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Enlightenment and extra-European cultures

Countering Islamophobia in the early Eighteenth Century

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Abstract. This article looks at a certain number of writers in the early 18th Century, mainly British and French, who reacted against the dominant hostility to Islam and the Muslim world and tried to provide a more accurate presentation of them. After surveying different ideological uses of more positive representations of Islam and the Ottoman Empire, as well as the work of some scholars of Arabic who were concerned with greater accuracy, I concentrate on two authors about whom we know very little; they both spent time in and wrote about the North African state of Algeria and tried openly to counter European prejudices against Muslims. A brief discussion of the only work written by the French diplomat Jean-Philippe Laugier de Tassy (a history of Algiers) is followed by a longer section on Joseph Morgan, who published several works. Both his *History of Algiers* and his annotated translations of a poem on Islam written by a Spanish Moor and of a work on North Africa by French monks who went there to ransom captives show an excellent knowledge of the region, its people and their language. While far from being totally positive about the state which lived by piracy, he makes a vigorous case against disinformation concerning Islam and Muslims and encourages his readers to understand others and to judge them by the same standards we apply to ourselves.

Keywords. Islam, North Africa, Moors, corsairs, translation.

Can we talk about ‘Islamophobia’ in the 18th Century, and even more about ‘countering’ it? Much has been written about how 18th-century Europeans viewed the Muslim world and Islam itself, and there has been considerable disagreement on the subject, ranging from Edward Said’s stance on Orientalism, to those French scholars who claimed that the Enlightenment was essentially sympathetic towards Islam¹. I have often argued that such generalisations are too simplistic and that we encounter a wide range of opinions and stances. In this article, under what can be seen as a deliberately anachronistic title, I would like to discuss some voices who were far from being dominant but who do exemplify this variety; they both indicate that other stances were possible and encourage us to reconsider how we think about the history of Europe’s relations with the Muslim world.

¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Routledge, London 1978; Maxime Rodinson, *La Fascination de l’Islam*, Maspéro, Paris 1980; Hichem Djait, *L’Europe et l’Islam*, Le Seuil, Paris 1978.

This is not to deny that the underlying European view of both this world and its religion was generally one of hostility, towards the main challenger to Christianity, represented since the 15th Century by the Ottoman Empire, whose expansion was still seen as a danger to Europe at the beginning of the 18th Century. While this attitude is often referred to, particularly in the Muslim world, as crusading, it often was in fact a more deep-seated general fear and suspicion rather than a desire for conquest and domination. The Orientalism denounced by Edward Said and often criticised, was probably more characteristic of the following century (and even here needs to be nuanced). The 18th Century saw a wider range of opinions and a large amount of curiosity about a world which was both familiar and alien.

Recently, there has been more study of European writings on the Muslim world, which does bring out this diversity and the detailed knowledge of it possessed by 18th-century Europeans². I myself have often emphasised the way Islam was used, and often instrumentalised, in internal European debates, and this subject has more recently been surveyed over a longer period by Noel Malcolm³. In the present article, however, I want to look at a slightly different aspect of European interest in the Muslim world, namely writings by those whose aim was to try to present it more accurately to a European audience and to correct deformations and misinterpretations; a few of them even went as far as openly opposing European hostility and denigration. I do not wish to claim that these were anything other than a minority of dissenting voices or to claim that the 'Enlightenment' (whatever one means by the term) was sympathetic to Islam, but I think it is worth recovering these voices and reflecting on what they meant.

Majority 18th-century opinion, both in popular representations and among the intellectual élite, tended to continue the traditional Christian hostility towards Islam as a false religion and its prophet as an impostor. This was coupled with an acute awareness of the Ottoman Empire as a permanent threat both in the Mediterranean and on land in the east of Europe, although as the century progressed this fear started to lessen as the Ottomans encountered military defeat. However, at the

same time, the development of the study of Arabic, Persian or Ottoman and the founding of university chairs in various European countries in the 17th Century led to greater knowledge and the translation of Arabic works as well as the Quran. Thus the growth of erudition and a greater concern with accuracy led in some quarters to greater objectivity, despite the ritual repetition of hostility⁴. Scholars such as Edward Pocock, who held the first chair of Arabic at Oxford University in 1663 or Barthélemy d'Herbelot, whose *Bibliothèque orientale*, based on Arabic sources and published by Galland in 1697, became a widely respected reference work in the 18th Century, contributed to these developments, which were however not without dangers; George Sale, who translated the Quran into English, prefaced with a less hostile life of the Prophet, was accused of irreligion or even of being a secret Muslim⁵.

Islam was used in anti-Catholic and more widely irreligious works, which emphasised, for example, the greater toleration existing in the Ottoman Empire than in many Christian, especially Catholic, countries — although one cannot interpret all such uses as being necessarily evidence of irreligion, deism or freethinking. While Pierre Bayle, a defender of toleration, frequently expresses in his *Dictionary* the usual hostility towards the Prophet, generally presented as an impostor, he also however compares the Turks, who are tolerant despite the Quran's injunction to fight the infidels, with the Christians' persecution of heretics which is contrary to the teachings of Christ⁶. And the Irish freethinker John Toland wrote in *Nazarenus* (1718): «shou'd the Grand Seignior insist upon it, they might with as much reason and safety be tolerated at London and Amsterdam, as the Christians of every kind are so at Constantinople and thro-out all Turkey»⁷. Another comment found in several writers is that Islam is a more sublime religion than Christianity and presents a more exalted view of the deity⁸. This led on occasion to comparisons between

⁴ See in particular Bevilacqua, *The Arabic Republic of Letters*.

