

## **A Critical Study of Colin Wilson's *A Criminal History of Mankind*\***

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This is an interesting book containing a detailed analysis of crime and the criminal mind. It describes the different forms of crimes from the early history of mankind through the Middle Ages up to the present time. A great deal of effort is made to uncover, wherever possible, the underlying causes of these crimes, whether psychological or otherwise.

The book is divided into three major parts, the first of which deals with the psychology of human violence. The second part is the longest one and it outlines the criminal history of man. Part three is concerned with mass murder.

The book, in its three parts, is full of historical facts and fascinating incidents. However, it seems that the author's research is a bit inadequate in certain areas in the book, particularly those areas where early Islamic history is concerned. Some of what appear to me to be inaccuracies of significant importance are:

On page 262 the author states: "In 680, most of Ali's family was assassinated, including Fatima, the Prophet's daughter."

Again on page 283; "Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, has been killed in the massacre of Sh'ites in 680 AD."

Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, was neither assassinated nor was she killed in any massacre, and she did not live till 680 as Wilson says she did. She died in her bed from natural causes only a few months after her father's death, towards the end of

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\*London: Grafton Books, 1990, 702 pp.

632. In fact, she was the first person of the Prophet's close relatives to die after him; all historians seem to agree on that. They do disagree on the exact date of her death, but again the majority of them say that she died on the 3rd day of Ramadan A.H. 11 at the age of about 29.

Fatima was born five years before her father was proclaimed a prophet. Muhammad, the Messenger of God, stayed in Mecca thirteen years advocating his prophecy, with little or moderate success. He and his followers, the Muslims, were persecuted and his life was in danger, so he migrated from Mecca at the end of September 622. In Medina he spent ten productive years before he died on 8 June 632. When we add these years, Fatima's age at her death would come out to be a little more than 28 years, in close agreement with the age given by historians. If, on the other hand, she did live until 680, as Wilson claims, she would have been 74 at the time of her death, or thereabouts: too old to be the mother of an infant, because her youngest child, Zaynab, was about five years old at the time of her mother's death. This child would grow up to become the lady from the Prophet's household who witnessed the killing of her brother, al-Husayn, and the massacre of his family at Kerbala in 680. She herself was not killed in that massacre, but died, of her grief, one and a half years later in Egypt on Sunday 14th Ramadan A.H. 62, She was fifty-six years old. Today an important residential and commercial sector in the middle of Cairo, where she is buried, is named after her, "al-Sayyida Zaynab."

On page 258 Wilson says: "The town of Yathrib—later Medina—was three hundred miles to the north. On the night of 16 July 622 AD., assassins burst into the Prophet's house and rushed to his bedroom. They were too late. Mahomet had slipped away earlier and was now heading towards a cave in Mount Thawr, accompanied by only Abu Bakr. His flight to Yathrib—the hijra (or hegira)—was the turning point in his life. he arrived three *two months later*, on 20 September 622."

On average, a camel, carrying a passenger and his travel belongings, can easily cover about 25 miles (40 km) per day. A distance of three hundred miles would, therefore, require from 12 to 15 days by such a camel. Consequently, if the Prophet and Abu Bakr left Mecca on 16 July 622, they would have arrived in Medina about the end of July or early in August, not two months later. One would assume that these particular travelers wanted to get to Medina as fast as possible, because an enemy was in pursuit and, therefore, there was no reason for them to linger about in the desert for two months. Even if they took an indirect route in order to evade their pursuers, the time required would not have been as long as two months—more likely only a bit longer than my estimate of 12 to 15 days.

Al-Tabari and Ibn Hisham agree that the Prophet and Abu Bakr spent three days hiding in a cave in Mount Thawr before they resumed their journey to Medina, and Glasse says that the journey itself took some ten or fourteen days. Thus, the entire time since they left Mecca should be thirteen to seventeen days. As a consequence, one of the dates given by Wilson must be incorrect: if they started on 16 July 622, they could not have arrived on 20 September 622, or, if they arrived on the later date, they could not have started on the former one.

