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Religious Diversity and Cultural Transmission in Pre-modern Europe

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Over the past several decades, historians of Medieval Europe have worked to show the complexity and diversity of Europe's religious, linguistic and cultural landscape. Medieval Europe was neither a multicultural paradise nor an ethnically pure enclave. Archaeology, ethnolinguistics, literary studies and textual studies all show the constant movement of populations into and across Europe, from earliest antiquity until today. I have participated in two European-funded projects that explore different aspects of that religious and cultural diversity. From 2010 to 2015, I directed an ERC advanced grant entitled 'RELMIN: The legal status of religious minorities in the Euro-Mediterranean world (5th–15th centuries)'. Since 2019, I am one of the four directors of an ERC synergy grant, 'The European Qur'an,' which explores the place of the Qur'an in European culture between the twelfth and early nineteenth centuries. This article presents these two European research programmes and their implications for understanding the history of Europe's religious diversity.

In May 2015, members of the British Movement, a white supremacist group, went to Lincoln Cathedral to 'revive a tradition of the English Middle Ages'. They wanted to venerate Little Saint Hugh, a boy supposedly killed by Jews in an act of ritual murder in 1255, whose tomb had been venerated for centuries. In 1955, the tomb had been quietly replaced with a plaque debunking the story of ritual murder and lamenting that, because of such fabricated lies, Jews in Britain and elsewhere had been victims of persecution and violence. Yet the members of the British Movement were having none of this: when a priest met them and explained that Hugh was not a saint and

that Jews had not killed him, they retorted that his words and the 1955 plaque were ‘an abomination and an insult to the memory of Little Saint Hugh’ (Teter 2020, 1–2). In August 2017, neo-Nazis paraded in Charlottesville, Virginia, decked in tacky faux-medieval outfits: for them, Medieval Europe was a pure white civilization that battled Muslim enemies through crusades and persecuted Jewish enemies in Europe in order to protect civilization.

These fantasies are not the monopoly of the far right and they are not recent. European nationalisms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were based on simplified, purified views of national history, with the middle ages as a crucial formative period according to nineteenth-century nationalist ideologues who forged the ‘myth of nations’, as historian Patrick Geary has called it (Geary 2002). These myths are still very much alive in popular culture and in far-right political rhetoric. Serbian nationalists evoke the 1389 battle of Kosovo; the far-right Spanish party Vox promises a new ‘Reconquista’ against Muslim immigrants; in France, Marine Le Pen tries to enlist Joan of Arc in her nationalist agenda. And the list goes on.

In all of these cases, medieval communities are imagined as ethnically, religiously and culturally homogeneous, whereas they were, on the contrary, hybrid and constantly changing. Religious, linguistic and cultural plurality are imagined as the bane of immigration and globalization in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. To be sure, the nationalist myths of medieval cultural homogeneity are opposed by another potent myth, that of *Convivencia*. A number of Ashkenazi intellectuals in nineteenth-century central Europe, living under the pall of European antisemitism, looked back to the medieval Muslim world as a golden age where Jews were tolerated and Jewish culture and learning flourished (Tolan 2018). The notion gained popularity in Spain after the death of Francisco Franco in 1975 and has been heavily exploited in the tourist industry in Toledo and Andalucia. It became popular in US academia in the 1980s, as the medieval Iberian peninsula was often portrayed as a model multicultural society.

Beyond these competing myths, historians have worked to show the complexity and diversity of Europe’s religious, linguistic and cultural landscape. Medieval Europe was neither a multicultural paradise nor an ethnically pure enclave. Archaeology, ethno-linguistics, literary studies and textual studies all show the constant movement of populations into and across Europe from earliest antiquity until today. I have participated in two European-funded projects that explore different aspects of that religious and cultural diversity. From 2010 to 2015, I directed an ERC advanced grant entitled ‘RELMIN: The legal status of religious minorities in the Euro-Mediterranean world (5th–15th centuries)’.^a Since 2019, I am one of the four directors of an ERC synergy grant, ‘The European Qur’ān’,^b which explores the place of the Qur’ān in European culture between the twelfth and early nineteenth centuries.