⁵ Barthélemy d'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale, ou Dictionnaire universel contenant généralement tout ce qui regarde la connaissance des peuples de l'Orient*, Compagnie des libraires, Paris 1697; George Sale, *The Koran, Commonly called the Alcoran of Mohammed*, J. Wilcox, London 1734.

⁶ *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, article Mahomet, note AA; see Rolando Minuti, *Orientalismo e idee di tolleranza nella cultura francese del primo '700*, Olschki, Firenze 2006, p. 201.

⁷ John Toland, *Nazarenus, or Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*, 2nd edition, J. Brotherton, J. Roberts, A. Dodd, London 1718, p. 5. See Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken. The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660-1730*, Cambridge U. P., Cambridge 1992, pp. 120-132; Pierre Lurbe, *Le christianisme au miroir de l'Islam dans le Nazarenus de John Toland*, «Dix-huitième Siècle», 27, 1995, pp. 335-348.

⁸ E.g. Henri de Boulainviller, *Vie de Mahomed*, published posthumously in London in 1730, presents the Prophet as a philosopher and Islam as a religion close to deism.

² E.g. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East. The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia*, Princeton U.P., New Haven 2018 (original: *Die Entzauberung Asiens. Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*, C.H. Beck, Munich 2013); Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters. Islam and the European Enlightenment*, Harvard U.P., Cambridge 2018; Ziad Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an. The Politics of Translation & the Construction of Islam*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford 2009.

³ Noel Malcolm, *Useful Enemies. Islam and the Ottoman Empire in Western Political Thought, 1450-1750*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2019.

Islam and Socinianism, due to its emphasis on the unity of God and rejection of the Trinity. Such parallels could be used both to encourage sympathy for Islam among Antitrinitarians and as a weapon by their enemies to denounce them⁹.

The representations of Islam as a more rational, deistic religion persisted well into the 18th Century often in the company of more hostile views. One example of such diversity is the work of a deistic 'philosophe' who is not very well-known today but was very widely read in the 18th Century, the marquis d'Argens. In his youth he had visited Istanbul and he discusses Islam in his *Mémoires*. His best-selling multi-volume *Lettres juives*, which went through a large number of editions and translations from 1736 onwards, exploited the popular taste for letters by imaginary travellers. These letters, written by different Jewish travellers from the Ottoman Empire in various countries in Europe and around the Mediterranean, enabled Argens both to criticise contemporary mores and to discuss philosophy, literature, science etc from the point of view of outsiders. While critical of all religions and not at all particularly favourable towards Islam, he praises it as a religion which is much closer to natural religion than is Christianity; he says that despite its «absurdities», it teaches a purified morality and its precepts are worthy of admiration by the greatest philosophers¹⁰. He devotes a letter to the Quran, which he quotes in Du Ruyter's translation, criticising the contempt shown for it by Christians and Jews, saying instead that it is a system of philosophy that contains excellent things, full of piety, providing a majestic idea of God's immense power¹¹. Elsewhere he quotes Leibniz's letter to La Croze to support the view of Islam as a sort of deism¹². Despite his open deism, such an attitude meant, according to him, that he had to reply to malicious rumours that he had become a Muslim when he was in Constantinople and had been circumcised¹³. Similar praise for aspects of Islam is found in Voltaire, together with much criticism¹⁴, and Edward Gibbon, in his generally much more favourable presentation of Islam, writes that «a philosophic theist might subscribe to the popular creed of the Mahometans, a creed too

sublime perhaps for our present faculties»¹⁵. These examples show that even amongst writers who frequently expressed hostile views of Islam, the way it was used to criticise Christianity enabled them to express on occasion more favourable views of aspects of it, in works which were widely read.

Sometimes, however, it was simply erudition and the concern for accuracy which led some scholars to contest certain prejudices. For example, the erudite Biblical textual scholar Richard Simon included in a work mainly concerned with the Eastern Churches, published in 1684, a short chapter called «De la créance et des coutumes des Mahométans», written, according to him, «afin que ceux qui voyagent en Levant se défassent de quantité de préjugés qu'ils ont contre cette Religion»¹⁶. He emphasised that much of Islam was copied from Christianity (hence its similarity with both Christianity and Judaism), made a plea for a more open attitude to it and its Prophet, and praised its morality. Thus, even if this work was mainly addressed to theologians, it was an attempt to get away from hostile polemic. Mention should also be made of Adriaan Reeland, who taught oriental languages at Utrecht, and published in 1704 a work on Islam, using Arabic texts in order to give a more exact view of the religion as presented by its followers; in so doing he aimed to correct anti-Muslim prejudices, especially as voiced by certain theologians. The work was translated into French by the Protestant David Durand, which made it accessible to a larger public and quite widely read, as it went through several editions as well as being translated into other languages¹⁷. Although such works were seen as irreligious and put on the Index, it should not be forgotten that for these Protestants a more exact knowledge of Islam was also important in order to help conversion, as Durand explains:

je vous avouë que je ne saurois voir qu'avec peine que des Chrétiens s'amusement à des accusations sans fondement, qui n'aboutissent qu'à nous faire encore plus haïr des Orientaux, en faisant soupçonner notre bonne foi, au lieu

⁹ See for example Arthur Bury, *The Naked Gospel*, n.p. 1690; Mathurin Veysière de La Croze, *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur le Mahometisme et sur le Socinianisme*, published in *Dissertations historiques sur divers sujets*, Reinier Leers, Rotterdam 1707, vol. I.

