

Reading the Qur'ān in the 17th-Century Sephardi Community of Amsterdam*

Leer el Corán en la comunidad sefardí de Amsterdam
en el siglo XVII

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This article presents an unknown Spanish translation of the Qur'ān, extant at the Ets Haim/Livraria Montezinos Library of the Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam. The manuscript dates from the seventeenth century and was the work of a Spanish or Portuguese Jew living in Amsterdam or another community of the Sephardi diaspora. In the present contribution, a detailed material description of the manuscript and its contents, as well as of its Italian and Spanish sources, is offered. While the translator claimed that the work was translated “word for word from Arabic,” he actually used the Italian version of the Qur'ān by Giovanni Battista Castrodardo, published by Andrea Arrivabene in Venice in 1547. The short appendix on the life of Muhammad, on the other hand was based on a Spanish polemical work addressed to the minority of the moriscos: the *Confutación del Al*

Este trabajo presenta una traducción del Corán al castellano, desconocida hasta ahora, conservada en la Ets Haim/Biblioteca Montezinos de la comunidad judío-portuguesa de Amsterdam. El manuscrito data del siglo XVII y fue la obra de un judío español o portugués que vivía en Amsterdam o en otra comunidad de la diáspora Sefardí. En este estudio se ofrece una descripción material detallada del manuscrito y de su contenido, así como un análisis de sus fuentes italianas y españolas. Aunque el traductor dice haber traducido la obra «palabra por palabra del árabe», en realidad, parece haber utilizado la versión italiana del Corán realizada por Giovanni Battista Castrodardo y publicada por Andrea Arrivabene en Venecia (1547). Un corto apéndice sobre la vida de Mahoma, por otro lado, se basa en una obra polémica castellana destinada a la minoría morisca: la *Confutación del Alcorán* y

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corán y secta mahometana by Lope de Obregón, published in Granada in 1555. This translation represents a unique case-study of the re-contextualization of the Qurʾān in early modern Europe and of the History of Reading across European and Mediterranean confessions.

Palabras clave: Qurʾān; Translation; Renaissance; Judaism; Sephardim; Portuguese Jews; Seventeenth Century; Amsterdam; Venice; Menocchio; Andrea Arrivabene; Giovanni Battista Castrodardo; Leon Modena; Abraham Gomez Silveira; Religious Polemics.

secta mahometana de Lope de Obregón, que fue publicada en Granada (1555). Esta traducción representa un ejemplo único para el estudio de la recontextualización del Corán en los comienzos de la Edad Moderna en Europa, así como de la Historia de la Lectura entre las diferentes confesiones en Europa y el Mediterráneo.

Key words: Corán; traducción; Renacimiento; judaísmo; sefardismo; judíos portugueses; siglo XVII; Amsterdam; Venecia; Menocchio; Andrea Arrivabene; Giovanni Battista Castrodardo; Leon Modena; Abraham Gomez Silveira; polémica religiosa.

In 1999 Lazarus-Yafeh published a study of four extant Hebrew manuscripts with a translation of the Qurʾān, based on the Italian version published by Andrea Arrivabene in 1547. The study showed the process of cultural re-contextualization of Islam's sacred book among Jews in early modern Europe. In one of these manuscripts, MS B 255 of the Royal Library in Leningrad, the anonymous scribe mentions that he had copied it during a visit to Amsterdam in 1653.¹

Although presently no Hebrew translation of the Qurʾān is kept in the Jewish collections of Amsterdam, the Ets Haim/Livraria Montezinos library of the Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam does possess a Spanish manuscript translation of the Qurʾān, which has been described in its print catalogue but has hitherto received no scholarly attention. Because of its role with the reception of the Qurʾān among European Jews, and of the exceptional nature of a Spanish Qurʾān translated in the diaspora, we will offer a description of the manuscript, together with some initial considerations of its relevance.

dam) for their kind and efficient assistance during the research performed at the library and for putting at our disposal a magnificent reproduction of the manuscript, photographed by Ardon Bar-Hama, Raʾanana, Israel. Harm den Boer is author of paragraphs 1 and 2 and 8, while Pier Mattia Tommasino of paragraph 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. In addition, we wish to thank Alyssa Pelish who revised the text.

¹ Lazarus-Yafeh, "A Seventeenth Century Hebrew Translation of the Qurʾān."

1. Description of the manuscript

The manuscript has the signature EH 48 D 20 of Ets Haim/Livraria Montezinos; on the end cover leaf a glued label indicates that it was donated to Ets Haim in 5645 [1885], by the late J[aco]b van J[aco]b Ferares, chief rabbi at The Hague.

Title: Libro del Alcorán / traducido palabra / por palabra de arábigo en español dividido / en dos partes. / La primera contiene el principio de las cosas criadas en / este mundo y principio del reyno de Mohamet / y principio de su compañía. / La segunda de su Ley y preceptos.

The manuscript is written on paper and measures 19,7 x 16,4 cm. It has one unnumbered leaf and 205 leaves numbered on the recto side; the last leaf is blank. The text occupies 21-22 lines to a page. The manuscript is not dated, although a date appears on leaf 205r. The paper can be identified as coming from the Netherlands: it has the watermark of the city of Amsterdam.

Contents: f. [1]r: Title; f. [1]v: blank; flr-44v: text [first part: On the birth and childhood of Muḥammad and the passage of prophetic light]; f. 45r-183r: text [second part: Qur'ān]; ff. 183v-184v: blanks; ff. 185r-193r: text [partial summaries of the preceding chapters]; ff. 193v-205r: text [last part: on the life of Muḥammad]; f. 205v: text [statement by the anonymous scribe/translator/writer on the author of the last part].

The physical evidence of the manuscript offers little support for a precise dating. In their catalogue of the manuscripts held in Ets Haim/Livraria Montezinos Library, Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld suggested that it is a “late 17th century copy,” perhaps on the basis of their impression of the “current Iberian writing.” However, this cursive writing – one and the same for the whole text – is not very distinctive. It could stem from the first half of the seventeenth century, but can also be found in the early eighteenth century.²

² Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Ets Haim, Livraria Montezinos, Sephardic Community of Amsterdam*, p. 230.

The paper holds more information. It has the watermark of Amsterdam, with two lions holding the crowned coat of arms of the city, and three vertically aligned crosses in the center. This watermark was used in Dutch paper production from the second half of the seventeenth century. Of course, the approximate date (*post quem*) refers only to the manuscript copy of the Spanish Qur'ān translation, not to the period of composition of the translation and the last summarized text.³

The text contained in the manuscript is hard to circumscribe with precise dates. The translated “first part,” on the “Beginning of things created in this world and the beginning of the Reign of Muḥammad and beginning of his company”,⁴ and the “second part,” the Qur'ān itself,⁵ present distinctive linguistic features not present in the added appendix, the very shortened version of Lope de Obregon's *Confutación del Alcorán y secta Mahometana*, published in Granada in 1555.

2. The language of the manuscript

The translation has a remarkable feature which lends the Spanish language used in the “first” and “second” part an archaic character, fitting for texts of a sacred nature. The translator, in fact, used the unequivocal vocabulary of the so-called Spanish ‘Ladino’ translation of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish Liturgy made by exiled Iberian Jews residing in Ferrara, and printed between 1552 and 1558. The use of a very specific Spanish lexicon for the literal translation of the sacred Hebrew text is well known. The lexicon has been the subject of extensive studies, pointing at both medieval Iberian Jewish practices of word-for-word translations of the Scriptures, and a creative process of literal translation realized in the sixteenth century.⁶

³ The online Gravel Watermark Archive (<www.gravell.org>) gives about thirty examples of this type of watermark used between 1668 and 1691.

⁴ This description is announced on the first unnumbered leaf: “La primera [parte contiene] el principio de las cosas criadas en este mundo y principio del reyno de Mohamet y principio de su compañía.”

