



ISLAM

IT'S ALSO OUR HISTORY

TWELVE CENTURIES OF MUSLIM PRESENCE IN EUROPE.



Culture

With the support of the European Union Culture Programme



DISCLAIMER

This exhibition is not a work of circumstance. It has been included in the programme of the Museum of Europe since its origin, seventeen years ago, and has continued to haunt the minds of members of our association.

It also addresses a fundamental concern – the study of European relations, taken as a whole, both internally and externally, and takes its place in a series bearing the statement “It’s our history”: “Europe, it’s our history”, “America, it’s our history”, and now Islam. “Islam”, with a capital letter since this term not only denotes a religion but also a civilisation.

It turns out that our exhibition comes at a very relevant time in history when the meeting between Europe and Islam is witnessed by citizens from the continent in all its tragic manifestations – massive and chaotic waves of immigration, senseless terrorist violence, feelings of alienation, incomprehension and hostility.

Should we cancel it or at least postpone it until happier circumstances? Definitely not, we believe. It is precisely because the timing is tragic that it is important to show our contemporaries the extraordinary richness of this history, which has helped to make us what we are. We should not hide what is wrong any more than relativize it, but place it a centuries-old history, which has much more to it than just this.

After all, do we imagine a history of Europe reduced to wars between its nations?



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1. FOREWORD

In the European imagination, both Muslim and non-Muslim, there is a stubbornly rooted idea that the Muslim presence on European soil is a late import, dating from the waves of immigration of the second half of the twentieth century. This results in another preconceived notion: that these two civilisations, Europe and Islam, are fundamentally foreign to one another, and condemned by the vicissitudes of history to coexist uneasily with one another.

The exhibition Islam, its also our History shows that this is completely wrong. Far from being a recent presence, Islam has never been absent from Europe and European civilisation since it first burst onto the stage of history.

The Muslims arrived in the Western part of the Mediterranean in the eighth century with the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, where they remained for seven centuries. By the time that the fall of Granada in 1492 brought an end to the Muslim presence in the West of the continent, the Turks had already been well established for over a century in the East, in the Balkans, which they incorporated into a vast empire. Just as there is a North African Islam, a Turkish Islam, an African Islam, an Indo-Pakistani Islam, an Arabic Islam and an Indonesian Islam, so too there was – and still is today – a specifically European Islam.

So can we talk of two civilisations that are foreign to one another? No, Europe and Islam are two civilisations which have sometimes been in conflict with one

another, to be sure, but which come from a common spiritual and intellectual core, tracing the same scriptural origins and claiming the same philosophical heritage. The twelve-century story of their involvement with one another has been violent at times, peaceful at other times, but always rich in mutual influences. Without their encounter, neither Europe nor Islam would be what they are today.

Amid the flow and ebb of territorial advances and retreats over the centuries, this exhibition revisits this history, which, for better or for worse, is our common heritage and in which we all play a part.



2. A CIVILISATION EXHIBITION

Islam, its also our History is a civilisation exhibition. Though relatively rare in Europe, where large collections and a strong and venerable tradition have always favoured art exhibitions, the civilisation exhibition is nonetheless a powerful cultural tool. It has the advantage of drawing in tens of thousands of visitors. It is a spectacle that can unfold over a fairly long period, appeal to the intelligence and sensitivity of a large audience, and, by operating on all levels of communication, simultaneously address all social classes, all ages and all levels of education. It alone has the potential to be of interest to university professors, college students, business people and mothers alike. As such, the civilisation exhibition creates social ties and imparts meaning to them through culture.

A well-designed civilisation exhibition breaks down barriers between different fields of cultural activity and in so doing broadens the horizons of those who habitually consume them. It throws light on contemporary political questions through history,

science, art, or even, as we have uniquely experienced, through theatre. It integrates different kinds of knowledge contributed by different disciplines, blending them into a harmonious whole. While such a dialogue may not generate scientific knowledge – an exhibition will never replace a book or a scientific article – it is a powerful producer of understanding and curiosity.

In a world disoriented by the globalisation of commerce and the explosion of communication technologies, the civilisation exhibition conveys a humanist message. It restores humans to their rightful place at the heart of human concerns.

