

Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

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Edited by
David Thomas and John Chesworth
with John Azumah, Stanisław Grodź,
Andrew Newman, Douglas Pratt



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European Qur'an translations, 1500-1700

Thomas E. Burman

A flawed forerunner¹

In 1480-81, a Sicilian Jewish convert to Christianity named Flavius Mithridates (*alias* Guillelmus Raymundus de Montecathero) translated *sūras* 21 and 22 of the Qur'an into Latin for Federigo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino. They appear side by side with the Arabic text in two columns, accompanied by a commentary in a de luxe manuscript now preserved in the Vatican. We cannot help but see in the visually impressive presentation of Mithridates' edition and translation a nod to the values of humanist scholarship returning *ad fontes*, which is also to be found in other European – especially Latin – translations of the Qur'an in the early modern period. Indeed three different complete Latin Qur'an translations would appear during this period that presented the text along with elaborate, and remarkably learned, commentary, two of them offering their readers the Arabic and Latin versions side by side. Moreover, in Mithridates' version we find not a whiff of the typical polemic that shows up so often in conjunction with Qur'ans that circulated in the Latin West – there is no preface warning readers of the dangers of the text to follow, no marginal notes denouncing the mendacity of Muḥammad, no vicious jabs in the commentary at the bellicosity of Islam. Mithridates' translation may, by its utter lack of polemical apparatus, be seen to anticipate the fact that Qur'an translation in this period was not simply a matter of making Islam's holy book available for Christian fulmination and refutation. Widespread scholarly interest in Semitic languages and popular fascination with the exotic wonders of the East were also powerful incentives for translation, and such a fascination may indeed have given rise to Flavius Mithridates' version. For one thing, it is in fact an execrable

¹ The bibliography on the subject of Qur'an translations is substantial and growing apace. It is, therefore, impossible to include anything like a comprehensive listing of relevant works in an article of this length. Readers are urged to turn to the bibliography and notes of the works by Burman, Bobzin, Tommasino, and Hamilton and Richard discussed below where, collectively, a vast range of relevant scholarship is mentioned. See also H. Bobzin, art. 'Translations of the Qur'an', in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Leiden, 2006, v, pp. 340-58.

translation, evidence that this apparently quite learned man was willing to play the charlatan when he thought no one was looking. On the second page of his edition, for example, he translates the common Qur'anic verb *nūḥī* as the proper name *Nūh*, so that the text at Q 21:7 reads 'we sent before you Noah' (*missimus ante te noe*) where it should read 'we sent before you none but men whom we inspired'. Errors of this scale show up throughout his translation, and the apparently learned notes are often just as faulty, though this did not prevent the Latin text from being copied into other manuscripts, including another de luxe one. Owners of such a version of the Qur'an were clearly not interested in either real polemic and disputation (which requires at least a modicum of accuracy) or philological study. Produced at the cusp of the 16th century, therefore, Mithridates' version embodies much of the complexity of presentation and motive that characterises early modern European Qur'an translations, whether into Latin or into the vernacular.²

Like some of the other Qur'an translations of this period, moreover, Mithridates' version found only a small audience. Where wide readership is concerned, the period is dominated until the mid-17th century by the first Latin translation of the Qur'an, Robert of Ketton's 12th-century version, which not only continued to be copied in this period – an expensive Florentine manuscript of it, including a handsome author portrait of Muḥammad, appeared in 1516³ – but was also printed (twice) in Theodore Bibliander's widely disseminated anthology of Latin works on Islam in 1543 and 1550,⁴ and was translated into Italian in 1547. (This Italian version then became the basis for further vernacular translations into

² For the details of Mithridates' translation discussed here, see T.E. Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān in Latin Christendom, 140-1560*, Philadelphia, 2007, pp. 14-15, 18-21, 24-6, 133-50. See also H. Bobzin, 'Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada e la sua traduzione della sura 21 ('dei profeti')', in M. Perani (ed.), *Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alias Flavio Mitridate. Un ebreo converso siciliano. Atti del convegno internazionale Caltabellotta (Agrigento) 23-24 ottobre 2004*, Palermo, 2008, 173-83. On Mithridates' apparent authorship of a remarkably learned set of notes on portions of the Qur'an in Arabic, see Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān*, pp. 141-43, and B. Grévin, 'Un témoin majeur du rôle des communautés juives de Sicile dans la préservation et la diffusion en Italie d'un savoir sur l'arabe et l'Islam au XV^e siècle. Les notes interlinéaires et marginales du 'Coran de Mithridate' (ms. Vat. Hebr. 357)', in B. Grévin et al. (eds), *Chrétiens, Juifs et Musulmans dans la Méditerranée médiévale. Études en hommage à Henri Bresc*, Paris, 2008, 45-55.