⁵ Again, from the first (title) leaf: “La segunda de su ley y preceptos”, Engl.: “The second part on its Law and commandments”. de su compañía.”

⁶ Hassan (ed.), *Introducción a la Biblia de Ferrara. Actas del Simposio Internacional sobre la Biblia de Ferrara, Sevilla, 25-28 de noviembre de 1991*; Alvar, *El Ladino, Judeo-español Calco*; Den Boer, “La Biblia de Ferrara y otras traducciones españolas de la Biblia

Throughout the translations of both parts, the reader finds words that are very uncommon in sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish such as ‘fonsado(s)’ (Engl. ‘armies’, f. 8v); ‘profundinas’ (for ‘profundidad/es’, Engl. ‘depth’, f. 11); ‘conortar’ (f.11v), an anachronism in 17th century Spanish for ‘confortar’ (Engl. ‘to comfort’), but common in the Ferrara translation of the Bible and Jewish Liturgy; ‘fermosura’ or ‘faces’, to be found throughout the text: both are archaisms already in the sixteenth century, present only in novels of chivalry, but also in the Ferrara translations, ‘sombair’ (‘sombayéndolos’, Engl. ‘to persuade, spur’, f. 21r); ‘afermosiguar’ (Engl. ‘to glorify, to praise’, f. 34r); ‘aviviguar’ (Engl. ‘to bring [back] to life’, f. 131v); and many other cases.

On the morphological level, the use of the present participle, an archaic form by the sixteenth century, but widely employed in the Ferrara translations, is also present in the Spanish Qur’ān translation. It can be found, for example, in ‘bos diciente’ (‘voz diciente’, Engl. ‘a voice that spoke’).

The so-called Ferrara translation of the Jewish Bible and Liturgy presents many features of literal translation, on the syntactic level, from Hebrew. In contrast, the syntax of the present Spanish translation of the Qur’ān seems unaffected and is common to sixteenth– and seventeenth-century Spanish syntax. This seems only logical, taking into account that the Spanish translation was not made from Arabic, and probably neither from Hebrew, but rather from the Italian translation by Giovanni Battista Castrodardo, published by Andrea Arrivabene in Venice in 1547.

The manifest influence of the Spanish Ladino translation of Ferrara is remarkable. It clearly points towards the Jewish context of the translation, although in the literature produced by the Iberian Jews of converso background, the influence of Ladino is almost exclusively limited to a biblical context and, indirectly, to the Spanish and Portuguese religious literature of the Iberian Jews, in which Scriptures were quoted. Although some authors admired and felt inspired by the almost sacred character of the Ferrara translation,⁷ many others rejected the word-

entre los sefardíes de Europa occidental”. The vocabulary of the Ferrara Bible and part of the Liturgy has been incorporated in Spanish’ largest historical database, ‘CORDE’, which can be consulted online (<<http://corpus.rae.es/cordenet.html>>).

⁷ Den Boer, “La Biblia de Ferrara,” pp. 253-255.

for-word translation and the exotic vocabulary, intended as a one-to-one translation of Hebrew words, finding it “rude” or “backward.”⁸

The use of the ‘Ferrara vocabulary’ in the present manuscript makes it probable that the translator not only belonged to an Iberian Jewish community, but also possibly to the environment of rabbinic education. In this environment, Ladino word-for-word translation was used frequently in the educational practice of rendering Hebrew texts in order to comment them.

Another distinctive feature of the translation is the influence of Portuguese, which is a common trait of Iberian Jewish literature produced in the communities of the Western Sephardi diaspora such as Venice and Amsterdam. It surfaces in the occurrence of some Portuguese words, for example ‘lapa’ (Engl. ‘cave’, f. 109), not used in Spanish. But, above all, this Portuguese influence is evident in the use of the inflected infinitive, the *infinitivo pessoal*, not used in Spanish. Examples can be found throughout the text: “Y mi marido entonces procuraua por hacer caminar el asna por las otras *seren* ydas adelante, yo oy de todas las partes una voz fuerte que decia ‘¿Eres Alima?’”; “Yo entonces le respondi *averen* ido a pacer los animals.”⁹

Finally, some remarks must be made on the spelling of the text and its punctuation. As for the first, the scribe of the manuscript displays a spelling with frequent vacillation between ‘b’, ‘v’ and ‘u’; ‘s’, ‘ç’, ‘z’; and ‘j’; ‘y’, ‘i’, ‘x’; as well as an inconsistent use of the ‘h’, none of which we regard as distinctive at the present stage of our research. Such variant forms of spelling similar phonemes and sounds are common among many Iberian writers and even more so in a linguistically hybrid environment such as that of the Portuguese and Spanish speaking Jews of Iberian converso origin. The spelling does not offer much support for a precise dating of the manuscript, since it can be found in both sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts. It seems evident, however, that the scribe was familiar with both Spanish and Portuguese, as we have found no peculiar, deviant orthography, including accents.

The punctuation of the text is quite unusual: and, to our knowledge, it is not present in other Iberian Christian or Jewish texts of the period. The punctuation is not in accord with phrases or with the large periods

⁸ Den Boer, “La Biblia de Ferrara,” pp. 255-256.

⁹ Amsterdam, Ets Haim, 48 D 20, 14v, 16v.

normally construed in early modern Spanish. In the manuscript, dots are found after individual words, after groups of words or after what we would identify as phrases (see, for instance, ff. 27v and 28r). The punctuation seems to be a particular trait of the scribe.

The evidence of the manuscript and the language of the translation point to an Iberian Jewish environment. We can reasonably assume that the manuscript was written by a Portuguese Jew in Amsterdam during the seventeenth century, or, perhaps, at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The statement at the end of the text (f. 205r), referring to the last part of the manuscript, not announced on its title leaf, provides some more information. According to its anonymous author, the text says:

Marcos de Obregón, priest of Saint Vincent in the city of Ávila, who was given the task of evangelizing the Moriscos that lived in that land, being a person who knew the Arab language and was read in the books of the Moors, composed in the year 1553 one [book] on the life and events of Mohammed, from where I took this brief notices.¹⁰

This information refers to the work *Confutación del Alcorán y secta Mahometana, sacado de sus propios libros: y de la vida del mesmo Mahoma*, by Lope, not Marcos, de Obregón, which was published in Granada in 1555 not in 1553. Comparing the rather extensive original, a folio volume with 72 leaves printed on both sides, with the shortened version in the manuscript, there is no doubt that the anonymous composer of this part used the work by Lope de Obregón. The latter presented for his polemical purpose a negative image of the prophet, insisting on all his purported personal flaws, his relations with the devil and the Jews, his false miracles and the continuous strifes among his successors. The shortened version contained in MS EH 48 D 20 reflects this negative image, although it leaves out all the strongly colored adjectives and attributes, as well as many of the characterizations so insistently used by Obregón.¹¹

¹⁰ The original Spanish text says “Marcós de Obregon, cura de San Vicente en la ciuda de Áuila, el año de 1553 a quien se le auía encomendado la dotrinación de los moriscos que viuían en aquella tierra, como hombre que sauía la lengua aráuiga y leýdo en todos los libros de los moros, compuso uno de la vida y susesos de Mahoma, de donde saqué estas breues noticias.”

¹¹ In Obregón’s work, “Mahoma” is qualified as “that damned” (‘aquel maldito’), and marginal glosses resume his faults, as in ‘Tricks and lies of Mahoma to succeed in his intent’ (“Astucia y fingimiento de Mahoma para salir con su empresa,” f. 9v).

The reference to a ‘Marcos’, instead of ‘Lope de Obregón’, and the year 1553 instead of 1555 seems to be a lapse of the scribe or, perhaps, of the anonymous compiler than a strategy to mislead the reader. It is, however, revealing: ‘Marcos de Obregón’ was the protagonist of a well-known Spanish picaresque novel by Vicente Espinel, published for the first time in 1618.¹² We are therefore provided with a *terminus post quem* for the manuscript, or at least for its last part.

