barbarians: the royal library, which alone, among the spoils of Alexandria, had not been appropriated by the visit and the seal of the conqueror. Amrou was inclined to gratify the wish of the grammarian, but his rigid integrity refused to alienate the minutest object without the consent of the caliph; and the well-known answer of Omar was inspired by the ignorance of a fanatic. ‘If these writings of the Greeks agree with the book of God, they are useless and need not be preserved; if they disagree, they are pernicious and ought to be destroyed..... the sentence was executed with blind obedience; the volumes of paper or parchment were distributed to the four thousand baths of the city; and such was their incredible multitude that six months were barely sufficient for the consumption of this precious fuel. Since the Dynasties of Abulpharagius have been given to the world in a Latin version, with pious indignation, has deplored the irreparable shipwreck of the learning, the arts, and the genius, of antiquity. For my own part, I am strongly tempted to deny both the fact and th consequences. The fact is indeed marvellous; ‘Read and wonder!’ says the historian himself; and the solitary report of a stranger who wrote at the end of six hundred years on the confines of Media is overbalanced by the silence of two annalists of a more early date, both Christians, both natives of Egypt, and the most ancient of whom, the patriarch Eutychius, has amply described the conquest of Alexandria. The rigid sentence of Omar is repugnant to the sound and orthodox precept of the

Mahometan casuists: they expressly declare that the religious books of the Jews and Christians, which are acquired by the right of war, should never be committed to the flames; and that the works of profane science, historians or poets, physicians or philosophers, may be lawfully applied to the use of the faithful. A more destructive zeal may perhaps be attributed to the first successors of Mahomet; yet in this instance the conflagration would have speedily expired in the deficiency of materials. I shall not recapitulate the disasters of the Alexandrian library, the involuntary flame that was kindled by Caesar in his own defence, or the mischievous bigotry of the Christians who studied to destroy the monuments of idolatry. But, if we gradually descend from the age of the Antonines to that of Theodosius, we shall learn from a chain of contemporary witnesses that the royal place and the temple of Serapis no longer contained the four, or the seven, hundred thousand volumes which had been assembled by the curiosity and magnificence of the Ptolemies. Perhaps the church and seat of the patriarchs might be enriched with a repository of books; but, if the ponderous mass of Arian and Monophysite controversy were indeed consumed in the public baths, a philosopher may allow, with a smile, that it was ultimately devoted to the benefit of mankind. I sincerely regret the more valuable libraries which have been involved in the ruin of the Roman empire; but, when I seriously compute the lapse of ages, the waste of ignorance, and the calamities of war, our treasures, rather than our losses, are the object of my surprise. Many curious and interesting facts are buried in oblivion: the three great historians of Rome have been transmitted to our hands in a mutilated state, and we are deprived of many pleasing compositions of the lyric, iambic, and dramatic poetry of the Greeks. Yet we should gratefully remember that the mischances of time and accident have spared the classic works to which the suffrage of antiquity had adjudged the first place of genius and glory; the teachers of ancient knowledge, who are still extant, had perused and compared the writings of their predecessors; nor can it fairly be presumed that any important truth, any useful discovery in art or nature, has been snatched away from the curiosity of modern ages.”²¹

English historian Alfred J. Butler (1850-1936) is one of the first scholars in the western world to have written extensively on the conquests of Egypt. He states that the story of Umar ordering the burning of books is “ridiculous”:

“Caliph’s orders could not make it burn: what then became of all these manuscripts ? And when one has deducted all the writings on vellum, how can it be seriously imagined that the remainder of the books would have kept the 4,000 bath furnaces of Alexandria alive for 180 days ? The tale, as it stands, is ridiculous; one may indeed listen and wonder. ... It is difficult either to convict or to clear Caesar of the charge. Plutarch has no doubt of the fact: As his fleet was falling into the hands of the enemy, he was forced to repel the danger by fire: this spread from the dockyards and destroyed the great Library Plut Caes.”²²

Alfred J. Butler goes further and states that the story is a “mere fable, totally destitute of historical foundation”:

“One or two other points remain to be noticed. Let it be granted for a moment that all the foregoing reasoning has not seriously shaken the theory of the survival of the Serapeum Library; and suppose also that the Library was intact when the Arabs captured Alexandria ; I would still say that its

destruction by the Arabs is extremely improbable. For this reason : that the Arabs did not enter Alexandria for eleven months after its capture, and in the treaty of surrender it was expressly stipulated that during the interval, not only might the Romans themselves depart, but that they might carry off all their movable possessions and valuables. During all this period the sea was open, and the passage to Constantinople and other ports was absolutely unhindered. The mere market value of the books in the Serapeum Library, if it existed, must have been enormous: their literary value must have been keenly appreciated by a large number of persons with intellectual interests : and these students would surely have forestalled the fabled zeal of John Philoponus by securing the removal of such priceless treasures while it was still time, instead of leaving them to the ignorant mercy of the desert warriors to whom the city was to be delivered. Finally, the silence that prevails among fifth and sixth century writers reigns also after the conquest. There are no Arab historians of Egypt in the seventh or eighth century; and it might be said that later writers were anxious to suppress the story of the burning of the Library. But this cannot apply to the Coptic bishop, John of Nikiou, who was a man of learning, and who wrote before the end of the seventh century. The range and the detail of his work prove that he had access to plentiful sources of information fifty years after the conquest. Abu Faraj himself- the author of the charge against the Arabs-proves that Alexandria continued to be frequented by students about the year 680 A.D: for he represents James of Edessa as going to Alexandria to complete his education after receiving a thorough instruction in the Greek language and in the Scriptures at a Syrian convent. This evidence warrants the assertion that some private and monastic libraries continued after, as before, the conquest. But if there had been a great public library before the conquest, and if it had been burned by the Arabs at the conquest, is it possible that John of Nikiou - an almost contemporary writer, who deals minutely with the capture of Alexandria-should have consigned to oblivion an event which not merely impoverished his history of its best materials, but robbed the literary world of its great storehouse of treasure for all time? It may not be amiss to briefly recapitulate the argument. The problem being to discover the truth or falsehood of the story which charges the Arabs with burning the Alexandrian Library, I have shown,

- i. that the story makes its first appearance more than five hundred years after the event to which it relates;
- ii. that on analysis the details of the story resolve into absurdities;
- iii. that the principal actor in the story, viz. John Philoponus, was dead long before the Saracens invaded Egypt;
- iv. that of the two great public Libraries to which the story could refer, (a) the Museum Library perished in the conflagration caused by Julius Caesar, or, if not, then at a date not less than four hundred years anterior to the Arab conquest; (b) while the Serapeum Library either was removed prior to the year 391, or was then dispersed or destroyed, so that in any case it disappeared two and a half centuries before the conquest.
- v. that if, nevertheless, it had existed when Cyrus set his hand to the treaty surrendering Alexandria, yet the books would almost certainly have been removed-under the clause permitting the removal of valuables-

during the eleven months' armistice which intervened between the signature of the convention and the actual entry of the Arabs into the city; and

- vi. that if the Library had been removed, or if it had been destroyed, the almost contemporary historian and man of letters, John of Nikiou, could not have passed over its disappearance in total silence.

The conclusion of the whole matter can be no longer doubtful. The suspicion of Renaudot and the scepticism of Gibbon are more than justified. One must pronounce that Abu Faraj's story is a mere fable, totally destitute of historical foundation."²³

In the book, "The Library of Alexandria, Centre of Learning in the Ancient World" written by the Emeirtus Professor Roy Macleod (b. 1941) and published in 2000, he casts doubt on the story:

"there are many objections to accepting this tradition. The story first appears more than 500 years after the Arab conquest of Alexandria. John the Grammarian appears to be the Alexandrian philosopher John Philoponus, who must have been dead by the time of the conquest. It seems, as shown above, that both the Alexandrian libraries were destroyed by the end of the fourth century, and there is no mention of any library surviving at Alexandria in the Christian literature of the centuries following this date. It is also suspicious that the caliph Omar is recorded to have made the same remark about books found by the Arabs during their conquest of Iran. In short, the story is at best a testimony to the persistence of legends about the library long after it had in fact disappeared."²⁴ Bernard Lewis (b. 1916) gives the most detailed rebuttal to this mythical story:

"Despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, some writers are still disposed to believe and even repeat the story of how the Great Library of Alexandria was destroyed by the Arabs after their conquest of the city in 642 A.D., by order of the Caliph 'Umar. This story-its origins, purpose, acceptance and rejection-provides an interesting example of how such historical myths arise and, for a while at least, flourish. This story first became known to Western scholarship in 1663, when Edward Pococke, the Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, published an edition of the Arabic text, with Latin translation, of part of the compendious History of the Dynasties of the Syrian-Christian author Barhebraeus, also known as Abu al-Faraj. According to this story, 'Amr Ibn al-Ās, the commander of the Arab conquerors, was inclined to accept the pleas of John the Grammarian and spare the library, but the Caliph decreed otherwise: 'If these writings of the Greeks agree with the book of God, they are useless and need not be preserved; if they disagree, they are pernicious and ought to be destroyed.' The books in the library, the story continues, were accordingly distributed among the four thousand bathhouses of the city, and used to heat the furnaces, which they kept going for almost six months. The myth of the Arab destruction of the library of Alexandria is not supported by even a fabricated document. One may wonder what purpose it served. One answer, often given and certainly in accord with a currently popular school of epistemology would see the story as anti-Islamic propaganda, designed by hostile elements to blacken the good name of Islam by showing the revered Caliph 'Umar as a destroyer of libraries. But this explanation is as absurd as the myth itself. The original sources of the story are

Muslim, the only exception being the Syrian-Christian Barhebraeus, who copied it from a Muslim author. Not the creation, but the demolition of the myth was the achievement of European orientalist scholarship, which from the eighteenth century to the present day has rejected the story as false and absurd, and this exonerated the Caliph Umar and the early Muslims from this libel. But if the myth was created and disseminated by Muslims and not by their enemies, what could possibly have been their motive? The answer is almost certainly provided in a comment of Paul Casanova. Since the earliest occurrence of the story is an allusion at the beginning of the thirteenth century, it must have become current in the late twelfth century—that is to say, in the time of the great Muslim hero Saladin, famous not for his victories over the Crusaders, but also—and in a Muslim context perhaps more importantly—for having extinguished the heretical Fatimid Caliphate in Cairo, which, with its Ismāʿīlī doctrines, had for centuries threatened the unity of Islam. ʿAbd al-Latīf was an admirer of Saladin, whom he went to visit in Jerusalem. Ibn al-Qiftī’s father was a follower of Saladin, who appointed him Qādī in the newly conquered city. One of Saladin’s first tasks after the restoration of Sunnism in Cairo was to break up the Fatimid collections and treasures and sell their contents at public auction. These included a very considerable library, presumably full of heretical Ismāʿīlī books. The break-up of a library, even one containing heretical books, might well have evoked disapproval in a civilized, literate society. The myth provided an obvious justification. It is unlikely that the story was fabricated from the whole cloth at this time. More probably, those who used it adopted and adapted folkloric material current at the time. According to this interpretation, the message of the narrative was not that the Caliph ʿUmar was a barbarian because he destroyed a library, but that destroying a library could be justified, because the revered Caliph ʿUmar had approved of it. This once again, as on so many occasions, the early heroes of Islam were mobilized by later Muslim propagandists to give posthumous sanction to actions and policies of which they never heard and which they would probably not have condoned. It is surely time that the caliph ʿUmar and ʿAmr Ibn al-ʿĀs were finally acquitted of this charge which their admirers and later detractors conspired to bring against them.”²⁵

British historian and scholar of Islam, Arthur Stanley Tritton (1881-1973) states that “ ʿUmar I did not destroy the library” and that such words were “put into his mouth”: “It has been proved that ʿUmar I did not destroy the library at Alexandria. In addition to other reasons, one may argue that the words put into his mouth, ‘If the books agree with the Koran, they are unnecessary; if they do not, they are pernicious’ reveal the mind of a later age, when Islam had become intellectually proud.”²⁶