Finally, the kind of civilisation exhibition we have in mind must necessarily have a European dimension, for two reasons: because the chosen themes are never confined to the particularity of one nation, and because this will be a travelling exhibition.



ISLAM IN EUROPE: A DIVERSE ARRAY OF FACES AND STORIES



3. A TOUR OF THE EXHIBITION

Given the immense timespan and vast geographical area covered by this story, any attempt at completeness is obviously doomed to failure. We have therefore constructed our exhibition around the notion of 'legacies' – in other words, the traces that have remained from this centuries-long encounter and that pervade the material and spiritual civilisation of Europe. The main events in this history, which are referred to throughout the exhibition, are outlined in the concluding film shown before the final exhibition space, dedicated to our time.

1- INTRODUCTORY SPACE

- ◆ **Message:** poetical outline of the long history of relations between Europe and Islam.
- ◆ **Exhibition technique:** immersive audiovisual installation.



IMMERSIVE AUDIOVISUAL DISPLAY



ARTWORK EXPRESSING THE MEETING OF BOTH CIVILISATIONS

2- THE ABRAHAMIC LEGACY

- ◆ **Message:** Islam and Christianity: two branches of the same family tree.
- ◆ **Exhibition technique:** The two civilisations' common spiritual origin is revealed by means of paintings showing three shared prophets: Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Koranic verses relating to them are displayed opposite these paintings.



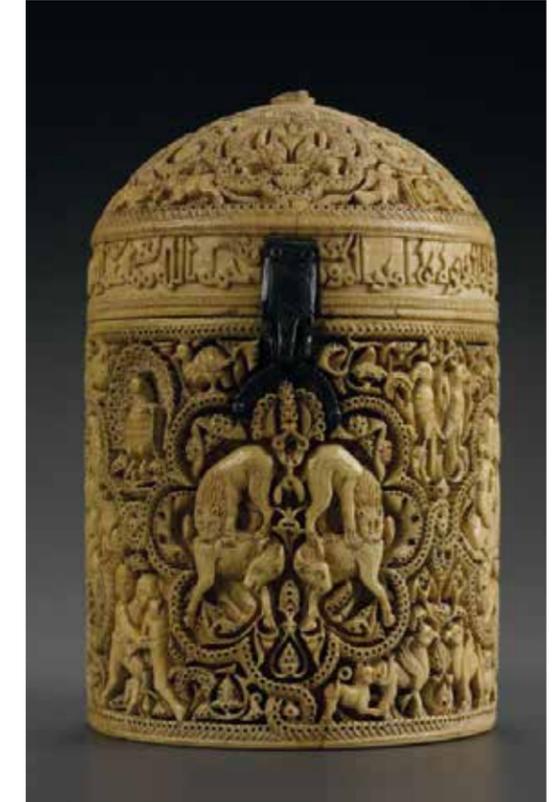
THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC, REMBRANDT, 1635,
OIL ON CANVAS, HERMITAGE MUSEUM, ST PETERSBURG



THE ARAB-ANDALUSIAN AND ARAB-SICILIAN LEGACY:
A LIBRARY OF CONTEMPORARY KNOWLEDGE

3- THE ARAB-ANDALUSIAN AND ARAB-SICILIAN LEGACY

- ◆ **Message:** The first phase of Islamic expansion (Andalusia), followed by the first phase of withdrawal (Sicily). Between the two phases, the balance of power is reversed, but the Christian West is the side that consistently benefits through its contact with the Muslims.
- ◆ **Exhibition technique:** Display evoking a library containing contemporary knowledge; objects illustrating the different areas of knowledge; interactive devices.



DATE-PICKING, THE AL-MUGHIRA PYXIS
(POMMADE POT, IVORY, MADE IN AL-ANDALUS IN 968),
LOUVRE

4- THE OTTOMAN LEGACY

♦ **Message:** In a Europe cut in two between a Christian West where hardly any Muslims remained and an East dominated by Islam but widely populated by Christians, and where the Ottomans had replaced the Arabs as the main 'Other', conflict-laden relations did not prevent commercial, diplomatic and intellectual exchanges. The difference during this second phase of Muslim expansion is that the balance of advantage from these exchanges was increasingly in favour of the West.

