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# Early modern English understanding of Islam through the 1649 Alcoran of Mahomet

Lemiya M. Almas  
Iowa State University

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**Early modern english understanding of Islam through the 1649  
*Alcoran of Mahomet***

by

**Lemiya Mohamed Almas**

**A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS**

**Major: English (English Literature)**

**Major Professor: Faye Whitaker**

**Iowa State University**

**Ames, Iowa**

**1999**

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Graduate College  
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Lemiya Mohamed Almas

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signature redacted for privacy

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**Major Professor**

Signature redacted for privacy

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**For the Major Program**

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**For the Graduate College**

In memory of my grandfather, who would have been so proud of me

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I will miss you all.

THE  
ALCORAN  
OF  
MAHOMET

Translated out of *Arabique* into *French*;

BY THE

*Sieur Du Roy*, Lord of  
*Malenair*, and Resident for the  
King of *France*, at

ALEXANDRIA.

*And newly corrected for the Satisfaction of  
all those who are desirous to see the  
original.*

Printed

1649

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 1998, the second semester of my Fulbright Program of study in the English Department at Iowa State University, particularly during the course of English 533 (Readings in British Literature and Culture), and specifically while reading John Milton's *Paradise Lost* I experienced a "Muse." Throughout English 533 we had tackled the demands of entering the minds of people from a distant time and place, namely that of English Literary Renaissance, through the canonical, newly canonical, and not-yet-canonical writing of the designated historical moment. Through the wealth of available literature produced in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>C, came the realization that the people of Early Modern England were eager to receive new currents of knowledge in all aspects of life. I was immediately curious to know how they learnt about Islam and what sources dealing with Islam were available to them.

In search of sources that dealt with Islam in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>C I came across Samuel Chew's *The Crescent and the Rose*. Chew's book is best likened to a catalog where he manages to list a great number of works written prior to and during Early Modern England that dealt primarily with Islam. Of the thousands of sources that Chew listed one was of particular interest to me, namely the first English translation of the *Koran* in 1649. With the help of my major professor and the staff in the microform room at Parks Library, I was able to obtain a copy of *The 1649 Alcoran of Mahomet*, and decided to explore Early Modern English Understanding of Islam through it.

The final objective was to obtain a general view of Islam in Early Modern English thought through the various questions that the translation raised. Curiosities such as:

- the lack of imprint on the title page
- the anonymity of the translator



- the inclusion of preliminaries to the translation by translator
- the consistency of Islam being referred to as the religion of the Turks
- the misconceptions about Islam that the 1649 *Alcoran* may have influenced, and possible reasons therefore.

I ended up with 5 chapters, excluding this introduction. Briefly, each chapter deals with the following:

Chapter Two briefly introduces the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* and its various sections. It also offers a detailed analysis of the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator's summary of Islam and examines it against Islam as Muslims know it. The objective of this chapter is to portray the erroneous picture of Islam and speculate on the possible reasons therefore.

In Chapter Three chosen verses from the 1649 translation are compared to more accurate contemporary translations, for the purpose of arguing and providing evidence that the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* does not capture the literal sense of the original in Arabic. This chapter does not aim at placing responsibility for the manipulation of Muslim Doctrine on the 1649 English translator.

In Chapter Four the translator's note to the Christian reader and Alexander Ross's appendix are analyzed to reveal possible fears linked to the lack of imprint on the title page.

Through what is known today about Christian conversion to Islam in Early Modern English thought, Chapter Five sets out to prove that similar notions were still prevalent during the appearance of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*. This is attempted through a close look at the translator's note to the Christian reader and Ross's appendix.

The final chapter, which is the conclusion to this thesis, looks back at what the previous chapters have dealt with, in addition to the haunting questions that still remain unanswered and ways to approach them.

## CHAPTER 2. ISLAM AS PRESENTED BY THE TRANSLATOR THROUGH “A SUMMARY OF THE RELIGION OF THE TURKS”

In Early Modern England there existed misconceptions of Islam and after 1649 one of the primary sources that shaped and perpetuated misconceptions was the first English translation of the *Koran*, which appeared that year bearing the curious title page: *The Alcoran of Mahomet Translated out of Arabique into French; by the Dieur Du Rjer, Lord of Malezair, and Resident of the King of France, at Alexandria. And newly Englished, for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish Vanities printed in London in Anno Dom. 1649.* For almost a century this translation was the only available English translation, after the Latin version translated from Arabic during the Crusades.

The 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* starts with various brief preliminaries. The first is the English translator's address to the Christian reader entitled, “The Translator to the Christian Reader,” followed by a three-page summary of Turkish religion.” A Summary of the Religion of the Turks” is followed by the French translator's address to the reader entitled “The French Epistle to the Reader” and documents signed by Turkish officials in Alexandria that protected the French translator during his route back to France. Next is the table of contents of the one hundred and fourteen chapters of the *Koran* and the English version of the *Koran*, occupying 394 pages. The 1649 translation closes with a short biography of Mahomet, and “A needful Caveat or Admonition for them who desire to know what use may be made of, or if there be danger in reading the *Alcoran*, by Alexander Ross.”

The title page of the 1649 translation states that its purpose was to provide the Early Modern English audience an insight into Turkish vanities. Likewise, the section in the translation entitled "A Summary of the Religion of the Turks," which will be dealt with in the course of this chapter, refers to Islam as being the religion of the Turks. This consistency in reference to Islam, though Islam originated in Arabia and not Turkey, could have been for one of many reasons. The Ottomans controlled most of Arabia in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century, and so Arabians were synonymous with Turks to Europe and Early Modern England. Another reason was that Early Modern England was well aware of the power and threat of the Ottoman Empire in Europe, and to them, as to the rest of Europe, the Turks were the main source of knowledge about Islam. And Samuel Chew points out, in *The Crescent and the Rose* (1937), that England's interest in starting trade with the Turks was evidently growing but it was not until 1575 that trade with the Ottoman ports began to regularize (Chew, 157).

Generally speaking the Ottoman Empire, also known as the Turkish Empire, was established in western Anatolia early in the fourteenth century by the Turkish tribal chieftain Othman. As this empire grew by conquering lands of the Byzantine Empire and beyond, it came to include all of Asia Minor; the countries of the Balkan Peninsula; the islands of the eastern Mediterranean; parts of Hungary and Russia; Iraq, Syria, the Caucasus, Palestine and Egypt; part of Arabia; and all of North Africa through Algeria. Still powerful in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, it was ruled by three Sultans: Bayezid II (1481-1512), Selim I (1512-20), and Suleyman I the Magnificent (1520-1566). Bayezid extended the Empire in Europe, added outposts along the Black Sea and put down revolts in Asia Minor. He also turned the Ottoman

fleet into a major Mediterranean naval power. Late in life he became a religious mystic and was displaced on the throne by his more militant son, Selim I. During Selim's short reign the Ottomans moved south—and eastward into Syria, Mesopotamia (Iraq), Arabia, and Egypt. At Mecca, the chief shrine of Islam, Selim took the title of caliph, ruler of all Muslims. The Ottoman sultans were thereafter the spiritual heads of Islam, thereby displacing the centuries-old caliphates of Baghdad.

Through acquiring the holy places of Islam, Selim cemented his position as the religion's most powerful ruler. This gave the Ottomans direct access to the rich cultural heritage of the Muslim World. Leading Muslim intellectuals, artists, artisans, and administrators came to Istanbul from all parts of the Arab World, and made the empire much more of a traditional Islamic state than it had been. An added benefit of Selim's efforts was control of all Middle Eastern trade routes between Europe and the Far East. The growth of the power had for sometime been an impediment to European trade, and this led European states to seek routes around Africa to China and India.

Elizabeth I came to the throne of England in 1558 during the zenith of Suleyman I the Magnificent's power, when the Ottoman Empire was at the height of its political power and close to its maximum geographical extent. Suleyman, Selim's surviving son, came to the throne in an enviable situation. New revenues from the expanded empire left him with wealth and power unparalleled in Ottoman history. In his early campaigns he captured Belgrade (1521) and Rhodes (1522) and broke the military power in Hungary in 1529 and Tripoli (now Libya) in 1551. In more peaceful pursuits he adorned the chief cities of Islam with mosques, aqueducts, bridges, and

other public works. In Constantinople he had several mosques built, among them the magnificent *Suleymaniye Cami* named after him.

Early Modern English trade with Turkey, and hence their contact with the Turks, did not start until late after 1453 when the Turks captured Constantinople. According to Chew there was little trade between England and the Levant because England faced a lot of hostility from the two Italian republics, Genoa and Venice, and at a later date Marseilles, in the form of the high duties imposed at certain ports, the illegal and less unavoidable exactions of unscrupulous Turkish officials and the danger from pirates (Turkish, Moorish, Algerine, Maltese and Greek). So in essence the attempt to establish commercial relations with the Turks was sporadic. It was only when the Anglo-Spanish relations grew more strained that Elizabeth saw in the Sultan a potential ally. She managed to send her ambassador to convince the Turks to threaten the *Spanish Armada* just as they were getting ready to attack England. Whether this move by Elizabeth was part of the reason why she was excommunicated and considered a Turkish ally by the European states is still a question for speculation. But it is worth mentioning that in 1559, at a time when Turkish naval activity in the Mediterranean had been noticeably—and ominously—on the increase, and though much of it was centered on the North African Coast and so somewhat outside Venice's direct sphere of interest, the Turkish threat was nevertheless near enough to cause Venice misgivings. War preparations in Venice proceeded apace and Christian states were appealed to by Venice but the responses were less enthusiastic, and "No appeal was addressed to Queen Elizabeth, who had been under sentence of excommunication since February" (Norwich, 469).

Elizabeth's hostility towards Venice and their hostility towards her was evident during this period and Chew points out Elizabeth as being reported by her first envoy to Morocco, Edward Hogan, to have said that "she and the Great Turk were alike enemies of idolaters" (qtd. in Chew, 104). Chew quotes Hakluyt as saying that Edward Hogan added that the Great Turk "beareth a greater affection to our Nation than to others because of our religion, which forbiddeth worship of idols" (qtd. in Chew, 104).

The history of the Ottoman Empire and its conquests were well cemented in the minds of the Early Modern English audience of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*. This audience would have been familiar with a proliferation of treatises produced by travelers during sixteenth century, some of which were general in character while others dealt particularly with the Ottoman Empire. Chew lists a wide variety of those treatises dealing particularly with the Ottomans such as: Abraham Hartwell's translation *The Ottoman of Lazaro Soranzo. Wherein is delivered as well and full and perfect report of the might and power of Mahamet the Third Great Emperour of the Turkes now reigning* (1603); and Richard Knolles's (c.1550-1610) *The Generall Historie of the Turkes, from the first beginning of that Nation to the rising of the Othoman Familie: with all the notable expeditions of the Christian Princes against them. Together with the Lives and Conquests of the Othoman Kings and Emperours. Faithfully collected out of the best Histories, both ancient and moderne, and digested into one continual Historie until this present yeare 1603*. Knolles was noted to have used among other historical works on the Turkish Empire Ashton's *Shorte treatise*

*upon the Turkes Chronicles* (1446) which was a main source of information regarding the Ottoman Empire available to the Elizabethans (Chew, 111-112).

As a result of these treatises the prevalent image the Early Modern English audience of the 1649 translation had of the Turks was that of power and arrogance. There is no doubt that history, in the past and even today, portrays the Turks during the zenith of the Ottoman Empire as powerful and arrogant and as an example consider the following letter from Selim to Venice:

Selim, Ottoman Sultan, Emperor of the Turks, Lord of Lords, King of Kings, Shadow of God, Lord of the Earthly Paradise and of Jerusalem, to the Signory of Venice:

*We demand of you Cyprus, which you shall give us willingly or perforce, and do not wake our horrible sword, for we shall wage most cruel war against you everywhere: neither put your trust in your treasure, for we shall cause it suddenly to run from you like a torrent.*

*Beware, therefore, lest your arouse our wrath...* (qtd. in Norwich, 464)

There is no doubt that the letter above echoes a tone that reeks of confidence, arrogance and threat towards its addressee, qualities associated with those who possess power. Hence, the translator in providing an in-depth study of the "Turkish Vanities" through his translation of their doctrine is perhaps aiming at making his audience see the Turks in a different light. In other words, seeing Turkish power as vanity, and accordingly in his address to the Christian reader he presents his translation as "the Ground-work of the religion of the Turks," and describes the *Koran* as "... rude, and incongruous...so farced with contradictions, obscene speeches, and ridiculous fables" (n.p.n). In other words, any empire based on such a book as the *Koran* deserved to be called anything but powerful. So, in essence the translator's



objective in presenting the *1649 Alcoran of Mahomet* is to argue the long held Early Modern English notion that the Ottomans were powerful, and have his audience's question that image and see the Turks through his eyes.

