Cultural Encounters Between East and West, 1453-1699
Cultural Encounters Between East and West, 1453-1699

edited by

Matthew Birchwood and Matthew Dimmock

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For their patience we thank Vlatka Nercessian and Cambridge Scholars Press; for their permission to reproduce the Moroccan ambassador illustration, Chiswick House and English Heritage; and for other illustrations Cambridge University Library, The British Museum, The British Library, The New York Public Library and the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi. In the divisive international climate in which we live, when this work is crucially important, we hope that the “encounters” between individuals, institutions and cultures fostered by the conference and this volume are just a beginning—to all those involved, thanks.
1453  Siege and Capture of Constantinople by Mehmed II, “the Conqueror”.

1454-81  Greece, Trebizond and the Crimea conquered by the Ottomans.

1481  Ottoman forces land at Otranto in Italy.

1492  Catholic Spain conquers Granada. Voyage of Columbus.

1517  Egypt and Syria conquered by Selim I. Pope Leo X calls for a crusade against the Ottomans. Luther publicises his 95 Theses.

1521  Belgrade taken by Suleyman I, “the Magnificent”.

1522  Ottoman conquest of Rhodes.

1526  Battle of Mohacs in which the forces of the Hungarian king, Louis II, are defeated by the Ottoman army. Buda is taken by Suleyman.

1529  The first Siege of Vienna.

1532  Further Ottoman campaigns into Christian Hungary resulting in the Siege of Guns. As a consequence, Charles V is forced to agree to the peace of Nuremberg with the German Protestants.

1534  Final severance of ties between England and Rome.

1535  Offensive and defensive alliance signed between Ottomans and France. Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, conquers Tunis.

1536  The Pilgrimage of Grace in England.

1540  Treaty established between Venice and the Ottomans.

1541  Hungary is annexed, and becomes an Ottoman territory. Charles V’s attempt upon Algiers fails.

1543  The height of the Franco-Ottoman alliance: a combined fleet captures Nice.

1545  The Diet of Worms begins. Charles V and Ferdinand I establish the Truce of Adrianople with the Ottomans.

1548  The Ottomans occupy Tabriz, Persia.

1553  Peace is established between the Ottomans and Persia.

1560  Ottomans destroy Spanish fleet near Tripoli.

1562  Eight-year truce signed between Suleyman I and Ferdinand I.

1565  Siege of Malta.

1566  Further Ottoman campaigns in Hungary.

1568  Moorish revolt in Spain.

1569  The crusading Northern Rebellion in England.

1570  Elizabeth I is excommunicated by Pope Pius V in the bull Regnans in Excelsis.
Chronology

1571  Ottoman conquest of Cyprus. Battle of Lepanto results in defeat of Ottoman fleet.
1573  Peace of Constantinople between Venice and the Ottomans.
1576  The culmination of Spanish incursions into The Netherlands—the sack of Antwerp.
1578  The Battle of Al-czar-el-kebir, ‘Alcazar’, in which a Portuguese invasionary force is defeated in Morocco. King Sebastian I is killed.
1580  Portugal is invaded and annexed by Spain. The Anglo-Ottoman “Capitulations” are established.
1588  The English defeat the Spanish Armada, blessed as a crusade.
1590  Peace settled between Shah Abbas I of Persia and the Ottomans.
1596  Battles between Ottoman and Imperial forces in North Hungary.
1601  First English East India Company voyage, under John Lancaster. Moroccan embassy in London.
1602 (1627) Conflict between Ottomans and Persia.
1606  The Treaty of Zsitva-Torok is established between the Ottomans and the Austrians.
1611  Thomas Sherley returns to England as ambassador from Persia.
1620  An English fleet is sent to attack Algiers.
1622  Osman II is deposed.
1627  Treaty concluded between the Ottomans and the Emperor Ferdinand II.
1637  British attack Salé.
1638  Murad IV reconquers Baghdad.
1642  Outbreak of the Civil War in Britain.
1645  Ottoman-Venetian conflict is reignited.
1649  The Execution of Charles I.
1660  Restoration of English Monarchy and Charles II. Ottoman campaigns in Transylvania.
1662  Charles II gains Tangiers as part of his dowry through marriage to Catherine of Braganza.
1663  Ottomans declare war upon Emperor Leopold I and threaten to invade Germany.
1665  The French attack Tunis and Algiers.
1667  Siege of Candia.
1669  Crete is taken by the Ottomans after a siege begun in 1648.
1671  Ottomans declare war on Poland.
1678  The Popish Plot in England.
1683  Moroccan embassy in London. Siege of Vienna.
1684  The British abandon Tangiers. Holy League established against the Ottomans.
1686  The Ottomans lose Buda to Charles, Duke of Lorraine. Russia declares war upon the Ottomans.
1687  Mehmed IV is deposed.
1688  The “Glorious Revolution” in Britain.
1690  The Ottomans reconquer Belgrade and occupy Bulgaria.
1699  Treaty of Carlowitz is established between the Ottomans and Austria, Russia, Poland and Venice. The Ottomans cede Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia and Slavonia to the Hapsburgs; Poland accept Podolia and the Ukraine; Venice the Morea; Russia retains Azov.
INTRODUCTION

