

HIDDEN HISTORY

30 untold stories
of Islam in the West

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Foreword

While writing *Apostate*, a book in which I described my personal journey to Islam, I found more than just Islamic answers to my Christian questions. I also came across a wealth of relatively unknown stories and anecdotes about the history of Islam in the West. A number of these stories made their way into that first book — but many others were left on the proverbial shelf.

The still-widespread belief that Islam is somehow alien to the West — and the notion that the religion only arrived in the Netherlands with the first so-called guest workers — prompted me to start giving lectures on this historical misunderstanding. In these talks, I highlight a range of remarkable and rarely told events that powerfully refute such claims.

Islam and Muslims have, in fact, played a defining role in the history of the West, leaving their mark on everything from architecture to law — and much in between. Yet this influence receives little to no attention in the media, in schools, in cultural discussions, or in politics. And when Islam is mentioned, it is often in a negative (politicised) context. As a result, the rich and often astonishing role that Islam has played in shaping Western history remains unknown. And as the saying goes: *what is unknown is unloved*. Unjustly so.

The aim of this book is to bring that “hidden history” back into the light — and in doing so, offer new perspectives.

Through 30 short stories — key moments, striking quotes by major historical figures, and other remarkable facts — this book explores how Islam has also helped shape what is now called “the Western world.”

Perhaps the awareness of a shared history — and the realisation that Islam was already part of the West long before nations like the Netherlands or the United States had even gained independence — can help foster greater understanding, appreciation, and connection. Among non-Muslims and Muslims alike.

From an Islamic point of view, the entire world is a place of and for worship. In that sense, Muslims are always “at home” — whether they like where the Creator has placed them or not, whether the “home” looks familiar or foreign, whether the surrounding society values their presence or not.

Islam is universal. And wherever Muslims may find themselves, they are called to be a positive and powerful example — and to live according to the ultimate guide for this life. History shows us: it can be done.

Joram van Klaveren

1. The Founding of the Netherlands: Islamic DNA

In the 16th century, the Netherlands was part of the Spanish Empire. King Philip II was strict, demanded (for that time) high taxes, and recognized only the Catholic faith as a religion. It was precisely at that time that the Protestant Church was on the rise, and more and more people identified with the denomination of Martin Luther (the man who initiated this split – the Reformation – in 1517).

Philip II of Spain was so extremely opposed to this new Christian movement that he wanted to introduce the death penalty for those who converted to Protestantism. William of Orange – who had been appointed to lead the Dutch part of the Spanish Empire – had been raised at the Catholic Spanish court but came from a Protestant background. He was therefore opposed to the new measures and wanted freedom of conscience for his subjects.

In 1566, the growing tensions led to the so-called “Iconoclastic Fury,” during which Protestants – for several months and throughout the country – destroyed the statues and paintings in Catholic churches. This was the indirect reason for Spain to send in soldiers to crush the “rebellion.”

Spain was far too powerful and too strong to fight alone, and so William of Orange decided to seek help from the enemy of his enemy: the Ottoman Empire. He sent a letter to the Ottoman sultan (Selim II) requesting support in the fight

against Spain. The sultan promised financial, military, and tactical support. Among other actions, the Ottomans intensified their own war against the Spanish in the Mediterranean Sea, thereby helping the Dutch gain time to reorganize.

The Ottoman Empire already had at that time a form of religious freedom that was still unknown in Europe. This idea inspired the Protestant William in his quest for (greater) freedom of conscience for his people. Eventually, the Dutch — in part thanks to the support of the Ottomans — were victorious over Spain.

During various battles in which cities were liberated — including Leiden — the Dutch flew Turkish flags with three crescents on their ships and carried medallions in the shape of a crescent moon, bearing the slogan: “*Rather Turkish than Papist*” (which in today’s Dutch means “*Rather Muslim than Catholic*”).

In the town of Den Briel (now: Brielle), there is even a depiction on a building façade showing a Dutch soldier of the time wearing a Turkish fez on his head, once again marked with the Islamic crescent. It was a tribute to the Ottoman support of that era.

Islam, whether one likes it or not, thus plays a very positive — and even historically decisive — role in the founding history of the Netherlands.

About the author

Hidden History is the second book by Joram van Klaveren. In his earlier work, *Apostate*, the former Dutch politician described his personal religious journey and eventual conversion to Islam.

With *Hidden History*, he aims to lift the veil on the often-overlooked Islamic history of the West. Through 30 short stories, the book highlights how deeply intertwined Islam has been – for centuries – with the part of the world we now call the West.

Joram van Klaveren graduated in 2005 with a degree in Religious Studies from the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. He was active in Dutch politics for years, working with the far-right Party for Freedom led by Geert Wilders. He served as a parliamentary aide, chairman of the provincial party in Flevoland, and Member of Parliament in the Dutch House of Representatives.

After leaving the party over the now-infamous “fewer Moroccans” incident, he completed a second degree in education, became a spokesperson for conservative Christians on national radio, and began writing what was intended to be an anti-Islam book. But during the writing process, he experienced what he describes as



a “change of heart and mind” — and eventually embraced Islam.

Today, as a Muslim, he seeks to dispel widespread misconceptions about the religion. He is co-founder of the Islam Experience Center, the first Islamic Museum in the Netherlands, and regularly gives lectures at home and abroad. His work and reflections can also be heard on various podcasts.