

A Tale of Two Museums (Part 1)

by Hugh Fitzgerald



“What you don’t know about America’s Islamic heritage” is what USA Today purports to tell us in [a feature story](#) published some time ago that remains relevant as one example of a growing chorus.

One of the greatest stories rarely told about the long history of Muslim immigration to the United States stretching back hundreds of years is actually being told most days by Amir Muhammad, the founder and chief curator of America’s Islamic Heritage Museum, a tiny institution with a do-it-yourself collector’s vibe and a modest entrance fee that sits in an out of the way corner of southeast Washington, D.C.

But, in an age of American political sectarianism when immigrant and minority-rights groups and U.S. lawmakers have blasted President Donald Trump’s incendiary comments, not

many people are paying attention to the story Muhammad is revealing about the Muslim experience.

“American Muslims haven’t been great at explaining our side, at engaging with folks – you know? Not too many Americans come out here. We get some schools and international guests,” said Muhammad, 64, in a recent interview.

As Muhammad spoke in one of the museum’s small airless hallways, the lights kept flickering. Nearby, a smoke alarm chirped in need of batteries. Dusty glass displays featured Korans from around the world. Outside, the run-down front entrance was framed by a sign in a blue font: America’s Islamic Heritage Museum. Orange-yellow streaks of rust ran down the face of it.

“Once, a French documentary crew stopped by,” he added. “It’s like that.”

Small airless hallways, flickering lights, a smoke alarm that needs batteries, “dusty glass displays” of “Korans from around the world.” A sign outside this tiny place, rust-streaked in orange-yellow. A general air of inattention and decay. Once a French film crew stopped by. Sounds as if they didn’t do any filming. Still, for Amir Muhammad, it’s a living: he’s the founder, and the sole employee, who sets his own salary, solicits donations, and can only be fired by himself.

America’s Islamic Heritage Museum started in 1996 as a traveling exhibition called Collections and Stories of American Muslims. Since moving, in 2011, to its current location on Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, the museum, according to its website, has introduced and entertained about 18,000 people with artifacts, documents and photographs that explore and reveal the contributions and legacies of American Muslims. That’s about 2,600 visitors per year, a figure far from the more than 30 million visits made last year to the 19 museums, galleries and National Zoological

Park that comprise the Smithsonian Institution four miles away.

If this Islamic Heritage Museum has 2,600 visitors each year, that's about 8 people a day. Is this "museum" which has exactly one employee, who just happens to also have been the provider of its unprepossessing exhibits (what do Qur'ans from different lands have to do with America's Islamic heritage?), and also the collector and keeper of the entrance fees to the museum, as well as the beneficiary of any grants this "non-profit" enterprise might receive, really to be taken seriously?

"This area's kind of the hood of the hood," said Muhammad, using slang to describe an economically deprived area, and also to justify why some Americans may deliberately choose to give his museum a wide berth.

Could it be that this down-at-heels vest-pocket museum is simply not very impressive? Could it be that the story of America's "Islamic Heritage" on display is neither broad nor deep, and that much of the museum's offerings consist of thousands of photographs of sports and movie stars, and posters with potted biographies of the same handful of Muslim slaves who are unfailingly trotted out by propagandists eager to show that "Islam has always been part of America's story" – Omar ibn Said, Ibrahim abd al-Rahman, Ayyub bin Sulayman, Bilal Muhammad, and Yarrow Mamout?

Then there are the claims made by Amir Muhammad, in his museum's exhibits, for the presence of Islam in America even before the arrival of Muslim slaves. These claims, made about Muslims accompanying Columbus on his voyages, do not stand up to inspection, as we shall see. Similarly, there are claims about the "respect" the Founding Fathers supposedly felt for Islam. Thomas Jefferson bought a Qur'an, but it was not out of any putative respect for Islam. Jefferson was simply a man of

wide-ranging learning. We have, in fact, evidence that Jefferson was not fond of Islam. He gave testimony to Congress about what the Tripolitanian emissary, with whom he, and John Adams, had been negotiating in London, told him was the reason for the attacks by North African corsairs – the “Barbary pirates” – on American ships. Here is what Jefferson reported as the envoy’s answer:

He said that the attacks by the North Africans were “founded on the Laws of their Prophet, that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have acknowledged their authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as Prisoners, and that every Musselman who should be slain in Battle was sure to go to Paradise.”