Matthew Birchwood and Matthew Dimmock

A radical reappraisal of the relationship between “East” and “West” is currently underway. Critical approaches to the early modern period have too often tacitly assumed a binary opposition between a civilized Christian “West” and the encroaching barbarity of an infidel “East”. However, recent work by scholars across a range of disciplines is doing much to discredit the long-held assumptions of traditional historiography, suggesting instead a profoundly different conception of Afro-Eurasian geography, less preoccupied with Europe as a central defining concept.¹

This volume represents the findings of a conference devoted to bringing together new work in this field, and the diverse articles that follow draw upon the disciplines of history, cultural studies, art history, literary theory and anthropology to produce a collection varied in its scope and approach. What they all point to is the complexity of cultural negotiation which took place in the myriad “encounters”—diplomatic, mercantile, religious and military—throughout this period. The conquest of Constantinople in 1453 signalled the extent of Ottoman imperial ambition in Christendom but it also inaugurated a period of unprecedented exchange both material and notional which undermines the representation of a period defined by unremitting hostility between two supposedly alien cultural traditions.

As such remarks already imply, a project of this kind is confronted with a problem of terminology. Most fundamentally perhaps, “East” and “West” are inherently subjective designations which depend upon the orientation of the viewer as much as any remotely consistent geographical reality. As the papers that follow demonstrate, in this period there is generally no sense of a clear or rigid demarcation between what are ordinarily thought of as “East” and “West”. The range of cognitive maps they delineate show—from both Christian and Muslim perspectives—that an idealized unity defined by faith remained an extraordinarily potent idea, despite in both cases no longer existing in the propagandist forms in which it was invoked. It is an underlying principle of the work that follows that “East” and “West” remain, at best, notional entities with fluid boundaries contingent upon their specific cultural and historical contexts. Broadly identifiable contours can, however, be sketched in. One apparently crucial difference throughout the period was that of religion, and for many of the protagonists represented here the most evident embodiment of Muslim power was the civilization of the imperial Ottoman dynasty. As Mehmed IV’s army
crossed the Danube in the summer of 1683, the empire spanned three continents, stretching from the shores of the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf to its east and almost as far as Vienna to its north and west. At the heart of it all was the sublime Porte itself, considered to “have been created by nature for the capital of the world”, a symbol not only of the imperial grandeur of the Ottoman state but also of its thriving economic success. Visitors to the city were struck by the sumptuousness of its mosques and palaces, but also by the multiculturalism of this bustling entrepot, accommodating communities of Muslims, Christians and Jews permitted to practise their faith with relatively little state interference. As one of the main conduits for commerce between the Mediterranean and Asia, merchants from virtually every European power plied their trade at the port. Despite sustained episodes of direct military conflict between the Ottomans and their trading neighbours throughout this period, the business of profit making continued to ensure a steady circulation of material goods as well as to sustain the cultural and political dialogue that went along with it.

Some of the most readily identifiable and well documented “encounters” were those that took place between diplomatic representatives of various national interests. The language and practice of diplomacy provides a revealing, if densely coded picture of power relations between “East” and “West”. To take the English example: following the establishment of the Anglo-Ottoman “Capitulations” in 1580 the Levant trade developed to become an essential component of the economic life of the nation, and as late as 1679 the consul at Smyrna, Paul Rycaut, published an updated version of these customary “Capitulations” with the observation that “they are of an other nature & forme, then articles of peace are usuall to bee betwene two nations; for hee requires no counterpart from his Majestie”. The countenance of the English king, in other words, was largely irrelevant to this contract, not least because, by their very nature, they codified a tributary relationship in which it was the Christian trader and not the Ottoman host who constituted the supplicant and cultural “outsider”. In this sense, diplomatic relations between the two were never wholly reciprocal and there would, for example, be no resident Turkish ambassador to Britain until the end of the next century.