A careful analysis of "A summary of the Religion of the Turks" reveals the 17thC translator's fragmented, biased and erroneous presentation of Islam to his Early Modern English audience. The fragmented fashion in which the translator presents his material on Islam, as shown through the brevity of the summary and its lack of detail, suggests the translator's limited knowledge of Islam. Also, the translator's limited knowledge of Islamic theology and terminology constantly forces him to use his own Christian background in interpreting Islamic beliefs and rituals. In the summary the translator also presents misconceptions about Islam side by side with accurate interpretations, and the identification of such instances in the summary brings to light the erroneous picture the translator has portrayed.

Evidence to support the translator's use of Christian theology to interpret Islam occurs in the opening of "A Summary of the Religion of the Turks " which starts with the following:

The Turks believe one sole God, in one sole Person, Creator of heaven and earth, the rewarder of the good, and punisher of the wicked; who hath created Paradise for the recompense of the righteous, and Hell for the last punishment of crimes. They believe that *Mahomet* was a very great Prophet, whom God sent into the world to teach men the way of salvation, and call themselves Musulmaes, that is to say, recommended to God, or save. (n.p.n)

Here the opening clause bears a striking resemblance to the Nicene Creed, which begins: "We believe in one God, The Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, Of

all things visible and invisible..." This similarity could have been an advantage to both the translator and his target audience, in that it served as a medium for comparison in dealing with religious concepts unknown to both the translator and his audience. And this could have also been the reason for the translator using Christian theology and terminology. For speaking of the unfamiliar using familiar theology and terminology helped both the translator and his audience gain an insight into the difference between Christianity, as preached in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>C England, and the "religion of the Turks." There always exists the possibility that the translator's familiarity with Islamic theology and terminology was extremely deficient.

Another instance in the summary where the translator interprets Islam through Christian theology is his use of the word "salvation" in talking about the purpose for the advent of Islam through Prophet Mohamed (Peace Be Upon Him): "They believe that Mahomet was a great Prophet, whom God sent into the world to teach men the way of salvation (n.p.n)." And the summary is peppered with the translator's use of Christian terminology as will be observed through the further analysis of the summary, but the simplest example would be the translator's use of the word "Temple" in talking about Muslim place of worship, instead of the correct word *mosque*. According to the O.E.D the word *mosque* was used as early as the 1400's in reference to Muslim place of worship. It was also used by Sir T. Roe in *Negotiations* (1624) where he talks about "the building of so many Mahometan moschyas." So, *mosque* was a term used at the time the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator wrote the summary of Islam, but it would have been very likely that his Early Modern English audience would have been more familiar with the word "Temple," which is biblical and used in

reference to Jews and pagans in the Old and New Testaments, than they would have been with the correct term *mosque*.

The translator's use of the word "Person" in the opening of the summary, quoted previously, is a fore-grounding of the Muslim "denial," as the summary puts it, of the Holy Trinity, a central Christian belief defined in the Nicene Creed. The unity of the Godhead in the *Koran* is best shown through the translation of the following verse from the 112<sup>th</sup> chapter in the *Holy Koran* (Suraat Al-Ikhlās):

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious Most Merciful

Say: He is Allah, The One;  
Allah, The Eternal, Absolute;  
He begetteth not, nor is he begotten;  
And there is none, like unto Him. (112)

This chapter from the *Holy Koran* and specifically the verse "He begetteth not, nor is he begotten," is in clear and direct opposition to the proclamation: "Begotten not made," in the Nicene Creed. The conflict between Christians and Muslims over the birth of Jesus and his status in respect to God—God, Son of God or Prophet—was one that continued from the Crusades. According to Mayer's *The Crusades*, the theory that Muslims were idol worshippers had been losing currency since the middle of the twelfth century. There was no question as to whether Muslims were rigorous monotheist and hostile to image worship. It is obvious not only from Elizabeth's speech mentioned earlier but also from the summary that claims that Muslims believe in "one sole God." Marcia Colish in *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition 400-1400* says that:

Islam joined Judaism and Christianity in professing monotheism, the belief in divine creation out of nothing, and a way of

combining public and private prayer, almsgiving, and social as well as personal ethics. . . But they thought that Christianity had departed from strict monotheism in its doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ. Other teachings of Christ, viewed as uniquely privileged prophet of God, they deemed worthy of respect. (128)

The conflicting views between Christians and Muslims regarding Jesus's status—Prophet, God or Son of God—is presented and expressed by the translator in the following quote from the summary of Islam:

They deny Jesus Christ to be God; neither believe they in the holy Trinity: they say that Jesus Christ was a great prophet, born of the Virgin Mary both before and after her delivery; that he was conceived by divine inspiration, or by a divine breath, without a father, as Adam was created without a mother; that he was crucified, that God took him into heaven, and that he shall come again, on earth at the end of the world to confirm the law of Mahomet; they likewise affirm that the Jews thinking to crucifie Jesus Christ, crucified a man among them that resembled him. (n.p.n)

Mayer adds that from the Christian point of view, the Muslim error lay not so much in their concept of God as in their attitude to Christ. The emphasis in the first two phrases, "The Turks believe one sole God, in one sole Person," is a confirmation of the contrast between Muslim belief and Christian belief as documented in the Nicene Creed. This argument is clearly prevalent in Early Modern England at the time when the 1649 translation of the *Koran* appeared.

In the translator's point of view the reason for the advent of Islam through Mohamed (p.b.u.h), who came to teach the salvation of man, was because through the translation of the Bible a lot had been lost from the original Holy Scriptures and the

Law of Go, “they believe that the *Alcoran* was brought to him at severall times by the Angel Gabriel, in the city of Mecca, and that of Medina, because the Jews and the Christians had altered the holy Scriptures, and the Law of God” (n.p.n).

That Mohamed (p.b.u.h) came for the salvation of mankind is not altogether wrong from the Muslim point of view. The translator’s use of the word “salvation” is problematic, for Mohamed (p.b.u.h) does not create salvation for Muslims as Jesus does for Christians, but rather the *Koran* brings clear messages for salvation.

The definition the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator provides for the word *Musulmaes*, or Muslims as they are called today, as those “recommended to God, or saved” further reflects the Christian translator’s obsession with salvation, and the projection of his Christian beliefs onto his interpretation of Islam. Furthermore, the definition of Muslims as being “recommended to God or saved” ties in well with the so-called “vanities of the Turks,” which appears on the title page of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*. For centuries, Christians considered Christianity to be the one true religion and for them it was a source of pride. But while Early Modern English Christians did not hesitate to believe in the singularity of their own religion they interpreted similar beliefs when held by the Turks as vanity.

In addition to the translator using Christian theology and terminology in interpreting Islam in the summary, he also merges misconceptions and accurate interpretations of Islam together. This convoluted portrayal of material on Islam presents a confusing and inaccurate picture of the religion. Juxtaposing the translator’s misconceptions against the reality of Muslim faith helps to illustrate the

distortions about Muslims presented by the translator in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*.

As expressed in the summary Muslim's do believe in one sole God "Allah" and Allah is: ". . .Creator of heaven and earth, the rewarder of the good, and punisher of the wicked; who hath created Paradise for the recompense of the righteous, and Hell for the last punishment of crimes" (n.p.n). Also true is the manner in which the *Koran* was brought to Mohamed (p.b.u.h). Mohamed (p.b.u.h), as expressed in the summary, was given verses of the *Koran* by the Angel Gabriel in the course of twenty-three years. These verses were later on put together into a book known as the *Holy Koran*, "...they believe that the *Alcoran* was brought to him at severall times by the Angel Gabriel, in the City of Mecca, and that of Medina..." (n.p.n). Yet no detailed account of the life and death of Mohamed (p.b.u.h) is included in the summary, but in a section that appears near the end of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* entitled "The Life and Death of Mahomet the Prophet of the Turks and Author of the *Alcoran*." From a Muslim point of view, this section is a very detailed but biased account of Prophet Mohamed (p.b.u.h) which makes such claims as that of. Mohamed's mother being a Jew, which apart from being a degrading term when used by a 17<sup>th</sup> century Christian is an utter misconception. So are misleading facts such as that of Mohamed (p.b.u.h) traveling as far as Corozan, which according to available records on his life, he never did.

Truth regarding Mohamed's (p.b.u.h) life, as Muslims know it, is that Mohamed (p.b.u.h) was born in Mecca in about 570. Most of the people in Arabia at the time were members of clans, which were themselves parts of tribes. Mohamed (p.b.u.h)

was born into the Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe. His father had died before he was born, and his mother died six years later. He was put into the care of the head of the clan, his grandfather, Abd Al-Muttalib, then into the care of Abd al-Mutalib's successor, Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle. Although, these facts of Mohamed's (p.b.u.h) life are mentioned in the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator's section on Mohamed's (p.b.u.h) biography, they are presented in a biased form. For instance Mohamed's (p.b.u.h) uncle Abu-Talib is referred to as being "...of vile condition and unable to give him [Mohamed] education above the common ignorance and irreligion of his country." Another example is about Khadijah, the Prophet's first wife, and it is in reference to when she, on realizing that her husband was ill with what is referred to as the "falling sickness," laments:

...to see herself yoked to one so diseased, and tormented with an hideous infirmity, he excused it, and easily wrought in her a belief, that being constrained frequently to converse with the Angel Gabriel, his fraile body, unable to abide the splendor of his heavenly presence, fell into that distemper, and at the departure of the divine Ambassador, recovered its former condition. (n.p.n)

Khadijah, in the above quote is portrayed as a woman easily giving in to her husband's explanations, for the purpose of retaining the reverence that his family and neighbors held for him. Yet, among Muslims, Khadijah is known to have given Mohamed (p.b.u.h) advice on many an occasion, and during their married life she was his best advisor and comforter.

Returning to the focus of this chapter, "A Summary of the Religion of the Turks", the summary also touches upon the fact that Muslims believe in all prophets starting from Adam (p.b.u.h). On the first page of the summary the translator points

out that Muslims are required to observe the Ten Commandments of Moses (p.b.u.h): “They believe the Decalogue of *Moses*, and are obliged to observe it...” (n.p.n). Concerning Muslim belief in all Prophets starting from Adam Colish says: “The Muslims regarded their faith as the full, and final, expression of a religious tradition that had begun with Judaism and Christianity, sharing the belief that God reveals His will and moral law in history through His prophets” (Colish, 129). Though this notion is not explicitly expressed in the summary, it is hinted at through the mentioning of Moses and later on Jesus on the third page.

Islam has five pillars or central tenets which proceed in the following order from the first which is Profession of Faith (that there is one God and Mohamed is his Prophet); to the second, which is Prayer; to the third, which is Fasting; onto the fourth, Alms Giving (*Zakat*); to the fifth and final pillar, which is Pilgrimage. The translator attempts to address all of the five pillars in the summary of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*, but his attempt is futile. Because he is obviously not aware of them being central tenets of Islam, he presents these crucial pillars as observations, in other words rituals that he has seen Muslims perform without knowing the significance thereof. Furthermore, these essential elements of belief are related in a very fragmented fashion as will be shown.

The first two pillars mentioned in the summary—prayer and fasting—are discussed as observations on the first page of the summary.

They are obliged to pray five times a day, viz. In the morning, at noon, at the evening, when the sun setteth, and an hour within night... They fast the month, or moon, which they call Ramazan; during this month, they neither drink nor eat all the day, until the sun be set, but in the night drink and eat, according to their



appetites, flesh and fish, except the flesh of swine, and wine, that is at all times forbidden them; after this fast they have the feast of *Bairan* as the Christians Easter after Lent. (n.p.n)

The details included in the quote above regarding prayer and fasting are true. Muslims pray five times a day—dawn, noon, evening, sun set and at night before midnight. But the washing ritual that is performed as a prerequisite for prayer is not mentioned until the third page of the summary, along with added biased misconceptions. Of the washing ritual necessary for prayer, the summary accompanying the 1649 translation says: “They believe that after being well washt, saying some prayer appropriate to that Ceremony; they have also the soul purified from all filthiness and sinne, which is the cause that they wash and bathe often, especially before they pray” (n.p.n).