³ See T.E. Burman and L. Giamalva, 'A sixteenth-century European author portrait of Muhammad and medieval Latin traditions of Qur'an reading', in C. Gruber and A. Shalem (eds), *The image of the Prophet between ideal and ideology. A scholarly investigation*, New York, 2014, 159-79.

⁴ Theodore Bibliander, ed., *Machumetis Sarracenorū principis, eiusque successorū vita, ac doctrina, ipseque Alcoran . . .*, 3 vols, Basel, 1543, 1550.

German and Dutch.) Only in the mid-17th century, with the publication of André du Ryer's elegant, readable French translation, based directly on the Arabic original, did Robert's translation and its descendants begin to recede into obscurity, as du Ryer's was not only frequently reprinted, but became the basis for further translations into English, Dutch, German and Russian. The definitive end of Robert of Ketton's *long dureé* as the standard European version of the Qur'an came with the publication at the very end of this period of Ludovico Marracci's astounding *Alcorani textus universus*, a deeply learned edition, Latin translation, and refutation of the Qur'an that would serve as the basis of many vernacular versions.

Latin translations

Despite the continual growth of the European vernaculars as scholarly languages throughout this period, Latin remained a central learned language well into the 18th century, so it is not surprising that the Qur'an continued to circulate in, and be translated into, Latin right across these two centuries. Even Mark of Toledo's early-13th-century word-for-word translation, which, though made in Spain, circulated almost entirely in Italy and only on a limited scale, was recopied in the 16th century.⁵ An abridged Qur'an – *Compendium Alchorani* based on a lengthy and detailed analytical table of contents written for Robert of Ketton's Latin Qur'an – circulated in a handful of manuscripts from 1537 on, and Johann Albrecht von Widmanstetter arranged for it to be printed in 1543.⁶ In addition, various scholars tried their hand at making Latin versions of small portions of the qur'anic text. Guillaume Postel left a working draft of a translation of *sūras* 1-2:140, which he put to use in *De orbis terrae concordia*.⁷ In 1617, the Orientalist Thomas Erpenius published a bilingual version of *sūra* 12 with the Arabic alongside his new Latin translation (comparing the latter with Robert of Ketton's medieval version). In the 1630s, a schoolmaster named Johannes Zechendorff published Latin

⁵ As we find in MS Paris, BNF – lat. 3394, fols 1r-269r. For full descriptions of this manuscript, see T.E. Burman, *Religious polemic and the intellectual history of the Mozarabs, c. 1050-1200*, Leiden, 1994, pp. 217-23, and *Bibliothèque Nationale. Catalogue général des manuscrits latins*, Paris, 1966, v, pp. 393-41.

⁶ Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān*, pp. 103-10.

⁷ See Hartmut Bobzin's excellent discussion of this draft and Postel's work with the Qur'an in general in his *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation. Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa*, Beirut and Stuttgart, 1995, pp. 447-97.

versions of *sūras* 67, 78, 101 and 103; Christian Ravius published a bilingual version of *sūras* 1 and 2 in 1646.⁸

Still another partial version – and the most substantial of them – circulated in a handful of early-modern manuscripts, though it is of uncertain date and attribution. A note in Spanish in one of the copies reads *este Alcorano traduzido por l'obra del Reverendissimo Patriarca de Constantinopoli Cyrillo*, and for this reason the translation has been ascribed to the scholarly Greek patriarch, Cyril Lucaris (1572-1638), but it is much more likely that this note means that Lucaris commissioned a translator whose name is unknown.⁹ Oscar de la Cruz, whose edition of this text is based on two closely related manuscripts, has argued that the text is an incomplete draft (containing *sūras* 1-3, then 5-30:8, and *sūras* 104-14) in which some substantial portions appear more than once. He also suggests that the text as we have it seems to be a mixture of the Qur'an proper and a commentary on it based, perhaps, on Arabic commentaries. As it happens, at least two further manuscripts of this translation have survived (MS Cambridge, Cambridge University Library – Mm. IV. 11 and MS Oxford, Bodleian Library – Arch. Selden B. 4 [and thus once the property of John Selden]), and these will doubtless shed light on this almost entirely unstudied work of Qur'anic scholarship.¹⁰

