EXCLUSION OR CONCEALMENT: Approaches to Traditional Arabic Exegesis in Medieval-Latin Translations of the Qur’an

When medieval Latin Christians confronted the large number of Muslims living in southern Europe and adjoining areas they also confronted the Qur’an. For, though it took some centuries, close proximity between Christian and Muslim eventually caused Christians to take an interest in the scriptures that formed the core and inspiration of Islamic religion.¹ That interest, arising quite explicitly out of a desire to refute and convert, became so intense that by the early thirteenth century there existed two complete —though still unedited— Latin translations of the Qur’an, both of them produced in Spain. The first of these, called Lex Mahumet and part of the famous collection of Islamic works translated at the behest of Peter the Venerable in 1142-43, was produced by an expatriate Englishman, Robert of Ketton, who had come to Spain during the previous decade to translate Arabic scientific and mathematical works.² The second translation, Liber alchorani, made by a native, Arabic-speaking Spanish Christian named Mark of Toledo, was completed in 1211 under the aegis of the Archbishop of Toledo, Rodrigo

¹On the early-medieval European lack of interest in Islam, and the slow growth of awareness and concern about it, see B. Kedar, Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward the Muslims (Princeton, 1984), passim, esp. 3-135.

Jiménez de Rada. Though there were a surprising number of European intellectuals in the medieval and early-modern periods who could read Arabic and who studied the Qur'an in the original language, the great majority of European Christians of this period who wanted to investigate Islam’s holy book had to do so through the medium of one (or sometimes both) of these medieval-Latin versions.

Now anyone who has thought about it (or tried her hand at translation) is aware of how serious are the potential pitfalls awaiting the translator, and how numerous the opportunities for mischief. Translating is hard work; it is also the occasion for serious distortion should the translator be so motivated. How easy it would be to adjust, to rework, to skew the meaning of a text, particularly if one were hostile to it and the civilisation that has grown up around it. So one cannot take up a medieval Latin translation of the Qur'an without wondering if the translator has done exactly this. Medieval European Christians were, after all, overtly and nearly universally hostile to Islam and its scriptures. It is just here, however, that these two medieval Latin versions of the Qur'an first surprise us, for, as Norman Daniel has recently observed, both translators, though they were explicitly opposed to Islam, were quite concerned to produce what they saw as an accurate, intelligible version of that work. While there are numerous flaws and errors in both works, it is very hard to find intentional, polemical distortion in either.

This does not mean, though, that what readers of these texts had in their hands were Latin versions of the Qur'an exactly as Muslims knew and understood it. For, ironically, the very methods of translation adopted by these high-medieval Arabists to insure the accuracy and intelligibility of their versions tended unintentionally to introduce sys-

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temic distortions. Moreover, in each case the reasons for this were nearly opposite. The first Latin translator, Robert of Ketton, adopted an energetic, paraphrasing approach to his translation of 1142-43. His paraphrase, however, incorporates an enormous amount of explanatory material directly from the Muslim-Arabic tradition of Qur'ān exegesis, so that his version is really a translation of the Qur'ān melded together with substantial portions of the traditional exegesis of it. I have argued elsewhere, therefore, that Robert's much-criticised translation is really a much sounder version of the Qur'ān than it has been given credit for. But though his approach is in many ways a laudable one, there is one serious difficulty with it: Robert proceeded in such a way that it became impossible for the European reader to separate the Qur'ānic text from the long tradition of interpretation of it. Text and commentary have been inextricably combined, and this is not really the Qur'ān as Muslims knew it.

On the other hand, Mark of Toledo attempted to produce a faithful version of the Qur'ān by translating it with mechanical literalism, following the Arabic syntax closely, paraphrasing only rarely, periodically even introducing neologisms based on Arabic models. Though Mark also appears to have consulted Arabic commentaries on the Qur'ān as he translated, he only rarely altered his Latin text to make it conform with them. What the European reader is faced with in this case, then, is a version of the Qur'ān that is almost entirely cut off from the tradition of interpretation according to which it was always understood by Muslims. Just as reading the Bible outside the powerful Jewish and Christian exegetical traditions developed around it is in a very real way not to read the Bible at all, so reading the Qur'ān outside the framework provided by the classical tafsīrs, or commentaries, is to engage a Qur'ān that is not quite the Qur'ān of Muslims.