The translator does not know three things about the washing ritual. First, he is unaware it is a prerequisite to prayer, so he mentions the washing ritual as a point separate from his previous point on prayer. Second, he does not understand the two forms of washing rituals; and third he misapprehends their relevance. For this reason, there appears to be a parallelism in the translator’s attempt to describe the Muslim washing ritual and baptism. Christian infant baptism was a requirement of the state and Church of England, and was considered to be the only way to be purified from original sin and be fit to enter heaven. Baptism, which is a one-time Christian ritual, is done once in the life time of a Christian but the Turks “wash and bathe often” because they are never baptized as Christians are and hence are not fit to enter heaven because they, the Turks, are full of “...filthiness and sinne.” Therefore,

equating the Islamic ritual of washing before prayer with baptism the actual significance of the washing ritual is lost. Muslims perform the washing ritual to symbolically, as well as physically, separate themselves from the daily marks of normal life and work and prepare themselves to enter into the presence of God.

The profession of faith which is accurately stated in both Arabic and English as: "La ilha illa allha Mehemat rasoul allha, that is, There is but one God, Mahomet is his Prophet and Apostle," confusingly appears together in a paragraph that talks about sacraments. The summary claims, however, that Islam considers circumcision to be sacrament which is performed on boys as soon as they are able to pronounce the profession of faith:

They have no Sacrament, but Circumcision; they cause their children to be circumcised at the age of seven or eight years; and when they can pronounce these words, *La ilha illa allha Mehemet rasoul allha*, that is, There is but one God, *Mahomet* is his Prophet and Apostle... (n.p.n)

Islam has no sacraments, whereas Protestant England had two, the Reformation having rejected the seven sacraments of the Roman rites. Colish observes that "Islam also shared with Judaism the circumcision of males to signify their membership in the religious community, and dietary restrictions, in this case abstention from pork and alcoholic beverages" (129). Though Muslims practice circumcision, it is neither a sacrament nor a mandatory practice, as baptism was for Protestant England. In fact, Islam has no ordained clergy, and theoretically anyone considered competent can be called upon to deliver the Friday sermon. These instances of imposing Christian theology to provide reasons behind Muslim practices reveals the ethnocentric character of the Early Modern English translator.

Alms Giving, an obligatory tax and another pillar of Islam, is indirectly mentioned in the summary as follows: "They are great founders of Temples and Hospitals, and they are obliged to give to the poor the first days of the year, the tithe of what they have gained during the preceding year" (n.p.n). Not only does the above quote attempt to describe the fourth pillar of Islam but it also attempts to explain what is known in Islamic terminology as *Waqf*. *Waqf* is a religious endowment, a property giving revenue, as regulated by Islamic law. The revenues are used to finance mosques, and other religious institutions.

The fifth pillar of Islam, is not mentioned until the third, and last page of the summary, separate from the four mentioned previously. This last pillar is described as:

They have *Mecca* and *Medina*, that are two Cities of *Arabia*, in great veneration, because Mahomet was born at Mecca, and buried at Medina; they make thither great pilgrimages, and believe that Land to be Holy: they bear likewise singular respect to the City of Jerusalem, for that it hath been the Birth-place, and hath been of many Prophets. (n.p.n)

This fifth pillar, which is interpreted accurately in the above quote, is pilgrimage or *hajj* which is an annual Muslim rite that every Muslim is expected to take part in at least once in a lifetime. All of the five pillars of Islam are mentioned briefly in the summary but their presentation lacks the details that would help the 1649 audience of the translation to recognize their significance.

The existence of different sects in Islam, like the five pillars, is poorly understood by the translator. There are two major divisions in Islam--*Sunnah* and *Shi'ah*. A major difference from *Sunnite* emphasis was the emergence of "passion

history” among the followers of *Shi’ah*, comparable in many ways to the Passion Plays about the life of Jesus, and the whipping of nuns and priests to experience the suffering of Christ through physical torture. In *Shiite* tradition the violent death in 680 of Ali’s son, Hussein, is celebrated annually with orations, plays and processions. And this practice is described in the summary as follows:

They have moreover another sort of Religious Vagabonds through the world, clothed like fools of that Country; they often go naked, and cut their skin in many places, are held to be holy persons, and live by alms, which are never refused them; both the one and the other sort of Religious are called *Dervis*, they are known by their habit, and can retire and marry when they please.  
(n.p.n)

The summary mentions the *Dervis*, a people of the Mevlevi sect, known as the *Sema*. The Muslim priests of this religious group perform a serious religious ritual in a prayer trance to Allah. The *Dervis* branched from the Sufi Islamic practice, which consists of both Sunnis and Shiites, and in fact most Sufis were from the former major division. This variety of practice in Islam and its history are clearly unknown to the 17thC translator.

In addition to the translator’s observation of religious rituals that Muslims perform, the translator touches upon some observations regarding the nature of Muslim life. That Muslims do not use clocks to tell the time portrays them as still living primitive life styles compared to the flourishing and advancing technology of the modern life of Early Modern England and Europe in general: “They use no Clocks; at the hour of their prayers their Priests ascend the highest part of the Tower, that is in the corner of the Temple, and with aloud voyce call the people to prayer, singing

prayers, composed for that purpose" (n.p.n). In connection to the telling of time in Early Modern England, Abbot says, "During this period domestic clocks and pocket watches became familiar, though not common" (15-16). The 17<sup>th</sup>C translator does not realize that Muslims preferred to tell the time of prayer through the position of the sun, rather than use watches or clocks. The concept of time was a very familiar one to Muslims and they adhered to a very strict prayer schedule.

From the primitive Muslim method of telling the time, the translator moves on to other issues about Muslim life and devotes a large portion of the summary to the marriage laws as practiced by the Turks and supposedly practiced by all other Muslims:

They are permitted to have four wives, married at the same time, and as many Concubines as they are able to maintain...They can put away their wives when they think fit, paying them what they promised them in contract of marriage, and marry again at their pleasure but the women are bound to tarry until they are assured that they are not with childe before they marry again; and their husbands .are obliged to keep, and take care of the children. The children that they have with their slaves are reverently esteemed with those of their wives, and are all held as legitimate. (n.p.n)

Abbot points out that according to the laws of both Church and state, marriage created a relationship between man and wife which was exclusive and dissoluble only by death. Hence, the idea of marrying four women at the same time would have been an appalling concept to Early Modern England. Christian monogamous tradition also played a major part in Early Modern England's opinions of polygamous marriages among Muslims.

It has been shown through the close analysis of "A Summary of the Religion of the Turks" the 1649 translator's inaccurate portrayal of Islam. The translator lacked knowledge of the broader Muslim world, relied on his fear of the Turkish Empire at the same time, as he ventured to address the topic of little familiarity and for which he could not accept great praise. But truth remains that the deficient and distorted view of Islam given through the summary in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mohamet*, and through the translation of the *Koran* itself, as will be discussed in the following chapter, shaped Early Modern English attitudes about Islam.

### CHAPTER 3. POSSIBLE REASONS FOR MISTRANSLATION AND MISINTERPRETATION OF MUSLIM DOCTRINE IN THE 1649 *ALCORAN OF MAHOMET*

In the previous chapter the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator's erroneous and distorted portrayal of Islam through the analysis of "A summary of the Religion of the Turks" was illustrated. The objective of this chapter is to examine the translation itself and show that the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* does not follow the original *Koran* in Arabic with close fidelity and sometimes misses the sense of the original altogether. This will be attempted through the comparison of selected verses from the 1649 English translation to the same verses from fairly accurate contemporary English translations. But before embarking on this comparative study, it is necessary to look into the very first translation of the *Koran* into a European language, the 1143 Latin translation, that may have been available to both the Early Modern English translator of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* and his audience.

The very first European language the *Koran* was translated into was Latin. Hans Eberhard Mayer's *The Crusades* claims that the *Koran* was translated in 1143 when Peter the Venerable, abbot-general of Cluny, had the *Koran* translated into Latin by the Englishman Robert of Ketton. With Peter's Latin translation Muslim doctrine was, for the first time, made available to the Christian world. Now, why did Peter the venerable have the *Koran* translated? According to Mayer, Peter's purpose for the translation was his preference for peaceful persuasion to the force of arms in dealing with Muslims: "I attack you not with arms, as many of us often do, but with words, not with force but with reason, not with hate but with love...I love you; out of

love I write to you and with the help of the Scriptures I show you the way to salvation” (qtd. in Mayer, 230).

The 17thC translator’s purpose in translating the Muslim doctrine into English is parallel to Peter’s and will be dealt later on in this chapter. For centuries, Peter’s Latin translation of the *Koran* was the only translation of Muslim doctrine available to learned Europe, including England of course, Latin being the language of the learned in England.

The reliability of the 1143 Latin translation can only be evaluated by one proficient in both the Arabic language and Latin and thus able to appreciate the sense of the *Koran* in its original language and measure the Latin version against it. The lack of the aforementioned skills on my part leads me to draw upon the criticism of other scholars like Arthur J. Arberry and Samuel Chew. Arberry in *The Koran Interpreted* says about Peter the Venerable’s Latin translation:

The first rendering of the *Koran* into a western language was made by the English scholar Robertus Retenesis in the twelfth century, at the instance of Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny; it was complete in 1143, and enjoyed considerable circulation in manuscript. Exactly four centuries later this mediaeval Latin version was published at Basle, the editor being Theodore Bibliander (Buchmann) of Zurich. It abounds in inaccuracies and misunderstandings, and was inspired by hostile intention; nevertheless it served as the foundation of the earliest translations into modern European idioms. (7)

And Chew in *The Crescent and the Rose* provides a detailed account regarding the Latin translation. Chew claims that during a journey through Spain Peter observed the growing power of Muhammedanism and became convinced of the need for better-instructed propaganda against Islam. For if Christian scholars were no longer to



attack blindly a body of doctrine with which they were only acquainted through ill-report they must have a first-hand knowledge of that whereof they spoke. To supply this want, Chew continues, Abbot Peter engaged an Arab and three Christians who knew, or claimed to know, Arabic to translate the *Koran*. Yet, the anti-Islamic mood in which the heavy task of translating the *Koran* was undertaken did not encourage accuracy nor was the state of scholarship such as to insure it, continues Chew, and the outcome was:

Notoriously full of errors of translation and reveals no effort to reproduce sympathetically the stylistic features which in any case can be rendered only approximately and with difficulty in a European language. Supplementary to the text Peter composed a refutation of Muhammedanism. (434)

Obviously Chew knew Latin well, and his comment on Peter's translation suggests that he could have read the 1143 Latin translation. His comment on the difficulty of subjecting the Arabic language of the *Koran* to translation into a European language, also hints at the possibility of him knowing Arabic, but no known records confirm this possibility. But, regarding the reliability of the Latin translation both Arberry and Chew's comments confirm that it was unreliable and governed by anti-Islamic intentions.

The 1143 Latin translation of the *Koran* could have been available to the Early Modern English translator of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* and its audience. But the English audience of the Latin translation would have been very limited compared to that of the 1649 English translation. Latin, during 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>C England, was not as widely used as in the past and Mary Abbot in *Life Cycles in England: From Cradle to Grave* describes Latin proficiency among the people of Early Modern England.

...some familiarity with the meanings of Latin words was a prerequisite for understanding most serious books and, for academic work, a command of Latin was essential. Nevertheless readers, and hearers, who had not Latin, had access to a rich literary store. The chapbooks, cheap and crudely painted, illustrated with bold woodcut pictures and decorations, were widely read and heard: they came in two varieties—the 'godly' and the 'merry', which contained advice to the lovelorn, jokes, love stories and tales of dering-do, horoscopes and guides to palmistry. (9)

Abbot's quote above suggests that though Latin was still used in Early Modern England it was limited to academic fields, and hence was losing the weight it had held in England in the past where Latin was the language of other fields including religion. English started to be widely used among scholars to address the elite who were not proficient in Latin, and as an example Abbot comments on a scientific book written by an Early Modern physician name Edward Jorden. Jorden wrote his book, *A Brief Discourse of a disease called the Suffocation of the Mother* (1603), "Tactfully, not in Latin, the language of professional discourse, but in English, 'a vulgar tongue' and, at least formally, addressed those educated people 'who are apt to make everything a supernatural work, which they do not understand (qtd. In Abbot, 20)." In addition, it is a well known fact that the select few who knew Latin and Greek were those of the Grammar Schools of Early Modern England, which were not open to the public. So in essence, Peter's Latin translation of the *Koran* could only have been read by an Early Modern English audience proficient in Latin; but the 1649 English translation reached out and broadened its audience to encompass a wide range of Early Modern English audiences.