Three complete, and completely new, Latin translations of the Qur'an also appeared in this period. While only the last, Marracci's *Alcorani textus universus*, found a wide readership, the other two are significant in various ways for what they tell us about European approaches to Islam's holy book. A generation after Mithridates' deeply flawed edition and translation of two *sūras*, a version that went a long way toward fulfilling its promise appeared in the form of an Arabic-Latin Qur'an edition commissioned by the Semitic scholar, Christian Kabbalist and prelate Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo (1469-1532). While travelling in Spain as papal legate in 1518, Egidio hired one Iohannes Gabriel Terrolensis,

⁸ On Erpenius, Zechndorff, and Ravius see A. Hamilton and F. Richard, *André du Ryer and Oriental studies in seventeenth-century France*, Oxford, 2004, p. 92.

⁹ The text is edited on the basis of two manuscripts in O. de la Cruz Palma, *La traducción del Corán atribuida al patriarca de Constantinopla Cirilo Lúcaris (1572-1638)*, Madrid, 2006.

¹⁰ On this translation, see the introduction to the edition, de la Cruz Palma, *La traducción del Corán*, pp. xiv-xlvii passim, esp. pp. xviii, xxxvii-xxxviii, xl. On the two further manuscripts, see *A catalogue of the manuscripts preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, Cambridge, 1861, iv, p. 220; and F. Madan and H.H.E. Craster, *A summary catalogue of Western manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford*, Oxford, 1922, ii/1, p. 605. The Cambridge manuscript in particular seems to include *sūras* that do not appear in de la Cruz Palma's edition – 95, 96, 97, and 99 among others (see fol. 128v).

almost certainly a convert from Islam, to make a new Latin translation of the Qur'an.¹¹ Though surviving in only two manuscripts, neither of which preserves its original scholarly apparatus in full, it is certain that Iohannes Gabriel's edition offered the Arabic original in the first of four parallel columns stretching across the verso and the recto of the folios open before the reader, with the transliteration of the Arabic into Roman script in the second column. The third column contained his new Latin translation, while in the fourth appeared a set of explanatory notes based directly on mainstream Muslim Qur'an commentators. The Latin version that survives in each manuscript is a reworking of the original text, which had also been corrected and supplemented by another Muslim convert, Leo Africanus. All this makes it nearly impossible to be certain of precisely how the original text read at many points, but there is no doubt that Iohannes Gabriel was consulting qur'anic commentaries as he worked. At Q 2:58, for example, believers are asked to remember when God told the followers of Moses, upon arriving at Jerusalem, to 'enter the gate in prostration, and say, *hiṭṭatun!*' On its own, this last puzzling term means either 'alleviation' or 'humiliation', though the preferred interpretation among Qur'an commentators was derived not from these meanings but from etymology. The root *ḥṭṭ* means, among other things, 'to take on a burden', and thus this exclamation could mean, al-Ṭabarī observed, 'God has taken over the burden from you of your sins.' Iohannes Gabriel inserted this interpretation directly into the text: *Et ingredimini per portam prostrate et dicite: 'Aufer nostras culpas'* ('And enter through the gate in prostration and say: "Take away our sins"').

The medieval Qur'an translators Robert of Ketton and Mark of Toledo had likewise turned to Muslim commentators as they worked (Flavius Mithridates quite clearly had not).¹² Neither, however, composed a commentary for their Latin Qur'ans like that in Egidio's edition. Surviving only partially in the 17th-century Milan manuscript, this commentary is overwhelmingly philological in its concerns. At Q 2:138, it tells us that the surprising term *ṣibgha*, 'colour' or 'dye', refers here to 'the baptism of the Christians', a view that conforms to what many commentators say, including *al-Zamakhsharī*, who is cited explicitly. But these notes do not just explain difficult terms or usages; they also frequently inform us

¹¹ K.K. Starczewska, 'Latin translation of the Qur'ān (1518/1621) commissioned by Egidio da Viterbo. Critical edition and introductory study', Barcelona, 2012 (PhD Diss., Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).