Facets of Diversity: Regulating Religious Plurality in Medieval Legal Texts

One of the key challenges facing Europe since the end of the Second World War has been to confirm and protect the rights of minority religious groups: Jews in particular, but also Catholics or Protestants (in countries where one or the other group is a minority) and members of other religions who have immigrated into the European Union: Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and others. The freedom to practise one's religion is a fundamental right inscribed in the laws of the Union and of its member states. Yet, in practice, religious expression is perceived differently in various member states and by the members of the diverse religious communities that cohabit in those states. The wearing of a Sikh Turban, a Catholic Holy Week procession, or the call of a muezzin issuing forth from a loudspeaker atop a minaret: each such public expression of religion poses a series of questions involving distinctions between public and private spheres, between religious and cultural symbols, between the identities of religious communities and national polities. The situation is complicated by two contrasting but not mutually exclusive phenomena: an increasing secularization of European societies and a reaffirmation of religious identities. While the broad principles of religious freedom are universally acknowledged, the contours of that freedom in the daily lives of Europeans of all religions (or without religion) vary from one member state to another and are frequently subjects of debate and polemics.

The issues of religious diversity and of the regulation of pluralistic European societies are not new. On the contrary, religious diversity in Europe is grounded in the practice of Christian and Muslim states of the European Middle Ages. In the Christian Roman Empire of the fifth and sixth centuries, emperors banned paganism, yet allowed Jews limited freedoms, creating a protected but subordinate status for the empire's Jewish subjects. In the wake of the Muslim conquests of much of the former Roman/Byzantine Empire, Jews and Christians obtained the status of *dhimmi*s, protected minorities that enjoyed broad religious freedoms and judicial autonomy, but whose social and political status was inferior to that of Muslims. In Christian kingdoms of medieval Europe, Jews (and in some cases Muslims) were accepted as subordinate minorities who could maintain their synagogues and mosques and openly practise their religions. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, the status of these religious minorities became increasingly precarious in many European states: minorities faced violence and often expulsion – this is the case for Christians and Jews in Almohad Spain (twelfth and thirteenth centuries), for Jews in many medieval and early modern states, and for Muslims in Sicily (thirteenth century) and Spain (fifteenth–sixteenth centuries).

The legal status of these minorities in European societies, precarious as it at times proved to be, was grounded in fundamental legal and sacred texts and in the traditions of learned commentaries to those texts. A number of imperial laws concerning Jews were promulgated in the fourth and fifth centuries and subsequently were reissued in the *Codex Theodosianus* promulgated by Theodosius II in 438. Various laws decree

protection of synagogues, respect for the Sabbath (Jews could not be summoned to court on a Saturday), etc. Moreover, a hierarchy of Jewish officials was recognized and given, quite explicitly, the same privileges as the high officials of the Christian church, creating what Amnon Linder has called a 'Jewish Church' (Linder 2006: 157). Various theologians subsequently developed theological considerations to justify the legal rights granted to Jews by the Roman state. A so-called 'Augustinian doctrine' of Judaism (Nemo-Pekelman 2015) relegated Jews to a protected but subordinated social and legal status. In various works, Augustine addresses the role of Jews in Christian society. In the *City of God* (XVIII: 46), he explains that the Jews who put Jesus to death and failed to believe in him were in consequence crushed by the Romans and sent into exile among the nations. Since they are found everywhere, they serve as witnesses, 'living letters of the law': proof in the flesh both of the truth of the scriptures which they preserve in the original Hebrew and of the humiliation meted out by Christ to those of his people who refuse to recognize Him as their Lord. While Christian heretics (such as the Donatists) should be compelled to conform to the Catholic faith, Jews should be allowed to live in peace among Christians. The Christian emperors who protected Jews were perhaps not interested in establishing a coherent, theologically centred Jewry law: rather, their laws are more often than not reacting to specific situations at the request of various individuals – sometimes bishops or imperial officials, sometimes Jews (Nemo-Pekelman 2015). The theologians, such as Augustine, confronted with Emperors who issued legal guarantees to Jews, found theological justifications for a social status quo that they had not chosen, that explained why Christians allowed Jews to live in their midst.^c