The 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* was, unlike Peter's Latin translation from the original language of the *Koran*, translated from the French translation by Sieur Du

Ryer. To establish the claim that the 1649 English translation follows the French version with close fidelity would require the close comparison between the two versions. But, lacking proficiency in French, I once more draw upon Chew's response to this question. Chew makes the claim that: "The anonymous English translator has followed the French version with close fidelity; and the French is reasonably faithful to the literal sense of the original" (450). Two assumptions may be drawn from Chew's statement. One assumption is that the 1649 English translation is faithful to its French source text by Sieur Du Ryer, and the second that the French captures the sense of the original *Koran* in Arabic, making the English translation equally faithful to the literal sense of the Arabic *Koran*. Chew excuses what he refers to as the "vulgarizing of the spirit and style of the book [*The Koran*]" as due to:

...lack of literary tact and skill and in part to congenital racial and religious antipathy. The strange perversions of biblical stories and characters irritated and alienated Christian readers, who ascribed to deliberate malice and calculated blasphemy what was due to misunderstanding or ignorance. (451)

Chew is clearly contradicting himself, because racial and religious antipathy can lead to the manipulation of the source text during translation and so can the alienation of Christian readers, as was the case with the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator. The previous chapter dealt with how the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator, possibly through alienation or unfamiliarity with Islamic theology and terminology resorts to what he knows, Christian theology and terminology, to talk about Islam. The outcome is a distorted image of Islam. That Chew was proficient in French and read the French translation is likely, and so is the possibility that the 1649 English translation is faithful to its French source. But as a Muslim who has appreciated the original *Koran* in Arabic I would strongly argue

Chew's second assumed claim. The 1649 translation is an extremely defective translation. And before commencing the comparative study to prove this point, the identification of the 17thC translator's attitudes towards Islam is necessary. Surely, there must have been anti-Islamic attitudes that affected the translating process and resulted in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*, being described by Ross, who is one of the readers of the 1649 translation, as being: "...a hodge-podge made of these four ingredients. 1. Of Contradictions. 2. Of Blasphemie. 3. Of ridiculous Fables. 4. Of Lyes "(n.p.n).

The 17<sup>th</sup>C translator's attitudes to Islam that may have affected his translation, will be identified through a closer look at his introductory note to the Christian reader which is the first section that his audience encounters when reading the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*. A detailed analysis of this section will be attempted in the following chapter, to identify possible fears the translator may have had that resulted in the misconstrued image of Islam in the 1649 translation. But for now, the hostile attitude towards Islam, which may have affected the 17thC translator's translating process, will be briefly discussed.

The anonymous translator's hostility towards Islam and Muslim doctrine is evident in the opening of his address to the Christian reader. He states his purpose for taking up the heavy task of translating what he refers to as "the Ground-work of the religion of the Turks," as being due to:

There being so many Sects and Heresies banded against the Truth, finding that of Mahomet wanting to the Muster, I thought good to bring it to their Colours, that so viewing thine enemies in their full body, thou mayst the better prepare to encounter, and I hope overcome them. (n.p.n)

From the onset Muslims are identified as enemies and the translation likened to a weapon with which to destroy the enemy as shown through the translator's words: "that so viewing thine enemies in their full body, thou mayst the better prepare to encounter, and I hope overcome them" (n.p.n). This purpose is parallel to that of Peter the Venerable, mentioned earlier on in this chapter, and like Peter's the translator's intentions for translating and presenting the 1649 translation to his Early Modern English audience were far from friendly.

The first mistranslation that may have been the result of the 17thC translator's hostile intention towards the source that he was translating appears in the second chapter of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*. The mistranslated verse in the chapter entitled "The Chapter of the Cow," deals with, according to Muslim interpretation, the notion that Allah does not disdain from using what humans would consider, base creatures such as gnats, flies, spiders etc. to bring across his message to the universe: "God is not ashamed to compare a little \*Puny to an extream Greatness: Now, so it is, that true believers know, that it proceedeth from their Lord" (3). The definition for the word "Puny" is provided in the margin of the same page and it is defined as "a stinking worm frequently growing in beds in hot countries." The English equivalent to the word that has been replaced by "Puny" is "gnat" a small two-winged fly, or any insect belonging to the genus *Culex*. A gnat is a very unspecific word when

compared to the very specific word "Puny." This mistranslation could have been unintentional and hence due to the translator being misinformed or intentional in that it aimed at hindering the universality of the *Koran*. In other words, by rooting koranic law and theology to a particular place, such as the hot deserts of Arabia it is a means of distancing it from the Early Modern audiences' environment, which was inversely cold. There is no doubt that Arabia was widely known, to the Early Modern English mind, as the land of deserts. Literature of the time was laden with references to the Arabian deserts, and Chew mentions some. Among the sources that Chew quotes is Richard Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (n.d) a book that considers the virtue of a change of climate as a cure for melancholy, and the deserts of Arabia are far from pleasing to the nerves because they are: "...barren, because of rockes, rolling seas of sand, and dry mountaines... uninhabitable therefore of men, birds, beast, void of all greene trees, plants and fruits, a vast rocky horrid wilderness, which by no art can be manured" (qtd. in Chew, 23). Chew claims that Richard Burton was an "arm chair traveler" who never ventured far from home, meaning England. Like Burton, the translator of the 1649 *Alcoran* thought of Arabia as the land of barren and inhabitable deserts, as is clear from his discussion of the method in which Prophet Mohamed (pbuh) lured Arabians into Islam by tempting them with the delicious fruit the Arabians lacked in the desert.

...as a sole means to allure them to a belief of it , induced first the Parents and allies of his wife, then the more ignorant and meaner sort to embrace it, and esteeme Mahomet as the Messenger of God sent to guide them into eternall felicity, and the enjoyment of Paradise, which the easier to ensnare them, he fained to be full of such pleasures as fall under sense, and a

plentiful fruition of those delights, that in those more barren and desert parts of Arabia they exceedingly wanted. (n.p.n)

The distancing of beliefs, concepts, or central themes reminds us of many Early Modern writers such as Ben Jonson and John Ford to name a few. These dramatists resorted to the same distancing method used by the 17thC translator of the *Koran* when dealing with themes that may prove offensive to the intended audience. The reason was more than likely to defend themselves against prosecution. Ben Jonson's *Volpone* was situated far from England, in Venice the merchant's paradise where the central sins were considered by an Early Modern audience to be avarice, lust and pride. John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, revolving around the sensitive theme of incest, also takes place in Venice. Just as the Jonson and Ford distanced the central themes of their works to defend themselves from being accused of social criticism, the translator used the word "Puny" instead of "gnat" to restrict koranic concepts to one area of the world away from England. It is the translator's way of saying that Islam and its doctrine were not applicable to the Early Modern audience reading it. This mistranslation also serves as a method of degradation, in that it portrays Arabia as less than habitable, and hence its people less than human.

It is relevant to point out that this mistranslation could have been due to the French source and not at all the Early Modern English translator's mistake, and this further applies to all mistranslation discussed in this chapter. But the process of translation is an interactive process between the source text and the translator, and the translator does make conscious choices during the process. For example, in

retaining the language used in theological texts, such as using words like “thou” and “thee” etc, the translator is making a conscious choice in his choice of language. Furthermore, if he was using “Puny” in a sense that his audience would have been familiar with, why does he provide a clear definition in the margin?

An example similar to the translator’s replacement of the word “gnat” with “Puny” appears in the opening verse of Chapter Four in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* entitled “The Chapter of Women.” The verse, quoted below from the 1649 translation, is completely mistranslated and misinterpreted through the insertion of the word “belly” and the notion of Arabian men swearing by the belly of their wives: “O ye people, feare your Lord that created you of one sole person, and created his wife of his rib, of whom issued many men and women. Feare God, by whom you sweare, and say the belly \* of your wives, God exactly observeth your actions” (47). The translator explains his use of the word “belly” on the margin saying, “The ancient Arabians swore by the name of God, and the belly of their wives because they feared their sterility.” It is not the insertion of the word “belly” instead of “womb” that is problematic because the two words appear to be synonymous in the O.E.D, but what is problematic is the misleading interpretation of the verse provided in the margin. A more accurate translation of the opening verse of “The Chapter of Women” mistranslated above is:

O mankind! Fear your Guardian Lord who created you from a single Person, Created, out of it, His mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; Fear Allah, through Whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and be heedful of the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you.  
(205)



The original point of the use of the word “womb” in the opening verse of the fourth chapter, replaced by “belly” by the anonymous English translator, is not remotely related to a superstitious practice as that of Arabian men swearing by the bellies of their wives. The correct interpretation of the verse is that the unregenerate male is apt, in the pride of his physical strength, to forget the all-important part the female plays in his very existence, and in all the social relationships that arise in our collective human lives. Therefore, the mother that bore a son must ever have her son’s reverence, and likewise so should the wife through whom man enters parentage. And sex which governs so much of our physical life, and has so much influence on our emotional and higher nature, deserves not our fear, or our contempt, or our amused indulgence, but our reverence in the highest sense of the term. It is with this fitting introduction that the discussion of women, orphans, and family relationships begins in the fourth chapter of the *Koran*.

The mistranslation and misinterpretation of the use of the word “belly” in the 1649 translation appears to aim at distancing koranic concepts from its Early Modern reader. The notion of men swearing by the belly of their wives was a practice unheard of in England and would sound as ridiculous as the tales of tale bearers. For Chew points out that Geoffrey Chaucer’s saying in “The Man of Law’s Prologue”<sup>1</sup> that “Merchants are the fathers of tidings and tales and that the wallets of shipmen and pilgrims are full of lies” (Chew, 3), was still prevalent in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>C England. In addition to presenting the *Koran* as laden with ridiculous references and distancing it from the intended Early Modern English audience’s practices it also served another

purpose. The notion of Arabian men swearing by the bellies of their wives also presents Muslim men as superstitious, illogical and primitive in nature and continues the inhuman image of Muslims that the 17thC translator starts with his use of the word "Puny" instead of "gnat."

Alexander Ross in his appendix to the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* describes the 1649 translation as a collection of contradictions, blasphemies, ridiculous fables, and lies. Taking up Ross's notion that the *Koran* is full of contradictions, which he explains further as meaning that: "he [Mohamed (p.b.u.h)] doth ordinarily say, and unsay the same things." Even today, readers of translations of the *Koran* develop the same reaction as Ross. The reason for such a reaction is readers' unawareness of the history of the way the *Koran* was bestowed upon Prophet Mohamed (p.b.u.h) and the Arabians. The translator's careful study of his Early Modern English readers, who more than likely knew very little about the history of Islam, could have prevented the responses similar to Ross's. The *Koran* did not literally come down as a book, or as the translator points out in his biography of Mohamed (p.b.u.h) in the 1649 translation, between the horns of a bull. The *Koran* was brought to Prophet Mohamed (p.b.u.h) as verses in the course of 23 years. Let us consider, for instance, verses where Ross may have witnessed this contradiction.