¹² See Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān*, pp. 36-59.

about the occasion of revelation – the broader context in which Muslims believed that particular verses were revealed. Q 2:55-56, for example, discusses the people who told Moses that they would not believe him until they saw God plainly, at which point God struck them with a bolt of lightning and then raised them from the dead so that they might be grateful. In explanation of this story, commentators usually cited Islamic traditions relating that, after the Children of Israel had repented of their worship of the Calf, God had ordered Moses to come to him with a group of the Israelites who would apologize to him. So he chose 70 men. But after making their way to the place where they would apologize to God, they spoke the words of the verse – ‘We will not believe you until we have seen God plainly.’ They were then struck by lightning and died, but when Moses wept and besought God, He brought them back to life. Johannes Gabriel’s Latin note presents a concise version of just this event. It is true that there is almost no overt polemic in either this translation itself or the notes that accompany it. Nevertheless – or so I have argued – one cannot help but notice a preoccupation in the notes with the topics typically at issue in Christian attacks on Islam, such as the nature of jihad, the principle of qur’anic abrogation, the supposed biblical prophecies concerning Muḥammad, and the sex life of the Prophet.¹³ Christian polemic is never far removed from European Qur’an reading throughout this period, as is clear in the two other complete Latin translations.

In the mid-17th century the Observant Franciscan, Dominic Germanus of Silesia (d. 1670), produced a complete Latin translation of the Qur’an which, though lacking an edition of the Arabic text, did offer the reader a learned commentary, much as Egidio da Viterbo’s Latin Qur’an had. Having travelled widely in the Middle East and learned Arabic, Persian and Turkish, Germanus spent the last 18 years of his life at the royal monastery of El Escorial outside Madrid, much of it working on this translation.¹⁴ Dividing the qur’anic text into a long series of passages roughly equivalent in length, he presented these in Latin, each accompanied by a *scholium* that discussed a range of potential topics – rare words, exotic names, the occasion of revelation – intermixed with polemic and apologetic. As in many other cases, then, Germanus’ enormous

¹³ For the above details on Egidio da Viterbo’s edition and translation, see Burman, *Reading the Qur’ān*, pp. 149-77.

¹⁴ Germán de Silesia, *Interpretatio Alcorani litteralis. Parte I. La traducción latina; introducción y edición crítica*, Madrid, 2009.

philological efforts served, as he made quite clear in his preface, the goal of attacking Islam and defending Christianity. His translation itself often incorporates material from the qur'anic exegetical tradition, as when he gives us *amnīs paradīseus* ('paradisial river') for the rare word *al-kawthar* in Q 108:1, a term that Qur'an commentators often explain as 'a river in paradise'. The *scholium* to this passage goes on to explain the occasion of revelation for this short *sūra*: 'They say that a male child had been born to Muḥammad, [and] he named him Ibrāhīm', but this child 'died while still an infant'. Muḥammad's enemies, Germanus observes, rejoiced at this, saying, 'Now our Muḥammad despairs, deceived of any hope of posterity, because he begets no male child after this.' This *sūra* with its gift of a 'paradisial river' was meant to console him. Like his interpolation of the phrase *amnīs paradīseus*, this explanation of the occasion of revelation is based directly on traditions commonly cited in Qur'an commentaries, commentaries that Germanus, like Iohannes Gabriel Terrolensis, often cited by name. This remarkably learned work – like Egidio da Viterbo's Qur'an edition and translation – never made it into print, and the manuscripts in El Escorial and Montpellier that preserve various versions of it (Germanus continued to work on it up to his death) were largely ignored until the late 19th century.¹⁵

When Germanus died in 1670, the greatest pre-modern European work of qur'anic scholarship, Ludovico Marracci's *Alcorani textus universus*, was already well under way.¹⁶ Like Germanus, Marracci, an Italian priest of the order of the Chierici regolari della Madre di Dio who was also professor of Arabic at La Sapienza University as well as confessor to Pope Innocent XI, divided the text of the Qur'an into manageable sections which he presented to his readers first in carefully vocalized Arabic, and then in his new Latin translation, followed by a series of *notae* that address lexical, grammatical and interpretive problems. Like most other Latin Qur'an translators, Marracci often includes material drawn directly from Muslim commentators, usually placing these interpolations in italics or in italics and brackets, but his careful notes generally also supply far more explanatory material. At Q 2:104, for example, where Muslims are forbidden to use the phrase *rā'inā* ('watch over us!'), Marracci tells

¹⁵ For details of this translation discussed here, see Burman, *Reading the Qur'an*, pp. 53-6.