Although the manuscript presents itself as a ‘word for word’ translation from Arabic into Spanish, its contents reveal that the Spanish translation is yet another example of retranslation of the Qur’ān going back to the Medieval Latin *Corpus Islamolatinum*. Some specific renderings in the translation clearly indicate that the text used was the Italian version by Giovanni Battista Castrodardo. Given the Jewish context of the Spanish translation, it is possible that the Hebrew translation of the Qur’ān, also made in its turn from the Italian, was at its base. However, because of the strict adherence of the syntax of the Spanish text to the Italian text, this does not seem probable at this stage of the analysis.

3. The main source of the manuscript

The main source of the Spanish text is the *Alcorano di Macometto*, published by Andrea Arrivabene in Venice in 1547. Although a promotional frontispiece claimed that the work had been “newly translated from Arabic into Italian,” this translation was essentially based on the medieval *Corpus Islamolatinum* (1142-1143), published by Johannes Oporinus and Theodor Bibliander in Basel in 1543.¹³

The *Alcorano di Macometto* was a handy companion to Islam, more accessible to a large readership than Oporinus’s Latin encyclopedia, which appeared in a large format (folio). Arrivabene proposed a renewed Islamic compendium, written in a more comprehensible language and printed in a smaller and cheaper format (quarto). He issued a volume aimed at furnishing Italian and Euro-Mediterranean Italo-

¹² *Relaciones de la vida*.

¹³ Tommasino, *L’Alcorano di Macometto. Storia di un libro del Cinquecento europeo*, p. 29; Bobzin, *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation. Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa*, p. 242; De Frede, *La prima traduzione italiana del Corano sullo sfondo dei rapporti tra Cristianità e Islam nel Cinquecento*.

phone readership with information about Islamic history and Islam as the dominant religion of the Ottoman Empire.

The three *states* of the *edition* are dated 1547. The third and definitive *state* consists of three books (100 folios), prefaced by a long introduction (50 folios), which is preceded by three preliminary texts: a dedicatory letter signed by Andrea Arrivabene, an anonymous sonnet, to be attributed to the poet Paolo Crivelli, and an anonymous letter to readers (six folios), undoubtedly written by the translator of the text. Differences between the three *states* are only in the preliminary texts and in the introduction, while the three books present no textual or bibliographical change. Consequently, it is not possible to argue which *state* of the edition the Spanish translator used for his text, because he translated neither the preliminary texts nor the introduction of the *Alcorano*.¹⁴

The structure of the *Alcorano* is very simple and clear. The text is divided into four parts, including the long introduction as a book itself (Introduction+3). The introduction and the first book bring together historical texts on Islam (Introduction+1). The second and third books contain the Italian translation of the Qur'ān, based on the Latin version by Robert of Ketton (2+3). The *Alcorano* is therefore divided into two macro-sections: the first deals with the history of early Islam and the Ottoman Empire (Introduction+1), while the second is exclusively centered on the translation of the Qur'ān (2+3).

The introduction is based on fifteenth, and especially, sixteenth-century sources, such as Italian and Central European *turcica*, Spanish polemical works, and Venetian humanistic historiography. In contrast, the first book reshapes the medieval trilogy of historical, biographical and polemical texts, known in the manuscript tradition of the *Corpus Islamolatinum* as *Fabulae Sarracenorum*. The three texts are the *Liber de generatione Mahumet*, the *Chronica mendosa et ridicula Sarracenorum* and the *Liber de doctrina Mahumet*.¹⁵

The *Liber de generatione* and the *Chronica mendosa* are shortened into twelve small chapters. The entirety of the *Liber de doctrina Mahumet*, however, is translated into Italian. What's more, the transla-

¹⁴ Tommasino, *L'Alcorano di Macometto*, pp. 79-85 and 311-318.

¹⁵ De la Cruz Palma, "Los textos de la llamada Collectio Toletana, fuente de información sobre el Islam."

tion of the *Liber de doctrina Mahumet* is reinforced by numerous marginal notes, taken from the cabbalistic *notationes* by Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter, published in his edition of the *doctrina* in 1543.¹⁶ For a brief contrastive description of the content of the *Alcorano di Macometto* and the *Libro del Alcorán* see the Appendix.

The Spanish translator omitted the preliminary texts, the entire introduction and all the marginal notes. He translated into Spanish only the three books of the *Alcorano*, which have long been considered as a unit by the general readership. Nevertheless, the Spanish translation is divided into two parts. The first translates the thirteen chapters of the first book of the *Alcorano* (12+1). The second reunited the 124 *suwar* of the medieval Latin Qur'ān, which were split into two books in the Italian version: 28 and 96 chapters each. Moreover, the Spanish text presents the *fātiha*, 'the opening *sūrah*', as an introductory text, not as the first chapter of the Qur'ān. The same distinction occurs in the Italian translation. In addition, both the Italian and the Spanish texts use the word chapter (*capitolo*, and *capítulo*) to designate the *suwar* and contain colophons to indicate the end of each section.

The Spanish text is clearly based on the Italian translation. The author of the *Alcorano* translated Bibliander's printed version of the *Corpus Islamolatinum* (1543) but he used also a manuscript copy of it. The Italian translator seems to confirm it in a marginal note of the first book. Commenting on the use of transliteration, he said: "These Barbaric names are not written in Arabic alphabet, and they are differently transliterated both in printed and in manuscript copies of the Qur'ān."¹⁷

However, the use of Bibliander's encyclopedia is extremely evident. As Hartmut Bobzin and Thomas Burman have already demonstrated, Bibliander added his own errors and misunderstandings to Ketton's Latin translation of the Qur'ān. For example, Bibliander read "arca ubi repositae sunt divinae virtutis reliquiae" for Ketton's "archa ubi repositae sunt divine virtutes reliquiaeque." Burman comments: "He – wrongly – reads 'virtutis' instead of 'virtutes' " and "He – again wrongly – reads 'reliquiae' instead of 'reliquiaeque'." The Italian version depends on Bibliander's errors: "ove son riposte le reliquie della divina virtù di Mosé e d'Arón." Subsequently, the Spanish translation

¹⁶ Widmanstetter, *Mahometis Abdallae filii theologia dialogo explicata*.

¹⁷ *Alcorano di Macometto*, f. 14r; Hamilton-Richard, *André Du Ryer*, p. 91.

is based on the Italian version of Bibliander's printed text: "el arca en que estan las reliquias de la perfeccion divina de Mosse y de Aron."¹⁸

Moreover, all the paratextual, polemical, historical, and even autobiographical material added over centuries to the *Corpus Islamolat-inum*, at least between the first medieval glossators, Bibliander and the translator of the *Alcorano*, have been eliminated from the margins. Nowhere throughout the entire text is there any judgment of the Qur'ān or of Muḥammad. The author of the Spanish translation, or the copyist of the manuscript, apparently felt no need to justify his effort to his co-religionarists. This does not imply that the manuscript was an outright neutral representation of Islam. Its appendix on the life of Muḥammad, again without marginal notes, does not shed a positive light on the prophet.

4. The translator and editor of the *Alcorano di Macometto*

The translator and editor of the *Alcorano di Macometto* is not identified in the edition itself. Only by re-examining the text itself for clues that might reveal his identity, was it possible to identify the translator and editor of the *Alcorano*. He turned out to be Giovanni Battista Castrodardo from Belluno, a forgotten but very active *poligrafo* who lived between 1517 and 1588. Giorgio Piloni, a late sixteenth-century historian from Belluno, who knew Giovanni Battista personally, defined him as "a man who studied law and literature for a long time."¹⁹

Castrodardo's very short and ambitious career was concentrated almost entirely between 1543 and 1548. During this period, he lived in Padua, visited the court of Pope Paul III in Rome, and worked in Venice. Here he started his career as a translator and editor of historical works. In 1544, he worked for the printer Michele Tramezino, translating from Latin into Italian a historical work by Niccolò Leonico

¹⁸ De Sacy, "Notice d'un manuscrit arabe de l'Alcoran, accompagné de notes critiques et de variantes," pp. 103-109; Burman, "Tafsīr and Translation: Traditional Arabic Qur'ān Exegesis and the Latin Qur'ān of Robert of Ketton and Mark of Toledo," p. 771; *Machumetis Sarracenorūm*, I, 18, pp. 38-39; *Alcorano di Macometto*, 32r; Amsterdam, EH 48 D 20, f. 57v.