Amir Muhammad mentions his continuing to find more evidence for early American mosques. but what that evidence is remains unknown, and to date neither Amir Muhammad, nor anyone else, has yet shown that any mosque was built in this country prior to that one-room structure put up in Ross, North Dakota, in 1929.

The second museum discussed in this article is in Jackson, Mississippi. This grandly-titled and tiny “International Museum of Muslim Cultures” is less than twenty years old.

“It was a struggle for a long time to even get American Muslims behind our idea,” said Emad Al-Turk, referring to the International Museum of Muslim Cultures in Jackson, Mississippi, an institution he co-founded about six months before the 9/11 attacks.

The International Museum of Muslim Cultures is perhaps less well known than America’s Islamic Heritage Museum, partly because it is located far from any major city in a predominantly rural state. And its focus is on educating the

public about Islamic history and culture and Muslim contributions to world civilization, not just America's.

"At the time, people were really scared about what was happening and how the relationship between American Muslims and non-Muslims was changing," said Al-Turk.

In Al- America, his 2008 book about America's Arab and Islamic roots, the writer and journalist Jonathan Curiel notes that since the 9/11 terrorist attacks it has been difficult for some Americans to "see Arab and Muslim culture as anything other than terrorism and fundamentalism ... 'Arab' and 'Muslim' have become code words of alarm."

"There has also been a tendency, Curiel believes, to reject any historical claims Arab and Muslim culture might have on American culture – to view it as "their" culture, not "ours."

And yet:

Did you know there are two towns in the United States called Mohammad? There's also a Palestine, in Texas, and an Aladdin, in Wyoming. There's been a U.S. post office in Mecca, Indiana, since 1888. In fact, from New Orleans to the Alamo, Moorish styles of architecture can be detected in buildings across the USA. Even the pointed arches that once stood at the base of the fallen World Trade Center towers in New York City mimicked Islamic geometric tradition. Blues music may be a uniquely American art form that originated in the Deep South – music ethnographers have established that many of its harmonies and note changes resemble Muslim prayers and other recitations, a result of the African slaves who came to the U.S. from Muslim areas on that continent.

This paragraph makes far too much of these toponyms. American settlers often chose names out of an atlas, a gazetteer, a history book. They would sometimes choose something exotic, just for that reason. There are towns in Indiana called Chile,

Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Angola and Zulu. They were not founded by anybody from those nations, nor were there any Zulus in Indiana. There are at least twenty Moscows in the United States, none of them founded by Russians, or by people connected to, or wishing to honor, Russia. There are a Mars and a Moon in Pennsylvania, but no extraterrestrials were involved in their naming. That there are two towns called "Mohammed" and that there has been a post office in Mecca, Indiana since 1888, tells us nothing about the presence of Muslims, or interest in, or respect for, Islam. They only tell us that some people found "Mohammed" and "Mecca" suitably unusual as placenames, for those who had had their fill of Smithtons and Brownsvilles.

Scholars of the Middle East say that there are many possible explanations for an apparent lack of interest in the USA's Islamic heritage, not least that many Americans simply don't know it exists.

The best (and most obvious) explanation for this "lack of interest" is that there is hardly anything to this claim of America's "Islamic heritage." There is no evidence, it has to be repeated, that any Muslims accompanied Columbus. No evidence exists for the claim that between one-third and one-fourth of the slaves in America were Muslims. Sylviane Diouf has made an even more preposterous and equally unsubstantiated claim. Between 2.5 and 3 million Muslims, she estimates, were sold into slavery in the Americas; they were "probably more numerous in the Americas than any other group among the arriving Africans." Where does this come from? No data is supplied, no source is cited. Others have repeated, but no one else has corroborated, her amazing claim. She simply makes it up, and, protects herself by use of the word "probably" ("probably more numerous"), and hopes her readers will accept it. No doubt some will. When it comes to making large claims for Islam's presence in America, historical rectitude goes by the board.

“A lot of people might assume Muslim immigration started in 1965 when the U.S. had a period of immigration reform, others will date it back to the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, yet others to the 9/11 attacks, but usually no one looks farther back than the 1960s and certainly not beyond the 20th century for this history at the popular level,” said Hussein Rashid, who teaches at Columbia University.