¹⁶ Ludovico Marracci, *Alcorani textus universus ex correctioribus Arabum exemplaribus summa fide ac pulcherrimis characteribus descriptus. Eademque fide, ac pari diligentia ex Arabico idiomate in Latinum translatus . . . : His omnibus praemissus est prodromus in quo (Mahometis vita, ac res gestae . . . referuntur)*, 2 vols, Padua, 1698.

us that both *rā'inā* and *unzhurnā*, the term that they were to use instead, 'mean almost the same thing, that is: "watch over us" or "have regard for us".' He then quotes the commentator Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (first in Arabic and then in Latin), who makes clear that Jews were derisively greeting Muḥammad with the proscribed term, because in Hebrew it meant 'heckling' or 'flippancy', so God caused it to be forbidden.¹⁷ By virtue of its extensive notes on the text throughout, Marracci's enormous edition provided his European readers with the Qur'an accompanied, as Alexander Bevilacqua has recently observed, by much of its 'traditional Sunnī interpretation'.¹⁸

As Roberto Tottoli demonstrates in a forthcoming article, moreover, an astonishing group of manuscripts, including working drafts of Marracci's translation and Arabic commentaries that he made use of, survives to this day in the library of his order. While this corpus of materials has only recently come to light, and merits extensive examination, it already seems likely that Marracci's claim that he translated the Qur'an four different times is correct, since among these materials are four separate versions of the translation as he worked on it. Furthermore, there is remarkable evidence here that Marracci initially used the commentary of the Andalusī Ibn Abī Zamānīn as the basis for his translation. Among his manuscripts is a copy in Maghribī script of this commentary, so widely influential in Iberia (only the fourth known manuscript, by the way). From this manuscript, Marracci made his own two-volume copy, setting out the first version of his Latin translation in the margins. This cache of manuscripts is by far the richest body of evidence from the pre-modern period of how a European scholar read and translated Islam's holy book – very likely one of the richest bodies of evidence relating to pre-modern translation of any kind – and it awaits comprehensive examination.¹⁹

Marracci's *Alcorani textus univērsus* is, without doubt, a monumental scholarly achievement, but just as polemical motives intermixed with philological concerns in the work of both Iohannes Gabriel Terrolensis and Germanus of Silesia, so Marracci's careful consultation of Qur'an commentaries was of a piece with defending Christianity and attacking

¹⁷ For these details, see Burman, *Reading the Qur'an*, pp. 163-4.

¹⁸ A. Bevilacqua, 'The Qur'an translations of Marracci and Sale', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 76 (2013) 93-130, p. 110.

¹⁹ R. Tottoli, 'New light on the translation of the Qur'an of Ludovico Marracci from his manuscripts recently discovered at the Order of the Mother of God in Rome', in A. Rippin and R. Tottoli (eds), *Islamicae litterae / Books and written culture of Islamic world*, Leiden, 2014.

Islam. Not only is the first volume of this massive work an elaborate refutation of Islam, but after the *notae* that comment on each section of the Qur'an from a philological point of view, Marracci added an equally lengthy set of *refutationes* or *refutata* with the same purpose. The 'refutations' to Q 2:1-29, for example, begin by derisively observing that the three mysterious letters, *alif-lām-mīm*, 'are placed for no good reason at the beginning of this *sūra* if the understanding of them is reserved only for God'. Marracci goes on to attack, among other things, the Islamic belief that Jews and Christians corrupted their scriptures – nearly eight columns on this topic alone – that paradise contains carnal pleasures, and that God created the earth before the heavens, rather than the other way round.²⁰

Vernacular translations

Marracci's edition and translation became influential almost immediately – a German version of the Qur'an based on his Latin translation appeared in 1703, just five years after the printing of *Alcorani textus universus* in Padua in 1698.²¹ But by this point the Qur'an had already appeared in a number of European vernaculars. By far the earliest was a translation into Italian of Mark of Toledo's 13th-century Latin Qur'an made by Nicola Berti in 1461, fragments of which survive in a manuscript anthology of travel literature from the early 16th century.²² Just as partial Latin translations appeared in this period, so also did partial vernacular ones, such as an unpublished mid-16th-century French translation of the first four *sūras* of the same Latin Qur'an that survives in five gatherings added to the end of a 16th-century manuscript that contains all of Mark's translation.²³

²⁰ Burman, *Reading the Qur'an*, pp. 173-77.