¹⁰ *Lettres Juives*, P. Paupie, La Haye 1738, letter 17 (vol. I, pp. 146-148).

¹¹ *Lettres juives*, P. Paupie, La Haye 1737, letter 84 (vol. III, pp. 186-189).

¹² *Ibid.*, Letter 167 (vol. V, p. 110).

¹³ *Ibid.*, Préface, vol. V.

¹⁴ Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs* (1756) ch. VI (Classiques Garnier, Paris 1963, vol. I, p. 271).

¹⁵ E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788), vol. V, ch. 50 (Penguin, London 1994, vol. III, p. 178). Similar remarks can be found in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* article "SARRASINS ou ARABES (philosophie des)".

¹⁶ *Histoire critique de la créance et des coutumes des Nations du Levant*, publiée par le Sr de Moni, Frederic Arnaud, Francfort [Reinier Leers, Rotterdam] 1684, ch. XV.

¹⁷ Adriaan Reeland, *De religione mohammedica*, G. Broedelet, Utrecht 1705 ; *La religion des Mahometans, exposée par leurs propres Docteurs, avec des Eclaircissemens sur les Opinions qu'on leur a fausement attribuées. Tiré du Latin de Mr. Reland et augmenté d'une Confession de Foi Mahometane, qui n'avoit point encore paru*, Isaac Vaillant, La Haye 1721 (translated from the 2nd ed. 1717). See Minuti, *Orientalismo e idee di tolleranza*, cit., pp. 180-185.

*de les attirer par des sentimens de candeur et de lumiere; qui diminuent le mal, ou du moins qui ne l'augmentent pas; qui facilitent le commerce et la bienveillance entre les Peuples, et, par ce moyen, les conversions*¹⁸.

However, the concern for a more exact view of the Muslim world and its peoples did not necessarily imply expressing more sympathy for their religion. Simon Ockley, professor of Arabic at Cambridge, translated Arabic histories and published in 1708 a *History of the Saracens* based on Arabic texts, which went through several editions and was much read and used by others. His aim was to inform readers about Arabic philosophy, culture and learning and to counter views of their barbarism. As he explained, he translated Arabic works:

*to give those who are as yet unacquainted with it, a taste of the acumen & genius of the Arabian philosophers, & to excite young scholars to the reading of those authors which, through a groundless conceit of their impertinence & ignorance have been too long neglected*¹⁹.

However, he avoided discussing Islam as such, preferring to refer the reader to Humphrey Prideaux's well-known hostile account in *The True Nature of Imposture, fully displayed in the Life of Mahomet* (1697).

For others, it was the experience of travel in the Ottoman Empire which led to more nuanced opinions. A traveller like Thévenot, for example, admitted the good qualities of «Turks»²⁰, and the well-known Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who went Constantinople as the wife of the British ambassador and had access to the women's quarters, expressed a certain admiration for Ottoman culture. Her «Turkish Embassy letters», written while she was in Istanbul in 1716-1718, were widely read and went through several editions after they were published posthumously in 1763²¹. Of course, such experiences did not necessarily lead to sympathy; on the contrary, many travellers returned with extremely hostile views and wrote very critical accounts, especially in the later part of the century. For a very small number, however, their time in the Muslim world had a much greater effect and led them to attempt openly to combat Christian prejudices against Muslims.

¹⁸ *La religion des Mahometans*, «Préface du Traducteur», p. LIX.

¹⁹ *The Improvement of Human Reason exhibited in the Life of Hai Ebn Yokdham ...*, transl. by S. Ockley, E. Powell & J. Morphew, London 1708, Preface.

²⁰ Jean de Thévenot, *Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant*, Louis Billaine, Paris 1664.

²¹ Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: written, during her travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, to persons of distinction, men of letters, &c. in different parts of Europe. Which contain, among other curious relations, accounts of the policy and manners of the Turks*, T. Becket and P.A. De Hondt, London 1763.

In the rest of this article, I would like to concentrate on two such writers, who are much less known than those mentioned so far. Both of them wrote on North Africa, in particular Algeria, which in itself is interesting as this country usually came in for particular criticism on the part of Europeans. The state lived largely by piracy, its navy attacking European ships and capturing and ransoming those on board, and it was generally seen to be the most intractable and aggressive of the North African regencies nominally subordinate to Istanbul. While both of these authors, who were clearly in contact with each other, remain somewhat shadowy figures and their motives not always easy to discern, there is evidence that their works were known and read at the time.