Ruth Stellingmeyer Mackensen comments on this mythical story as: “This story that ʿAmr, on the order of the second caliph, destroyed a Great Library of Royal Foundation in Alexandria, and that although it was believed and recounted both by Christian and by Moslem historians, it is utterly groundless. The fact that Arabic writers should have perpetuated such a reflection on their forefathers speaks for their candor if not for their critical judgment. Possibly the story arose among a group of scholarly but heretical Moslems who greatly admired the remnants of Greek learning but regretted that so few survived and at the same time had little use for the early caliphs. There

is good evidence that serious Arabic scholars were aware that they did not possess the full body of Greek literature. This hypothesis is frankly an imaginative construction for which there is no direct evidence, but it is offered as a possible explanation of the origin of a curious story which has aroused endless discussion.”²⁷

Philip K. Hitti (1886 -1978) calls the story “tales that make good fiction” and comments on the story as:

“The story that by the Caliph’s order ʿAmr for six long months fed the numerous bath furnaces of the city with the volumes of the Alexandrian library is one of those tales that make good fiction but bad history. The great Ptolemaic Library was burnt as early as 48 B.C. by Julius Caesar. A later one, referred to as the Daughter Library, was destroyed about A.D. 389 as a result of an edict by the Emperor Theodosius. At the time of the Arab conquests, therefore, no library of importance existed in Alexandria and no contemporary writer ever brought the charge against ʿAmr or ʿUmar. ʿAbd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī, who died as late as A.H. 629 (1231), seems to have been the first to relate the tale. Why he did it we do not know, however, his version was copied and amplified by later authors.”²⁸

British philosopher and historian Bertrand Russell (d.1930) gives a strong rebuttal to this story as:

“The belief that fanaticism promotes success in war is one that is not borne out by history, although it is constantly assumed by those who cloak their ignorance under the name of ‘realism’. When the Romans conquered the Mediterranean world, fanaticism played no part in their success. The motives of Roman Generals were either to acquire the gold reserves of temples with a view to keeping half for themselves and giving half to their soldiers, or, as in the case of Caesar, to gain the prestige which would enable them to win elections in Roma and defy their creditors. In the early contests of Christians and Mohammedans it was the Christians who were fanatical and the Mohammedans who were successful. Christian propaganda has invented stories of Mohammedan intolerance, but these are wholly false as applied to the early centuries of Islam. Every Christian has been taught the story of the Caliph destroying the Library of Alexandria. As a matter of fact, this Library was frequently destroyed and frequently re-created. Its first destroyed was Julius Caesar, and its last antedated the Prophet. The early Mohammedans, unlike the Christians, tolerated those whom they called ‘people of the Book’, provided they paid tribute. In contrast to the Christians, who persecuted not only pagans but each other, the Mohammedans were welcomed for their broadmindedness, and it was largely this that facilitated their conquests. To come to later time, Spain was ruined by fanatical hatred of Jews and Moors; France was disastrously impoverished by the persecution of Huguenots...”²⁹

Mosio Renan, a French orientalist in his lecture “*Islam and Knowledge*” comments on the issue: Though it is said that ʿAmr bin ʿĀs burnt down the Library of Alexandria but is an utter lie. The library was burnt down quite before a long time.³⁰ In his *Arab Culture* Dr. Gustave Le Bon says: ʿUmar is accused of burning down the library of Alexandria. In this connection I would like to say that this kind of barbarous action was against the customs and manners of the Arabs; a man gets surprised that such an absurd story is in vogue and to be accepted. In our times the event has been refuted in such an excellent way that it needs no more discussion. Easily,

explicitly and with the help of authentic sources it can be proved that a long time before the Arabs, the Christians themselves ruined the Library of the pagans of Alexandria as such as they had broken its idols. Consequently there remained no book during Arab period which could have been burnt down.³¹ Italian orientalist Graffin says: No Muslim or non-Muslim historians has accused 'Amr bin 'As of burning down the library of Alexandria six hundred years after its conquest. It may be refuted by the mildness of 'Amr bin 'As in politics and tolerance of which the then famous Christians historians gave the evidences e.g., Yuhana, New Kossy, in his "*History of Egypt*" (written in old Abyssinian language) also praises the mildness of 'Amr bin 'As.³²