²¹ David Nerreter, *Neu eröffnete Mahometanische Moschea/worinn nach Anleitung der VI. Abtheilung von unterschiedlichen Gottes-Diensten der Welt/Alexander Rossens/Erstlich Der Mahometanischen Religion Anfang/Ausbreitung/Secten/Regierungen/mancherley Gebräuche/und vermuthlicher Untergang/Fürs andre/Der völlige Alkoran/Nach der besten Edition Ludovici Marraccii, verteutscht/und kürzlich widerlegt wird*, Nürnberg, 1703.

²² See L. Formisano, 'La più antica (?) traduzione italiana del *Corano* e il *Liber Habentomi* di Ibn Tūmart in una compilazione di viaggi del primo Cinquecento', *Critica del testo* 7 (2004) 651-96 (partial edition of the translation, pp. 669-96).

²³ Formisano, 'La più antica (?) traduzione', p. 662. See the manuscript descriptions cited in n. 5 above.

The earliest vernacular version surviving in its entirety is *Alcorano di Macometto* published by Andrea Arrivabene in Venice in 1547.²⁴ Though the title page advertises that the volume contains the teaching, life, customs and laws of Muḥammad *tradotto nuouamente dall'Arabo in lingua Italiana*, Arabists such as Joseph Scaliger soon realised that what was on offer here was an Italian translation of Robert of Ketton's Latin version, which had been printed only four years previously. As was the case with many manuscripts of Robert's translation as well as that printed edition, Arrivabene presented his Italianized version together with most of the other works translated in the 12th century under Peter the Venerable's auspices. In his recent and richly detailed study of Arrivabene's Italian Qur'an and its historical and cultural context, Pier Mattia Tommasino has argued that this work, which appeared in three slightly different versions, was not only part of its publisher's well-known programme of publishing the works of heterodox thinkers, but also reflects Arrivabene's consistent interest in translating and publishing works of ancient and contemporary history. Moreover, Tommasino argues, 'it is not only a book of anti-Islamic polemic based on old medieval sources', but also 'a volume of historical, religious, political, and ethnographic information meant for a variety of readers', and, indeed, reflects an anti-Habsburg and philo-Ottoman agenda. He has, moreover, also advanced a detailed argument suggesting that the translator employed by Arrivabene – who clearly did not do this work himself – was one Giovanni Battista Castrodardo, a translator of historical works and commentator on Dante.²⁵ In 1616, the Nuremburg pastor Salomon Schwegger (1551-1622) translated Arrivabene's Italian Qur'an into German.²⁶ This version was reprinted in expanded form in 1659 and 1664. The first Dutch version of the Qur'an, printed in 1641, is in turn based on Schwegger's German translation.²⁷ Arrivabene's Italian Qur'an was even the basis for Hebrew and Spanish versions of the Qur'an that circulated among the Jews of Amsterdam in the 17th century.²⁸

²⁴ A. Arrivabene (ed.), *L'Alcorano di Macometto, nel qual si contiene la doctrina, la vita, i costumi, e le leggi sue. Tradotto nueuamente dall'Arabo in lingua italiana*, [Venice], 1547.

²⁵ P.M. Tommasino, *L'Alcorano di Macometto. Storia di un libro del Cinquecento europeo*, Bologna, 2013, pp. 19, 22, 66.

²⁶ Solomon Schwegger, *Alcoranus Mahometicus, Das ist: Der Türcken Alcoran/Religion und Aberglauben*, Nuremberg: Ludovicum Lochner, 1616.

²⁷ *De Arabische Alkoran, door de Zarazijnsche en de Turcksche propete Mahometh*, Hamburg, 1641.

²⁸ See H. Lazarus-Yafeh, 'A seventeenth-century Hebrew translation of the Qur'an', *Scripta Mediterranea* 19-20 (1998-99) 199-211.