In Muslim societies, protected minorities enjoyed the status of *dhimmi*: principally the 'people of the book', Jews and Christians, although the status was de facto extended to other groups subsequently (Zoroastrians, Hindus). This status on the whole accorded them protection from the violence and expulsions that often faced Jews and Muslims in late medieval Europe. Hundreds of legal texts from Muslim Spain, Sicily and elsewhere testify to the role of religious minorities and to the legal questions posed by their daily relations with the Muslim majorities. *Fatwas* (judicial consultations) and *hisba* manuals (regulations concerning marketplaces and urban space) deal with everything from the reliability of Jewish and Christian witnesses in court trials to dress restrictions. Some of these texts also deal with the situation of Muslims who found themselves in the position of minorities among Christians, whether temporarily (on Italian ships, for example) or permanently (under the dominion of Christian kings of Sicily or Spain).

While Jews were everywhere the minority, their relations with the adherents of other religions were also based on sacred texts (the Torah) and on the legal opinions of the Talmud. Various Jewish authors of medieval Europe, from Cordova to Krakow, in texts such as biblical commentaries, letters, or *responsa*, offered legal advice to fellow Jews on the proper and legal limits to relations with Christians and Muslims.

Throughout the middle ages and beyond, religious elites – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim – attempted to erect and police boundaries between those identified as Jews, Christians and Muslims, but also within Judaism (kairite/rabbanite, in particular), Christianity (between a plethora of Churches) and Islam (Sunni/Shii, of course, but

also in more subtle ways between juridical schools (*madhabs*) or Sufi orders). While theological distinctions and arguments could be mobilized by these elites to justify boundaries and fustigate those on the other side, often the tracing and crossing of boundaries is seen in day-to-day issues, as we find in a variety of legal texts dealing with key issues in interconfessional relations: food and the sharing of meals, sexual relations and clothing restrictions, delimitation of sacred or cultic space, and access to justice.

A great many normative texts from our period texts evoke food in one way or another: which foods one can eat or cannot eat, the possibility (or not) of ‘contamination’ of food or drink through contact with an infidel, the legality (or not) of buying food from an infidel or sharing a meal with him or her. Food prohibitions – what one can eat, and above all with whom one can eat – have often been used to mark and separate the faithful from outsiders (Freidenreich 2011). Ashkenazi Jews often sold cuts of meat that they considered non-kosher (notably the hind quarters) to Christians: either directly to consumers or to Christian butchers. This provoked the ire of various ecclesiastical authorities. The synod of Esztergom in Hungary in the early twelfth century prohibited Christians from buying meat that had been ‘spurned’ by Jews.^d We find similar prohibitions reiterated by Popes, such as Innocent III in 1208 and in civil legislation, notably in Catalonia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.^e We also find Jewish authorities, such as Solomon Ibn Adret of Catalonia, addressing the question of whether meat touched by a gentile butcher is permissible to Jews.^f

Christian and Jewish writers addressed the question of whether wine could be corrupted through contact with infidels, rendering it unfit for consumption or for use in the Eucharist.^g Eating and drinking with infidels posed problems, in part because it could lead to other kinds of intimacy. A 1267 synod of the Polish Church ruled:

We prohibit all Christians of this province under the penalty of excommunication (the following): they should not accept that a Jew or a Jewess to cohabit with them, nor should they dare to eat and drink with them, or dance and hop merrily with them during their weddings or feasts. Christians should not buy meat and other food from Jews, so that Jews, who regard them as enemies, could not fraudulently poison Christians.^h

The synod posits a fundamental enmity between Jews and Christians: the pretext for prohibiting purchase of food from Jews is that they might try to poison Christians. Yet the rest of the text belies this: the real worry seems to be intimacy between Jews and Christians who eat, drink, dance and party together and who share the same lodgings.