One seeming internal contradiction involves the drinking of wine. The first verse that mentions the drinking of wine appears in the fourth chapter of the *Koran* entitled "The Chapter of Women": "O ye who believe! Approach not prayers in a state of intoxication, until ye can understand all that ye say..." (4:43) translated accurately in

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<sup>1</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, "Man of Law's Prologue," ll.128.; *The House of Fame*, ll.2121

the 1649 translation as: "O you that believe, make not your prayers, being drunk, until you know what you speak" (51). It is well known among Muslims that before the descent of this verse alcohol was widely consumed at all times of the day in Arabia. But after its descent Arabians started consuming alcohol at night after the last prayer. It should be noted that this verse did not prohibit alcohol consumption completely but rather prohibited its consumption before performing prayer, one of the central tenets of Islam. Years later, the people of Arabia were then blessed with another verse that also dealt with alcohol consumption. This verse appears in the second chapter of the *Koran* entitled "The Chapter of the Cow" and reads as follows: "They ask thee concerning wine and gambling. Say: "In them is great sin, and some profit in, for men; But the sin is greater than the profit" (2: 219). This verse is translated in the 1649 *Alcoran* as: "They will enquire of thee concerning wine and of hazard; say unto them, that it is in them a great sin, and yet of utility to men; but the evil that they cause, is much greater than the profit that they reape" (20). Unlike the verse that appears in the fourth chapter prohibiting prayer during intoxication, the verse from the "Chapter of the Cow" quoted above clearly warns Arabians of the hazards of alcohol consumption and the evils it reaps, and labels its consumption sinful. The last verse that finally prohibits Muslim consumption of alcohol appears in Chapter Five entitled "The Chapter of the Table" and reads:

O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, sacrificing to stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination, --of Satan's handiwork: Eschew such (abomination) that ye may prosper.

Satan's plan is (but) to excite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the

remembrance of Allah, and from prayer: will ye then not abstain?  
(5:90-91)

Translated in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* as:

Wine, Games of hazard, Idols, Lots, and divinations are abominations, and filthy practices of the Devill, depart from him perhaps you will be righteous. The Devill desireth to sow among you dissention, and horreur, through wine, and games of hazard, to choak your remembrance of God, and of praying to him; abandon wine, and games of hazard, be obedient to God and the Prophet. (74)

For those who are unaware of the history of the *Koran*, the above verses concerning the prohibition of alcohol consumption certainly appear contradictory. Truth, as Muslims know it, is that because alcohol was widely consumed in Arabia its sudden prohibition would prove problematic. As a result, alcohol prohibition was implemented gradually to accommodate the stubborn mentality of the people of Arabia at the time of Prophet Mohamed (p.b.u.h). It is noteworthy that these verses were not mistranslated by the translator, but a marginal note regarding the manner in which the prohibition of alcohol was brought about among Muslims through such verses was necessary to avoid reactions like Ross's. This lack of clarity on the translator's part could be attributed to his own lack of knowledge in the history of the *Koran*, yet it serves to prove his initial point that the *Koran* is "...so rude, and incongruous a composure, so farced with contradictions," an opinion he clearly expresses in his address to the Christian reader.

The second point the 17thC translator and Ross bring up is that the *Koran* is full of ridiculous fables. It was probably realized that the *Koran* encompassed some of the same stories as those in the *Bible*, like the story of Adam and Eve, Moses, Jesus

etc. But it was also realized that the accounts of these “biblical stories” in the *Koran*, like Jesus’s story for instance, differed in some respects to those in the *Bible*. The koranic version would have been viewed as untrue and, indeed, blasphemous. For Ross and the Early Modern English audience of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* Christianity was the universal religion that could only be opposed by barbarous paganism which was destined to be either converted and, if not, then destroyed, and thus religious beliefs encompassed in Christian doctrine was the utter truth. Chew adds that to Early Modern Christians “any self-styled religion that had arisen since the founding of Christianity must necessarily be nothing but a treacherous offshoot from the true faith” (397). Islam clearly opposes long-held Christian beliefs, as discussed in Chapter One where in the summary the 17thC translator claims that Muslims deny “Jesus Christ to be God, or the Son of God; neither believe they in the holy Trinity.” The explanation Muslims offer regarding their belief that Jesus was not crucified, as expressed by the translator in the summary, is that Jesus ascended into heaven and God put in Jesus’ place on the cross a man who resembled him, whom the Jews finally crucified. The translator of the 1649 English translation possibly acquired knowledge of Islamic beliefs regarding Jesus through the translation of the *Koran*, which deals with these beliefs in numerous verses. The following translation of the verse from the third chapter entitled “The Chapter of the Lineage of Ioachim” in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*, are God’s words to Jesus regarding Jesus’ ascent to heaven.

O Jesus, I will cause thee to die, I will elevate thee to myself, and remove thee far from infidels, and prefer those who have obeyed thee, to infidels at the day of Judgment. That day shalt assemble

you all before me; I will judge the differences between you, and will punish the impious, in this world, and in the other. (35)

A more accurate translation of the verse above reads as follows:

Behold! Allah said: "O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee of the falsehoods of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: then shall ye all return unto Me and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute. (2:55)

The following verses in Chapter Four, "The Chapter of Women," from the 1649 translation confirm the Muslim belief that Jesus was not crucified.

Certainly they slew him not, neither crucified him, they crucified one among them that resembled him; such who doubt it are in a manifest error, and speak not but through opinion. Certainly they slew him not; on the contrary, God took him up to himself, he is Omnipotent and prudent in all his actions. (62)

The verse above regarding the Jews crucifying a man who resembled Jesus is similar in meaning to the translation of the same verse in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*. But it does not capture the different shades of tone, as this more accurate translation.

That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah"; But they killed him not, nor crucified him. Only a likeness if that was shown to them. And those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not. Nay Allah raised him unto Himself: and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise. (4: 157-158)

Thus, Muslim beliefs were clearly in opposition to long held Christian beliefs of Early Modern England as defined in the Nicene Creed discussed in the previous chapter. The koranic story of Jesus not being crucified, may have sounded to an Early Modern audience, who regarded the accounts of Jesus's crucifixion in the *Bible* to be the

truth, a "ridiculous fable." And since the crucifixion of Christ is one of the central Christian beliefs as defined in the Nicene Creed, and is behind the Christian notion of salvation, for Muslims to claim that Jesus was not crucified was a major blasphemy.

The 17thC translator's translation of the *Koran* shows that he has in some instances either eliminated or added some verses. A good example from the 1649 English translation that demonstrates both the addition and omission of verses is in Chapter Twelve entitled "The Chapter of Joseph." According to the original *Koran* Joseph master's wife has attempted to seduce him and in order to avoid her seductions he runs out of the chamber, only to be chased by his master's wife who encounters her husband at the door. On encountering her husband, she accuses Joseph of seducing her, at which point a wise member from the household is called upon to bear witness. Yet, in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* the story is somewhat different in that it is an infant in the cradle that bears witness.

She [Joseph's master's wife] met her husband behind the door, to whom she said, what other thing doth he merit, who would dishonour thine house, than to be imprisoned, and severely chastised? Lord, said *Joseph* she [Joseph's master's wife] solicited me, that infant which is in the cradle, and of thy parentage shall be witness: then the infant in the cradle said...(163)

A common European saying is that "From the mouths of babes come words of wisdom," and the manipulation of this verse could have been a result of this European notion. Whether this addition was intentional or unintentional, on the part of the translator, is open to speculation, and a look at the French source by Sieur Du Ryer would assist us in knowing whether it was a French or English mistranslation.

But considering that the addition of an infant witness was intentional, one possible reason for such an addition was probably to avoid presenting koranic stories as exactly the same as biblical ones. This aids the translator in presenting Islam as being, as Chew says, "...a bastard and a treacherous offshoot from the true faith" (397), in other words encompassing Christian beliefs but in a manipulated form, adding to the notion that the *Koran* is full of "ridiculous fables."

The exclusion of certain verses also occurs in the same chapter, "The Chapter of Joseph," in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*. The manner in which Joseph's master's wife attempts to seduce him is expressed very sensually in the original *Koran* and it is the sensual details that have been excluded in the 1649 English translation. The verse which describes Joseph's master's wife shutting the door to the chamber she and Joseph are in, and saying, according to Arthur J. Arberry's translation in *The Koran interpreted*, "Come! Take me" is omitted in the 1649 *Alcoran*. Instead the verse reads: "His master's wife became amorous of his beauty, she one day shut him into her chambers, and solicited him with love" (12:147). The sensuality that is typical of Joseph's story in the original *Koran* is toned down, to sound more like the biblical story of Joseph. This is clearly an aversion to talking about sex, possibly because what was alluring about Islam was its sensuality, which was one the reasons for Christian conversion to Islam, an issue that will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Four.

From the 17thC translator's mistranslation and misinterpretation of the *Koran* we move to another issue, the language of the 1649 translation. Linguistically the 1649 *Alcoran* is far from appealing. Unlike his previous comment about the 1649 translation capturing the sense of the original *Koran*, Chew's comment regarding its



language is to the point. Chew describes, both the French and English translations, as lacking literary tact and style and unable to capture the eloquence of the original in Arabic:

The soaring eloquence which moves Arabs to tears or to shouts of joy becomes in French, and still more in English, tasteless extravagance and bombast; the passages of homely wisdom and good counsel seem merely tedious platitudes, especially when this pedestrian version is set in contrast to the majestic language of the Authorized Version of the Bible; the figurative style, natural to the Semites, required for the transmission of something of its beauty a literary art beyond the reach of Le Sieur du Ryer and his English translator; mysteries which to the Moslems have all the allurements of the sublime unknown become merely puzzling and distracting ; historical and biographical allusions clear to the Faithful through the exegesis of a thousand years seem but wearisome digressions...(450-51)

To demonstrate the dryness and loss of poetical touch in the 1649 English translation, I will call upon Arberry's translation, which, to a degree, captures the poetical touch of the original *Koran* in Arabic. Consider the following translated verse from the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*, from the first chapter entitled "The Preface".

In the Name of God, gracious and merciful; Praised be God, gracious and merciful: King of the Day of Judgement. It is thee whom we adore; it is from thee we require help. Guide us in the right way, in the way of them that thou hast gratified; against whom thou hast not been displeased, and we shall not be misled. (3)

The same chapter entitled "The Opening" in Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted* is not as verbose as the anonymous translator's translation in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*.

In the Name of God, The Merciful, the Compassionate

Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being,  
The All-merciful, the All-compassionate,  
The Master of the Day of Doom.  
Thee only we serve;

to Thee alone we pray for succour.  
 Guide us in the straight path,  
 The path of those whom Thou has blessed,  
 Not of those against whom Thou art wrathful,  
 Nor of those who are astray. (29)

The 1649 translation of "The Opening" is full of tedious repetitions, and is linguistically unappealing when compared to Arberry's more accurate translation that captures the sense and poetical touch of the original. It is extremely difficult to illustrate the beauty of the language of the *Koran* in Arabic in any other language in the world. To Muslims, and especially Arab Muslims, the *Koran* is considered the highest form of Arabic language and literature and one of its many miracles was it was delivered from the mouth of an unlearned man, Prophet Mohamed (p.b.u.h). To appreciate the language of the *Koran* one must listen to it in its original language, and the mystic Jalal al-Din al-Rumi expressed the appreciation of the language of the *Koran* as thus:

The Koran is a bride who does not disclose her face to you, for all that you draw aside the veil. That you should examine it, and yet not attain happiness and unveiling is due to the fact that the act of drawing aside the veil has itself repulsed and tricked you, so that the bride has shown herself to you as ugly, as if to say, "I am not that beauty." The Koran is able to show itself in whatever form it pleases. But if you do not draw aside the veil and seek only its good pleasure, watering its sown field and attending on it from afar, toiling upon that which pleases it best, it will show its face to you without you drawing aside the veil. (qtd. in Denny, 148)

If anything the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* cemented into the minds of its Early Modern English reader the notion that the *Koran* was nothing but a verbose, linguistically unattractive and extravagant book. It is a small wonder that the Early Modern English audience was not impressed.

This chapter has tried to identify some of the instances from the 1649 *Alcoran* that negate Chew's assertion that the 1649 *Alcoran* follows with fidelity the literal sense of the original. The numerous manipulations and mistranslation are far too obvious to be overlooked. It is not clear at this point whether the mistranslation and misinterpretation of Muslim Doctrine was the anonymous Early Modern English translator's or Sieur Du Ryer's fault, but a comparative study of the French and English version would help in knowing who was responsible for them. But it is a fact, that for almost a century the 1649 translation shaped Early Modern England's attitudes towards Islam, for it was not until 1734 that the next version by a lawyer named George Sale was published. The distorted picture of Islam that the anonymous translator presented to his Early Modern English audience, could have been a product of the mistranslation in the French source text, his own attitudes towards Islam, lack of knowledge about Islam, or a manipulation on his part to succeed in the publication of his translation. The anonymous translator and the possible dangers of printing and introducing the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* are the themes of the oncoming chapter.