♦ **Exhibition technique:** Display evoking a huge Ottoman tent, symbolising the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, the wars between this empire and the Christian states, and the empire's treatment of its minorities; objects; interactive devices.



STATUE OF A JANISSARY HOLDING A CLOCK, 17TH-18TH CENTURY, MADE IN GERMANY FOR THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE DRESDEN, STAATLICHE KUNSTSAMMLUNG



ARRANGED IN AN OTTOMAN TENT CAPTURED AS WAR BOOTY AND SUBSEQUENTLY USED IN EUROPEAN COURTS FOR FESTIVITIES

THE COLONIAL LEGACY



5- THE COLONIAL LEGACY

♦ **Message:** the Ottoman Turks began a long phase of decline as early as the second half of the sixteenth century. Three centuries later, with this process complete, Christian Europe moved in to replace it: in the East of the continent, by means of nation states; in the West, through the colonial adventure in the Maghreb and the Middle East. The colonisation of former Ottoman territory was accompanied by the introduction of a system of unequal economic, intellectual and institutional exchanges. In Europe, the influence of the Muslim East was felt mainly in art (Orientalism) and everyday life (vocabulary, cuisine). In a second phase beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, Westerners themselves began the last stage of their own withdrawal: decolonisation, which generated political, ideological and, soon afterwards, demographic upheaval on European soil.

♦ **Exhibition technique:** Recreation of a dock in a Mediterranean port, symbolising Europeans' journeys to an Islamic world which was the subject of many legends; their return in the wake of decolonisation; and the beginning of the arrival of Muslim populations after the Second World War, whether from former colonies (France) or not (Belgium, Germany).



DRESS DESIGNED BY PAUL POIRET (1879-1944) 1911, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW-YORK

6- A HISTORY THAT IS TWELVE CENTURIES OLD AND STILL ONGOING

- ◆ **Message:** this is a history of flows and ebbs and of the interpenetration of the two civilisations.
- ◆ **Exhibition technique:** a film lasting 10-12 minutes, which sets out, summarises and completes the story that the exhibition has unfolded so far.

7- TODAY

- ◆ **Message:** In Eastern Europe, Muslim populations dating back a long time – the Bosnian Muslims and the Tatars in the Crimea – and their experience of first dictatorship, and then war;

In Western Europe, the re-establishment of Muslim populations through labour immigration (the post-war reconstruction), family reunification, and latterly, the arrival of waves of refugees fleeing the Middle East conflict.

- ◆ **Exhibition technique:** contemporary artworks with commentary.

The exhibition will be created in two formats (approximately 1,200 m² and 300 m²) so that it can be presented in spaces of varying capacity and travel round Europe.