The first is a French diplomat called Jean-Philippe Laugier de Tassy. Despite his distinguished career, the details of his life are somewhat sketchy; his birth date is unknown, but we know that he entered the service of the French Ministry of the Marine in 1699 and was briefly captured by the Spanish in 1706. In July 1717 he was appointed Chancellor at the French consulate in Algiers. It is not clear how long he stayed there, as according to one source he left after only a year. In 1720, he was appointed «commissaire de la Marine» – in fact consul – in Amsterdam, a post in which he was renewed in 1729. He remained there until his death in 1748 and seems to have enjoyed very good relations with the Dutch authorities and to have been highly respected; he was given an honorary distinction by the Duke of Orleans in 1737 and made a baron of the Empire by Emperor Charles VII²². The only work he apparently published was his *Histoire du Royaume d'Alger*, which appeared in Amsterdam in 1725; he explained in his Preface that he wrote it because of the curiosity that he encountered about that country due to its war with the Netherlands. Based on his own observations, it is in general a fair-minded account of Algiers's history and government but also its different inhabitants and customs, and of course its religion. His more objective attitude is expressed in his Preface: after having observed that «Les préjugés de la plupart des Chrétiens sont si terribles contre les Turcs et les autres Mahométans, qu'ils n'ont point d'expressions assez fortes pour faire voir le mépris et l'horreur qu'ils en ont», he goes on to denounce these prejudices as unfounded, remarking :

²² See Anne Mézin, *Les Consuls de France au siècle des Lumières (1715-1792)*, Direction des Archives et de la Documentation, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Paris 1997, pp. 381-382 ; and my article in *Christian-Muslim Relations: a bibliographical history*. Vol. 13. *Western Europe (1700-1800)*, ed. by D. Thomas and J. Chesworth, Brill, Leiden 2019, pp. 572-575.

*je suis persuadé que si ces mêmes personnes pouvaient converser sans le savoir avec des Mahométans qui n'eussent point le turban et qui fussent habillés à la manière des chrétiens, ils trouveraient dans eux ce qu'on trouve dans les autres peuples. Mais s'ils avaient le Turban, cela suffirait pour les faire opinionâtrer dans leurs préventions*²³.

He makes a plea to judge others by objective standards, and not to be swayed by prejudices concerning people of another religion based on nothing but errors and lies. We should recognise the good and bad in everyone, as he does in his own descriptions, in which he shows no great sympathy for the Algerians while at the same time emphasising their fair treatment of the Christians in Algiers, who are free to practice their own religion. He contrasts the good travellers, who are interested in learning about and understanding others, from the stupid travellers who simply condemn anything that is different from what they have known at home. He is also particularly concerned to counter the propaganda and what he calls the «fables» spread by Spanish monks to justify their expeditions to North Africa to ransom the Christian captives held there²⁴. In his account of the treatment of the captives (ch. XVI), he does not hide the bad treatments some of them undergo but overall gives a much more favourable account of their circumstances; he even claims that the Christian «slaves» are better treated than the free Christians in Algiers (p. 280). Here he is also concerned to counter the totally negative accounts of the Spanish monks and the way they play unscrupulously on the sensibilities of the public in order to encourage the faithful to contribute money to ransom the captives.

Laugier's work seems to have been quite widely read as an authoritative source for information about Algiers, and also North Africa and the Muslim world more generally, for example by Montesquieu²⁵, and an adapted and enlarged version of it was published in 1830 when the French landed in Algiers. It was also translated into Dutch, Spanish (going through several different editions), Italian and German, as well as the English translation mentioned below, which seems to have been the basis for the German version at least.

This brings us to the second person I wish to discuss, in more detail, namely a certain Joseph Morgan.

JOSEPH MORGAN

Joseph Morgan has left a lot more traces than Laugier de Tassy, mainly because he published much more widely than his French colleague, but here again we know extremely little about him and have to rely on what he himself tells us in his various works²⁶. He is very different from the French diplomat, closer to Grub Street, but although in many ways he appears quite marginal, in others he is exemplary due to his involvement in various different fields – although he is now unknown in all of them. We know nothing about his origin, date of birth or education, although he seems to have been well educated. The first information that we have about him is that he lived in North Africa, apparently in Algiers, during the first twenty years of the 18th Century, where he seems to have been for a time secretary to the British consul in Algiers (but not for long); he took part in the war against the Spanish in Oran and seems to have been briefly Vice-consul in Morocco. He went to Tunis in 1719 and returned to England around 1720 when he started to publish, clearly trying to make a name for himself as an author and a scholar; but he does not seem to have succeeded and apparently remained poor, earning money by translation²⁷. He was thus an outsider; but at the same time he managed to publish well-presented works, some of which seem to have sold or attracted a list of respectable subscribers, as well as a short-lived political journal²⁸. But he disappeared from the scene as suddenly as he appeared, and nothing more is known about him after the last published work that we know to be his, in 1739.

Several of his works reflect his experience in North Africa and concern both the countries he knew and Islam as a religion. This is the case of the first work he published after his return to England, *Mahometism Fully Explained*, published in two volumes, in 1723 and 1725, the second one by subscription; it was the translation of a poem written in Spanish in Arabic characters, by Mohamed Rabadan de Aragón (1580? -?). Morgan says he bought a manuscript copy of *Discurso de la luz* at Tessatore in Tunisia from a certain Hamoda Bussisa Tibib in September 1715²⁹. He gave the rare manuscript to Lord Harley (to whom he dedicated the first volume

²³ Laugier de Tassy, *Histoire du Royaume d'Alger*, Henri du Sauzet, Amsterdam 1725, Préface.

²⁴ It is difficult to know whether this reveals particular sympathy for or closeness to Protestants, which might be linked to his good relations with the Dutch. It is interesting that Morgan calls him a good Christian.

²⁵ *De l'esprit des lois*, livre XXII, ch. II.

²⁶ For more information, see Ann Thomson, *Joseph Morgan et le monde islamique*, «Dix-huitième Siècle», 27, 1995, pp. 351-363; and the entry by Nabil Matar in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, cit., pp. 188-196.