#### CHAPTER 4. THE TRANSLATOR AND THE PROBLEMS OF INTRODUCING AND PRINTING THE 1649 ALCORAN OF MAHOMET

The previous two chapters dealt with misconceptions about Islam through the mistranslation and misinterpretation of Islam in the *Alcoran of Mahomet*, and the possible reasons therefore. This chapter aims at scrutinizing the anonymous 17thc translator through his address to the Christian reader and his biography of Prophet Mohamed (p.b.u.h): "The Life and Death of Mahomet the Prophet of the Turks And The Author Of The *Alcoran*," to address his fears of presenting his 1649 translation. In addition, the ways in which the translator tailors his argument in his address to the Christian reader to avoid misunderstandings that he fears may result from his translation will also be discussed. Alexander Ross's appendix to the 1649 translation will also be examined, whenever necessary, for the same purpose.

Imagine that one is living in an age marked with, among other strife, religious strife:

...by 1640 there was widespread belief in a popishly inspired plot to undermine the English constitution. The country feared that papists had infiltrated the court: the 'Jesuited Papists' were the main villains identified in the Grand Remonstrance... The Reformation affirmed the importance of the individual conscience against the dogmas of priests: it attracted much 'popular' support from those no longer willing to accept authority without question. In the English context, Puritans held that the Elizabethan settlement of the church was not adequate, and worked from the 1645s against the ecclesiastical establishment for further reformation. They were often harassed or persecuted by authority and their religious sufferings, plus their sturdy individualism, meant they also led the struggle against the political oppression and arbitrary government. (Hughes, 91)

And in the midst of this religious turmoil among people of the same faith, in this case Christianity, it occurs to an Early Modern English translator to introduce a translation of the Holy Scriptures of another religion. Such, one can fathom, is the dilemma the translator of the *Alcoran of Mahomat* would have faced. The risk inherent in translating the *Koran* is evident from the title page where neither the translator nor printer's name appear, a circumstance which points to the need to issue a dangerous book surreptitiously.

On the issue of who the anonymous 17<sup>th</sup>C translator of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* was, many critics like Samuel Chew in *The Crescent and the Rose* inquire as to whether the translator was Alexander Ross. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography* Alexander Ross was a theologian educated at King's College in Aberdeen. He was Chaplain c.1622 to Charles I, who presented him to vicarage of Clarisbrooke. Ross published poetical works in Latin and English but no records show that he published works in French. And the translator clearly claims in his note to the Christian reader that he has translated the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* from the French: "Such as it is, I present to thee, having taken the pains only to translate it [*The Koran*] out of French" (n.p.n). It could have been possible that Ross was proficient in French, but there is a need for stronger evidence to claim that he was the translator. Furthermore, Ross had no fear of having his name printed on the appendix he wrote for the 1649 translation where his attitude toward the *Koran* is at times difficult to discern, for he at times scorns the doctrine finding it barbarous, superstitious, and heretical, and at others he admits that there is some good in it, as one might come upon "a precious stone in a dunghill" (n.p.n), and even "some jewels

of Christian virtues" (n.p.n). The question is that if Ross had no fear of acknowledging his authorship of the appendix where he promotes the reading of Muslim doctrine, why would he not have his name appear on the title page? Comparing the translator's preface to the 1649 translation with Ross's stylistic qualities in the appendix and some of his other works written during that time period may be a way to approach the question of authorship. Another approach would be to trace Ross's religious activities during the 1640s to explore the possibilities of any practical reasons he might have had for issuing or promoting a translation of Muslim Doctrine. But at this point the question of who the translator of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* remains unknown.

Unlike the question of authorship, the problems of publishing the 1649 translation are much clearer, as Ross points out in his appendix to the 1649 translation.

I know the publishing of the *Alcoran* may be to some dangerous and scandalous, dangerous to the reader, scandalous to the higher powers, who notwithstanding have cleared themselves by disliking the publishing and questioning the publishers thereof; but for the danger, I will deliver in these ensuing propositions my opinions, yet with submission to wiser judgements. (n.p.n)

Ross's statement confirms the suspicion of the lack of imprint on the title page, and opens up the question as to the propriety of licensing the translation for publication, and goes about cautiously suppressing the danger. Ross's statement quoted above, and his lengthy appendix justifying the benefits of reading Muslim doctrine, also hint at the possibility of legal measures having been taken against the publishers. So, the

translator and publisher's fear of prosecution by "the higher powers" could possibly explain the lack of imprint on the title page of the 1649 translation.

Fear of prosecution, an obvious result of existing religious conflicts prevalent in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>C England, could have possibly been one of the main reasons for the inclusion of the translator's address to the Early Modern English reader, entitled "The Translator to the Christian Reader." In this address the translator, line for line, attempts to justify his choice of introducing Muslim doctrine by translating the *Koran*, likely to be considered a heretical book by his English audience. That Islam was a religion of heretics who were clearly the enemies of Christians because of their opposition to Christian beliefs, as shown in the previous chapter, is directly expressed in the very first sentence of the address.

There being so many Sects and Heresies banded together against the Truth, finding that of Mahomet wanting to the Muster, I thought it good to bring it to their Colours, that so viewing thine enemies in their full body, thou mayst the better prepare to encounter, and I hope overcome them. (n.p.n)

To the translator and his Early Modern English audience the truth, as expressed in the previous chapter, is the beliefs enclosed in Christian doctrine, as inferred from the translator's choice of the phrase "they deny" instead of "they believe in." This is a deliberate choice, which portrays the Christian translator's opposition towards Muslim beliefs, which he sees as clearly opposing long-held Christian beliefs rather than being an independent belief system. Samuel Chew in *The Crescent and the Rose* comments on it being difficult for Christian piety to conceive of a sincere non-Christian belief. As a result, the more it was realized that the religion of Islam claimed to be of a different creed the stronger grew the belief that the founder of Islam, Mohamet (p.b.u.h) was a fraud and that his religion was heretical as well. Clearly, the

translator of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* from the onset establishes his opposition to Islamic beliefs, and cements his position as an ardent and faithful Christian to avoid any accusations that may suggest him to be otherwise.

In his opening sentence, the translator also attempts to relate the translation of the *Alcoran of Mahomet* to the lives of his Early Modern English audience. He claims that the translation serves as a tool to educate his audience about their enemies, the Turks, and eventually overcome them. This reflects the growing threat of the Ottoman Empire in Europe and the Holy Lands, which the Turks seized from the Muslims of Arabia. The 1649 translation like its predecessor, the medieval translation into Latin, addressed an audience that saw the Turks as a threat. This is clear from the title page, where the translator says that the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* was "...newly Englished for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish." And the translator consistently magnifies the threat the Turks were imposing in his note to his Christian reader through statements like the following:

It may hapily startle thee, to find him so to speak English, as if he had made some Conquest of the Nation, but thou wilt soon reject that feare, if thou consider that this his *Alcoran*, (the Ground-work of the Turkish Religion) hath already been translated into almost all Languages in Chritendome, (at least the most general, as the Latin Italian, French, etc) yet never gained any Proselyte, where the Sword, its most forcible, and strongest argument hath not prevailed...(n.p.n)

The translator in the statement above builds up fear and simultaneously reassures his audience. He reassures his audience that though they should fear the Turks they should be reassured that the Turks have not, as of yet, taken over England, and this presents the immediate need to educate his audience about the Turks and their religion as a means of protection. So, the 17thC translator, though indirectly, is



pointing at the good turn he has done his Early Modern English audience in presenting them with Muslim doctrine in a language that was accessible to them.

Though the 1649 translator hints at the favor he has done his Early Modern English audience, he is, at the same time, cautious not to present his accomplishment of translating the *Koran* as being novel accomplishment, possibly for two reasons. The first reason for the translator's cautionary statement could have been due to the well known fact that Early Modern England wanted to be in unison with, or even overcome, the advancements in the continent. In other words, if the *Alcoran of Mahomet* has been translated into other Christian languages including Latin, Italian and French, Early Modern England, until the appearance of the 1649 translation, was far behind. Apart from the translator's efforts to keep up with the advancements on the continent, he was probably afraid of being prosecuted for his first attempt to translate the *Koran* into English. The history of England is marked with persecutions of translators like John Wyclif (1324-84), William Tyndale (1484-1536) and Miles Coverdale. It is true that though many translations of the Bible have been praised, first attempts have been condemned and the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator's attempt was the first of its kind in English history. Therefore, prosecution could have been a possibility.

In the same opening statement of the translator's address to the Christian reader the fear of being misunderstood as offering another option to Christianity, to an already confused and religiously unstable audience, is implied. For this reason the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator addresses the idea of conversion directly, saying that the translation of the *Koran* into other languages has prevented conversion rather than promoted it.

He also adds, that the conversions that have occurred and are occurring are due to the Turks relying on the “Sword” rather than on rational means.

the successe of their wars, and greatnesse of their Empire, then which is more fallacious: for that which both in former, and these latter Ages hath been common to the bad with the good, cannot be a certain evidence of the justice of a Cause, or the truth of Religion. (n.p.n)

It appears that the proliferation of renegades, Christians who converted to Islam, was a well-known fact among sixteenth and seventeenth century readers of the 1649 translation and it was necessary for the translator to clear himself of any accusation that may label him as a promoter of renegades rather than a refuter. That there were renegades, Christians who converted to Islam, during the time of the publication of the 1649 translation is evident from the translator’s constant referral to them in the “Translator to the Christian Reader” as: “those of that Batch, having once abandoned the Sun of the Gospel.” Ross also goes to great measures to advise against presenting the *Alcoran* to those who are not well grounded in Christianity: “...But weak, ignorant, inconstant, and disaffected minds to the truth, must not venture to meddle with this unhallowed piece, lest they be polluted with the touch thereof...” (n.p.n). Renegades, one of the central fears the translator addressed in his 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*, and possible reasons for their conversion will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter.

From the issue of Turks gaining converts by the sword and not by the strength the translator leads the reader into his next argument—that of the *Koran* being a book:

...so rude, and incongruous a composure, obscene speeches, and ridiculous fables, that some modest and rational Mahometans have thus excused it that their Prophet wrote an hundred and twenty thousand sayings, whereof three thousand only are good, the residue (as the impossibility of the Moons falling into his sleeve, the Conversion and salvation of the Devils, and the like) are false and ridiculous. (n.p.n)

The translator's opinion regarding Muslim doctrine, unlike Ross's, is not difficult to discern. His hostility towards the outcome of his translation radiates through his use of such adjectives as "rude," "ridiculous" and "obscene." And placing the 1649 translation in its social, political and religious context and knowing who the anonymous translator was would reveal whether he had the liberty to do otherwise. But it appears that throughout his note to the Christian reader, the 17thc translator builds a cocoon of arguments in order to avoid any misconceptions that may entertain the notion that he was doing anything other than portraying his Christian contempt of Islam. This is not a malicious contempt, but more of a portrayal of his ardent faith in Christianity.

Christian attack on Islam in Western Europe has typically been through declaring Mohamed (p.b.u.h) a false prophet, and the translator of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* is no exception. In the past English writers such as John Lydgate, for example, in his last book of *The Fall of Princes* (1440) wrote of Mohamed (p.b.u.h): "This is the story off Machomat the fals prophete and how he beyng drunke was devoured among swyn" (qtd. in Chew, 398).

According to Chew, Lydgate claimed to have taken the story of Mohamed (p.b.u.h) from "bookis olde" and that he actually deviated from his principal source or maybe

even had access to the French version by Laurent de Premierfait of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*. Chew summarizes Lydgate's biography of Prophet Mohamed (p.b.u.h), occasionally using quotes from Lydgate's work.