¹⁹ Tommasino, "Giovanni Battista Castrodardo bellunese traduttore dell'Alcorano di Macometto"; Piloni, *Historia della città di Belluno*, f. 143v.

Tomeo, *De varia historia libri III* into *Li tre libri di Niccolò Leonico de varie historie*. He worked on his second project between 1544 and 1547. It was a commentary on Dante's *Comedy*, or more likely an edition of the text with short introductions to the cantos (*argomenti*). His third work was the *Alcorano di Macometto*, known as the first printed translation of the Qur'ān in a European national language.²⁰

Castrodardo's last work was a chronicle of the bishops of Belluno, which he wrote after returning to his hometown in 1548. In this text, Castrodardo shows his strong antiquarian scholarship and his cultural withdrawal into local and ecclesiastic history following his return to Belluno. In fact, Castrodardo abruptly interrupted his literary career in 1548, apparently without any reason. Upon having returned to Belluno, he seems to have lived for forty years hiding his Venetian connections and his works as a translator, especially the translation of the Qur'ān, finally prohibited by the *Index Tridentinus* in 1564. He never became dean of the chapter and he died in Belluno between October 1587 and February 1588.²¹

It is evident from this brief portrait that Castrodardo's profile is different from the other translators of the Qur'ān in early modern Europe. He did not have any concern for Oriental languages or for the exegesis of the Bible. He was not a Jewish convert like Flavius Mithridates, nor a Morisco like Juan Gabriel de Teruel. He was not a cultivated linguist, as were Guillaume Postel and Theodor Bibliander. He was not a fierce polemicist fighting against Islam, nor a preacher living in Galata and Pera. He was not attracted by humanistic multilingualism, or by a diplomatic career in the Levant as was the French André Du Ryer. Castrodardo was, essentially, a *poligrafo*, a translator and editor of historical and literary works. He promoted Italian as a language of culture and explicitly endorsed the anti-exoticism sponsored by the Paduan Academy of the "Infiammati." In this milieu, the effort to learn Hebrew and Arabic was considered too great, as well as unnecessary, since the most important works of Arabic and Islamic culture were already translated

²⁰ Leonico Tomeo, *Li tre libri di Nicolo Leonico de varie historie, nuovamente tradotti in buona lingua volgare*.

²¹ Dresden, Sächsischen Landesbibliothek Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek di Dresden (SLUB), F.65^a, pp. 88-96; Schnorr von Carolsfeld, *Katalog der Handschriften der Sächsischen Landesbibliothek zu Dresden*, pp. 373-374; Tommasino, "Frammenti ritrovati di Giovanni Battista Castrodardo (c. 1517-c. 1588) storico dei vescovi di Belluno."

into Latin. The profit in terms of knowledge, “l’utile,” was not comparable to the waste in terms of time: “il danno del tempo.”²²

5. Between Venice and Constantinople

The printer Andrea Arrivabene dedicated the *Alcorano* to Gabriel de Luetz, baron of Aramon, the fourth French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire (1547-1553). He was charged by Francis I with negotiating an alliance between France and the Ottomans and with convincing Süleiman I to launch a military campaign against the Imperial forces in Hungary. Both the ambassador and the publisher were strictly linked with Venetian evangelical circles and Italian reformers. Therefore, the dedicatory letter is extremely important for an understanding of the book’s nature. The French diplomat embodied, in the middle of the Schmalkaldic war (1546-47), the anti-imperial and religious hopes of Italian heterodox groups, who wanted to spread the Reform throughout the Italian peninsula.

The *Alcorano di Macometto* reflects the diplomatic context in which it was published: a military alliance between France and the Ottoman Empire. Thus, it should be examined as a pocket encyclopedia of religious and imperial history of Islam, that could have been used “in war time as well as in peace time,” as the publisher emphasized in the dedicatory letter.²³

Although the *Alcorano* contains many polemical marginal notes required to bypass censorship, its originality relies on the anti-Imperial and pro-Ottoman political propaganda published in the text, especially in the introduction by Castrodardo.²⁴

²² Piccolomini, *De la institutione di tutta la vita de l’homo nato nobile e in città libera*, f. 39r-v; Speroni, *Dialogo delle lingue, Trattatisti del Cinquecento*, pp. 623-624. Likewise Castrodardo affirms that it is not necessary to know the correct spelling and pronunciation of Arabic words, *Alcorano di Macometto*, 14r: “[...] i quai nomi barbari percioché sono fuori dei loro propri caratti arabi, e perché si trovano diversamente scritti in tutti i testi dell’Alcorano a stampa et a mano con difficoltà si ponno scrivere e proferire, ne però molto importa, non essendo loro di nostra legge a noi saperli.”

²³ *Alcorano di Macometto*, f. [5]r; Stella, “Utopie e velleità insurrezionali dei filoprotestanti italiani (1545-1547),” p. 140 and 159.

²⁴ Tommasino, “Reading Machiavelli, Translating the Qur’ān, Muḥammad as a law-giver in the *Alcorano di Macometto* (Venice, 1547);” Tommasino, *L’Alcorano di Ma-*

The first but not the sole intended audience of this compendium is the political and religious refugees linked with the French embassies both in Venice and Constantinople, who travelled from Venice to the Bosphorus during the late 1540s and the beginning of the 1550s. Among them were anti-Medician and anti-Imperial political refugees, European and Italian anti-Trinitarians, merchants and gentlemen from Ferrara, evangelical preachers living in Galata and Pera, as well as Spanish and Portuguese conversos. The French ambassador had an active role in helping migrants who searched for political and religious asylum in the Ottoman Empire. A letter from the reformer Zsigmond Gyalui Torda (1510-1569) to Melancton, dated December 1545, provides evidence that D'Armon, still lieutenant of the ambassador Escalin des Aymars, accomodated evangelical preachers in his house in Pera:

In Turkey itself many people proclaim Christ. There were Franciscus Picus and the Hungarian Zegeginus [Stephan Szegedinus, 1502-1572]. The latter teaches a large audience, both in Galata and in Constantinople. He is taken care of by the French ambassador and by other Christians who work and trade here.²⁵

6. D'Armon, Arrivabene, and the Jewish diaspora

Among the merchants linked to D'Armon there were also conversos from the Iberian peninsula. Leonardo Pomaro *junior* was the brother of the French agent Pietro Pomaro, and son of the Spanish converso Leonardo Pomaro, who was a close friend of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Christophe de Longueil. Leonardo *junior* seems to have been a member of the anti-Trinitarian *Collegia vicentina* and he certainly took part in D'Armon's diplomatic mission (1547). During the early 1550s, he lived as a merchant in Constantinople, helping his brother Pietro buy Greek manuscripts for Ulrich Függer.²⁶

cometto, pp. 221-255; Giustinian, *De origine urbis Venetiarum* [1492, 1534]; Giustinian, *Historia di M. Bernardo Giustinian* [1545].

²⁵ Tommasino, *L'Alcorano di Macometto*, p. 103; De Enzinas, *Epistolario*, p. 368: "In ipsa Turcia multi Christum annuntiant. Franciscus Picus, Hungarus Zegeginus, nunc Galatae, nunc Constantinopoli in magna auditorum frequentia docet, alitur a Gallico oratore et ab aliis Christianis qui ibi serviunt vel negociantur."