Indian scholar D. P Singhal rejects the story that the Library of Alexandria was burnt by Muslims. He says: "In 642 Alexandria, protected by walls and towers and guarded by the Byzantine fleet, fell to the Arabs. The hub of intellectual and cultural life for about a thousand years and the proud possessor of some of the best monuments of antiquity. Alexandria lay in ruins before the arms of the Arab commander 'Amr Ibn al-'As. According to a well-known story, the manuscripts from the famous library supplied fuel for the public baths for six months. The story also relates the oft-quoted remark allegedly by Caliph Omar Ibn al-Khattab (ca. 634-44) when he consented to the destruction of the library: 'If these writings of the Greeks agree with the book of God, they are useless and need not be preserved; if they disagree, they are pernicious and ought to be destroyed.'" He further says: "The story, however, is no more than a fable. It makes its first appearance in the solitary report of a stranger, Abul Faraj, who wrote five hundred years later. The reported sentence of the Caliph is alien to the traditional precept of the Muslim casuists who had expressly commanded the preservation of captured religious texts of the Jews and Christians, and had declared that the works of profane scientists and philosophers could be lawfully applied to the believer. Seldom in history has there been a parallel for transcribing a falsehood with such persistence, conviction, and indignation, in spite of contrary evidence. Gibbon, like many other scholars denied both the fact and the consequences. In fact, the Arabs were far too fond of books and knowledge to behave in this manner. They built a number of famous libraries in their empire, and their librarians were often men of high learning. But many other Asian conquerors, such as Mahmud of Ghazni, Holagu, and Genghis Khan, destroyed libraries. European invaders from Palestine and Syria burned the magnificent library at Tripolis during the first Crusade. Many early and medieval Christian enthusiasts burned libraries, archives, and works of art in North Africa, pre-Columbian America, Rome and Asia. It is likely that Emperor Theodosius of Constantinople destroyed all or part of the library of Alexandria because, as a devout Christian, he did not approve of pagan books-Greek or Asian."³³

Diana Delia comments on this version as

"Although numerous other libraries throughout the ancient Mediterranean-in Asia Minor, the Persian Empire, Athens and Rhodes, for example-have disappeared, no one ponders their fate. In the Western tradition, the romantic lament for the lost wisdom of the ancient world is reserved for the great library at Alexandria. The legend of the main library and its magnificent collection inspired the ruminations of the medieval Arab historians in the thirteenth century. The dazzling impression that the size and splendour of Alexandria made on Arabs and

the potential danger it posed to an absolute faith are revealed by Ibn Duqmaq, who cited 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Jurajj as claiming that, although he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca sixty times, 'if God had suffered me to stay a month at Alexandria and pray on its shores, that month would be dearer to me than the sixty pilgrimages which I have undertaken.' In Ibn Duqmaq's own experience, 'if a man make a pilgrimage around Alexandria in the morning, God will make for him a golden crown set with pearls, perfumed with musk and camphor and shining from the east to the west.' In contrast to the classical tradition, which attributed the destruction of the Ptolemaic library to accident, Arab historians 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, Ibn al-Qifti, and Abu al-Faraj credited the dashing Muslim general 'Amr with its deliberate ruin during the Arab conquest of Egypt in A.D 642. The second caliph, 'Umar, allegedly doomed the great library by decreeing as superfluous all books that conformed with the holy Qur'an and as undesirable all volumes that contradicted it. Thereupon, 'Amr reportedly consigned the entire collection to the flames, heating some four thousand public baths at Alexandria for a full six months. Bold tales of this sort glorified both the magnificence of the ancient city and the Arabs who had conquered it. But several considerations render the Islamic tradition suspect. It is scarcely likely that many pagan manuscripts from the main library and annexes survived the depredations of Christian zealots during late antiquity. Also, this story suddenly surfaced in the thirteenth century after five and a half centuries of silence. And precisely the same response of Umar is recorded by Ibn Khaldun in connection with the destruction of another library in Persia. Romanticism combined with nationalistic fervor to fabricate an utterly fantastic legend about the destruction of the great Alexandrian library-not by the Romans but by the most recent subjugators of Egypt. 'Listen and wonder,' Ibn al-Qifti sceptically concluded, as well one might! Though clearly apocryphal..."³⁴