It is Hussein Rashid who shows casual contempt for American non-Muslims, to whom he ascribes such ignorance. It is he who is making an assumption, that Americans think Muslim immigration started in 1965, or in 1979, or even in 9/11. Why does he think this? Where is the data to support this claim of such ignorance? Was there a poll in which Americans were asked when they thought Muslims arrived in America? Nothing of the sort. Hussein Rashid wants us to take on faith his claim about our own surpassing ignorance. Here's my own counter-claim: it is he, Hussein Rashid, who is ignorant about what Americans know about the Muslim presence in this country.

My own sense, and that of few dozen other Americans with whom I have checked about when Muslims began arriving in numbers, though only anecdotal evidence, may be of interest. The consensus is that from the late 1800s to the beginning of World War I (when immigration from Ottoman lands nearly ended for the duration of that war), thousands of Muslims arrived, mainly from Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria. Many more Christians – in the tens of thousands – came from the same places, fleeing Muslim mistreatment. Muslim immigration did indeed then decrease almost to nothing. First, it decreased because of the Immigration Act of 1917, which barred “polygamists” and insisted on immigrants passing a literacy test. Second, Muslim immigration was essentially ended by the Immigration Act of 1924. That Act limited the number of immigrants allowed entry into the United States through a national origins quota. The quota limited the number of immigration visas to each national group to two percent of the total number of people of

each nationality in the United States as of the 1890 national census. And even more important, the 1924 Act excluded immigrants from Asia. That meant immigrants from the Muslim Middle East were barred. How many immigrants from Egypt – 2% of those of Egyptian origin who were in the U.S. in 1890 – were admitted? There were certainly nowhere near 50,000 people from Egypt in the U.S. in 1890, so we can estimate that, at the very most, there were a few hundred people from Egypt who would have been allowed in annually. That quota would have been used up mainly by Coptic Christians, who were better educated than Egyptian Muslims, and given their mistreatment, much more motivated to emigrate. From the 1920s to the early 1950s, despite the 1924 Act, about 1,000 Arabs arrived in the U.S., annually, most of them Christians from Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt.

Hussein Rashid seems to think Americans are “ignorant” to think that serious Muslim immigration to this country began only in 1965. But they were, in fact, correct. It was only in that year that the new immigration act was passed that removed the previous total ban on immigration from Asia.

Another possible recent reason for the dearth of interest in Islam in America: For the past two years, the Trump administration has made Islam a dirty word.

Not only has the president made opposition to immigration, particularly immigration from some Muslim-majority countries, a central plank of his first term in office. Trump himself has frequently negatively associated Islam and the Middle East more generally with violence and cultural differences claimed to be anathema to American life and identity.

It has to be repeated: the so-called “Muslim ban” by Trump applied to seven countries, two of which were non-Muslim (North Korea, Venezuela). Furthermore, 95% of the world’s total Muslim population remained unaffected by the ban. It

applied only to countries that were unable or unwilling to supply information about their citizens to the American government for further vetting. It was a rational decision, not “bigotry,” based on considerations of national security.

“Islam hates us,” Trump said on the campaign trail in 2016.

Qur’an 2:191-193, 3:151, 4:89, 8:12, 8:60, 9:5, 9:29, 47:4, 98:6. ‘Nuff said?

“Criminals and unknown Middle Easterners are mixed in,” he tweeted on Oct. 22 after ordering the military to be on alert for a caravan of migrants from Central America attempting to enter the U.S. despite efforts to have them stopped at the border.

“For Trump, there appears to be a whole lot of people who are not fully American. Muslims aren’t. Mexican-American communities aren’t. Women. Black people,” said Rashid.

Hysterical hyperbole from Hussein Rashid. Where has Trump said any of those groups are “not fully American”? Please provide a single remark that he has made along those lines.

But experts on Islam say there is a problem with Trump’s Muslim narrative: Muslims have been coming to America since at least the 17th century, with anywhere from a third to a quarter of the enslaved Africans brought to the U.S. against their will likely Muslims.