²⁶ Tommasino, *L'Alcorano di Macometto*, pp. 119-120; Bock, *Historia antitrinitariorum, maxime socinianismi et socinianorum*, II, p. 424.

The French ambassador was linked with the brothers Pomaro, as well as with other Iberian Jewish refugees, who arrived in Constantinople during the last years of his diplomatic mission (1552-1553). Beatriz de Luna, alias Gracia Nasi Mendes, and her nephew João Miquez, alias Joseph Nasi, were among those supported by the French embassies both in Rome and on the Bosphorus as they settled in Constantinople too.²⁷

Andrea Arrivabene was also linked with the House of Nasi. Publishing the *Dialogo della Sacra Scrittura* by Ortensio Lando in 1552, he wrote one of the three dedicatory letters to Beatriz de Luna. The other two were signed by Ortensio Lando and Girolamo Ruscelli. Arrivabene's letter provides evidence of the connections between the publisher, his evangelical circle, and the Iberian Jewish refugees in Venice and Ferrara:

Havendo io risaputo che M(esser) Hortensio Lando haveva posto in carte un bel ragionamento ch'egli già hebbe nella Fratta con la Divina Donna Lucretia Gonzaga, et dalle particolari relationi delli molti honorati gentilhuomini Gioan Michas [João Miquez, alias Joseph Nasi], Bernardo Michas [Bernardo Miquez, brother of João] Alphonso Nunneza [Alonso Nuñez de Reinoso], Odoardo Gomez [Duarte Gomes], lo haveva consacrato al vostro Illustre nome, feci ogni opra per vederlo, et ne supplicai a capo chino, et con le ginocchia piegate la sopradetta Signora, che ne haveva copia. Il che per la sua rara cortesia facilmente impetraí, et appresso ottenni che per opra mia si stampasse, sì come gli anni adietro ho fatto stampare molti suoi belli et vaghi componimenti. Ho mentre a ciò mi apparecchio, compresi in detto Dialogo tutte quelle bellezze che in alcuno moderno auttore desiderar si possono; et non solo per ciò dotto ne stimai l'autore, ma prudente anchora et giuditioso, ch'egli havesse eletta vostra Signoria, cui dedicasse opra piena di Christiana pietà, sendo quella tutta pietosa et piena di dottrina, sendo di elevato ingegno et ammirabile valore. Se per tanto alcuno errore nell'istamparla fusse occorso, priego la Bontà (4)r di Vostra Signoria a non haverlo a male, ma sofferire con altezza di animo le imperfettioni dei nostri mali ministri, come ancho comportar

²⁷ Roth, *The House of Nasi: the Duke of Naxos*, pp. 22-23; Chesneau, *Le Voyage du Monsieur D'Aramon, ambassadeur pour le Roy en Levant*, pp. 48-49: "En ce temps lá Jehan Miquez [João Miquez, alias Joseph Nasi], portugalois vint en Constantinople avec lettres de faveur de M. de Lansac ambassadeur du Roy à Rome pour le favoriser en quelques affaires qu'il ne voulut poursuivre aucunement. Il y trouva la sire Beatrix de Lune, portugaloise et juive riche, prèz laquelle il se retira, esperant en epouser la fille; ce qu'il fit aprèz s'estre premierement declaré juifs et fait circoncrire"; Lopes Andrade, "Os Senhores do Desterro de Portugal: Judeus Portugueses entre Veneza e Ferrara em meados do século XVI," p. 70.

suole i travagli di maggiore importanza che alcuna volta le occorrono. Né altro accadendo, farò fine allo scrivere, humilmente alla vostra buona gratia baciando le mani.²⁸

The printer was aware of Doña Gracia's condition. She would have tolerated the typographical errors scattered through the book, much as she endured her exile. Together with Beatriz de Luna, Arrivabene mentions other Portuguese and Spanish conversos. Among them, there were her nephews João and Bernardo Miquez, the Spaniard Alonso Nuñez de Reinoso and the Portuguese Duarte Gomes, to whom Girolamo Ruscelli dedicated a rhyming dictionary published in Venice in 1558. Moreover, Girolamo Ruscelli and Ortensio Lando were linked both with Andrea Arrivabene and the French embassy in Venice. Considering this milieu, as well as the diffusion of contemporary Italian *turcica* and historiography among Jewish readers in contemporary Italy, it's highly probable that the *Alcorano di Macometto* was read by conversos, both in Italy and in Constantinople, right after its publication. It was a short, comprehensible handbook of Islam and the Ottoman Empire.²⁹

²⁸ Lando, *Dialogo di M. Hortensio Lando, nel quale si ragiona della consolatione, et utilità, che si gusta leggendo la Sacra Scrittura*, f. [3]r-v; Roth, *The House of Nasi*, pp. 22-23.

²⁹ Ruscelli, *Del modo di comporre in versi nella lingua italiana, trattato di Girolamo Ruscelli, Nel quale va compreso vn pieno & ordinatissimo Rimario. Nuouamente mandato in luce*, ff. [2]r-[7]v. Ruscelli's dedicatory letter to Duarte Gomes seems to provide evidence of Gomes's role in helping "foreigners" to settle in Italy. His houses in Venice and in Ferrara are described as "Havens of Mercy," ff. [6]v-[7]r: "Percioché qual persona crederò io che sia in questi contorni, per non dir più oltre, che non sappia come l'onoratissime case che V(ostra) S(ignoria) E(cellentissima) tiene continuamente in Venezia, et in Ferrara, sono il sostegno di tanti poveri, non solamente mendicanti, et manifesti, ma ancora vergognosi, huomini et donne, infermi, pupilli, et d'ogni'altra sorte di bisognosi, che ricorrono ogn'hora a quelle case, come a veri porti di misericordia, et di sollevamento alle lor miserie? Quanti poveri forestieri, quanti prigionii, quanti scaduti, quanti letterati, quanti scolari, quanti destituti da ogni parte riconoscono d'haver la vita, o l'onore dalla bontà della V(ostra) S(ignoria)"; Zavan, *Gli ebrei, i marrani e la figura di Salomon Usque*, pp. 88-93; Tommasino, *L'Alcorano di Macometto*, pp. 61-65 [for the relation between Ruscelli, Ortensio Lando and Arrivabene]. On the diffusion of Italian *turcica* and historiography among Jewish historians see Jacobs, "Joseph ha-Kohen, Paolo Giovio, and Sixteenth-Century Historiography," pp. 71-73; Jacobs, "Exposed to all the currents of the Mediterranean – a sixteenth-century Venetian Rabbi on Muslim History," pp. 33-60.

7. Menocchio, Leon Modena, and beyond

The *Alcorano di Macometto* was widely diffused throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. It was read, copied, and translated, especially between 1547 and 1647, when the French translation of the Qur'ān by André Du Ryer was finally published. The *Alcorano* circulated in Venice in the same diplomatic, editorial and heterodox circles in which it was published. From Venice, European diplomats and travellers, Italian reformers, and booksellers spread the *Alcorano* throughout Europe as a product of Italian Renaissance culture. The first British readers of it were translators of Italian literature, such as William Thomas, Thomas Hoby, Henry Parker and the Italian exiled Giacomo Castelvetro.³⁰

In seventeenth-century England, in addition to John Selden, Robert Ashley had a copy of the *Alcorano*. Ashley was the translator of Miguel de Luna's *Historia verdadera del rey don Rodrigo*, dedicated to Charles I under the title *Almansor the learned and victorious king that conquered Spaine* (1627). In France, the *Alcorano* was read by Guillaume Postel, Joseph Juste Scaliger, Antoine De Laval and Montesquieu, who owned a copy and probably used it for his *Persian Letters*. Around 1630 the French renegade Thomas/Osman d'Arcos wrote from Tunis to Pereise to request a copy of "the Latin, or of the Italian Koran." In addition, at least two manuscript copies were made from the print. So far, only one of the two has been found. It is preserved in the Bancroft Library of the University of California (Berkeley). This copy consists only of the three books, including the marginal notes, but without the preliminary texts and the introduction. The second one, made in Russia in the eighteenth century, was sold in London in 1899.³¹

During the seventeenth century, the *Alcorano* was also the basis for the German translation by the Lutheran preacher Salomon Schweigger, who learned Italian in Constantinople, where he found a copy of the *Alcorano* in the late 1570s. Schweigger's *Alcoranus Mahometicus* was printed in Nürnberg in 1616. This translation, in its turn, was the basis for the Dutch translation, printed for the first time in 1641.