M. N Roy (d.1954), an Indian revolutionary, radical activist, political theorist, philosopher penetratingly analyzed the issue in a wider perspective. It is worth quoting some part of his views on the subject: 'While books written in the eleventh and twelfth century indignantly detail the shocking tale of the burning of the library of Alexandria, the historians Eustichius and Elmacin, both Egyptian Christians, who wrote soon after the Saracen conquest of their country, are significantly silent about the savage act. The former, a patriarch of Alexandria, could be hardly suspected of partiality to the enemies of Christianity. An order of Khalif Omar has been usually cited as evidence of the barbarous act ascribed to his general. It would have been much, easier not to record that order than to suppress any historical work composed by Christian prelates who had endless possibilities of concealing their composition. A diligent examination of all relevant evidence enabled Gibbon to arrive at the following opinion on the matter: "The rigid sentence of Omar is repugnant to the sound and orthodox precept of the Mohammadan Casuists; they expressly declare that the religious books of the Jews and Christians, which are acquired by the right of war, should never be committed to the flames, and that the works of profane scientists, historians or poets, physicians or philosophers, may be lawfully applied to the use of the faithful." ("Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire").'³⁵ He further says: 'Byzantine barbarism had undone the meritorious work of the Ptolymies. The real destruction of the Alexandrian seat of learning had been the

work of St. Cyril who defiled the Goddess of learning in the famous fair of Hyparia. That was already in the beginning of the fifth century.³⁶

The authentic histories like *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, *Tarikh Yaqubi*, *Tarikh al-Tabri*, *Tarikh Ibn Kathir*, and *Tarikh Ibn al-Khaldun* find no information regarding this alleged occurrence. While commenting on these works with regard to the library of Alexandria Maulānā Shiblī Nu'mānī says, "These books are authentic, and over and above them, there is no other means available for instituting an enquiry into the condition of those times. In none of them is any information obtainable regarding the event under discussion. All of them, specially Thabri, the Conquest of Countries by Balazari, Husnul-Mahazira and Makreezi's work, contain detailed descriptions of the Conquest of Alexandria; but in not one of them is there any mention of the library."³⁷

Maulānā Sayyid Sulaimān Nadwī gives a brief and cursory life sketch of these historians as:

- i. 'Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī, was born in 577 A.H and died in 629 A.H. He wrote *Kitab al-Ifada Wa al-I'tibar*
- ii. Qādī Akram Jamāl al-dīn Qiftī was born in 568 A.H and died in 646 A.H. He is the author of *Kitab Ikhbar al-'Ulama' bi-Akhbar al-Hukama*
- iii. 'Abu al Farj bin al-'Ibrī Matlī the author of *Tarikh Mukhtasar* was born in 623 AH and died in 685 A.H.
- iv. Taqī al-din Maqrīzī was born in 766 A.H and died in 845 A.H. He compiled a history *Khutat-e-Misr*.

It is clear that the first man 'Abd al-Latīf Baghdādī died in 629 A.H and last one Maqrīzī died in 845 A.H. Thus the above tradition of the event is of seventh century Hijrah. While as Alexandria was conquered in the first century of Hijrah. It should be borne in the mind that during the gap of six hundred years Islamic and non-Islamic histories were written but none has ascribed this event to Muslims.³⁹ Both Maqrīzī and Baghdādī have mentioned the event in a passive form as, "It is said."⁴⁰ So it becomes quite obvious that ascribing the event to Muslims is not based on any sound source. This tradition has crept in Islamic histories by the way of Christian traditions.⁴¹

