

# THE MOSLEM WORLD

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## EDITORIAL

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### WHERE THE STONES CRY OUT

The public museums of Tunis and Algiers, the symbols of fish and dove and olive-branch in the newly-discovered catacombs of Sus, the broken columns of ruined churches from Carthage to Kabyle mountain villages, all bear witness to a North African Christianity which once flourished like "trees planted by the rivers of water." Then came the sirocco-blast from Arabia and turned this fruitful heritage into a desert of Islam—the Garden of Allah. Instead of the fig tree, the thorn; instead of the myrtle, the brier; instead of the Magnificat, the muezzin's call; instead of Cyprian, Tertullian and Augustine with the Gospel, there came 'Amru, 'Okba and the Senussi with the Koran. The Christian churches of North Africa were not only defeated by Islam, but wiped out. There are today no "Oriental" Christians in Tripoli, Tunisia, Algeria or Morocco. Only in Egypt a remnant remained. Yet God did not leave Himself without a witness. Where human voices were silenced "the stones cry out of the wall and the beam out of the timber answers" that Christ once had dominion in this territory. Shall He have it again?

We were impressed during a recent visit by the eloquence of this mute testimony—the indelible record of these too often forgotten pages of glorious history.<sup>1</sup> Who can stand beneath the twelfth century gateway of Bugia, where Raymond Lull won the martyr's crown, without

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Julius Lloyd. "The North African Church." S. P. C. K., 1880. P. S. Mesnage, "Le Christianisme en Afrique": 3 vols. (Origine, Décadence, Survivance) Jourdan. Alger, 1914.

being stirred with new resolve? Who can read the inscriptions in the catacombs at Hadrumetum (Sus), which tell of the Good Shepherd and peace through the Blood, without realizing the patience of unanswered prayer? Who would not be moved before the ruins of the great cathedral *Damous el Karita*, at Carthage, with its baptismal font, or the half-defaced crosses that still adorn the pillars of the courtyard in the great *Kairawan Mosque*? And then last, but not least, the plaster-cast of *Geronimo* in the museum at Algiers, his tomb in the cathedral and his portrait painted by the White Fathers at *Maison Carrée*—these also cry out. What is the story of his martyrdom?<sup>2</sup>

During an expedition made by the Spanish garrison of Oran in 1540 a young Arab boy was taken prisoner and baptized under the name of *Geronimo*. When about eight years old he again fell into the hands of his Moslem relatives, and was compelled to live as a Mohammedan until his twenty-fifth year. But the flame of his early faith, once kindled, could not be extinguished. He returned to Oran of his own accord, determined to live as a Christian. In May 1569, he accompanied a party of Spaniards in a small boat on an expedition against the Arab pirates. All the members of the little band were taken prisoners by a Moorish corsair and carried to Algiers. There every effort was made by the governor, himself a renegade, and the Moslem leaders to induce *Geronimo* to renounce Christianity. As he remained steadfast in his faith, he was condemned to death and, in accordance with a cruel custom (not without parallel since in Fez and Marrakesh), sentenced to be immured alive in a block of rough concrete and built into an angle of the fort then under construction. His feet and hands were tied with cords and, face downward, the cruel sentence was carried out. The earliest account of this martyrdom was given by *Haedo*, a Spanish Benedictine who

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Murray's "Guide to Algeria and Tunisia" and A. Berbrugger's, "*Geronimo, Le Martyr du Fort des Vingt-Quatre-Heures à Alger.*" 1850 Challamel, Paris. Abbé L. Delevaux, "*Geronimo, l'Emmuré de Babel-Qued, Drame Historique.*" Alger, 1920.

published a topography of Algiers in 1612. He carefully indicated the spot, and wrote: "We hope that God's grace may one day extricate Geronimo from his place and reunite his body with those of many other holy martyrs of Christ whose blood has consecrated this country." In 1853 it was found necessary by the French to destroy the old fort, and on December 27 in the very spot specified by Haedo, the skeleton of Geronimo was found. The bones were removed and buried in the cathedral. Liquid plaster-of-Paris was run into the hollow mould left by his body and a perfect model obtained, which shows not only the outlined agony of his features but the very chords which bound him and even the texture of his clothing. All who visit the museum, Kabyles and Moors and Europeans, are arrested by this striking plaster-cast of the youthful Arab in the very hour of his last agony.

Although the Barbary States have waited long for the coming again of the Evangel, the Cross is today in the field. The North Africa missionaries, the Southern Morocco missionaries, the Algerian Mission Band—brave pioneers all of them—and now the Methodist Episcopal Mission with its splendid organization, broad outlook and strong leadership, have occupied the great strategic centers. "Blessed is he who comes in the Lord's name." If His messengers were now to keep silent, the very stones would cry out.

The evangelization of all North Africa, in view of the present rapidly changing social, intellectual and political conditions and the present program of missions, is not only possible but urgent. The doors are nailed open. The people are everywhere accessible and in many places wonderfully responsive. There is crying need for reinforcement, for men and women who will respond to the call to reestablish the Church of Christ in North Africa.

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