If the 16th-century Italian *Alcorano di Macometto* was thus the origin of further vernacular versions of the Qur'an that circulated in this period, another vernacular Qur'an, André du Ryer's *L'Alcoran de Mahomet*, published exactly 100 years later, became the source for several more.²⁹ Like Germanus of Silesia, du Ryer had lived and travelled widely in the Middle East and had mastered Arabic alongside Turkish and Persian, rather than – as was far more common among early-modern Orientalists – as an adjunct to the study of Hebrew. Despite introducing his French Qur'an as useful for Christian missionaries (Du Ryer, *L'Alcoran*, p. 18), it is clear, as Alexander Hamilton and Francis Richard have shown, that du Ryer was much more concerned to present Islam's holy book as an exotic work of eastern literature, rather like the Persian poetry that he likewise translated (Hamilton and Richard, *André du Ryer*, pp. 94, 101). For this reason he worked hard to achieve a readable, elegant French version that at points became a paraphrase. The Qur'an's final brief *sūra*, for example, reads 'Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, the King of mankind, the God of mankind, from the evil of the sneaking whisperer who whispers in the hearts of mankind, from among jinn and men.' In Du Ryer's French it becomes 'Dis leur, Je me garderay des tentations du Diable et de la malice du peuple, par l'ayde du Seigneur du peuple, Roy du peuple' (Hamilton and Richard, *André du Ryer*, p. 103) Where the early-modern Latin versions of the Qur'an all follow the Arabic original closely, du Ryer's version, like Robert of Ketton's *Lex Mahumet* of the 12th century, departs from literal translation in order to offer its readers a Qur'an in a kind of elevated language that matches, at least to some extent, the high-register Arabic of the Qur'an itself.³⁰

Since du Ryer was working directly from that Arabic original, however, and because he was an energetic collector of Arabic manuscripts, including many copies of Qur'an commentaries, we should not be surprised that, like most Latin translators, he was consulting such commentaries as he translated. His collection included the widely influential 15th-century *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, the *Tafsīr al-kabīr* of al-Rāzī, and al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl*, among others, and his translation is shaped by his knowledge of them. At Q 4:157, where Jesus' crucifixion is described, and the commentators typically explain that the man who was crucified in his place actually looked like Jesus, du Ryer's French version helpfully includes

²⁹ André du Ryer, *L'Alcoran de Mahomet. Translaté d'arabe en françois*, Paris, 1647.

³⁰ Hamilton and Richard, *André du Ryer*, pp. 18, 94, 101, 103.

this extra-qur'anic information, saying of Jesus: 'Certainement ils ne l'ont pas tué, ny crucifié, ils ont crucifié un d'entr'eux qui luy ressembloit.' In this and many other cases, du Ryer provides his reader with no indication that his translation has been influenced by a Qur'anic commentator, though he repeatedly suggests in marginal notes that such commentators be consulted. Near the beginning of the *sūra*, for example, we are urged to 'Voy l'explication de Gelaldin' (i.e. *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*), a commentary he recommends repeatedly, though he also from time to time refers his readers to others, such as al-Bayḍāwī. While it is not clear how useful such references would be to the French readership that he had in mind – none of the commentaries existed in French (or even Latin) translation, and only a few European institutions and individuals (such as du Ryer) actually possessed copies of them – Hamilton and Francis are entirely right to observe that du Ryer's *L'Alcoran de Mahomet* was the first European work to make a broad, non-specialist audience aware of the huge Muslim tradition of commentary that surrounded the Qur'anic text.³¹

As a well-informed, elegantly written, and frequently reprinted version of the Qur'an, it is not surprising that du Ryer's *L'Alcoran de Mahomet* was soon put into other languages – indeed almost immediately. In 1649, an anonymous English version, often, and wrongly, attributed to Alexander Ross, appeared. It follows the French closely, even maintaining du Ryer's marginal references to Qur'an commentaries ('See the explication of *Gelaldin*'), and found a sizeable readership. It was printed twice in 1649 and then again in 1688, and was included in the multi-volume work, *The compleat history of the Turks from their origin in the year 755 to the year 1718*, published in the latter year (Hamilton and Richard, *André du Ryer*, p. 113). Within nine years a professional translator named Jan Hendricksz Glazemaker, who had produced Dutch versions of a large number of Latin, French, German and Italian works, published *Mahomets Alkoran, door de Heer Du Ryer uit d'Arabische in de Fransche taal gestalt* which, like du Ryer's original, was written in elegant prose, and in later editions accompanied by handsome engravings, suggesting that it too was intended for a broad audience.³² It too was reprinted many times, making it more successful than the anonymous English version. Glazemaker's Dutch version then became the source text for a German translation by

³¹ Hamilton and Richard, *André du Ryer*, pp. 96-98, 99, 100.