The first illustration of the centrefold—“The Moroccan Ambassador in Hyde Park” (1683)—is a remarkable and revealing depiction of one encounter between “East” and “West”, revealing not least because it highlights many of the problems inherent in attempting to construct anything resembling a consistent and coherent picture of cross-cultural encounter in this period. The portrait was commissioned to celebrate the visit of the Moroccan ambassador, Kaid Mohammed ben Hadu, to England in 1682 and was painted by the court painter Godfrey Kneller, whose sitters would include a galaxy of prominent society figures, including the last two Stuart monarchs. By all accounts, the foreign visitor made a deep impression upon London society, banqueting with members
of the court, visiting the building works at St Paul’s and even entertaining his hosts with a display of horsemanship in Hyde Park, the occasion rendered in Kneller’s portrait. What is striking about English accounts of the visit is the extent to which religious and cultural differences are displaced by representations of the ambassador’s nobility and “civility”, a strategy clearly designed to underscore the parity between the two parties. Nevertheless, untangling the complexity of meanings at play here is problematic. Although the English reception of the Moroccan envoy was a tangible encounter with very real political and military implications for the nation, nevertheless as both contemporary accounts and Kneller’s magnificent portrait indicate, what we are left with are unmistakable constructs of that encounter. Kneller’s portrait depicts the ambassador astride his rearing stallion, lance in hand: attired in rich eastern dress complete with turban, the figure is projected as both exotic and familiar. The chivalrous Moor was a well-established literary figure by the late seventeenth century and reassuringly assimilable to Caroline viewers. What is new is the setting, comfortably containing the Muslim horseman in the environs of Hyde Park.

The strategic purpose behind the courtly spectacle of the Moroccan embassy was also far reaching. The influence of the so called Barbary states of North Africa upon the conduct of Christian-Muslim relations in this period has been an area of relative neglect (which this volume goes some considerable way towards rectifying)—Charles II was by no means the first English monarch to receive a Moroccan embassy. Between August 1600 and February 1601, the court had played host to a delegation dispatched to discuss with the English Queen the possibility of an alliance against Spain, an embassy which produced another famous portrait, and which was the third to be welcomed in London. While the specific details of the ongoing relationship between England and the North African states reverberated through literary and popular culture, they are also indicative of wider encounters between cultures and peoples in the expanding Afro-Eurasian world. One example of this is Tangiers, the only English toehold on Muslim territory throughout the period 1453-1699, which had been ceded to Charles II in 1662 as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza. Twenty years later English forces were still struggling to establish this troublesome outpost. Upon the ambassador’s departure in 1682, Charles made a present of six hundred muskets to the Emperor of Fez, with the implicit assurance that they would be used to suppress the Moorish tribes that continually assaulted the Tangiers garrison. Nevertheless, various attempts to stave off its hostile neighbours proved both futile and costly and the garrison was finally—humiliatingly—evacuated in 1684. Just as the nature of the Anglo-Ottoman “Capitulations” insists upon a certain power dynamic, the inadequate and unsuccessful nature of such English adventures upon Muslim soil demonstrates
the unsustainability of post-colonial Saidian divisions in the early modern period.

The portrait of the Moroccan ambassador in Hyde Park thus illustrates both the conflations and refractions which inevitably result when one culture is viewed through the eyes of another, whilst the delicate diplomatic negotiations which historically frame the portrait are an indication of the interdependence of religious, geographical and political entities for which “East” and “West” can only ever be expedient generalizations. Elsewhere in Christendom, however, Ottoman territorial ambitions were about to reach their apogee, as the Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha led the Imperial army across the Raab and arrived at the Gates of Vienna on 12th July 1683. Suleyman I had placed the city under siege in 1529, and had paraded in front of it again in 1532 in a procession designed to supercede the earlier progresses of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Not only were all three of these campaigns represented in Christian texts as the direct consequence of Mehmed II’s conquest of Constantinople in 1453, but the ways in which the sieges were conducted—and iconographically represented by both parties—were a demonstration of certain shared forms “with equal recognition value, and equal vigour, from West to East and East to West”. Vienna was to mark the furthest extent of the Ottoman advance into Christian territory in this period, and conventional histories of the Ottoman Empire tend to designate the century leading up to this “final” confrontation as one of inevitable decline, reading in the series of bloody internecine struggles for the succession that followed the death of Ahmed I in 1617, the fatal weakening of the sinews of imperial hegemony. This is, however, to impose a teleological coherence upon events that has tended to distort the true situation as contemporaries perceived it, downplaying the wider influence of the Ottoman state. In the summer of 1683 the outcome of these events seemed far from a foregone conclusion, yet by 1699 and the Treaty of Carlowitz, mediated by the English ambassador Lord Paget and his Dutch counterpart, we begin to see a shift in conceptions of relative power that is reflected in the terms the Ottomans were forced to accept.