Lydgate writes of Mohamet, "a fals prophete and a magicien," who was born in Arabia of low kindred. He was an idolater. He was the first person to use camels as a means of locomotion. In Egypt he fetched merchandise. He studied the Bible. He married in Corozan a lady named Cardigan whom he attracted by "his sotil false daliaunce;" for "he koude riht weel flatre and lie." He proclaimed that he was the Messiah, thus by his false teaching bringing the people into great error. He suffered from the falling-sickness; and this shameful affliction he explained away by telling how when Gabriel appeared to him, sent by the Holy Ghost to instruct him, so dazzling was the angel that "to stand upriht he myghte nat susteene." (398-99)

Lydgate's source may have been available and widely read by the translator and his audience. Like Lydgate, the 17thc translator, in his section about the life and death of Mohamed (p.b.u.h), is very biased and passes judgements on Mohamed (p.b.u.h) using phrases such as "vicious Pagan." The examples are many but take for instance the following physical and mental description of Mohamed (p.b.u.h):

...[that Mohamed (p.b.u.h)] was of stature not tall, large sinews, & brown color, broad face, his head disproportioned to his Body: yet may we well imagine the beauty of his body surpasse that of his mind, which was full of deceit, vicious, and cruell, never sparing anything to advance his lust (in which he equalled himselfe to forty men) or to procure his revenge. (n.p.n)

Any attempts to present his material on Mohamed (p.b.u.h) in an objective fashion are completely dismissed by the 17thc translator possibly out of fear of being understood as trying to present a favorable picture of the 'Founder of Islam.' Also, the similarity in Lydgate's biased presentation of Mohamed (p.b.u.h) and that of the 17<sup>th</sup>C

translator could have been due to another of the translator's concerns. The translator was concerned about being viewed as attempting to change previous held hostile attitudes towards the "Prophet of the Turks" and his religion, that were already well cemented in the minds of his audience through works like Lydgate's. For this reason the translator shows no effort to use objective means of presentation, lest it be susceptible to misinterpretation that will place him in danger with officials.

It is very likely that the translator was well aware of Lydgate's account on the life of Mohamed (p.b.u.h), and it appears that it could have been a source the translator drew upon in his section on the life and death of Mohamed (p.b.u.h). According to Chew, Lydgate runs three of the miracles from the French text he adapted his work from together. Chew again paraphrases Lydgate's text, and throws in some of Lydgate's original quotes.

He suffered from the falling-sickness; and this shameful affliction he explained away by telling how Gabriel appeared to him sent by the Holy Ghost to instruct him, so dazzling was the angel that 'to stand upriht he myghte nat susteene.'

Milk white doves were often seen on his shoulder picking grains out of his ears. These he declared, came by grace of the Holy Ghost Hym to visite, to shewe and specifie; He was the prophete that callid was Messie

'He hung pots of milk and honey on a bull's horns, deceiving the people by interpreting the milk and honey as symbols of the abundance that would come to them by the merit of his ghostly works.' (399)

The 17<sup>th</sup>C translator, like Lydgate, mentions three miracles and in the same order, but they differ somewhat. The first of the miracles in the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator's account of

Mohamed's (p.b.u.h) life is Mohamed's (p.b.u.h) explanation to his wife regarding his showing symptoms of epilepsy or the "falling-sickness" as Lydgate and the translator refer it to. Mohamed (p.b.u.h) explains that his epileptic fits are the result of his communication with the Angel Gabriel: "...being constrained frequently to converse with then Angel Gabriel, his fraile body, unable to abide the splendor of his heavenly presence, fell into that distemper, and at the departure of the divine Ambassador, recovered its former condition" (n.p.n). The second miracle is of doves pecking grain from Mohamed's (p.b.u.h). In this quote from the 1649 translation the grain has been replaced by peas, yet the purpose for the bird pecking at his ear to give him a message from God remains the same: "...A Pigeon by him taught to come and pick a pease out of his eare, he told them it was the holy Ghost that came to tell him what God would have him do" (n.p.n). The last miracle is about the *Koran* being brought to Mohamed (p.b.u.h) between the horns of a bull, whereas in Lydgate it is not the *Koran* but pots of milk and honey that are between the bull's horns: "...an Oxe brought him a Chapter of the *Alcoran* upon his hornes, in a full assembly" (n.p.n). The similarities suggest that Lydgate's account on Mohamed's (p.b.u.h) life was one of the sources that the translator drew upon for his section on the life and death of Prophet Mohamed (p.b.u.h), but surely not the only source because the account is not a duplicate of Lydgate's. The 17<sup>th</sup>C translator's lack of knowledge on Islam could have been one of the reasons for him relying on works by other writers who wrote on the subject. But by retaining his predecessors biased mode of presentation of material on Islam, as is obvious from the examples mentioned above, he is cautious not to

appear to be trying to change any previous held beliefs against Islam, lest he be thought to promote Islam.

The 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* ends with a section entitled "A needfull Caveat or Admonition, for them who desire to know what use may be made of, or if there be danger in reading the *Alcoran*" by Alexander Ross. In this section Ross goes to great lengths to justify the reading of the translation and he touches upon some of the same points as the translator does in his address to the Christian reader. But what was the purpose of having Ross write an appendix to the 1649 translation? It could have been that Ross was asked, by the translator or the publisher, to write an appendix to promote the translation. This suggests that Ross probably had authority among theologians of his time and could have played a major role in promoting the 1649 translation and may even have had a hand in it being published.

It is evident that the translation of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* was problematic at the time it was printed, for if not, neither the translator nor Ross would go to such pains to justify its translation and publication, as has been illustrated through this Chapter. Clearly the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator had fears that he addressed, though at times indirectly, and felt the need to deal with them in the very first section that the reader encounters when opening the 1649 translation. One of the greatest fears that the translator possessed was that both Early Modern English authorities and readers of his translation would entertain the notion that he was encouraging the proliferation of renegades through his translation. For this reason, the translator himself and Ross bring up the issue in numerous occasions, as has been shown. The following chapter

will deal with the issues of renegades as expressed by the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator and Ross, in the light of what is known today about renegades in Early Modern England.



#### CHAPTER 4. RENEGADES THROUGH THE 1649 *ALCORAN OF MAHOMET*

An issue that perplexed Early Modern England that had to be addressed in their encounter with Islam was the growing number of Christians who were converting to Islam, or “Turning Turke” as N.I. Matar refers to it in “‘Turning Turk’: Conversion to Islam in English Renaissance Thought.” The Italian word ‘renegado’ had first been anglicized in 1583 to mean a convert from Christianity to Islam (O.E.D). In 1599 Richard Hakluyt succinctly stated that a “renegado” is “one that first was a Christian, and afterwards becommeth a Turke” (O.E.D).

In the Early Modern English encounter with Islam, Islam was looked upon as a religion that was destined to be either converted or destroyed. This has been shown earlier through the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator’s purpose for the translation where the translation is presented to its Early Modern English audience as a tool to overcome Muslims, not by violence but by peaceful means such as their conversion to Christianity. Ross expresses the same notion as Peter the Venerable and the 17<sup>th</sup>C anonymous translator in his appendix to the 1649 translation: “The reading of the *Alcoran* will insole us to beat Mahomet with his own weapon, to cut off the head of this *Galian* with his own sword, and to wound this unclean bird with guile pickt out of his own wings...” (n.p.n). Both Ross and the 1649 translator express the immediate need to issue a translation of Muslim doctrine, which suggests that Early Modern England realized, probably through the proliferation of literature on the Ottoman Empire, that Islam was enlarging its population. This was an obvious result of the geographical growth of the Ottoman Empire, for as mentioned in Chapter One, the Ottoman Empire

at the height of its power conquered parts of the Byzantine Empire and beyond, and came to include Asia Minor; the countries of the Balkan Peninsula; the Islands of the eastern Mediterranean; parts of Hungary and Russia; Iraq, Syria, the Caucasus, Palestine and Egypt; part of Arabia; and all of North Africa through Algeria. But this gradual realization of the success of Islam in gaining Christian converts raised many disturbing and fearful questions in the minds of Early Modern English Christians. Questions such as: Does not the fact that Islam had attracted many Christians imply that it is a better religion? Was Islam a true religion that was destined to take over Christianity as Christianity had taken over Judaism? And the translator in response to many of these concerns offers his services and translates Muslim doctrine into English and helps his audience view their enemies "in their full body, " and furthermore presents Islam as a far from appealing a religion compared to Christianity as has been shown in the previous chapters.

The previous chapter established the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator's fear, among other fears, of being accused of encouraging the proliferation of Early Modern English renegades by translating and presenting Muslim doctrine. This chapter aims at discussing conversion to Islam in Early Modern thought as revealed through scholars today, and the extent to which these views are reflected in the sections by the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator and Alexander Ross.

That Islam had come as a punishment for the sins of Christendom was a common notion in Early Modern English thought. Edward Brerewood's analysis of the causes of Ottoman's greatness in *Enquiries Touching the Diversity of Language and Religion* (1614) clearly explains that the spread of Islam is due to a number of factors.

He mentions God's wrath at Christian sins, among other factors, saying, "of the great spreading and enlargement of [this] religion [Islam] if the causes were demanded of mee, I should make answere, that beside the Justice of Almighty God, punishing by that violent and wicked sect the sinnes of Christians..." (qtd. in Chew, 118). It was a well-known fact that there was division among Christian states during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>C. England alone was engaged in commercial rivalry with Venice, political and economic rivalry with Spain and religious differences with all the Catholic countries of Europe. Thus, one might think that Early Modern England would have looked favorably on the Turks for waging war against the Catholics of the European states. However, was the notion that Islam was gaining Christian converts looked upon as pleasing? Such was not the case, and instead of sympathizing with the Catholic states, Early Modern England blamed them for the growing number of renegades. Furthermore, Chew points out that Thomas Beard in *The Theatre of God's Judgement* (1631), an encyclopedic catalogue of examples of God's judgement upon sinners, clearly blames Christian conversion to Islam on the Catholic admission of images into the church:

The Byzantine emperors, he [Beard] says, committed an offence against God when they readmitted images into their churches, and so God suffered the iconoclastic Turks to be the instruments for the execution of His most wrath, licensing them to commit 'grievous outrages and to make great wastes and desolations in all Christendome. (119)

Ross, like Brerewood and Beard, expresses his dismay at the quarrelling among Christians in England and the Continent in his appendix to the 1649 *Alcoran of*

*Mahomet*. God's punishment for Christian sins, according to Ross, was the success of Mohamedanism:

God grant we may walk in the light of the Gospel whilst we have in it, that we may not be overwhlemed with the dismall night of *Mahometane* darknesse, which God may justly inflict upon us; for our sins, rents and divisions are no lesser then those were of the Greck and Asiatic Churches, and doubtlesse except we repent we shall perish with them. (n.p.n)

Thus, the notion that Islam was spreading rapidly as a punishment for the sins of Christians was likely to have been popular among the Early Modern English readers of the 1649 translation, as is clear from Ross's comment.

Now that renegades, a manifestation of God's wrath on Christendom, were a reality Early Modern England, according to Matar, proceeded to designate renegades in different categories. These categorical divisions were made according to the reasons for Christian conversion to Islam, and ranged from forgivable to unforgivable conversions. Matar claims that there were altogether four categories of renegades in Early Modern England.

The first category consisted of children who were forcibly taken from their parents and raised Muslim. These children were not responsible for their renunciation of Christianity, and thus often looked upon pitifully by Christians. Nicholas Nicholay in *The Navigations* (1585) lamented the "eternall perdition of their [Christian children who converted to Islam] soules," as they changed from, "baptisme to circumcision" (qtd. in Matar, 34). These renegades, also known as "Janizars"<sup>1</sup> or "Azamoglani",<sup>2</sup> were bought by the Turks from their parents and enslaved. According to Giovanni Botero's *Relationi Universali*, these converts were taken by the Turks as "tithe from

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<sup>1</sup> The term is defined by Chew as those drawn from subject European populations, 110.

<sup>2</sup> Chew defines the term as those reared, from boyhood, in the use of arms and reared in a discipline that is quite monastic, 110.

their parents in their childhood” (qtd. in Chew, 110), were schooled in the use of arms, and as adults became military commanders in the Turkish military. In fact Wayne S. Vucinich in *The Ottoman Empire: Its Record and Legacy* claims that there was a tendency to attribute the greatness of the Ottoman Empire to “the presence of Christian origin in positions of importance, “ and to see its decline in the replacement of the converted Muslims by the Muslim born (24). These renegades, being originally from the enemy, served as spies for military operations. Ross and the 17thC translator do not address the innocent converts of the first category in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*. Given that a lot of sympathy was lavished on such converts, as pointed out by Matar, the hostility that is expressed by the anonymous translator and Ross when discussing renegades was not applicable to those who belonged to this category.