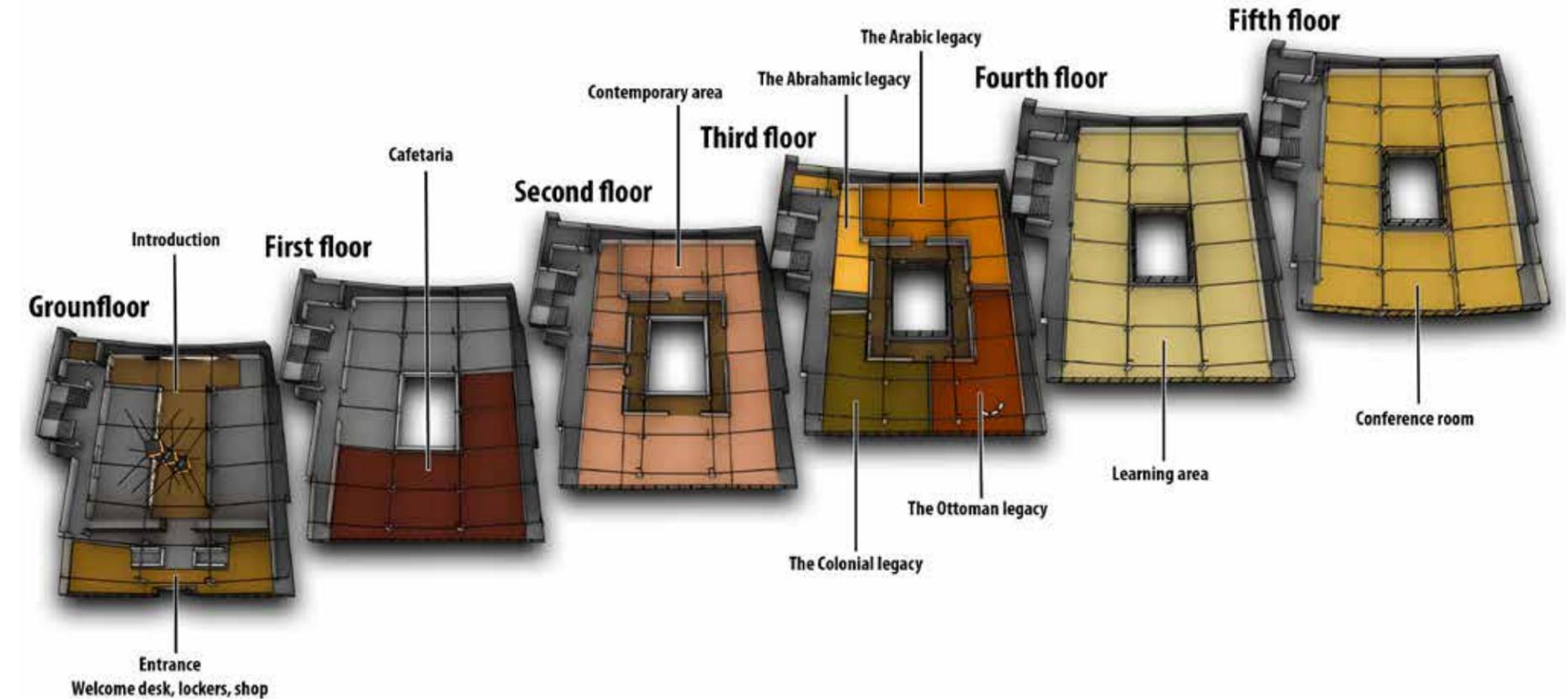


CONCLUDING AUDIOVISUAL PROJECTION



THE DREAM MACHINE, KADER ATTIA, 2003
COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL IMMIGRATION MUSEUM, PARIS
PHOTO: NATHALIE DARBELLAY

SET-UP





A GANGWAY: TRAVEL NARRATIVE IN TIME AND SPACE



A SPECIFIC SPACE ON COMMUNITY LIFE IN EACH ERA



4. AROUND THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition is treated here as the pivotal event around which a series of activities will be developed in order to extend, enrich and perpetuate its message.

- ◆ **Six interactive forums on multiculturalism**, the aim of which is to allow Muslims to explain their cultural/religious background to their non-Muslim compatriots. Participants will come from Belgium (the three linguistic Communities) and its neighbouring countries, and from various age groups and educational levels. These forums will be held during the period of the exhibition's presentation in Belgium.
- ◆ **Concerts**, held while the exhibition is on show in Brussels and elsewhere, will illustrate the encounter between these two civilisations in music. We are planning an eclectic programme in order to reach as diverse an audience as possible.

- ◆ **A fashion show** involving designers from several European countries who are inspired in their work today by the traditions of Islam. Fashion is particularly apt to seek fresh input from borrowings and encounters between different cultural spheres, making it a lively and attractive area that is very relevant to this project.
- ◆ **A sound and light show** in a central location in the capital. Combining video mapping, son et lumière, pyrotechnics and artistic performances, this spectacle will express the essence of the exhibition's theme in a sensory appeal to spectators. Tempora and Luc Petit Creation won the Exceptional Event prize at the Cannes Event Awards for the show From Texas to Bastogne; they will join forces again to create this spectacle.
- ◆ **A food festival**. In partnership with Visit Brussels, Ottoman and Moroccan cuisine will be celebrated during Eat Brussels!



6. THE PROJECT'S AUTHORS

THE MUSEUM OF EUROPE

The Museum of Europe was founded in Brussels in 1998 by a civil society group. It aims to promote and present cultural, tourism-related, recreational and educational activities and products that offer the general public a vision of Europe, its civilisation, its relationship with other civilisations and its citizens' sense of identity. The Museum of Europe creates its exhibitions through the company Tempora, with which it has a structural agreement. In addition, the Museum of Europe creates and disseminates publications relating to its exhibitions and events (exhibition catalogues, books and conference proceedings).