³⁰ Tommasino, *L'Alcorano di Macometto*, pp. 287-307.

³¹ Berkeley (CA), University of California, The Bancroft Library, Ms. UCB 7.

As has already been demonstrated by Lazarus-Yafeh, the *Alcorano* was translated into Hebrew. Two of the four manuscripts of this translation belong to the seventeenth century. The first one is dated in Venice, 1636, while the second was realized in Amsterdam in 1653. Additionally, the first has a colophon, which identifies the scribe, and possibly the translator of it, as the rabbi Jacob ben Israel Halevi, who died in Venice in 1637. The Hebrew manuscripts and the Spanish translation deserve a further, more systematic comparison than can't be offered here. Both skip the long introduction; both also do not accept the Italian enumeration of the chapters or the division of the Qur'ān into three books. However, the Spanish translation still seems to be based on the Italian translation, and not on one of its seventeenth-century retranslation (German, Dutch and Hebrew).³²

Lazarus-Yafeh perhaps overemphasized the “positive Jewish attitude toward the Ottoman Empire and Islam,” based on the fact that the Hebrew translator “did not translate the polemical introductory sections into Hebrew and the fact that copies were made later of this Hebrew translation in Amsterdam.” The introduction of the *Alcorano* is in appearance polemical, but it contains pro-Ottoman political propaganda published in the new life of Muḥammad written by Castrodardo, especially in the oration addressed to Muḥammad by the monk Sergius-Bahīra. The “positive attitude toward the Ottoman Empire and Islam” was, therefore, not exclusively Jewish. This attitude can be read as an element of continuity between distinct Euro-Mediterranean religious contexts and diplomatic moments over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We can look, for example, at a certain seventeenth-century reader of the *Alcorano*, whom Tuscan physician Francesco Redi assigned to write a report on the Islamic compendium. This reader found it very useful as a manual for political leaders and rulers, in which a select audience of politicians could learn the *arcana imperii* of the prophet Muḥammad.³³

³² Lazarus-Yafeh, “A Seventeenth-Century Hebrew Translation,” pp. 206-208.

³³ Lazarus-Yafeh, “A Seventeenth Century Hebrew Translation,” p. 211; Tommasino, *L'Alcorano di Macometto*, pp. 248-255 [on the Florentine reader of the *Alcorano*].

³⁴ Adelman, “A Rabbi Reads the Qur'an in the Venetian Ghetto,” p. 125 and 136-137; on Jewish readership in the Italian Renaissance, see Bonfil, “The Libraries of Italian Jewry between the Middle Ages and Modern Times” and Baruchson-Arbib, *Books and Readers: The Reading Interests of Italian Jews at the Close of the Renaissance*.

Recent scholarship has revealed another seventeenth-century, this time Jewish, reader of the *Alcorano*. Howard Tzvi Adelman has pointed out that the Venetian rabbi Leon Modena (1571-1648) read the Italian version of the Qur'ān. Modena presented "Islam in a positive light, very close to rabbinic Jewish practice, and he uses information about Islam, provided by Christian polemicists against Islam, against Christianity." His literary notebook, composed during the 1640s, just a little after Jacob ben Israel Halevi's death, includes a five-pages-long collection of information about Islam in Italian and Hebrew.³⁴

Adelman examines Modena's reading within the boundaries of his religious community, and separates Christian from Jewish readership. But in reality Venetian correspondents of Leon Modena, such as Fulgenzio Micanzio, shared with him a critical, and even positive, view of the prophet Muḥammad and contemporary Muslim practices. Furthermore, Lazarus-Yafeh and Adelman did not analyze *Alcorano*'s marginal notes as an exoteric system, necessary to convey information about Islam and political messages published within the text. We should also remember that the first intended readership for the *Alcorano*, possibly including Portuguese and Spanish conversos, as well as a later libertine and popular readership, shared similar attitudes toward Islam with rabbi Leon Modena. It seems therefore hazardous and reductive to propose a confessional taxonomy of readers.³⁵

It has recently been demonstrated that lower class readers such as the prophet Scolio from Lucca and the miller Menocchio, formerly studied by Carlo Ginzburg, owned a copy of the *Alcorano*. Both Scolio and Menocchio found in this text the episode of the young Ibrāhīm destroying the idols (Qur'ān, 21). Menocchio, relying on this episode, made his argument against the Catholic worship of saints during his second trial in the middle of the 1590s:

Interrogatus respondit: "Non si debbe adorar le loro imagini, ma solamente il solo Iddio, che ha fatto il cielo e la terra. Non vedete che Abram buttò per terra tutti li idoli e tutte le imagini et adorò un solo Iddio?"³⁶

³⁵ Micanzio, *Annotazioni e pensieri*, in *Storici e politici veneti del Cinquecento e del Seicento*, pp. 831-832.

³⁶ Del Col, *Domenico Scandella detto Menocchio: i processi dell'Inquisizione (1538-1599)*, p. 66 and 148.

This episode circulated through other works on Islam and translations of the Qurʾān, such as the *Cribratio Alkorani* by Nicolas von Kusa, the latin translation of *sūrah* 21 by Flavius Mithridates, that reached Veneto through the Augustinian Gabriele della Volta, as well as and both the Spanish and Italian versions of the *Gospel of Barnabas*. Menocchio, who talked about the Qurʾān with a Jew called Simone, found this story in the Italian translation by Giovanni Battista Castrodardo:

[...] così [Abramo] gli ruppe dal grande infuori. Domandano adunque chi aveva fatto questo, fu risposto dagli altri che era stato un fanciullo nominato Abramo. Menatolo adunque in presenza di molti, addomandavano s'egli haveva fatto questo degl'Idoli, rispose ch'il grande che era intero lo havea fatto.³⁷

The Quranic episode of the young Ibrāhīm, which seems to have a Midrasic origin, was later translated into Spanish and spread among Amsterdam's Sephardim:

[...] y así [Abraham] los quebró todos quitado el grande; y quando le preguntaron quién auía echo, respondió vno que auía sido el niño llamado Abraham, al qual traéndolo delante de muchos, le preguntaron si él auía echo esto de los ydolos y él respondió que el grande, que era perfecto aduía echo aquella obra.³⁸

Four decades after Menocchio was executed, the Venetian rabbi Leon Modena used a similar passage from the Italian translation to point out the similarities between Islam and Judaism. The topic was again the worship of images, and his source the *Alcorano di Macometto*. Modena wrote in his notebook: “Proibisce le imagini Cap. 25,” referring to chapter 25 of the third book:

Habbiamo noi forse commandato che si adori immagine alcuna? Molti parimente si son partiti da Christo figliuol di Maria, il quale esponeva le parabole, portando le sue imagini, e dicendo Christo esser eloquente, e i suoi precetti esser contrarii.³⁹

This paragraph was translated into Spanish in chapter 53 of the second book:

³⁷ *Alcorano*, 65r, Tommasino, *L'Alcorano di Macometto*, pp. 276-286 [on Scolio, Menocchio, the *Alcorano* and the worship of images].

³⁸ Amsterdam, EH, 48 D 20, f. 117r.