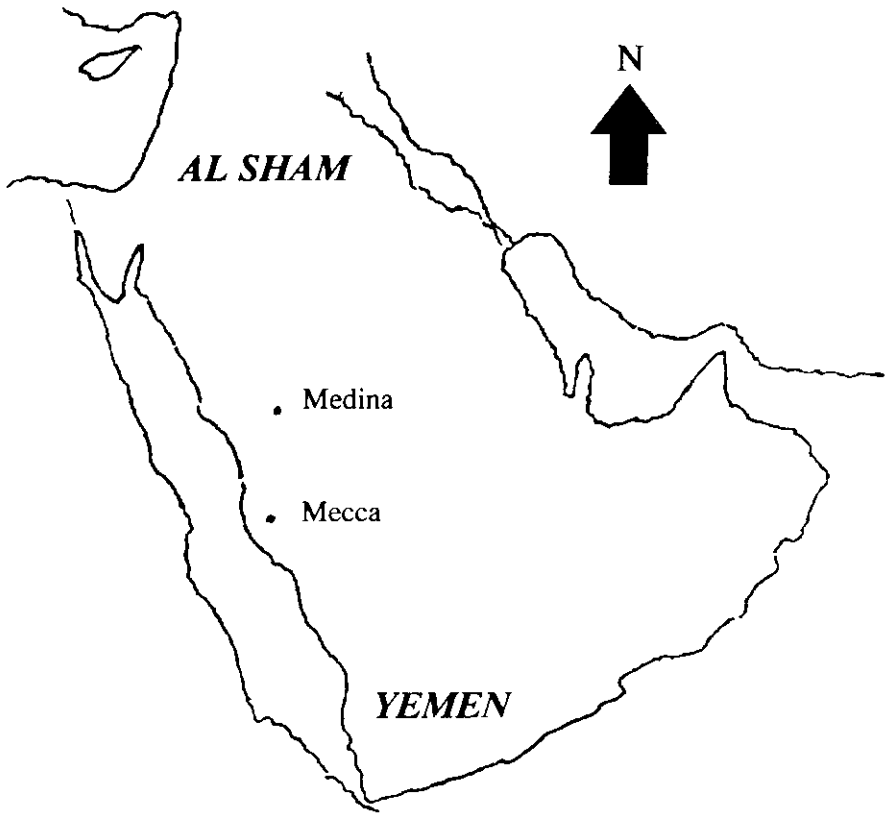
On page 259 Wilson states: "In fact, the year after his arrival in Medina, he himself went out on three such raids... So Mahomet sent out a raiding party in the sacred month of Rajab, a time when Arab hostilities were normally suspended; the Muslims intercepted and plundered a caravan coming from Yemen."

Here Wilson seems to be confused by the geography of this part of the Middle East. Both Mecca and Yemen are to the south of Medina—Yemen being further to the south and, therefore, Mecca is between Medina and Yemen (see map). A caravan starting in Yemen and moving northward passes throughout Mecca before reaching Medina. In that case it would be difficult to imagine such a caravan being intercepted at or near Medina.

The Meccan caravan referred to by Wilson was in fact coming from al-Sham in the north. The caravan was led by Abu Sufyan, one of the leading opponents of Islam at its beginning and the father of Muawiyah, who later became the fifth Caliph and was the founder of the Umayyad dynasty (41 /661 – 132/750). Abu Sufyan was able to avoid the attackers by taking the coastal route, but the incident, nevertheless, precipitated the battle of Badr, the first and certainly one of the most important battles in the history of Islam. So, the Muslims were not able to intercept the caravan, let alone plunger it.

On page 261 Wilson says: "Omar's great general, Khalid, known as 'the Sword of Allah,' defeated the Byzantines near Damascus and took Syria in 635."

Khalid b. al-Walid was at first a fierce opponent of Islam and participated on the side of the Meccans in the wars against the Muslims before he was converted to the new religion in the eight year of the Hijrah. The Prophet called him the "Sword of Islam" and sent him in a number of military missions which he conducted successfully. He was a brilliant commander, and the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, appointed him the leading general of the Muslim armies. In one of the bloodiest battles that Arabia has ever seen, he defeated the armies of Musaylamah, the foremost of a number of false prophets (who appeared in that part of the world towards the end of the Prophet's life) and killed the impostor.



During the reign of Abu Bakr, Khalid conquered parts of Iraq before he was directed to go and lead the campaign against the Byzantines in the north. Before the completion of this mission Abu Bakr died and Omar, the second Caliph, took over in Jumada II A.H. 13. The first major order Omar issued when he took office was to dismiss Khalid from his post as general of the Muslim armies. The letter of Khalid's dismissal reached Abu Obaidah, the new commander appointed by Omar in Khalid's place, while the battles against the Byzantines were going on. Therefore, Abu Obaidah hid the letter and did not reveal its contents until Damascus was taken and Khalid signed the surrender documents.

Khalid, thus, was not Omar's great general. And although Damascus surrendered in the early part of Omar's caliphate, Khalid was technically at that time Abu Bakr's general. He never afterwards held a leading command for Omar. He died during Omar's rule in 642 and the exact reason of his dismissal at a time when commanders of his caliber were in short supply remains a mystery to this day.