The prohibitions of eating and drinking together are often linked with concerns about sexual intimacy. It was illegal for Christians to marry non-Christians: Roman Christian emperor Theodosius I in 388 banned marriage between Christians and Jews, a prohibition promulgated in the *Theodosian Code* (in 438) and reiterated by the church councils of Orleans 2 (533), Clarendon 1 (535) and Orleans 3 (538), from which it was incorporated into Gratian’s *Decretum*.ⁱ Various popes and Church

councils sought to enforce separation of Christians from non-Christians to avoid opportunities for sexual relations: we see this concern for example in various bulls of Innocent III (1198–1216); under Innocent's direction, the Lateran IV council required Jews and Muslims to dress differently from Christians so that they might be recognized and that sexual contact with them be shunned.^j Aragonese officials sought out and punished Muslim women who had been sexually intimate with Christian men (Catlos 2014). Preventing interfaith sexual encounters was still an issue in late fifteenth-century Portugal (Soyer 2017).

Another important issue in many of these texts is the nature of sacred space. Jurists attempted both to delimit and protect sacred precincts and to define the protection given to places of worship of minority religions. In the face of Christian violence against Jewish synagogues, various Christian Roman Emperors issued laws protecting Jews' rights to practise their cult and to maintain their synagogues.^k Various versions of the Pact of Umar affirm that Christians and Jews may not build new churches and synagogues, but in fact this purported rule was enforced only sporadically. Maliki jurisprudence from medieval Spain and the Maghreb abounds with references to *kanīsas*: churches and synagogues (Bouchiba 2017). These jurists came to distinguish territories conquered by force (in which new *kanīsas* could not be built), new cities founded by Muslims (where *dhimmī* sanctuaries were also prohibited), and territories which submitted to Islam by pact (*ṣulḥ*) (where new churches and synagogues could be built) (García Sanjuán 2013). Yet there is in fact little evidence that any ruler ever tried to enforce such distinctions: when we do have evidence of building restrictions or destructions, it is often attributable to more immediate social or political concerns. Indeed, the tripartite distinction may be an *ex post facto* justification of decisions made by ninth-century emirs, who permitted the construction of a number of churches and synagogues in the outlying districts of Cordoba (Molénat 2013). Most of the texts mentioning these churches and synagogues in the legal sources describe them as essential parts of the urban landscape. They can be used as appropriate places for Christians and Jews to take oaths (Oulldali 2013). They also can be seen as places of danger: some jurists, while not prohibiting Muslims from entering Christian churches, discouraged it, since it could lead to contact with sacrilegious images or impure substances such as blood or wine. Indeed, various Arab poets had celebrated churches (and especially monasteries) as pleasure dens where adventurous souls could enjoy Bacchic excess (Aillet 2013).

A constant concern of these legal scholars is the proper functioning of justice. Various Muslim texts prohibited *dhimmīs* from bearing witness against Muslims, with a limited number of exceptions. While cases involving two Christians were in theory subject to the judgment of the bishop, they may in some cases be referred to the Muslim *qāḍī*, either at the behest of the bishop or at the request of the adjudicating parties. Why would two Christians (or Jews) prefer to submit their case to the *qāḍī*? There could be a variety of reasons: perceived justice or efficiency of the Muslim judicial system, higher expertise concerning the matter at hand (which could involve technical or commercial law), or simply a personal preference for the local *qāḍī* over a specific bishop or rabbi (Serrano 2017). It would be interesting to know what the Christian and Jewish judges who were being sidestepped thought of this:

were they happy to defer to the *qāḍī*-s concerning issues in which they had little competence? Did they resent this circumventing of their authority? No doubt this phenomenon is to be understood in the broader context of competing jurisdictions and of ‘forum shopping’, a widespread phenomenon in both Muslim and Christian societies in the middle ages (Tolan 2014).