The second category of renegades consisted of those adult Christians who were captured and enslaved by the Ottomans and seafarers and captured soldiers were prime examples. Matar claims that it was widely known in Early Modern England that though a Muslim master would keep a Christian slave indefinitely, he was likely to change his mind about a Christian-turned-Muslim, in accordance with koranic teaching, and free him. This probably resulted in captives converting for freedom’s sake. But, Matar adds, though Early Modern England understood the expediency of this kind of conversion, they did not sympathize with the second category of renegades like they did the first. The lack of sympathy for renegades who converted due to enslavement is expressed in Ross’s appendix where he says that in reading the *Alcoran* the Early Modern Christian reader will be inspired to thank God for blessing England with the light of Christian doctrine, and admire God’s fair judgment in subjecting other countries to the suffering and enslavement practiced by Mohamedanism. It is Ross’s opinion of it being a fair judgment on God’s part to

subject other countries to a lot of suffering that reveals his unsympathetic attitude to the second category of converts.

Christian converts who were the result of extensive exposure to Islamic behavior and values belonged to the third category. This could have been due to Christian visits to Islamic states or maybe even residency among Islamic communities. According to Matar, soon after trade with Turkey had flourished Sir Thomas Sherley in *Discourse of the Turkes* (1936) warned that “conversion with infidells doeth much corrupte” (qtd. in Matar, 36). Sherley added that the more time Christians spent among Muslims, the greater the possibility for Christians to adopt manners of Muslims: “In every 3 yeere that they staye in Turkye they loose one article of theyre faythe” (qtd. in Matar, 36). This category probably came as a result of Early Modern recognition of Islam’s tolerance of the two religions “of the Book [Koran]”—Judaism and Christianity—which allowed for close ties among the differing communities. Ross in his appendix to the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* cannot refrain from praising Muslims. He makes a comparison between Muslims and Christians, where he says that Muslims are zealous in their piety and more tolerant of “strangers” and “travelers” than to the Christians of Early Modern England, whom he labels as cold “both in devotion and charity,” unjust, intemperate and oppressive:

...how loving and charitable the Musslemans are to each other, and how careful of strangers, may be seen by their Hospitalls, both for the poor and for travellers: if we observe their justice, temperance, and other moral vertues, we may truly blush at our own coldnesse, both in devotion and charity, at our injustice, intemperance, and oppression, doubtlesse these men will rise up in judgement against us; and surely their devotion, piety, and works of mercy are main causes of the growth of Mahometanisme, & on the contrary, our neglect of Religion, and loosnesse of conversion, is a main hindrance to the increase of Christianity; is it not a shame, that they should read over their *Alcoran*, once every moneth, and we scarce read over the Bible in all our life?...and we shall prefer lascivious Poems, and wanton Ballads to the sacred Word of Almighty? (n.p.n)

Ross's bold statement, in which he ventures to criticize Christians, suggests that he probably had far more authority to express his opinions about Islam openly than the translator did. It is also clear from the quote above that Ross, unlike the 17thC translator who focuses more on Muslim behavior, focuses on the inner values of Muslims.

The 17<sup>th</sup>C translator also mentions the third category of renegades in his address to the Christian reader, where he says that these converts are "by custome drawn into error." The word "error" probably refers to coincidental rather than intentional conversion. In other words, this kind of conversion was not based on theological ground. In any case, this kind of conversion was not viewed sympathetically either, probably because it could be avoided. Immigrants and travelers would have been seen as more prone to this kind of conversion, and if they were not then their children would be.

Renegades who consciously denounced Christian faith and embraced Islam belonged to the fourth and worst category. There were definite cases of Christians preferring Islam on theological ground. The most notable case of conversion through free will, Matar says, was that of the Armenian Patriarch in Persia who had been a learned scholar and had read the writings of "Avicenne and other Arabian Philosphers, and some of the Mahometan Controvertists" (qtd. in Matar, 37). Unable to refute Muslim arguments against Christianity, the Armenian Patriarch, to the horror and confusion of his flock, converted to Islam.

The 17<sup>th</sup>C translator of the 1649 *Alcoran of Mohamet* was well aware of the fourth category of renegades. In his address to the Christian reader he describes those who have converted to Islam by choice as having wandered away from the righteous path of Christianity: "As for those of that Batch, having once abandoned the Sun of the Gospel, I believe they will wander as far into utter darknesse, by following

strange lights, as by this Ignis Fatuus of the *Alcoran*" (n.p.n). In this quote the English translator is referring to those who embraced Islam on theological grounds, especially when he claims that these renegades were " following strange lights, as by this Ignis Fatuus of the *Alcoran*" (n.p.n). The phrase suggests that the group being referred to in the quote denounced the light of Christian scriptures to follow the religion prescribed in the *Koran*, which is Islam. There is a tone of anger in the English translator's referral to the fourth category of renegades, which is a natural reaction given that this group of renegades was raising fearful questions as to whether Christianity was theologically lacking, and whether Islam was offering a truer path to salvation.

Apart from Matar's four reasons for Christian conversion to Islam, the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* hints at another reason also expressed by the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator in the 1649 translation. The sensuality of the Mohammedan conception of Paradise is declared by many writers, such as Chew, to be the chief attraction to converts to Islam. Matar expresses the same notion and describes it as conversion through "lust." This notion was probably founded on verses from the *Koran* that offered sensual descriptions of paradise. The first verses appear in Chapter Thirty-seven, entitled "The Chapter of Orders" in the 1649 translation (The translation of the verses will be quoted from both the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* followed by a more accurate English translation):

Such as shall obey God's commandments shall have place of safety wherein to rest, with all sorts of fruits, in pleasant gardens, sitting orderly on delicious beds, with glasses full of drink, pleasing to the taste, which shall not make them drunk. Their wives white as fresh eggs, shall not cast an eye upon any but upon them; they shall talk together. (276)



A more accurate translation of the above verse reads:

But the chosen servants of Allah,  
 For them is Sustenance determined  
 Fruits; and they (shall enjoy) honor and dignity.  
 Facing each other on raised couches.  
 Round will be passed to them a Cup from a clear flowing fountain,  
 Crystal-white, of a taste delicious to those who drink (thereof)  
 Free from headiness;  
 Nor will they suffer intoxication therefrom.  
 And besides them will be chaste women;  
 Restraining their glances, with big eyes (of wonder and beauty) as  
 if they were (delicate) eggs closely guarded. Then they will turn to  
 one another and question one another. (S. 37, A. 45-50)

Another description of Paradise in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* is in Chapter Forty-four, entitled the "Chapter of Smoke":

The righteous shall be in delicious places in the Gardens adorned with Fountains; they shall be clothed with purple, they shall behold each other face to face; we will assemble them with women, pure & clean, who shall have most beautiful eyes, that shall have fruits savory and delicious of all seasons. (309)

A more accurate English translation of the same verses from the "Chapter of the Smoke" sounds like this:

As to the Righteous (they will be) in a position of Security,  
 Among Gardens and Springs;  
 Dressed in fine silk and in rich brocade,  
 They will face each other;  
 And we shall wed them to maidens  
 With big, beautiful and lustrous eyes.  
 There can they call for every kind of fruit in peace and Security.  
 (S.44, A 50-55)

It is clear through the comparison of the above verses, depicting the sensual description of paradise in the *Koran*, that the 17thC translator has not only poorly translated the verses but also presented a less appealing picture of paradise than the one in the original *Koran*. But returning to the subject matter of the verses, the koranic

notion that there would be marriage and sex in paradise, and especially sex with virgins was new to Christians and no doubt seen as very sensual. To Early Modern England Mohamed (p.b.u.h) was very sensual, compared to Jesus who was celibate. Mohamed's (p.b.u.h) sensuality is clearly expressed in the 17thC translator's biography of Mohamed (p.b.u.h) in the 1649 translation, where his lust is likened to that of forty men. And Ross also refers to Paradise in the *Koran* as "fools Paradise." It seems that to Ross anyone who believed in the sensuality of Paradise as expressed in the *Koran* was merely a fool.

In relation to Islam being attractive because of its sensuality, D'Amico in *The Moor in English Renaissance Drama* says that Phillip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1642) represents civilization as sophisticated and tempting, as dangerous precisely because it could be attractive, and the imaginative re-creation of Islamic society required that it be seen as a true test of European and-Christian values (qtd. in D'Amico, 120). In other words, those who converted were weak and easily swayed by temptations expressed in the verses that describe Paradise in the *Koran*. Ross in his appendix warns those weak in their Christian faith from reading the 1649 *Alcoran*, lest they be taken in by the temptations Islam offers.

lest they be polluted with the touch thereof, as they were who came neer a leprous body; and if we will not venture to go into an infected house without preservatives, much lesse should any dare to read the *Alcoran*, that is not sufficiently armed with grace, strength, and knowledge against all tentations. (n.p.n)

The word "tentations" appears to be the Early Modern word for "temptations." And according to Ross, it is only those who are weak in their faith and susceptible to temptations that fall into error, and that is clearly in relation to temptations like the sensuality of Paradise in Islam.

Whatever may have been the reasons for Christian conversion during 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>C England, its existence to Early Modern England was a fact. And according to Matar, initially travelers and theologians reacted angrily at the sight of fellow countrymen or of European Christians renouncing their historic faith. It is not surprising, for renegades were living proof of the hegemony of Islam in Europe through the growing power of the Turkish Empire. But gradually writers realized that they had to address the issue of apostasy seriously rather than not at all, and the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator did so by translating Muslim doctrine and making it very clear that he was not in support of Christian conversion. He was hoping that through his note to the Early Modern English Christian reader and the biography of Mohamed (p.b.u.h) he would express his strong Christian heritage by portraying the fallacies of Muslim faith and also show that he had no intentions of encouraging the proliferation of renegades.

## CHAPTER 6. POSTSCRIPT

The 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* shows that Islam in Early Modern England was synonymous with the Ottoman Empire, and the Ottomans were the main source of information about Islam. This accounts for the consistency in Islam being referred to as the religion of the Turks, not only in the 1649 translation but also through the Early Modern English definition of conversion to Islam, where renegades were thought to be "Turning Turke." Therefore, the portrayal of Islam through the 17thC translator's various sections show a greater focus on Turkish Muslims than on Muslims as a whole. Furthermore, the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator's fear and hostility towards the Ottoman Empire suggests the growing threat and hegemony that the Ottoman Empire was posing to 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>C England, so much so that the issuing of a translation of the Turk's chief doctrine was considered dangerous. This is very evident through the lack of imprint on the title page and the great pains the translator and Ross went to justify the 1649 translation. How dangerous it was, and what the translator was exactly afraid of to choose to remain anonymous is uncertain. But situating the translation in its political, social and religious context would possibly shed light on issues related to the propriety of licensing the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* for publication and would also provide answers to questions such as the Early Modern English reception thereof.

As a Muslim who has appreciated the sense of the original *Koran* in Arabic, I can safely claim that Islam and its history are misrepresented and Muslim Doctrine misinterpreted and mistranslated in the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet*. It is defective and misleading to the extreme and neither captures the sense or spirit of the original. But

whether it was the French or English translator who was responsible for the manipulation of Muslim doctrine remains, to this point, an unanswered question. The answer to this question requires a comparative study of the French source translation and the 1649 English translation.

Was Alexander Ross the anonymous translator? If not, who was? The former question may be easier to answer than the latter. The analysis of Ross's stylistic qualities in his published works during the 1640s, and the examination of the sections by the anonymous translator for similarities, may aid in knowing whether Ross was the translator. Also, tracing Ross's religious activities prior to the date of the translation would possibly reveal any practical reasons he may have had to translate Muslim doctrine or contribute to it.

Renegades were definitely a reality, not only to those on the Continent who were in proximity with the Turks, but also to Early Modern England. Both the 17<sup>th</sup>C translator and Ross refer to Christian conversion to Islam in their sections to the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* on numerous occasions. But the issue of renegades is one-sided, where they are seen today through works by Early Modern Christians and hardly ever through works of their own. It is yet to be known if those Christians who consciously converted to Islam wrote about their experiences and whether their works ever saw the light of day.

Many issues regarding the 1649 *Alcoran of Mahomet* remain inconclusive. But what is conclusive is that this misrepresented and mistranslated translation of Muslim doctrine was the only English translation available to Early Modern England and it influenced some of the negative attitudes discussed in this thesis. It was not until

1734 that George Sale's translation of the *Koran* appeared and Sale expressed the need to issue another English translation of Muslim doctrine.

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