²⁷ For the list, see the entry in the *18th-century Translator's Dictionary*: <https://www.eutec-project.it/translators/en-joseph-morgan>

²⁸ *The New Political State of Great Britain. Including the Public Affairs of Foreign Courts*, 1730.

²⁹ *Mahometism Fully Explained*, E. Curll, W. Mears, and T. Payne, London 1723, 'The Author's Preface', note, [6].

of his translation) for his collection and it is now in the British Library³⁰. Morgan dedicated the second volume to Dr Richard Mead, an influential physician to the royal family and patron of many writers, also known for his huge collection of books and manuscripts. From both of these dedications we see that he was trying to attract influential patronage, and the list of subscribers also includes aristocrats, politicians, Church dignitaries and well-known writers. Morgan claimed to be one of the few people capable of understanding the manuscript, written in Arabic characters in a mix of different Spanish dialects and Arabic words spoken by the Moriscos in North Africa, because «by my long Continuance, and frequent Conversations with the Off-spring of those Exiles in Barbary, I am thoroughly vers'd in their Way of expressing their Sentiments»³¹. He prefixed to his translation the articles of faith of the Moslems found in another manuscript, also written in Spanish in Arabic characters, conserved in the public library in Amsterdam; this manuscript had recently been translated into French, from the Latin version, by David Durand (who had also translated Reeland)³².

Morgan insists on his concern to translate the manuscript faithfully, in order to present Rabadan's point of view, and he adds notes of his own, some about the interpretation and some explanations taken from recognised specialists like Ockley, d'Herbelot, Reeland or Prideaux. Occasionally he corrects mistakes or remarks on popular superstitions, drawing on his own experience, and recounts events he saw in Barbary, demonstrating great knowledge of the region and its dialects in his discussions of names, meanings or transcriptions. He also gives the point of view of some Algerians, such as the envoy to London in the 1730s and the latter's servant, from whom he says he obtained information.

Overall his attitude is relatively cautious, as he is apparently aware of the danger of seeming too favourable towards Islam, which would do him a disservice. For example, referring to Rabadan's criticism of the Trinity (p. 214), Morgan takes pains to point out that this is not his own opinion, as he is only the translator, and he adds:

³⁰ See Nabil Matar, *Jos.[eph] Morgan and Mohamed Rabadan: the First Muslim Biography of the Prophet Muhammad in English*, «Journal of Islamic Studies», 30, 2019, pp. 151-175.

³¹ Letter to Prideaux, *Mahometism Fully Explained*, E. Curll, W. Mears and T. Payne, London 1723, p. viii.

³² *La Religion des Mahométans exposée par leurs propres docteurs avec des éclaircissemens sur les opinions qu'on leur a faussement attribuées, tiré du latin de M. Reland et augmenté d'une Confession de foi mahométtanne qui n'avait point encore paru*, Isaac Vaillant, La Haye 1721; it is also used in *Cérémonies & coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, J.F. Bernard, Amsterdam 1723-1743, vol. 5, pp. 117-124.

*I would, nevertheless, fain have omitted this whole Paragraph, or, at least, have given it a different Turn; but, upon second Thoughts, I consulted some Gentlemen of Worth and Learning, who all told me, 'That if I pretended to give the World a Translation, I must give the real Meaning of my Author, and not my own, except I did it separately from the Work itself'. But for the Reader's further Satisfaction, I give a faithful Transcript of the whole Paragraph. Vide licet.*³³

He therefore also reproduces the original Spanish text. It is clear that he wants to present a more exact view of Islam and to attack prejudices; he writes, for example, at the beginning of the second volume:

*Very many grave Grecian, Italian, German, Spanish, and other Writers, have impudently exposed their little-com-mendable Malice, and impotent Partiality, by painting out Mahomet as something beneath the Human Species, and rendering his Descent still more base and contemptible than they have done his Person and Intellectuals. Now, this really is not Bonne Guerre; and all these un-manlike Methods of attacking ones Adversary, have been more than sufficiently exploded, and intirely refuted by some few less ungenerous enemies. Our late worthy Dean Prideaux, and the learned Monsieur Reland, have, in particular, plainly demonstrated, That Mahomet was several Removes from an Ideot, or a Drivler, and, that his Pedigree was not what those Champions make it to have been: Yet, notwithstanding their Gentleman-like Manner of Procedure, in those Points, they represent both himself and his Doctrine in Colours very proper to inspire all, who had the Happiness of being brought up in a Belief more uniform and beautiful, with an Abhorrence of a Persuasion so repugnant to Probability it self, as is certainly the Bulk of what that bold Impostor left behind him, as an unhappy Inheritance to his Proselytes, and their Posterity. I shall, therefore, not give my self any farther Trouble to confute those partial and indiscrete Historians, nor even to enumerate their Names, but shall enter upon my intended Subject...*³⁴

We see here a careful balancing act, as he refers to the Prophet as an impostor, quotes recognised specialists, including the hostile Prideaux as well as the more neutral Reeland, while trying to redress the balance. The overall aim is clearly to present to the English-speaking public the Moslem point of view about their own religion and beliefs, with comments intended to facilitate comprehension, and also to counter inexact criticism by Europeans.

He replies to criticisms that such a work is dangerous for those whose faith is weak, by saying that such

³³ *Mahometism Fully Explained*, p. 215.

