



The House of Wisdom

Having read Al-Khalili's book, what would you identify as the most critical elements that led to the florescence of Islamic science? In what ways are these the same as other moments of great intellectual creativity in world history, and in what ways are they different?

What is the *Mihna*? How do its aims square with the overall portrayal of the Caliph Al-Ma'mun in Khalili's book? What implications did it have? And how do you account for it?

When we study the Italian Renaissance, the first question to come usually isn't "Why did it end?" When we study the British Empire, the first question to be asked usually isn't "Why did it collapse?" But when we study Islamic science, we are almost immediately confronted with the question "What went wrong?" Why do you think this is so?

Al-Khalili's case for the importance of Islamic science is framed quite explicitly in terms of its contribution to the "European Renaissance"—in other words, the moment in which Western civilization emerged triumphant and the modern world was born. To what extent is this way of imagining Islam's role in history consistent with—or in conflict with—the larger aims of "Connected History"?

Generally speaking, historians attempt to understand people, ideas, and institutions from the past by placing them in their specific historical context—whereas scientists are dedicated to the discovery of consistent and immutable laws that are universally applicable. In what ways does al-Khalili address, or fail to address, this tension between history and science?