Reflecting recent developments in this emerging field, the present volume is divided into two distinct—although interrelated—parts: the first titled Citing Encounter, the second Siting Encounter. This distinction is designed to provoke a productive dialogue between individual papers and those in immediate proximity but also to draw attention to the differences between what are essentially constructions of encounter, whether refracted through literary or documentary accounts, and actual locations of encounter, sometimes geographic but also conceptual and more readily contingent upon a specific sense of direct engagement. As this suggests, the two categories overlap and intermingle. It is important to emphasize that to remain productive this grouping should not be
considered mutually exclusive or constrictive/constraining—several of the papers that follow might have been constructively placed in either section. Rather, the volume has been assembled in such a way as to draw out parallels between contiguous papers whilst recognizing that constructing a site of encounter may be central to an act of citation and vice-versa. Where this strategy crucially differs from existing critical work in this area is the opportunity it affords for consideration of multiple contexts—for example the conflicted notion of the “turke” in early modern England (in part one), in the light of a wider Christian-Islamic iconography (in part two) or the correlation between the form and function of the disputation and the equally ritualized conduct of Ottoman diplomacy in Europe. In both cases, each part positively informs the other, pointing to the complex layering of “west” upon “east” and “east” upon “west” throughout the period between 1453 and 1699.

Part I, *Citing Encounter*, is a collection of five papers which focus upon exactly the creation, imagining and elaboration of such interaction—the ways in which it is “cited” within manuscripts, printed texts and in wider Christian culture. In academic terms, this is perhaps the more recognizable of the two parts of this volume, drawing upon a considerable and developing body of critical literature stretching back to the influential work of Louis Wann and Samuel Chew, in particular the latter’s *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* (1937). Aside from work on individual dramatists and reformers, more recently the work of Nabil Matar has served to better define the field and should be considered the point of origin for much of the material that follows. Professor Matar was the first to persuasively challenge the application of Edward Said’s Orientalist thesis to the period in question, demonstrating in *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (1999) that Britain did not “enjoy military or industrial power over Islamic countries. Rather the Muslim had a power of self-representation which English writers knew they had either to confront or to engage.” As several of the following papers demonstrate, aspects of Anglo-Muslim power relations as recast by Matar also hold true for wider Christian culture: it was not until the Treaty of Carlowitz, and later Napoleon’s invasion of North Africa, that the prospect of a Western European order of power with any kind of “authority” over the “Orient” became conceivable. Furthermore, through exhaustive archival work, he has insisted that the evidence for “actual” encounter must be used to contextualize those constructions of apparent “otherness” that dominate the textual production of the period. As a consequence, he suggests, “in their discourse about Muslims, Britons produced a representation that did not belong to the actual encounter with the Muslims”, a powerful contention which comes under some scrutiny throughout this volume, and specifically in terms of the citing of encounter when, as John Tolan, Matthew Dimmock, Matthew Birchwood, Ken Parker and
Matar himself begin to demonstrate, imaginary encounter was nuanced and informed by “actual” encounter in numerous and complex ways.

Aside from a number of important but unpublished doctoral theses, the field defined by *Citing Encounter* has until recently been one largely consisting of investigations of the Moor and the Jew, and how these (and other) early modern “others” are constructed and represented.\(^{15}\) The “East-West” focus of this volume clearly incorporates investigations of this kind, not least in the eschatological, mercantile and doctrinal affinities habitually drawn between these figures and the “turke”. A wider notion of how foreignness might have been conceived in relation to cultural identity and indexed to political and religious anxieties at home is a recurrent theme of this collection. As a consequence, the theoretical framework developed in critical works like Jim Shapiro’s *Shakespeare and the Jews* (1996) and Kim Hall’s *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (1995) remain crucially important.\(^{16}\) As much as any other critic in this field, these disparate critical strands have been brought together by Daniel Vitkus—most recently in his *Turning Turk: English Theater in the Multicultural Mediterranean* (2003)—whose understanding of the ways in which cultural interchange in and around the Levant were inflected in early modern English culture informs and is responded to in many of the following papers.\(^{17}\)