³⁴ *Mahometism Explained*, vol. II, Printed for the Author, London 1725, p. v.

arguments are worthy of a Portuguese Inquisitor, but also that this account will make Christians prefer the purity of their own religion, more rational than «that Medley of inconsistent Incoherencies, *Mahomet's Alcoran*». However, then he continues:

*Indeed it contains abundance of good Morality, which might make the best of us blush to see ourselves so much outdone, by an ignorant, tho' subtil Heathen, if I may so call one who detested Idolatry, and taught the worship of the real, the only, and the self existing God, tho' after his own Manner.*³⁵

Such remarks are reinforced by some translated extracts that he also gives from another manuscript which he claims he saw when in North Africa, written in 1615 by a Morisco expelled from Spain called Abdelkrim Ben Aly Perez. These extracts condemn the idolatrous practices of the Christians and doctrines which undermine the unity of God: «there neither is, nor can be, but one only real, omnipresent self-existing and incomprehensible Deity, ever-living without Beginning and without end»³⁶. Such a remark again shows a certain affinity with Unitarianism; in any case, Morgan is clearly targeting here Catholic practices rather than Protestantism.

This is even more evident when he highlights the Spanish persecution of the Moors and the sufferings of the Spanish Moors at the hands of the Christians, in a section called «The Case of the Moriscoes or Spanish Moors», based on a pamphlet by Michael Geddes called *The History and Expulsion of the Moriscoes out of Spain*, published in 1702, an anti-Catholic plea for toleration³⁷. In his Preface, Geddes denounced the barbarity of the Catholics, the «undefatigable enemy», «with whom a Protestant, a Jew, and a Mahometan are all one and the same, no cruelties being thought great enough for any of them, if they will not believe as the Roman Church believeth». Geddes violently attacks the cruelty of the Spanish Catholics and their persecution of Muslims and Jews, claiming that the Muslims never persecuted anyone and allow others to practice their own religion³⁸. Morgan also emphasises the parallels between the oppression of the Moors in Spain and that suffered by the early Christian church³⁹, and when referring to the «superstitious and ridiculous ceremonies» of the pilgrims to Mecca or

the tricks of a *taleb* in Constantine in Algeria, he compares them to the practices of the Catholic Church. His concern to provide a less polemical and more exact view of Islam is, we see, linked to its instrumentalisation in the service of anti-Catholic propaganda, in which he also includes the argument concerning greater Muslim toleration of other religions. I do not, however, think one can reduce Morgan's sole purpose to such instrumentalisation, as will become clearer from a study of his other important work, the *History of Algiers*.

It is not surprising that Morgan should have decided to publish a book on Algiers in 1728, in view of the length of time he spent there. But the choice was also no doubt determined by the reading public's interest in accounts of foreign lands, and the particular interest in Algiers (as we have seen from Laugier de Tassy's remarks), with which European countries were often at war, in part due to their corsairs. That his work did apparently arouse interest can be seen from the fact that while he had to publish the first edition by subscription, a second edition was published by a bookseller in 1731. Here again, Morgan insists that his aim is to give an impartial and objective account to replace the usual «undeserved calumny», basing his account either on his own knowledge and experience or on well-known authorities. He denies that his aim is to defend those he calls «lawless free-booters» but simply to establish the truth:

What a monstrous Load of gross Lies and insufferable Absurdities, as I here and there occasionally observe, does one not fall in with immediately upon laying Hand on any Tract, Treatise, History, Memoir, Relation, Dictionary Geographical, Historical, or Critical, relating to Africa and its Affairs! Yet how many Wide-Acres tell one, scornfully, we have Histories enough of that Country? Why, truly, so we have: But the Question is, have we one, that is not rather Romance than History? Doubtless, those of other Parts are not free from Falsities: But of those I am not so good a Judge.

With the very same Principle I professed above, and not to ingratiate my self with any, I avow, that the Algerine Turks, notwithstanding I do them strict Justice, never had a more inveterate Enemy than my self, nor one who more heartily rejoiced at their Disgraces, and wished, nay merely languished for their Destruction, during the whole Time of my Intercourse in their Country; and all that purely on account of their imperious, insufferable Haughtiness, and that singular Air of Contempt with which they look down upon all but just their own insolent, scoundrel, base-born Selves: Nay, so deep is that irradicable Inveteracy ingrafted in my Mind, that I perfectly hate the whole Turkish Nation for the Sake of those Varlets; who, generally, are but the very Offal of the Ottomans, and; at this Day, I cannot but be mightily pleased at the Successes of the far less sour and morose, the far more affable, noble, communicative and

³⁵ *Mahometism Explained*, vol. II, p. lviii-lviii.

³⁶ *Mahometism Explained*, vol. II, p. 295. Morgan says the manuscript was lent to him by a Spaniard (who, he insists, was a moderate Catholic), to whom it had been lent by the grandson of the author.

³⁷ *Mahometism Explained*, cit., vol. II, pp. 225-366. See Michael Geddes, *Miscellaneous Tracts*, A. and J. Churchill, London 1702, which also contains amongst other things pamphlets against the Inquisition.

³⁸ *Miscellaneous Tracts*, cit., vol. II, pp. 297-298.

³⁹ *Mahometism Explained*, cit., vol. II, p. ix.