Indeed, the law court is an important place of conflict and conflict resolution. The Catalan town of Tortosa had distinct courts for Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities and, in theory, in cases involving litigants from two different faith communities, each was to be judged by his or her own judge (Masset 2014). While legal theory often imposed distinct jurisdictions for religious minorities and for the majority, often there was considerable wiggle-room, and enough competition between jurisdictions, for the clever or lucky to be able to benefit from the situation: we have documented cases for Hungarian Jews as well as for Portuguese Muslims (Barros 2014; Szende 2014).

I have chosen these examples from our research to illustrate the complex, intertwined nature of religious communities in Europe and the Mediterranean in the middle ages. The reality is more complex, nuanced and interesting than either the myth of *Convivencia* or that of national purity suggest. Our open-access database contains over 600 legal texts in the original languages (Arabic, Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and various European vernaculars), translations into English and French, commentaries and bibliography.^a It is devised as a tool for researchers and teachers, and has been used for teaching in secondary schools and universities in Europe, North America, North Africa and the Middle East.

The Qur’ān in European Culture

Napoleon Bonaparte, for Victor Hugo, was a ‘Mahomet d’Occident’ when he appeared on the banks of the Nile. Goethe as well expressed his admiration for the emperor by proclaiming him ‘der Mahomet der Welt’. Bonaparte liked to compare himself with the prophet, who was a source of inspiration for him: brilliant general, inspired orator, sage legislator: in sum, the paragon of the ‘great man’ who knew how to inspire the masses. On the *Orient*, the ship that brought him to Egypt, Napoleon read the Qur’ān, in the recent French translation by Claude-Etienne Savary. In his preface, Savary sketched a portrait of Muhammad as ‘one of those extraordinary men who, born with superior talents, appears now and again on the world’s stage to change it and to chain simple mortals to their chariots.’ Napoleon read the Qur’ān and saw in Muhammad a model for his conquest of Egypt. He ostentatiously carried his Qur’ān with him as he tried to win over Egypt’s *ulamā*, had them instruct him in its doctrine, and promised them that in Egypt he would establish a legal system based on the Qur’ān.

This is but one example of the surprising roles that the Qur’ān plays in European culture. I am the recipient, along with Mercedes García-Arenal (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid), Roberto Tottoli (Università degli Studi di

Napoli L'Orientale) and Jan Loop (Københavns Universitet), of a synergy grant from the European Research Council on 'The European Qur'ān. Islamic Scripture in European Culture and Religion 1143–1850' (or 'EuQu'). We study the ways in which the Islamic Holy Book is embedded in the intellectual, religious and cultural history of medieval and early modern Europe. We are particularly interested in how the Qur'ān has been translated, interpreted, adapted and used by Christians, European Jews, freethinkers, atheists and European Muslims.

We seek to place European perceptions of the Muslim holy book and of Islam into the fractured religious, political, and intellectual landscape of the period from 1143 to 1850. We explore how the Qur'ān played a key role not only in polemical interactions with Islam but also in debates and polemics between Christians of different persuasions and, indeed, how it is central to the epistemological reconfigurations that are at the basis of modernity in Europe. The project studies how the Qur'ān was interpreted, adapted, used and formed in Christian European contexts – often in close interaction with the Islamic world, as well as with the Jewish populations living in both Christian and Islamic regions. Concretely, this means studying, for example, the Qur'āns which Europeans brought, collected and copied; the Qur'āns they translated and printed in Arabic and in translation, often using Muslim exegesis (*tafsīr*) and Arabic grammars and dictionaries; and the Qur'āns which Muslim minorities living in European Christian lands copied, interpreted, translated into local vernaculars, often in Arabic script (*aljamīa*). It also means studying how non-Muslim European writers used the Qur'ān in their various writings, which included anti-Muslim polemics; inter-Christian polemics and apologetics (notably between Catholics and Protestants), scholarly studies in Arabic language, history, geography, theology and religious studies, and other disciplines; fiction and poetry.