“Experts on Islam say.” Which experts? Where has their “research” been peer-reviewed and published? Give us their names, their qualifications, and the papers they have written on the subject so we may read and judge them for ourselves. Have they somehow been able to collect data on the religious beliefs of slaves that has escaped everyone else? The Africans that European slavers bought on the coast of West Africa were

mostly from areas where Islam had not yet fully penetrated. That doesn't mean that no Muslims were sold as slaves in the Atlantic slave trade, just that their numbers must have been small. The slave traders themselves did not record Muslim slaves as being in their cargo. Furthermore, if between 1/3 and 1/4 of all the slaves had been Muslims, why did the slave-owners themselves never comment on the presence of these Muslims, beyond the same half-dozen names always trotted out? Why didn't the non-Muslim fellow slaves leave records, either oral (by telling an overseer or a slaveowner) or written (for those who had learned to write), of these "Muslim" slaves among their fellows? I know of only one such report, about Bilal Muhammad and the claim that he served 80 Muslims as imam, on a plantation on Sapelo Island, Georgia. It is only in recent decades that extravagant claims – always without sources – about there being great numbers of Muslims among the slaves, have been made. And when Rashid claims that "from a third to a quarter" "of slaves were "likely" Muslims, what are we to make of that word "likely"? Doesn't that word allow Rashid to make fantastical claims about the percentages of Muslim slaves and, if skeptics ask for evidence, he can defend himself by noting that "I only said it was 'likely'"?

There is also evidence that Muslims were on the ships that the Italian explorer, navigator and colonist Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic Ocean in the 15th century.

It's time to put paid to this claim made about Muslims and their supposed Columbus connection.

Three distinct claims are made by Muslim "scholars" about Muslims and Christopher Columbus. These are: first, the assertion that Columbus's navigator was an "Arab" and "Muslim"; second, that the Pinzon brothers, one of whom was captain of the Niña and the other the captain of the Pinta, were Muslims (or Moriscos, outwardly converts to Catholicism);

third, that Columbus recorded in his papers having seen a “mosque” on top of a mountain in Cuba, which means there must already have been Muslims in the New World before Columbus arrived.

Let’s deal with that last claim first, that “mosque sighting” in Cuba. It was first reported by a certain Dr. Youssef Mroueh in an article in 1996. There is no record of a “Youssef Mroueh” receiving a doctoral degree in history. In the article, Mroueh claims, without quoting the original words of Columbus’s papers, that he noted “seeing a mosque.” Here is Youssef Mroueh: “Columbus admitted in his papers that on Monday, October 21, 1492 [sic] CE while his ship was sailing near Gibara on the north-east coast of Cuba, he saw a mosque on top of a beautiful mountain.”

Note that word “admitted,” as if Columbus had wanted to hide any evidence of a Muslim presence in Cuba.

Why did Youssef Mroueh not quote Columbus? Here’s why: Columbus wrote “Señala la disposición del río y del puerto..., que tiene sus montañas hermosas y altas..., y una de ellas tiene encima otro montecillo a manera de una hermosa mezquita.” [unnamed editor] *Relaciones y Cartas de Cristóbal Colón* (1892), p. 49

In English: “Remarking on the position of the river and port..., he [Columbus] describes its mountains as lofty and beautiful..., and one of them has another little hill on its summit, like a graceful mosque.” – Clements R. Markham (tr.), *The Journal of Christopher Columbus* (1893), pp. 62-3

Columbus did not write that he had seen a mosque, but rather, that he had seen one hill atop another, looking “like a graceful mosque.” Youssef Mroueh surely knew this, but didn’t want to let his readers know it. So he didn’t quote from Columbus, changed the description from a simile (X is like Y, the hill is like a mosque) and made it a straight description

("there's a graceful mosque on the hill"), and hoped he could get away with it. And in fact, his version has been accepted by some Muslims, including Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who claimed in 2014 that "In his memoirs [sic], Christopher Columbus mentions the existence of a mosque atop a hill on the coast of Cuba."

Columbus never did.

And just as baseless and absurd was Erdogan's claim in the same 2014 speech that "Muslims discovered America in 1178, not Christopher Columbus. Muslim sailors arrived in America from 1178." Again, not a scrap of evidence. But such myths serve to feed Islamic pride. Many Muslims do believe such stories and dismiss any attempts by Westerners to disabuse them not as truth-seeking, but as examples of attempts to deny Muslim achievements.

The next claim made by Muslims is that Columbus had an "Arab" navigator.