³⁹ Ancona, Archivio della Comunità Israelitica, ms. n. 7, f. 61v; *Alcorano*, f. 80v.

¿por ventura encomendamos nosotros para humillarse a las ymágenes, como muchos ai que se apartaron de Jesus Naçaereno, hixo de María, y lo dexaron que él declaraua los exemplos y trahían a sus ymágenes? Y decían que Jesús era ombre de retórica y sus precebtos eran contra la Ley.⁴⁰

These examples clearly show the complex relationship between early modern readership and popular Orientalism. The miller Menocchio and rabbi Leon Modena, apparently separated by religious boundaries and social strata, used the same Italian print source about Islam to challenge the Catholic worship of images. It is now necessary to understand the links between Venetian and Amsterdam Jewish readers of the Qur'ān between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

8. Reading the Qur'ān among Amsterdam rabbis

Given the context outlined above, it would not have been surprising to discover a Spanish translation of Castrodardo's *Alcorano* among Amsterdam Sephardim. Islam was an actual preoccupation there, too; the city was perhaps a safe distance from the Turks, unlike to the Venice of Leon Modena, but at the end of the seventeenth century, the Republic of the Netherlands was also affected by the threat of the Ottoman Empire, as the War of the Great Alliance against French King Louis XIV was waged.

Additionally, through their involvement in trade, Amsterdam Sephardim had regular contact with the Muslim world, notably Morocco.⁴¹ The impact of the false Messiah Sabbatay Tzvi had also been strongly felt in the Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam. Tzvi's forced conversion to Islam could have triggered an interest in the Qur'ān among ex-conversos, although the disenchantment with this outcome was widespread and, as far as we know, the few that still followed him regarded his conversion to Islam as a dissimulation rather than as an act to be imitated. All these factors undoubtedly contributed to an increased interest in Islam among the Sephardim in Northern Europe. However, as Lazarus-Yafeh suggests in regard Leon Modena, the main reason for the surge in interest in the Qur'ān was most likely the

⁴⁰ Amsterdam, EH, 48 D 20, f. 149r.

⁴¹ García-Arenal, "Conexiones entre los judíos marroquíes y la comunidad de Amsterdam."

general scholarly interest in other religions, or as we would call it today in “comparative religious studies.”⁴²

The libraries of the Iberian “New Jews” of converso background, reknowned for their remarkable breadth of interest, reflected an impressive wealth of subjects in a variety of languages. Many of their books deal with religion and incorporate a large amount of Catholic and Protestant theology. In this context it is not surprising to find copies of the Qurʾān also present. We have located copies of Du Ryer’s French translation in several Sephardi libraries: that of Hamburg rabbi Samuel Abaz;⁴³ of David Nunes Torres, rabbi at The Hague – owner of two copies of the French Qurʾān⁴⁴ – and that of Dayan Salomo Jessurun, owner of the Dutch translation.⁴⁵ Recently, a beautifully bound copy of the Dutch Qurʾān from the collection of the wealthy Amsterdam Sephardi merchant Aaron de Joseph de Pinto (1710-1758) known as a book collector, was offered for sale.⁴⁶

Sephardim had their own motivations for taking an interest in Islam. Isaac Orobio de Castro, author of important polemical works against Christianity, found an ally in Islam that reinforced his arguments against idolatry. Orobio regarded the Qurʾān as a purely human product, called Muḥammad a false prophet just like the so-called Messiah of the Christians and mentioned the ‘stupidities’ God according to Islam communicated to the ‘barbarous’ Muḥammad. However, he found the source of Muḥammad’s teaching divine.⁴⁷

⁴² Lazarus-Yafeh, “A Seventeenth-Century Hebrew Translation,” pp. 208-211.

⁴³ Samuel Abaz of Hamburg, *Catalogus variorum*, ‘l’Alcoran de Mahomet’, listed under French books, number 26, p. 26. On Abaz and his library see Studemund-Halévy, “Codices Gentium. Semuel de Isaac Abas. Coleccionista de Libros Hamburgués” and Kaplan, “El perfil cultural de tres rabinos sefardíes a través de sus bibliotecas.”

⁴⁴ *Catalogus... David Nunes Torres*, 1728. Du Ryer’s, *L’Alcoran de Mahomet* appears twice, first under “Theologici in octavo,” number 118, p. 35, then under “Miscellanei,” number 507, p. 51, this time with the imprint Anvers, 1719. On David Nunes Torres see Den Boer and Salomon, “Haham David Nunes Torres (1660-1728), bezitter van het enig overgebleven exemplaar van Uriël da Costa’s Exame das tradições fariseas” and Kaplan, “El perfil cultural.”

⁴⁵ *Catalogus... Jessurun*, ‘Alkoran van, Mahomet, 1695’, under Dutch books in octavo, number 353, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Offered for sale by Forum Books, *Antiquarian Catalogue 2010*, 20, n. 21. The references to Muhammed as a false prophet and as ‘barbarous’ are found in his *Prevençiones divinas contra la vana idolatría de las gentes*, ed. Silvera, pp. 120 and 165, respectively.

⁴⁷ Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism the Story of Isaac Orobio De Castro*, p. 253, also quoted in Lazarus-Yafeh, “A Seventeenth-Century Hebrew Translation,” p. 210.

Another author of religious polemics among Amsterdam Sephardim, Abraham Gómez Silveira (1656-1740)⁴⁸ explicitly staged Islam as religion in his “theological dialogues” between a “wise minister of the reformed Church, a apostolic roman catholic theologian, a learned muslim Turk [and] an unbiassed Jew.” In these witty dialogues in verse, the Turk defends among other arguments, monotheism, the human nature of Jesus, and the enduring validity of the Torah. He even counters the Catholic, the main target of the dialogues, by speaking against enforced religion and he advocates natural law. Through this character, whose arguments for the largest part of the dialogues seem interchangeable with that of the reformed minister and the Jew, an image of Islam emerges as a rational religion, only obscured, as are other religions, by human weakness.

Silveira made use of Islam and the Qur'ān in other of his writings, too. In the ‘Silent book’⁴⁹ he purported to merely quote, without adding his own voice, from a wealth of sources in order to corroborate his arguments in favour of the everlasting validity of the Torah, and against Christianity. Among the many authorities he uses to his advantage, Silveira quotes from the Qur'ān⁵⁰ to argue, for instance, that “those who alter God’s commandments for their own interest, do not have part in Paradise,”⁵¹ or to assert, quoting from it, that “we gave Jesus the Gospels full of light to lead the people to the righteous path, with the confirmation of the Old Testament.”⁵²

Silveira quoted from a copy of the Qur'ān, referring to passages and leaves of the text he consulted. The references do not correspond with the Spanish translation of the Qur'ān discussed above. However, the edition of the manuscript we will offer in the very near future will help to clarify the nature of this translation, its relationship to its sources and its uses in seventeenth-century Amsterdam.

⁴⁸ On the author and his work, Brown and Den Boer, *El barroco sefardí: Abraham Gómez Silveira, Arévalo, prov. de Avila, Castilla 1656 - Amsterdam 1741 : estudio preliminar; obras líricas, vejámenes en prosa y verso y documentación personal*.

⁴⁹ *Libro Mudo*, EH, 48 B 18.

⁵⁰ Silveira quotes from a copy of the Qur'ān, with references to passages and leaves of his text. The leaves referred to do not correspond with that of our present Spanish Qur'ān translation; we have not been able to identify the translation and copy Silveira might have used.

⁵¹ *Libro mudo*, EH, 48 B 18, f. 35r.

⁵² *Libro mudo*, EH, 48 B 18, f. 36r.

Appendix

The edition of the *Alcorano di Macometto*

First state

L'ALCORANO | DI MACOMETTO. | LA VITA, LA DOT- | TRINA,
I COSTVMI | ET LE SVE LEGGI | Nuouamente dal Arabo | tradotto
in uolgare. | Con Gratie, e Priuilegi | M D XLVII
[4], xxxviii, 100; 4° A^4 a-i⁴ k² A-2B⁴.

