

Sa'id reserved his greatest contempt for the latter people, whom he dismisses as "rabble," "savages," and "scum," barely part of the human order, lacking any semblance of government or religion.

The fourteenth-century geographer and historian Ibn-Khaldun noted that unlike the Arabs, the Greeks and Romans did not apply a special term based on skin color to describe the northern European peoples with whom they came in contact because "whiteness was something usual and common (to them) and they did not see anything sufficiently remarkable in it to cause them to use it as a specific term."

The Islamic scholars also followed the Greek and Roman philosophers in believing that once racial differences were caused by the differing amounts of sunlight, they were inherited (an early form of Lamarck's theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics). For example, Ibn Habib, the ninth-century jurist from Islamic Spain, wrote that "A black woman may be repudiated if there is no blackness in her family; likewise a scald-head [that is, scabrous], because such things are covered by kinship." Since according to strict Muslim practice, a woman is to remain veiled and unseen by her prospective groom until they are married, the meaning of Habib's ruling is that a husband may repudiate a new wife (that is, annul the marriage) if, upon removing her veil he finds her to be black or scabrous, because both conditions were considered not only undesirable but hereditary as well.

Islamic View of Black Africans

The poet and satirist Jahiz of Basra (circa AD 776-869), in a manner not unlike that of the white defenders of slavery and colonialism who allegedly invented "race," described Africans (termed Zanj) as "the least intelligent and the least discerning of mankind, and the least capable of understanding the consequences of

actions." Like his later counterparts, Jahiz credited black Africans, "despite their dimness, their boundless stupidity, their crude perceptions and their evil dispositions," with the ability to "make long speeches."

Ibn Khaldun had this view: "The only people who accept slavery are the Negroes, owing to their low degree of humanity and their proximity to the animal stage. Other persons who accept the status of slave do so as a means of attaining high rank, or power, or wealth, as is the case with the Mameluke Turks in the East and with those Franks and Galicians who enter the service of the state [in Spain]."

In addition to the pejorative of not knowing their own fathers, practicing cannibalism, and having little understanding or intelligence, Maqdisi (circa tenth century AD) described the Zanj as "people of black color, flat noses, kinky hair." Similarly, the geographer Idrisi disparaged black Africans as having "stinking sweat" as well as a "lack of knowledge and defective minds such that men of learning are almost unknown among them." The thirteenth-century Persian writer Nasir al-Din Tusi went even further, claiming that the Zanj differed from animals only in walking on two rather than four feet, and that "Many have observed that the ape is more teachable and more intelligent than the Zanj." In addition to lack of culture and intelligence, Islamic writers also disparaged black Africans as being hypersexual, yet also filled with simple piety and carefree, happy, and with a natural sense of rhythm. Without knowing the source, one could easily believe such characterizations came from the Cotton South of the United States.

The Arabs, "like all other conquerors before and since, were reluctant to concede equality to the conquered, and for as long as they could they maintained their privileged position." In short, white European society was not the first to apply abusive stereotypes to black Africans.