*conversable Persians. This is no Sycophantry, no Adulation, in ordine ad; but my real and immutable Sentiments.*⁴⁰

While he was eager not to be seen as an advocate for the Algerines, it seems that he did in fact oscillate between sympathy and a desire to enlighten British readers and lead them to question their prejudices, and exasperation at the Algerines' behaviour. But notice that this is not a criticism of Moslems in general, but of a particular people. On the contrary, he goes on directly to condemn European ignorance of and hostility to Muslims, translating a passage by Laugier de Tassy, whom he calls «a worthy Gentleman and a good Christian»:

The generality of Christians are so prejudiced against the Turks and other Mahometans that they have scarce language harsh enough to express the horror and contempt in which they hold all of that persuasion. [...] Many persons make no manner of difference between the people of Barbary and real brutes; calling them, simply and absolutely, beasts [...] To such sort of folks the base name of a Turk, Moor, Arab, or other Mahometan is sufficient to inspire them with such opinions. But, I am persuaded, that could those very persons, unknown to themselves, converse with Mussulmans who had no turbans, and were habited after the Christian mode, they would find in them all they can meet with in other people. But if they wear a turban, that article alone suffices to induce them to persist obstinately in their prepossessions.

He reminds the reader that human vices differ according to

*Place, Education, Laws, Customs and Constitution, or Complexion. This is so notoriously true, that it must be owned, that what in one country are deemed enormous Vices, in another are commendable Qualifications. Many Parts of the following Sheets may serve to refute the Prejudices of such Persons as I have been mentioning, and to make them sensible, that among their own Compatriots there are many not a whit more civilized than are abundance of those people we treat of, and who have Customs and Manners altogether as ridiculous as they; would they but think fit to make a few Reflections...*⁴¹.

His own opinion is that

the Majority of the present Inhabitants of Barbary, and among others the Algerines, of whom I treat more in particular, want nothing in order to render them a very sociable, as they are a considerable People, but less Pride and Inurbanity, with somewhat better regulated Politics than they think proper to put in Practice: And it is withal

*proved, that the very Constitution of their Government, with the Character of those who compose it, drag and precipitate them, forcibly and insensibly, as it were, contrary to their Inclinations, into all the Outrages and Excesses which, from Time to Time, are there committed.*⁴²

Their defects and vices come from bad government, not from any inherent inferiority or defect. His plea is therefore to judge them by same standards as we do ourselves, pointing out that

*one almost daily meets with People, of both Sexes, ruder, more brutal, less polished, and superlatively more abominably impious, in this noble City, this very Metropolis of ours, than, I positively aver, I ever met with in Barbary, during my near twenty Years Intercourse in that savage Country; even among the wildest of the Arabs and Africans.*⁴³

He claims that the English would probably be even worse without rigour of good laws. He also quotes Laugier de Tassy's account of the massacre of Johan and Cornelis de Witt, lynched by a mob in The Hague on 20th August 1672, which was just as bad, if not worse, than the massacres of the Deys perpetrated in North Africa. In a similar way, in the body of the history, he seizes every occasion to undermine his readers' hostile prejudices. Describing in the historical part the camps of the Vandals and Belisarius, he again emphasises the similarity with his own time and the universality of vices:

*Have we not any Instances, in Story, of some such-like Deportment practiced by politer and more refined Nations, on this Side the Mediterranean, towards their own natural Princes, as these Savages, as they well needs have them to be, sometimes practice towards foreign Tyrants and Usurpers, whom they have all imaginable Reason to detest and abominate? Letting alone what I have both read and heard; I have even known many base and villainous Enormities perpetrated by such as would be highly affronted to be named in the same Breath with an African. But Prejudice will prevail; Sycophantry will flourish, and even be countenanced; and till Mankind wholly ceases to exist, there is little Appearance that any one Clime in the whole Universe, if peopled at all, will ever cease to be peopled by the same Mixture of Good, Indifferent, and Stark-Naught it now is, without any of those mighty Advantages so sanguinely stickled for by each Pretender to a Superiority in Purity of Morals*⁴⁴.

It is, I think, clear from all this, that Morgan is not simply using Islam as a tool to criticise the Catho-

⁴⁰ Joseph Morgan, *A Complete History of Algiers*, printed for the author by J. Bettenham, London 1728, pp. ii.

⁴¹ *Complete History of Algiers*, 1728, pp. II-IV.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

lic Church, but has a definite agenda of countering the generalised prejudices against all Muslims; he is trying, not to whitewash Muslims (he does not hide the defects and shortcomings of the Algerines in particular) and certainly not Islam, but to encourage a more objective view of them and above all a better understanding, by presenting *their* own point of view. While most obvious in his translation of Rabadan's poem, it is also clear that in this history he is attempting to do something similar, based on his long experience in North Africa and what seems to have been his unusually good inside knowledge of the people and their language. We could say that he is letting the subaltern speak.

His concern to counter unfounded prejudices is likewise evident in another of his publications, which also has a strong anti-Catholic bias. This is his translation of the work by the French Trinitarian monks, often called the «Pères Rédempteurs», who went to North Africa to ransom the French captives, or «slaves» of the pirate states. In their account of their expedition, published in 1721, they insisted at length on the ill-treatment of these «slaves» at the hands of the Moors and their immense suffering. This was of course part of their policy to encourage the faithful to contribute money to help in the good work of ransoming their fellow-Christians⁴⁵. Morgan added numerous footnotes to his translation, correcting their mistakes and adding information, sometimes taken from his own work on Algiers; but he particularly used these notes to criticise Popish superstition and accuse the good Fathers of downright lies in their presentation of the situation of the Christian captives in Algiers. For example, he adds a note to one account of the Algerines' barbarity, pointing out that while «We may take it for granted that some Barbary Moors, and these in particular, are as capable of inhumanities as any Spanish Inquisitor, or French Dragoon in Europe», the monks could have criticised such people nearer home⁴⁶. Elsewhere he accuses them directly of lies and defends the Moors as being less cruel than the Europeans:

O Fie, Father! Tho' it is Part of your Function to make a dismal story of Slavery among Infidels (the very Name of which is indeed bad enough) yet you should, methinks, adhere only to the Truth. You came very lately from Marseilles, where you must, or might have seen the Turks, Moors, &c, in a much worse condition than the most unhappy Beylic slave in Algiers; especially since the Alge-

rines have disused Gallies. You likewise must needs have seen or heard, how slaves are treated in Spain, Malta, Genoa, &c. The Beylic slaves of Algiers are (as yourself tells us) at free liberty to play, work for themselves, or steal, three hours before sunset; which latter case many of them take almost with impunity, openly selling whatever they have so acquired, and that not seldom to the very owners, who are sensible that complaining would be fruitless, and that the most satisfactory answer they must expect would be: 'slaves will steal if they can; it is your business to be careful of them'. Neither is it less certain, that thousands of Algiers captives live abundantly happier there (want of freedom excepted) than ever they can even hope to do at home; and that very many are excused with a few bastinadoes for crimes, for which they would have suffered the wheel in most parts of Europe, or at least have made their exit in a halter. Therefore I say again, Father, stick to the truth⁴⁷.

Morgan consistently refers in his footnotes to Catholic cruelties (and European punishments such as racks and wheels) as being much worse than those of which the Algerines are accused. And he particularly pours scorn on the «Popish Pageantries» represented by the processions of redeemed captives organised by the Trinitarians all over France in order to extract charity from the faithful. He contrasts these masquerades, which exploit the poor former captives «who doubtless had much rather be with their friends», with the way the British monarchy organises the release of their subjects (pp. 141-142). He even provides a list of those captives ransomed by the King of England.

This annotated translation, which transforms a work of French Catholic propaganda into a patriotic and anti-Catholic vehicle – while in line with the pleas we have seen above to judge everyone, including Muslims, by the same criteria – could perhaps be seen as instrumentalising arguments in their favour to criticise Christianity. But Morgan does not seem to have an irreligious aim, and instead is turning the work into British Protestant propaganda. It is true that such a stance would appeal more to the British reading public; in addition, as he was trying (unsuccessfully) to embark on a literary career and gain patronage, it was not in his interests to appear to be opposed to the Church of England. As we have seen in his translation of Rabadan's work, he was careful not to be seen to be adopting heterodox views.

Despite such precautions, however, I think it is clear that Morgan was attempting to counter European, and especially English, prejudices against Islam and Muslims, in the same way that Laugier de Tassy seemed to

⁴⁵ See François Comelin, Philemon de la Motte, Joseph Bernard, *Voyage pour la rédemption des captifs, aux royaumes d'Alger et de Tunis*, Louis-Anne Sevestre et Pierre-François Giffard, Paris 1721.

⁴⁶ *A Voyage to Barbary for the redemption of captives ... the whole illustrated with annotations, historical, critical and explanatory...*, Charles Gorbett et al., London 1735, p. 25.

⁴⁷ *A Voyage to Barbary*, cit., p. 44. A similar criticism of the monks' exaggeration of the slaves' suffering is made by d'Argens in *Lettres juives*, cit., letter 164 (vol. V, pp. 80-82).

want to counter French prejudices. His works are full of pleas to judge Muslims by the same standards that we use for ourselves, and he consistently attempts to correct errors and falsifications. More than this, his translation of Rabadan's poem does not limit itself to soliciting sympathy for the sufferings of the Moors at the hands of the Spanish; it is an attempt to present their own view of Islam, not that of the Europeans. This was a very different starting point from that of most of the translators of Arabic works, in particular the Quran, which was usually part of a missionary agenda. Morgan also went further than most of the authors who discussed Islam, even those who attempted to encourage a more balanced view, as their aim was frequently to undermine Christianity, whereas Morgan was clearly attempting to counter the dominant European view of Islam, which can, I think, be termed Islamophobia. Such a position was not easy in the 18th Century; as we have seen, George Sale's more sympathetic presentation of the Prophet which prefaced his widely known translation of the Quran led to accusations of irreligion or of secret conversion to Islam. It is interesting to note that Morgan apparently continued the work left unfinished by Sale on his death, published in 1739 as *The Lives and Memorable Actions of many Illustrious Persons of the Eastern Nations*. This was Morgan's last known work, as it is not at all certain that he had a hand in the publication in 1750, without the author's name, of the English translation of Laugier de Tassy's work on Algiers, even if it is possible that Morgan was responsible for the translation.

Thus, despite criticisms of works which appeared to show more sympathy for Islam, a certain number of such publications did appear. While Morgan seems to have experienced more real sympathy for and inside knowledge of those Muslim societies that he knew than did other writers, he was not totally isolated. His books were part of a body of work in which European readers could find more exact information about Muslims and their religion, together with some attempts to rectify unfounded prejudices. As the Century progressed, such an attitude arguably became rarer as the decline of the Ottoman empire seems to have encouraged contempt, and the beginnings of European occupation of Muslim lands started to change attitudes. It would, however, be a mistake to think that these colonial attitudes were the only ones possible in the 18th Century. It is important to study the diversity and complexity of thinking about the Muslim world and to realise that in the first half of the Century at least, another view was possible.