³² J.H. Glazemaker, *Mahomets Alkoran, door de Heer Du Ryer uit d'Arabische in de Fransche taal gestalt; beneffens een tweevoudige beschryving van Mahomets leven; en een verhaal van des zelfs reis ten hemel, gelijk ook zijn samenspraak met de Jood Abdias*, Amsterdam, 1658.

Johann Lange entitled *Vollständiges Türckisches Gesetz-Buch, Oder Des Ertz-betrigers Mahomets Alkoran*, published in 1688, which appeared not as an independent publication but as part of a large collection of cosmological and historical texts entitled *Thesaurus exoticorum*.³³

Concluding observations

Translation of all kinds has been and remains a remarkably understudied aspect of the human experience, despite all the interest that the new discipline of Translation Studies has generated. Though scholars in the last two decades have produced some remarkable works focusing on the Qur'an translations under discussion here, these efforts have in many ways only scratched the surface of a densely rich soil of compelling evidence. I noted above that the newly discovered cache of manuscripts relating to Marracci's edition and translation awaits serious study, but the same is true of other codices at El Escorial connected to Germanus of Silesia's work. While an edition of that translation has appeared,³⁴ moreover, it does not include the *scholia* that follow each section of his Latin Qur'an. An edition of Egidio da Viterbo's edition and translation that is currently under way likewise does not include the notes which, as in Germanus' case, depend so heavily on Arabic Qur'an commentaries. A great deal of work needs to be done, therefore, in clarifying the approaches to Qur'an reading and the methods of translation and commentary that we find in these Latin translations, and much the same could be said for the vernacular versions. Recent scholarship has, however, provided excellent models for taking up such study. The works of Bobzin, Hamilton and Richard, and Tommasino offer sophisticated, thickly described, accounts of the place of Qur'an translation in the intellectual and cultural worlds of early modern Europe. One feature of all this work is that, while detailed analysis of translation method is hardly absent – and indeed is often essential to these works and of very high quality – the

³³ J. Lange, *Vollständiges Türckisches Gesetz-Buch / Oder Des Ertz-Betrigers Mahomets Alkoran. Welcher vorhin nimmer vollkommen herausgegeben /noch im Druck außgefertiget worden. Auß der Arabischen in die Frantzösische Sprach übergesetzt Duch Herrn du Ryer. Aufl dieser aber in die Niederländische Durch H.J. Blasemacker [sic]. Und jetzo Zum allerersten mahl in die Hochteutsche Sprache versetzt*, in E.W. Happel (ed.), *Thesaurus Exoticorum, Oder eine mit Außländischen Raritäten und Geschichten Wohlversehene Schatz-Kammer Fürstellend Die Asiatische / Africanische und Americanische Nationes . . .*, Hamburg, 1688. On these further vernacular translations of du Ryer's version, see Hamilton and Richard, *André du Ryer*, pp. 110-19.

³⁴ See n. 14 above.

tired question of whether a particular version is a 'good' translation or not has largely been left behind in favour of far more useful and interesting analyses of why such translations were being undertaken in the first place, of how this activity fits with other cultural and intellectual currents, and of what other goals such translations serve besides making Islam's holy book available in new linguistic forms. A good starting point for all future scholarship is to bear in mind – as it too often is not – that communicating in language is the most sophisticated act in which humans engage, and that translating from one language to another is, therefore, not only a phenomenon that, quite literally, still eludes all systematic description or theorization, but an event of such complexity that it implicates every aspect of the human personality and the human community. It cannot, therefore, be usefully understood under a single frame of analysis or presumed to shed light on only a narrow dimension of the human character, especially when – as in the translations at issue here – it involves one of the most studied and revered texts in human history.