Some Muslims have claimed that Columbus did employ two Muslims on his own ship, one as a navigator, and another as an interpreter. They are flatly wrong. Let's consider the claims made that Christopher Columbus included Muslims in his crew. Not only is there not a shred of evidence to support this, but what evidence there is goes the other way. Columbus undertook his voyages because he wanted to discover an alternate route for Europeans to Asia, i.e., India, with its spices, precisely because Muslims had, with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, managed to seal off the old trade routes to the East from Christian Europe. Columbus, a devout Christian, who claimed the territories he discovered for "los reyes católicos" (the Christian monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella), would never have taken on members of the enemy camp (of Islam) for his crew, and especially would not have entrusted the critical job of navigator to a Muslim. But so effective has this Muslim rewriting of history been that in 2004, a State

Department employee put out a claim about Columbus's Muslim crew members: in a press release entitled "Islamic Influence Runs Deep in American Culture," Phyllis McIntosh of the State Department's Washington File claimed that "Islamic influences may date back to the very beginning of American history. It is likely that Christopher Columbus, who discovered America in 1492, charted his way across the Atlantic Ocean with the help of an Arab navigator."

No, it is not "likely." It never happened. The State Department was falsifying history in order to win favor among Muslims, both here and abroad.

Why did McIntosh make this absurd claim, even though "may date back" and "it is likely that" are weasel words providing an escape-hatch of deniability? How did she make the leap from no evidence to "may date back" and from "may" to "likely"? And even if, which did not happen, one crew member had turned out to be an "Arab" and thus a Muslim, how would that allow us to conclude that "Islamic influence runs deep in American culture"? What kind of "Islamic influence" would a single crew member have had on Columbus's voyages, with all the other crew members on all three ships being Christians (or conversos, Jews who had accepted Catholicism), or on the subsequent discovery and settlement of the New World? McIntosh was pulling rabbits out of an ahistorical hat. She, and the State Department for which she worked, either felt there was no harm in trying to curry favor with Muslims (history is silly putty to some; they shape it as they will), or were under pressure to rewrite history, possibly from George W. Bush's office (he was constantly prating about how "Islam is peace"), as part of a feelgood outreach campaign to American Muslims. But where did this particular story, about Columbus's "Arab navigator," come from?

It came from Muslims themselves. And it is based on a case of mistaken identity. For it was Muslims who, when they learned of an "Arabic-speaking Spaniard" on Columbus's first voyage,

decided that this must refer to a Muslim Arab. In fact, the reference was to one Luis de Torres, a converso (a Jew who accepted Catholicism). Luis de Torres knew Hebrew, Spanish, Portuguese, and some Arabic, and was taken on not as a navigator but as an interpreter by Columbus, who thought his knowledge of Hebrew would be useful if in Asia they ran into any Jewish traders (who were known to travel far and wide) or into members of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. But Muslims, in their eagerness to put themselves into the picture with Columbus, have committed two historical errors: first, they thought that the interpreter, the "Arabic-speaking Spaniard" Luis de Torres, was the navigator, and then they assumed that if someone on Columbus's crew spoke Arabic, as Torres did, he must have been an Arab and a Muslim. Wrong on both counts.

At some Muslim sites, it is claimed that the Pinzón brothers, Martin Alonso Pinzón, the captain of the Pinta, and his brother Vicente Pinzón, the captain of the Niña, were Muslims. There is even the further claim that the Pinzón family were related to Abuzayan Muhammad III, the Moroccan Sultan of the Marinid Dynasty. I have read everything about the Pinzón brothers I could find online. Should you wish to do as well, you could start [here](#).

Having done so, I have been unable to find a single Western historian who believes that the Pinzóns were Muslims, or of Muslim descent.

I did find a Muslim website that asserts the following:

On his first voyage to India, Columbus had two captains with Muslim family backgrounds, Martin Alonso Pinzon, the captain of the Pinta, and his brother Vicente Yanez Pinzon, the captain of the Niña. The Pinzon family was related to Abuzayan Muhammad III, the Moroccan Sultan of the Marinid Dynasty (1196-1465).

No sources are supplied for this claim. Just after this

assertion, on the same Muslim website, comes another remarkable, because baseless, claim, about the Chinese admiral Zheng He, who was indeed born a Muslim but later, devotion to Tianfei (the patron goddess of sailors and seafarers) became the dominant faith to which he adhered.