There are a series of central themes linking those papers comprising *Citing Encounter* that seem increasingly crucial to an understanding of the ways in which ideas of Islam and the “East” were formed and articulated, and of the tropes in which Muslim figures were repeatedly constructed. Of these, the seismic ramifications of Reformation in Europe and England’s severance of ties with Rome are keenly felt and continually referenced. John Tolan invokes the long history of Christian reflection, disputation and division to inform a new reading of Luther’s works, including his *95 Theses* (1518), and moots the possibility of Christian-Islamic interaction against an international background in which the Reformers were increasingly associated with the Ottoman incursions of the 1520s. The implications of this redefinition of heterodoxy—could both the Lutherans and the Ottomans be “the turke”, the “infidel”?—remain a potent subtext for many of the disputations explored by Nabil Matar, and in papers by Matthew Dimmock and Matthew Birchwood the consequences of England’s Protestant identity and subsequent alliance with the Ottomans are shown to have had a profound influence upon the ways in which such figures were imagined on stage and in popular literature. Ultimately, this process would engender a doubleness in English comprehensions of Islam—part admiration, part vituperation—which could only deepen as the ideological stakes were raised. As Birchwood’s paper illustrates, confronted by the political and spiritual crises of civil war and its aftermath, English commentators repeatedly
appropriated constructions of Islam and the Ottomans in order to treat the most contentious issues of the age.

As Dimmock demonstrates, a further consequence of schism in England was a freedom to pursue alliance with the Ottomans and the North African states that had been previously forbidden by papal decree. By Elizabeth’s reign, in nuanced ways, the Muslim had begun to occupy an ambivalent position in relation to the Protestant English, sharing not only a natural enemy in Catholic Europe but also an officially sanctioned trade agreement. The French had of course established the same alliance in the 1540s, a consequence of the enmity between Francois I and Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. Surely the most powerful impetus for encounter though was profit. In Aleppo and Izmir as well as at Istanbul, English merchants competed with their French and Dutch counterparts for a share of the lucrative Levant traffic. Trade clearly could and did animate the ways in which such encounters were “cited”, and often provided both a framework for interaction as well as fuelling anxieties of a latent apostasy inherent in those prepared to deal with the infidel. Nevertheless, trade remained the overriding concern of statesmen despite insistent denunciation from pulpit and playhouse, shaping diplomacy and animating discourse from fifteenth century Venice to seventeenth century England. The importance of commercial activity (and its attendant piracy) is explored in Ken Parker’s overarching investigation of the contacts between England and Barbary in this period, and elaborated in Dimmock’s detailed discussion of the Anglo-Ottoman Capitulations of 1580 and their reception. It also provides a significant background for Matar’s disputations, John Rastell setting his New Boke of Purgatory in some unnamed mercantile centre: a “great cytye” in “the eest partyes”.¹⁸

Part II, Siting Encounter, is also a collection of five papers which here share a common interest in the conceptual location of encounter—the geographical, ritual, political or iconographic space in which it is performed. This is an interdisciplinary area, which is less obviously bound to a single critical field, and as a result our contributors offer richly different visions of such “sites”. It is also a field that has been opened up by the work of relatively few scholars in recent years: of particular note are Cemal Kafadar’s archivally-based Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State (1995) and Metin Kunt and Christine Woodhead’s Suleyman the Magnificent and His Age: The Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern World (1995).¹⁹ On an exemplary geographical site of encounter, Andrew Hess’ The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth-Century Ibero-African Frontier (1978) has proved influential, re-orienting the position of the Barbary coast in relation to the events of this period and the ambitions of the major political and military players.²⁰ Similarly, Fernand Braudel’s vast The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II (1972-1973) continues to have a profound effect upon those working in these intersecting fields.²¹ More recently the understanding of sites of
“East/West” encounter has been further finessed in a variety of ways in Palmira Brummett’s *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (1994), Gülrü Necipoğlu’s article “Suleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry” (1989) and Jerry Brotton and Lisa Jardine’s influential *Global Interests: Renaissance Art Between East and West* (2000). In the later period, Daniel Goffman’s work has situated the English Levant trade firmly in the context of the domestic political situation and supplemented Robert Brenner’s authoritative groundwork, *Merchants and Revolution* in several areas. Goffman’s most recent book *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (2002) goes further to emphatically refute the myth of the Ottomans as a cultural entity apart from Europe.