It could be said that this story of the 'European Qur'ān' begins in 1142 on the banks of the Ebro, when Peter, known as 'the Venerable', abbot of the rich and powerful monastery of Cluny, met Robert of Ketton. Robert had come from his native England about ten years previously to learn Arabic and study science. He was not the only one: many young Europeans in the twelfth century, tired of what they saw as a rigid and sterile teaching of grammar and dialectics in the schools of Latin Europe, came to Spain to study medicine, philosophy, astronomy, and other sciences, in Arabic. It was there, in the northeast of the peninsula, that Robert met another intellectual transfuge, Hermann the Dalmatian. Robert and Hermann began to translate scientific texts from Arabic into Latin.

Peter of Cluny was on a tour of Spain. Cluny was at the head of a large monastic network, and Peter visited the Cluniac monasteries in Spain to watch over their observance of liturgical reform and monastic discipline. There, about 300 km from the border of the Almoravid emirate, Peter conceived the idea of refuting 'the heresy of the Saracens'. To do this, it was necessary to translate their holy book. As Peter himself explains in a letter to Bernard de Clairvaux, he met Robert and Hermann, 'in Spain, near the Ebro, studying the art of astrology, and I convinced them to do this work for a good price'. The study of geometry and astronomy did not fill the purses

of the two young scholars, and the patronage of the abbot of the richest monastery in Europe was more than tempting.

Robert therefore began to compose a Latin version of the Qur'ān. An arduous task, for he sought both to communicate the meaning of the holy book of Islam and to transform the rhythmic prose of the Arabic text into a 'Ciceronian' Latin worthy of a great text. Moreover, he was not content to simply translate the Qur'ān, but often integrated information from his reading of works of Muslim exegesis to clarify obscure passages. He accompanied the text with marginal glosses, notes which offer historical or exegetical explanations, or which sometimes denounce the 'errors' of the 'heretic Mahomet'. In his preface, Robert dedicated his translation to his patron Peter of Cluny: 'You asked me to translate the "law of Mahomet," he told him, so that you could refute it. Here it is, as for me, I am going back to my studies of astrology.' Peter indeed used the translation to compose his work of erudite polemic, *Against the Sect of the Saracens*. There were other Latin translations of the Qur'ān in the centuries that followed, but none was as successful as that of Robert, of which 24 medieval manuscripts survive. In these manuscripts, the text of the translation is elegantly presented: clear handwriting, wide margins, explanatory marginal glosses – a similar layout as used for manuscripts of the Bible. At the same time, the introductory texts and some of the glosses denounce this 'false law' of the 'heresiarch' Muhammad.

Starting in the fifteenth century, divisions within Latin Christendom and Ottoman conquests in Europe brought new urgency to the 'Muslim question' for the papacy. The conciliar movement of the fifteenth century attempted to bring to an end the papal schism, to create a system of collective governance of the Church, and to reconcile the Catholic Church with Hussites and Greek Orthodox. At the Council of Basel (1431–1439) in particular, a number of participants studied and discussed the Qur'ān (available in various manuscripts of Robert of Ketton's twelfth-century Latin translation) and used it in their arguments: notably Nicholas of Cusa, Juan de Segovia, Juan de Torquemada, Jean Germain, and Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (the future Pope Pius II) (Langeloh 2019). They used their reading of the Qur'ān to fuel their debates about issues as diverse as the proper governance of the Church, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, or the extent to which a common faith could coincide with a diversity of rites: *religio una in rituum varietate*, in the words of Nicolas of Cusa in the course of his negotiations with the Hussites, which he later would apply to relations between Christianity and Islam. For all of these authors, Ottoman conquests in Europe provoked a desire to understand and resist Islam. Yet when these authors study the Qur'ān, they increasingly find in it material to fuel debates about Christian society.