A Chinese Muslim, Admiral Zheng He, visited Americas during his seven maritime expeditions between 1405 and 1433.

[A link](#) is then given to a story which, presumably, supplies the evidence for this assertion. I dutifully clicked on that link. Then I read it, and discovered that there is no reference – none – to Zheng He’s travels to “the Americas during his seven maritime voyages.” The article mentions only travels to Asia and Africa. There apparently were no travels by Zheng He to the Americas.

The Muslim writer of this website apparently believes that if he gives a link, many people will assume the supporting material is there, and not bother to check. He may be right.

The same writer makes several other, equally baseless, claims about landings of Muslims in America before Columbus. There is, for example, this: “In 1312, Muslim explorers from Mali and other parts of West Africa arrived in the Gulf of Mexico for exploration of America’s interior using the Mississippi River as their access route.’”

I again searched for any evidence for this claim; I could find nothing anywhere on the Internet, except the crazed paper by that same notorious “scholar” Youssef Mroueh, who lists a series of claims about Muslims landing in America long before Columbus. To understand the scope of his wild claims, read his paper on “Precolumbian Muslims in the Americas” [here](#).

Thus, the same Muslim who wants us to believe without any evidence that the Pinzón brothers were Muslims, also wants us to believe, again without evidence, that Admiral Zheng He

landed in America, though he never claimed to have done so, and to believe, also without any evidence, that in 1312, sailors – from the desert kingdom of Mali (where did they acquire the ships, and where the seafaring experience?) – arrived in the Gulf of Mexico and then sailed up the Mississippi to explore the American heartland. Again, no evidence is presented.

These are all fables. But the truth doesn't much matter for Muslim propagandists. Let these claims appear, at some website, assertions without any evidence. Then one or more or all of them be reposted, at another website, again without any evidence. And then let them be reposted yet again, still without evidence. By now these claims have appeared in enough places so that for many it becomes the truth. Why? Because when a story appears in several places, many think it must be true. For they assume that had it been false, then surely it would not have been reposted.

There are even reports of Chinese Muslims making it to American shores, in California, in the 9th century. They arrived as pirates or fleeing religious persecution.

There is not a shred of evidence that “Chinese Muslims” made it to California in the 9th century. There is a 1763 copy of a Chinese map of the world that, it is claimed, was made in 1417, said to have been produced by Zheng He. But there are many reasons to think that the map is a much later forgery, because it describes the Himalayas as the highest mountain range, which became known only in the 19th century. There is no evidence that Zheng He ever made it to the New World. He recorded in great detail everywhere he went, from Ceylon to East Africa to Arabia, but nowhere does he mention sailing anywhere outside of Asia and Africa.

“We have autobiographies, we have oral histories, we have mosques, cemeteries, tombstones. We also have a lot of

conjectural evidence: For example, the way people are buried facing Mecca (Islam's holiest city, in Saudi Arabia)," said Rashid.

"Autobiographies" and "oral histories" – yes, but how many? There are the narratives of Job ben Solomon, two autobiographical pieces by Muhammad Said of Bornu, the Arabic autobiography of 'Umar ibn Said, the reports about Bilal Muhammad at Sapelo Island. But does that entitle Hussein Rashid to claim that one-fourth to one-third of slaves in America – which would mean several hundred thousand people – were Muslims?

Hussein Rashid mentions "mosques" as evidence of Muslim slaves. But where are these early mosques in America? All the historians agree that the first mosque in America dates from 1929. Had any earlier mosques been found, Muslims would have shouted that news from the rooftops, posted photographs of the sites, with full details of when the mosques were built and for how long they were in operation, and who served as imam, and who attended them. But no such reports have been forthcoming. Nor have there been verified reports about early Muslim "cemeteries" and "tombstones." Where are these Muslim cemeteries, supposedly dating from before the 20th century? Anyone can make a claim, including Hussein Rashid, but the absence of evidence is glaring.

What about Rashid's noting that some slaves were buried "in the direction of Mecca"? From America, the direction of Mecca is simply to the east. That does not mean that if a body is buried facing east that must mean that the dead person is a Muslim. There are, after all, only four directions toward which a coffin can be turned. "Conjectural evidence" indeed.

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