These five papers are also linked in a series of illuminating ways. Not only do they all focus upon the nature of the notional and shifting boundary between Christianity and Islam, “East” and “West”, but also upon the nature of what may and may not permeate that boundary. Notions of gift-giving are central to Palmira Brummett’s exploration of the kiss, and to Ken Jackson’s investigation of the Abrahamic as it occurs in *Titus Andronicus*, whilst the projections of cultural prestige these exchanges entail underpin both Mustapha Soykut’s discussion of Ottoman-Papal relations and, albeit in a very different context, Gerald MacLean’s remarkable examination of Ottoman fauna as experienced by Christian travellers compelled to classify and comprehend the exotic in “The Sultan’s Beasts”. The space of the body and the way in which it functions and is placed under stress at such sites of encounter is also addressed by Brummett and MacLean, and explored in some detail in Maurizio Calbi’s discussion of the intersection of masculinity and attendant notions of the “East”. Just as differing political persuasions define one’s position in terms of the kiss, through the introduction of an array of primary source material Soykut demonstrates that ongoing negotiations between the Papacy, Venice and the Ottomans were defined less by irreconcilable difference and more by a determination to explore the possibilities opened up by such contact.

Each of the papers collected here thus seeks to problematize what, in their contemporary manifestation, are often portrayed as age-old and static sites of conflicting encounter. By putting pressure upon the historical boundaries routinely believed to define this relationship, they reveal the rich albeit often fraught encounters and exchanges between two ostensibly distinct civilizations and in so doing they suggest a timely renegotiation of precisely those boundaries. Situated at the end of the period under consideration, Kneller’s celebratory portrait of the Moroccan Ambassador in Hyde Park invites a conceptual (and literal) point of entry for rethinking ways in which encounters between Christian and Muslim “East” and “West” have been characterized and
urges a reevaluation of the terms in which such encounters continue to be conducted.
Notes

4 Paul Rycaut, *The Capitulations and Articles Of peace betweene the Majestie of the King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland &c. And the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire...Written and published by Paul Ricaut Esquire Secretary to his Excellencie the Lord Embassadour* (Constantinople, 1663), p. 6.
5 The appointment of Yusuf Agah Efendi by the Ottomans as ambassador to London in 1793 marks the establishment of mutual diplomatic relations.
7 On the earlier embassies, see Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) p. 33. The anonymous 1601 portrait hangs in The Shakespeare Institute in Stratford, and is becoming an increasingly popular cover for modern critical editions of Shakespeare’s *Othello*, to which the embassy is considered contemporaneous. This is of course another example of the ways in which contemporary politics are being read back into the play.
10 Brotton and Jardine, p. 173.
11 See, for example, the chapter entitled “Seeds of Decline” in Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977).
16 See James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press,


18 John Rastell, *A new boke of purgatory whiche is a dyaloge & disputacyon betwene one Comyngo an Almayne a Christen man/ & one Gyngemyn a turke of Machometts law/ dysputynge by naturall reason and good philosophye/ whether there be a purgatorye or no purgatorye. which boke is deuyded into thre dyalogys ...* (London, 1530) sig. A. 2v.


22 For details see notes 1 and 9.


Part I

Citing Encounter
CHAPTER ONE

Looking East before 1453:
The Saracen in the Medieval European Imagination

John Tolan

“To fight against the Turk is the same as resisting God, who visits our sins upon us with this rod.”¹ So declared Martin Luther in 1518, in defence of his 95 theses. Like countless Christian authors before him, from seventh-century Syria or eighth-century Spain or Italy to fifteenth-century Constantinople, Luther cast Muslim conquerors in the traditional role of “God’s rod”, the unwitting instruments of His justice and wrath. This is of course a standard way for Christians, Jews or Muslims to interpret adversities. From the time of the Hebrew prophets, calamities such as plague, famine or invasion are seen as manifestations of divine punishment, for which the appropriate responses are repentance and spiritual purification.