Thus the story of burning of the library cannot be authenticated; it had in any case been largely destroyed before.⁴² The Museum and library survived for many centuries but were destroyed in the civil war that occurred under Aurelian in third century A.D the "daughter library" was destroyed by Christians in A.D 391.⁴³ The main part of the library was damaged during a fire in Brachium quarters when Julius Caesar besieged Alexandria in 473 B.C. It was ravaged in the civil war that occurred under Emperor Aurelian in the late 200's A.D. The Serapeum collection, endured until 391 A.D when Christians, following the edict of the Emperor Theodosius, destroyed the temple and its literary treasure.⁴⁴ European historian Hitler comments on this event as: 'Always, to me it is inconceivable that the destruction of library of Alexandria has taken place at the hands of Muslims because Arabs did not enter the city of Alexandria till eleven months. This was mentioned in the treaty that Romans could take their possessions to their land. During this period the sea route was

opened for them. Had there been any literary work present in the library, they would have certainly taken it with them'.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

There is no denying the fact that Islam attaches great importance to knowledge and education. The knowledge and education is the starting point of every human activity becomes evident from the fact that the first word of the first revealed verse of the Holy Qur'ān was 'Iqra', that is, "Read!". Knowledge (*'ilm*) occupies a significant position within Islam, as evidenced by the more than eight hundred references to it in Islam's most revered book, the Qur'ān. The importance of education is repeatedly emphasized in the Qur'ān. Several prophetic traditions highlight the significance of acquiring knowledge and developing scientific temper. The earliest manifestation of the importance Islam attaches to knowledge was visible when the prisoners of war who fell to the Muslims during the battle of Badr were offered freedom in lieu of their teaching to the children of Madinah. Islam makes it a religious duty upon Muslims to seek knowledge. The Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) on his departure from this world ordered his companions to treat the Egyptians well. This is authentically reported in many of our classic sources. The Prophet (pbuh) said to treat its inhabitants of Egypt well: "Abu Dharr reported: Messenger of Allah said, "You will soon conquer a land where people deal with Qirat." And according to another version: Messenger of Allah said, "You will soon conquer Egypt where Al-Qirat is frequently mentioned. So when you conquer it, treat its inhabitants well. For there lies upon you the responsibility because of blood ties or marriage relationship (with them)." Acting upon these directives, the early Muslims embarked upon the pursuit of knowledge and learning, the blessings emanating from which were to inspire a great civilisation in which Muslims and non-Muslims alike lived creative and useful lives and which, by its achievements, enriched the whole world. It is historical fact, that all of the four Caliphs, Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī protected and gave security to Churches, synagogues and temples. For example, the first Caliph Abu Bakr would issue clear orders not to "desecrate" Churches and leave those who are attached to their religions alone. It is highly improbable that 'Umar Ibn al-Khattāb would have taken such a decision. Besides, had he been of the view that there should be no need of any book except the Qur'ān, then he would have also taken the decision that there was no need of Churches, synagogues or fire-temples. The fact, however, is, as we discussed above, that the Library of Alexandria was destroyed by the Christians themselves, led to do so by their religious leaders. At the time, the act was gloried in; but when, with the spread of civilization and enlightenment, Europe found, to its dismay, that the stain of this barbarous act clung to it, it was found that the only practicable means of effacing it, was to transfer the blame to some other nation. When the Muslims conquered Egypt and took Alexandria, there was not a trace of this library; but prejudiced Christians attributed the alleged barbarian act to them. As Europe was then blinded by prejudice and sunk in ignorance, no one cared to enquire into the truth of the story, and the false accusation consequently spread far and wide. The fate of the library has been deplored by Europeans in language which leads one to believe that the library was their own collection. Such, however, is the popular opinion up to the present day, for no one has ever thought of attributing the act to the Christians themselves, as, it is evident, that no nation

will ever destroy its own handiwork. But what truth is there in this allegation, whose echo, at one time, filled every part of Europe? Alas! It is entirely unfounded! How then was it possible for such an unfounded statement to attain such publicity and acceptance, for such a length of time, in all the countries of Europe?

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How to cite this article:

Showkat Ahmad Shah (2018) 'Destruction of the Library of Alexandria By Muslims: A Mistaken Notion ', *International Journal of Current Advanced Research*, 07(1), pp. 9472-9482. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijcar.2018.9482.1568>