Exhibitions designed and produced by Tempora at the request of the Museum of Europe:

- ◆ **God(s), a User's Guide** (Brussels, 2006 - Madrid, 2007 - Quebec, 2010 - Ottawa, 2011 - Paris, 2012 - Warsaw, 2013)
- ◆ **It's Our History! 50 Years of European Adventure** (Brussels, 2007 - Wrocław, 2009)

- ◆ **America, It's Also Our History!** (Brussels, 2010)
- ◆ **14-18, It's Also Our History!** (Brussels, 2014-2015)
- ◆ **Islam: Part Our History! 12 Centuries of Muslim Presence in Europe** (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Turkey, 2016-2018)
- ◆ **The Holocaust by Bullets** (in conjunction with the Holocaust Memorial in Paris - Brussels, 2010)
- ◆ **Be.Welcome: Immigration in Belgium** (in conjunction with the Atomium - Brussels, 2010)
- ◆ **Cardinal Kominek, a Little-Known Founding Father of Europe** (in conjunction with the Municipality of Wrocław and the Museums of the Vatican, Vatican, Berlin, Wrocław, Brussels, 2015)
- ◆ **La Belle Europe. Europe in the Age of the Universal Exhibitions- 1851-1913** (Brussels, 2001-2002)

TEMPORA

Tempora designed and is creating the exhibition, and is coordinating its network of European partners. Tempora is a Belgian agency that designs, produces, promotes and manages cultural exhibitions and facilities. Founded in 1998, it is one of the leading players in this sector in Europe.

Tempora relies on a multidisciplinary team of around forty employees, covering the entire skill-set needed to create and manage the projects entrusted to it, including academics, project leaders, managers, architects, graphic designers, display designers, documentalists and multimedia experts.

Tempora has two key characteristics:

- ◆ **Its unique capacity as a turnkey provider**, which means that it can contribute to specific phases or handle entire projects on a ready-to-use basis: exhibition creation, development and production, promotion, receiving and managing the public;
- ◆ **Its international experience** in Europe, Asia and North America, with a record of managing major projects, designing and developing international exhibitions and museums, and organising foreign tours for exhibitions created and originally presented in Belgium.

Tempora's approach is based on a number of values: respect for locations and their history; the effective presentation of collections; the search for balance between lightness of touch, aesthetic considerations and strict adherence to scientific knowledge; the widest possible access; and education.

For many years, Tempora and the Museum of Europe have worked together to present high-quality exhibitions around the world. Since its creation in 1998, the company has completed numerous projects - both temporary exhibitions and permanent displays.

Exhibitions designed and produced by Tempora on behalf of third parties:

- ◆ **Dinner's Served!** (Brussels, Libramont)
- ◆ **It's Our Earth!** (Brussels, 2008 - Warsaw, 2009)
- ◆ **Renaissance 2.0** (Mons, 2013)
- ◆ **Seen on the Radio ! 100 Years of Radio in Belgium** (Brussels, 2014)
- ◆ **From Texas to Bastogne: Texas Aggies go to War** (Bastogne War Museum, 2014)
- ◆ **21 Rue La Boétie. Picasso, Matisse, Braque, Léger and their Dealer, Paul Rosenberg** (Liège, 2016 - Paris, 2017)

Permanent displays:

- ◆ **Espace Chimay** (Belgium, 2012)
- ◆ **Poznan Visitors' Centre** (Poland, 2014)
- ◆ **Gdansk Second World War Museum** (Poland, 2014)
- ◆ **Belgian Chocolate Village** (Brussels, Koekelberg, 2014)
- ◆ **The Doudou Museum** (Mons, European Capital of Culture, 2015)
- ◆ **The Artothèque** (Mons, European Capital of Culture, 2015)
- ◆ **Hougoumont Farm** (Waterloo, 2015)
- ◆ **Visitor Centre for the Replica Cave of Vallon Pont d'arc** (France, 2015)

Tempora and the Museum of Europe will team up with a large number of operators in Brussels for the successful organisation of additional events. Many groups will be working with us on this project once again.



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