Luther develops this theme in greater detail in 1529, when, in the aftermath of Suleyman the Magnificent’s annexation of much of Hungary, the risk of large swaths of the German lands falling under Ottoman dominion was a real and present danger. While Luther acknowledges that the emperor has the right and duty to defend his empire against the Turk, the most effective means of protection remain repentance and prayer, in order to “take the rod out of God’s hand.”² Luther’s message is the same in his Appeal for Prayer Against the Turk of 1541: “The Turk, you see, is our ‘schoolmaster.’ He has to discipline and teach us to fear God and to pray. Otherwise we will do what we have been doing—rot in sin and complacency.”³ Just as the Israelites refused to listen to their prophets and needed to be whipped by the king of Babylon, so do the Germans need the chastisement of the Turk.

It is not necessary, of course, to know anything about Islam in order to cast the Turk in this role of divine scourge. When, in the late 1520s, Luther begins to show interest in learning about the Turks’ beliefs and religious practices, it is for two principal reasons: first, as a foil for his critiques of the Catholic Church, in order to show that “the Pope’s devil . . . is bigger than the Turk’s devil” [Appeal for Prayer against the Turks, 227] He writes in 1530:
The religion of the Turks or Muhammad is far more splendid in ceremonies . . . than ours, even including that of the religious or all the clerics. The modesty and simplicity of their food, clothing, dwellings, and everything else, as well as the fasts, prayers, and common gatherings of the people . . . are nowhere seen among us—or rather it is impossible for our people to be persuaded to them. Furthermore, which of our monks, be it a Carthusian . . . or a Benedictine, is not put to shame by the miraculous and wondrous abstinence and discipline among their religious? Our religious are mere shadows when compared to them, and our people clearly profane when compared to theirs. Not even true Christians, not Christ himself, not the apostles or prophets ever exhibited so great a display. This is the reason why many persons so easily depart from faith in Christ for Muhammadanism and adhere to it so tenaciously. I sincerely believe that no papist, monk, cleric, or their equal in faith would be able to remain in their faith if they should spend three days among the Turks.4

In other words, the Turks are better Catholics than the papists themselves: convinced that their merit is reflected in their works, they excel in charity, fasting, devotion and prayer. If one is measured by works, the Turks outshine the papists. Proof, for Luther, that Catholics are doomed, more even than the Turks, for placing their hope in ceremonies, indulgences, fasting and the like, rather than in faith. Qualified praise of Muslim piety, sometimes misread by modern scholars as “relative tolerance”, is in fact a common topos: eighth century Syrian monophysites presented the Muslims as better masters and more pious than the Byzantine duophysite “heretics”, while Latin writers in the Crusader states used praise of Muslim piety to lambast the dissolute mores of Latin Christians. For Luther, the pious Turk can be used to bash (literally and figuratively) the dissolute papist.

Luther’s second reason for learning more about Islam is to counter those Germans who admire Muslims for their piety and justice and who would prefer the Sultan’s dominion to the oppression at the hands of their compatriots. “Some praise the Turk’s government because he allows everyone to believe what he will so long as he [the Sultan] remains the temporal lord” [On War against the Turk, 175]. “Since now,” he writes in 1530, “we have the Turk and his religion at our very doorstep, our people must be warned lest, either moved by the splendour of the Turkish religion and the external appearance of their customs, or offended by the meagre display of our own faith or the deformity of our customs, they deny their Christ and follow Muhammad.” [Preface to the Libellus de rito et moribus Turcorum] This fear pervades Luther’s writings on Islam: fear not merely of conquest of the German lands by the Ottoman armies, but—what was of course much worse for Luther—of the attraction that Turkish culture and Muslim religion would exercise on the Sultan’s German subjects, leading them to convert to Islam, or rather, as Luther puts it, to apostatize, to “become Turks”. In order to prevent such apostasy, Luther needs to study Islam, its practices and
doctrines, in order to refute it. The hostile, polemical view of Muhammad, the Koran, and Islam that Luther offers his readers is meant to cultivate in them a sufficient disdain for Islam to inoculate them against apostasy, even if they should find themselves under the Sultan’s rule, tempted both by the material advantages of conversion and by Muslim doctrine and practice.