Second state

L'ALCORANO | DI MACOMETTO, | NEL QVAL SI CONTIE | NE
LA DOTTRINA, | LA VITA, I CO= | STVMI, ET LE | LEGGI SVE. |
Tradotto nuouamente dall'Arabo | in lingua Italiana. Con Gratie, e
Priuilegii. | M D XLVII
[5], xxxviii, 100; A^4 B^1 a-i⁴ k² A-2B⁴.

Third state

L'ALCORANO | DI MACOMETTO, | NEL QVAL SI CONTIE | NE
LA DOTTRINA, | LA VITA, I CO= | STVMI, ET LE | LEGGI SVE.
| Tradotto nuouamente dall'Arabo | in lingua Italiana. Con Gratie, e
Priuilegii. | M D XLVII
[5], 1, 100; A^4 B^1 a-i⁴ k² l-n⁴ A-2B⁴.

The first *state* presents a quire of *cancellanda* (A^4), which contains a first version of the preliminary texts. Later, this quire was replaced by a *cancellans* of six folios (A^4 B^1). The third *state* presents an addition of three quires at the end of the introduction (l-n⁴), taken from contemporary *turcica*, namely from Giovanni Antonio Menavino and Bartolomej Georgijević.

Content of the third *state* of the *Alcorano di Macometto*

Frontispiece

L'Alcorano di Macometto, nel qual si contiene la dottrina, la vita, i costumi, et le leggi sue. Tradotto nuouamente dall'Arabo in lingua italiana. Con Gratie, e Privilegii, MDXLVII.

Preliminary texts

Dedicatory letter *Allo Illustrissimo Signor Gabriele de Luoes S. d'Aramon, consigliere della Maestà Christianissima et ambasciatore appresso il Signor Turco* (signed by Andrea Arrivabene), ff. [2]r-[5]v; sonnet *Com' il gran Re del ciel Gabriello elesse*, f. [5]v; letter to the readers *Alli pii lettori*, f. Ir-v.

Introduction

La vera vita di Macometto, tratta dall' historie di cristiani, ff. IIr-XIr; *Della religione de' Turchi*, ff. XIr-XXVIIIr; *Il matrimonio de' Turchi*, ff. XXVIIIr-XXXIIIr; *L'afflittione de' Christiani schiavi*, ff. XXXIIIr-XXXVIv; *La conditione de' Christiani ne' Paesi de' Turchi*, ff. XXXVIIr-XXXVIIIv; *Della legge Mahomet. In che è fondata la legge Mahometana*, f. XXXIXr; *De comandamenti della legge de' Turchi*, f. XXXIXr-v; *La esposizione del primo comandamento, che è dello amare Iddio*, f. XXXIXv; *La esposizione del secondo comandamento, dello ubidire al padre e alla madre*, ff. XXXIXv-XLr; *La esposizione del terzo comandamento, del non fare altrui quello che a noi non vorremmo che fusse fatto*, f. XLr-v; *La esposizione del quarto comandamento, dello andare ai Tempij*, f. XLv; *Come i Turchi fanno oratione nelle loro Meschit, cioè Tempij*, f. XLr; *Di quegli, a quali non è lecito andare alle meschite*, f. XLr-v; *La esposizione del quinto comandamento, del digiuno*, ff. XLiv-XLIr; *La esposizione del sesto comandamento, del sacrificio*, f. XLIIr-v; *Della elemosina*, ff. XLIIv-XLIIIr; *La esposizione del settimo comandamento che è del matrimonio*, f. XLIIIr-v; *Del Matrimonio, che usano al presente in Turchia*, ff. XLIIIv-XLIIIr; *De' giochi, che fanno quando la sposa esce dalla stufa*, f. XLIIIr; *Come va la sposa a casa del marito*, ff. XLIIIv-XLIIIr; *La esposizione dell' octavo, e ultimo comandamento*, f. XLIIIr; *Del peccato della Superbia*, f. XLIIIv; *Del peccato della Avaritia*, ff. XLIIIv-XLVIr; *Del vizio della Lussuria*, f. XLVIr-v; *Del peccato della Ira*, f. XLVIIr; *Del peccato della Gola*, f. XLVIIr-v; *Del peccato della Invidia*, XLVIIv-XLVIIIr; *Del peccato della Accidia*, f. XLVIIIr-v; *Prophetia de' Turchi*, ff. XLVIIIv-Lv.

First book

Il primo libro dell' Alcorano dove dimostrasi con qual pessime arti hebbe principio l' Imperio e la Religione di Macometto; Le cose da Dio

create, f. 1r-v; *La generatione di Macometto*, ff. 1v-6r; *La Natività di Macometto*, ff. 6r-8r; *La Nodritura di Macometto*, ff. 8r-10r; *La Vita i costumi la forma la statura, e l'opinioni di Macometto*, ff. 10v-13v; *Di Eubocara successore di Macometto*, ff. 13v-14r; *Aomar successore di Eubocara*, f. 14r-v; *Odmen successore d'Aomar*, ff. 14v-15r; *Ali successore di Odmen*, f. 15r-16r; *Alhacen successore di Ali*, f. 16r; *Moauui successore di Alacen*, ff. 16v-17r; *Iezid successore di Moauui*, ff. 17r-v; *La Dottrina di Macometto*, ff. 17v-24v; [colophon] *Il fine del primo libro di grande Auttorità appresso de Sarracini, avenga che sia colmo di Bugie, Fittioni, Buffonerie, Superstitioni, Vanità, biastemie, Favole, e Sogni*, f. 24r.

Second book

Il secondo libro dell'Alcorano nel quale si contiene la legge de' Sarracini impostagli da Macometto. Chapters I-XXVIII, ff. 25r-61v; [colophon] *Il fine del secondo libro ripieno di falsa Religione, e bestemie contro il figliuol di Dio, e'l Spirito santo, d'inviolabile osservanza appresso Macomettani*, f. 61v.

Third book

Il terzo libro dell'Alcorano nel quale medesimamente si contiene la legge di Macometto. Chapters I-XCVI, ff. 62r-100v; [colophon] *Et avenga che nel testo Arabo ci siano anchora alcuni pochi versi come ornamento del fine dell'opera, nondimeno non essendo di sostanza, né appresso il latino interprete, li habbiamo voluto lasciare, facendo fine ad honore di Giesù Christo, et a confusione di Macometto Propheta di spirito Diabolico, e Nuntio di Antichristo maladetto*, f. 100v.

Libro del Alcorán

Frontispiece

Libro del Alcorán, traducido palabra por palabra de arábigo en español, diuidido en dos partes. La primera contiene el principio de las cosas criadas en este mundo y principio del reyno de Mohamet y principio de su compañía. La segunda de su ley y preceptos.

First Part

De las cosas criadas del señor en el principio, f. 1r-v; *De las generaciones de los padres de Mohameet*, ff. 1v-10v; *Del nacimiento de Mo-*

hamet, ff. 10v-13v; *De la criación de Mohamet*, 13v-18r; *De la vida de Mohamet y sus condiciones*, ff. 18r-23v; *De Aobucra en lugar de Mohamet*, ff. 23v-24v; *De Aomer en lugar de Aobucra*, ff. 24v-25v; *De Ormín en lugar de Aomer*, 25v-26r; *De Abi en lugar de Odmen*, ff. 26v-27v; *De Alasín en lugar de Alí*, ff. 27v-28r; *De Mohabi en lugar de Alasín*, ff. 28r-29r; *De Iazid en lugar de Mohabi*, f. 29r-v; *De la Criación de Mohamet. Fue el mensajero del Señor; que su oración y su pas sea sobre él*, ff. 29v-44v; [colophon] *Fin de la primera parte del Alcorán*, f. 44v.

Second Part

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