Four centuries after Robert's translation, one of its manuscripts caught the attention of the Protestant humanist Theodor Bibliander, who conceived the project of publishing the translation in Basel, together with his commentaries and various medieval texts about Islam. The municipal council of the Protestant city of Basel took offense, judging it dangerous to publish this heretical book, and imprisoned the printer. Bibliander brought in Martin Luther, who declared that on the contrary

there was no better way to fight the Turk than to publish the ‘lies of Muhammad’. Bibliander was able to publish his Qur’ān – but without the mention of the city of Basel, in 1543. The volume contains introductory texts by Luther and Bibliander, as well as medieval works of anti-Muslim polemic denouncing the ‘law of Muhammad’. But, at the same time, Bibliander gave his edition all the careful work worthy of a sacred book, and the luxurious format of the two-volume translation is similar to that of the Bibles printed at that time. Martin Luther used this translation of the Qur’ān, in the new edition of Bibliander, to fuel his own refutations of the doctrines of the ‘Turk’.

Bibliander’s edition of Ketton’s translation indeed became one of the main sources of information on Islam for many European intellectuals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Latin translation was translated into Italian and published in Venice in 1547: the Italian version was then translated into German (1616), then from German into Dutch (1641). Some of these editions met with great editorial success: publishing the Qur’ān could be a financially attractive operation for a publisher in the seventeenth century.

How and why was the Qur’ān read in Latin, Italian, German or Dutch in the sixteenth or seventeenth century? For some, in the tradition of Peter of Cluny or Luther, it was to know one’s adversary better, the better to fight him: reading the Qur’ān served to fuel scholarly controversy against Islam. Starting in the sixteenth century, the holy book of Islam could also fuel the controversy between Catholics and Protestants, to show, for example, as Luther said, that ‘the devil of the pope is greater than the devil of the Turk’. Guillaume Postel, professor of Arabic at the French Collège Royal, in 1543 published his book on the concordance between the Qur’ān, or law of Mahomet, and the ‘evangelists’ (i.e., Protestants): the enumeration of the supposed similarities between Muslim and Protestant doctrines served above all to denounce the latter as heretics.

Michael Servetus was another avid reader of Robert of Ketton’s Qur’ān (in the Bibliander edition). This Aragonese scholar, adept in astronomy and medicine, drew from his reading of the Qur’ān arguments against the doctrine of the Trinity, which he presented as an aberration invented by the fathers of the Church in the fourth century. Condemned by the inquisition in Vienne, he escaped from prison and went as far as Geneva, where in 1553 he was burned at the stake by the Calvinist city council. In 1599, another man was also condemned to the stake for heresy, this time by the inquisition in Venice: a Friulan miller named Domenico Scandella, better known as Menocchio. Menocchio had read the Qur’ān, in the Italian translation of 1547. He was particularly struck by the description of the destruction of idols by Abraham (Qur’ān 21: 51-71). The same thing should be done in Italy, suggests Mehocchio: destroy the statues and images that adorn our altars. A proposal that the inquisitors did not appreciate and which (among other heretical assertions) led them to deliver him to the flames (Ginzburg 1992). No wonder the Italian translation of the Qur’ān was put on the *Index librorum prohibitorum*.

Robert of Ketton’s translation had its detractors. Juan de Segovia, in the 1450s, sharply criticized its content and style: it was a gloss to the sacred Muslim text rather

than a translation; a text that does not correspond with either the content or the style of the Arabic original. Juan, in collaboration with the faqih Içe of Gebir, made a new translation, in Spanish and in Latin (now lost). But Ketton's translation (and its Italian, German and Dutch versions) remained the best known, almost the only one, until the new Latin translation by Ludovico Marracci of 1698. As for the other European languages, André du Ryer, French consul in Alexandria and interpreting secretary to King Louis XIII, published a translation from Arabic into French in 1647, which was later translated into English (1649) and Dutch (1657). These translators distanced themselves from Ketton and claimed to offer versions much more faithful to the Arabic original. European readers studied the Qur'ān in order to learn Arabic (seen as key for the mastering of Hebrew) or to understand Middle Eastern history. The variety of their interests is not reflected in the prefaces to these translations, in which the 'sect of Mahomet' is presented as a heresy to be refuted.