In this, too, Luther is in the same situation as countless Christian writers before him, who, either as dhimmis in the heart of the Dar al-Islam or harbis near its borders like Luther, contemplate with alarm the conversion of Christians to Islam. From the seventh century to Luther’s day, from Iraq to the Iberian peninsula, Christian authors wrote apologetic and polemical tracts designed to discourage apostasy, portraying Muhammad as a false prophet and a heresiarch, lambasting the Koran, mocking Muslim ritual. To the legal discrimination and condescension that they received from their Muslim overlords, these Christian authors responded with equal and opposing scorn. It is important to bear in mind these origins of Christian polemical views of Islam. In the light of the current vogue for “post-colonial studies”, inspired in part by Edward Said’s work on the links between Orientalism and colonial ideologies in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain and France, students of Medieval and early modern Christian polemics against Islam tend to look for a pre-imperial Orientalism, for discourses that justify Christian or Western hegemony over Muslim subjects. Such discourse indeed exists, notably in the context of Crusade to the Levant and Reconquista in the Iberian Peninsula: the religious inferiority of the Muslim legitimates his subjection to the Christian prince and his inferiority to the Christian subjects. Yet most of those Christian writers of the Middle Ages who write anti-Muslim polemics do so from the position of dhimmis, subjected minorities desperately (and to a large degree unsuccessfully) seeking to instill disdain for Islam in their flock to stem the tide of apostasy. These writers are not perpetrators of colonial discourse, but if anything represent what Edward Said has called “resistance culture”: they demonize the ideology of the dominant power and offer an alternative, subversive narrative of its history.

For these two reasons, then—as a stick to bash papists and as a means to discourage apostasy—Luther sought, starting in the 1520s, to learn more about Islam. He turned, quite naturally, to the works of medieval scholars and polemicists who had confronted Islam from the twelfth to the early fourteenth centuries. In the 1520s, he came across a Latin manuscript of the Libellus contra legem Saracenorum an early fourteenth-century tract by Dominican missionary Riccoldo da Montecroce. In 1542, the Basel city council jailed two publishers who wanted to print, in Latin, a collection of texts about Islam including Robert of Ketton’s twelfth-century Latin translation of the Koran and Riccoldo da Montecroce’s Contra legem Saracenorum. The city fathers proclaimed that it was dangerous to publish the “fables and heresies” of the Koran. Luther intervened to convince the council that the Koran should be printed since there
was no better way to combat the Turks than to permit everyone to see for themselves Muhammad’s “lies and fables”. The Koran was published the following year, with a preface by Luther. 8 1542 was also the year in which Luther published his own German translation of Riccoldo’s *Contra legem Saracenorum*. 9 It is striking that when it comes to understanding the role of Islam in history, Luther and his contemporaries can do no better than to study, publish, and translate the work of Catholic medieval authors who confronted the same problems before them.

To understand how Luther and his contemporaries viewed the “Turk” it is hence essential to bear in mind how the medieval authors they depended upon portrayed the “Saracen”. For this, there is no better place to start than to look at the career of Riccoldo da Montecroce, whose *Contra legem Sarracenorum* was widely read in the sixteenth century, in Latin and in Luther’s German translation. 10

Riccoldo entered the Dominican order in 1267, after having received an education in letters. In 1288, after 21 years in the order, he obtained permission from Muño de Zamora, Master General of the Order, to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and to preach as a missionary to Mongols and Muslims. He recounts his voyage in his *Liber Peregrinationis* (c. 1300), in which he combines a narration of his pilgrimage to the holy sites with an ethnographical sketch of the different peoples he encountered on his travels, paying particular attention to their religious beliefs and practices. He sailed to Acre in 1288 and travelled inland to visit the holy sites of Galilee, Jerusalem, the Jordan River. He describes how at each of the holy places he and his companions performed mass, reading (or singing) the relevant gospel passages. But Riccoldo was not simply on a pilgrimage: he continued East, eventually reaching Tabriz, capital of the Mongol Ilkhân Khanate, where he preached through an interpreter. He eventually made his way to Baghdad, where he studied Arabic and read the Koran.

In describing his travels in his *Liber Peregrinationis*, Riccoldo is clearly surprised, not to say baffled, by the diversity of religious groups he encounters, and is at times unsure as to which groups of Christians he is to consider orthodox, which heretic. He places his description of the Saracens after his arrival in Baghdad:

This city, Baghdad, is the centre and capital of the Saracens, both in terms of their education and religion and in terms of their political power. . . . There the Saracens have their greatest universities [*maxima studia*] and their great teachers. There are many Saracen clerics [*religiosi*] there. Their different sects convene there. There one finds the great monasteries of the Saracens, called *mujarrad*, which means contemplatives. When I wanted to eliminate the perfidy of Muhammad, seeking to assault them in their capital and in the place of their university, I needed to converse with them at times; they received me as if I were an angel of God—in their schools,