It was not until the eighteenth century, with the English translations by George Sale (1734), then the French by Claude Etienne Savary (1783), that another vision of Islam was formed in Europe: the two translators presented Islam as a pure and rational monotheism, and Muhammad as an anticlerical hero. But this of course is in a very different context, as Enlightenment authors contested Christianity's monopoly on truth and criticized the privileged relations between royal and ecclesiastical power. The Qur'ān became, for these Enlightenment authors 'good to think with'.¹

These two different and complementary projects help debunk the myths of European ethnic, racial or religious purity. If the roots of Europe are Christian, they are also pagan, Jewish and Muslim. The legal texts examined in our RELMIN project reveal neither a 'clash of civilizations' nor a paradise of tolerance, but societies in which Christians, Jews and Muslims lived side-by-side, interacted daily, and at times came into conflict – and devised means for dealing with those conflicts. The European Qur'ān project shows the extent to which European intellectuals from the twelfth century onwards struggled to understand the Muslim holy book, often to refute it but also to mobilize it in internal Christian polemics. The Qur'ān is part of Europe's intellectual baggage. European religious plurality is not an accident of twentieth- and twenty-first-century immigration: it has been an integral part of European civilization for centuries.

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Notes

- a. RELMIN: <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin>
- b. EuQu: <https://euqu.eu/>
- c. I have developed this argument in greater detail in Tolan (2015a).
- d. Jerzy Mazur, 'Synodus Strigoniensis', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait254225/>.
- e. John Tolan, 'Innocent III, Ut esset Cain,' <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait30493/>; Josep Xavier Muntane Santiveri, 'Constitutiones editas per illustrissimum dominum regem Petrum tertium in generali curia Perpiniiani [38]', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait252412/>; Josep Xavier Muntane Santiveri, 'Constitucions i altres drets de Catalunya [I. 1. 9. 7],', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait252389/>.
- f. Nadezda Koryakina, 'Adret, Solomon ben Abraham (Rashba), עור שאלה [1:258],', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait252255/>.
- g. See, for example, David Freidenreich, 'Shelomo ben Yitzhaq, הר' פי וכן ורבינושמואל נתן ור', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait244091/>; Nadezda Koryakina, 'Abraham ben David de Posquières, ד'הראב כתב [67]', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait244130/>; John Tolan, 'Innocent III, Ut esset Cain,' <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait30493/>.
- h. Jerzy Mazur, 'Synodus Wratislaviensis – Consitutiones. Caput 10,' <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait252878/>.
- i. Capucine Nemo-Pekelman, 'Codex Theodosianus [3.7.2]', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait136982/>; David Freidenreich, 'Concilium Aurelianense II [c. 19]', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait238307/>; David Freidenreich, 'Concilium Claremontanum [c. 6]', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait238304/>; David Freidenreich, 'Concilium Aurelianense III [c. 14 (13)]', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait238305/>; Jessie Sherwood, 'Gratian, Decretum [C. 28, q. 1, c. 17: Si quis Iudaicae pravitati]', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait40851/>.
- j. Jessie Sherwood, 'Concilium Lateranense IV [c. 68]', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait30326/>; Tolan (2015b).
- k. See, for example, Capucine Nemo-Pekelman, 'Codex Theodosianus [16.8.9]', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait238489/>; Capucine Nemo-Pekelman, 'Codex Theodosianus [16.8.12]', <http://www.cn-telma.fr/remlin/extrait244133/>.
- l. This is the apt expression of Elmarsafy (2009: 6).

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