These striking differences in their approaches to translation are apparent upon reading even short passages of their texts side by side with the Arabic Qur'ān. At verse 2:91, for example, the Qur'ān discusses the infidelity of the ancient Jews:

Wa-idadhā qila la-hum, 'āminū bi-mā anzala Allāh,' qālū, 'nu'minu bi-mā unzila 'alaynā.' Wa-yakfurūna bi-mā wara'ahu wa-huwa al-haqq muṣaddiqa li-

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8 On this see my "Tafsīr and Translation," 708, 716, 720-22.
mā ma‘ahum. Qul: fa-lima taqțulūna anbiyā’ Allāh min qablu in kuntum μᵳ minin?

[And when it is said to them, ‘believe in what God has revealed,’ they say, ‘we believe in what has been revealed to us.’ But they disbelieve in what has come after it, and it (i.e. the Qur’ān) is the truth that verifies what (scripture) they already have. Say: then why did you slay the prophets of God previously if you are believers?]9

Mark of Toledo, the literalist, gives his reader this Latin version of the verse:

Et quando dicitur eis, ‘credite in id quod destinauit Deus,’ dicunt, ‘credimus in id quod destinauit nobis,’ et blasphemant in id quod est post ipsum quod est [v]erum attestans ei quod haberent. Dic: quare occidistis prophetas Dei priusquam crederetis.

[And when it is said to them, ‘believe in that which God has sent to you,’ they say, ‘we believe in that which he has sent to us.’ And they blaspheme that which is after this, which is the truth attesting to what (scripture) they had. Say: why did you kill the prophets of God before you believed?]10

Though he has made small adjustments, and though he misunderstood one word in the last sentence,11 for the most part Mark’s translation follows the Arabic closely and carefully. As a result, the reader comes away with not only a very good idea of the literal content of the Qur’ān, but also something of a feel for its rhetorical and stylistic tendencies. Mark nicely preserves here the dialogue form so common throughout the Qur’ān: “And when it is said to them, ... they say ...” Likewise the culminating command to “say” (translating “Qul” as “Dic” — “Say!”) jars the Latin reader just as it does the Arabic reader. It is true that not all of this is natural in Latin. The verb blaspheme, for example, is only rarely followed by the preposition in, but Mark gives us this construction because that is what the Arabic has, the verb kafara (“to blaspheme, to disbelieve”) normally governing through the preposition

9 All translations from the Arabic or Latin are mine.
10 Mark of Toledo, Liber alchorani Machameti quern Marcus canonicus Toletanus de arabica lingua transstulit in latinum 2 (Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, F. V. 35), fol. 2va (on this fifteenth-century ms. see A. Sorbelli, Manoscritti delle Biblioteche d’Italia 28, 97). Unless otherwise indicated, I will cite this ms., which appears to be one of the better mss. of this work.
11 He read the in, “if,” as an, “that,” two words that differ only by a small, and often lacking diacritic, this leading him to understand the last sentence to mean “why have you killed the prophets of God before you believed,” rather than, “why have you killed the prophets of God if you are believers.”
bi- ("in"). But despite such potential problems, it is certain that the reader of this passage of Mark's translation has before him a version of this verse that gets across much of its content and form quite accurately. And this passage is quite representative of his approach throughout.

Robert of Ketton, in contrast, provides his reader with an abridging paraphrase of these verses, and attaches it grammatically to the previous verse — something he does fairly commonly throughout his translation:

... qui dicentes uos nulli nisi libro uobis dato credere uestre legi resistitis hunc suum confirmatorem respuentes. Si boni estis cur prophetas perimitis?

[... who (i.e. the Jews), saying yourselves to believe in nothing except the book already given to you, you oppose your (own) religion, rejecting this confirmation of it. If you are good, why do you kill the prophets?]  

Stylistically, this is much better Latin, but the price for this more Ciceronian prose has been the elimination of those very dialogic devices that Mark of Toledo so carefully preserved. Though Robert has conveyed the meaning of the passage as accurately as Mark, his reader will never feel the sense of confrontational urgency that the command "Say" (Quid, Die) embodies in both the Arabic original and Mark's literal translation.

Yet we cannot write off Robert's Lex Mahumet as an inadequate paraphrase. We cannot do this because it turns out that this energetic recasting of the Qur'an is frequently influenced in vivid ways by the traditional Muslim commentaries on that sacred book. Consider, for example, his translation of the first part of verse 2:282. At the beginning of this very lengthy discussion of how to draw up purchase and loan contracts, the Qur'an reads as follows:

Ya ayyuhâ alladhin âmunu, idhâ tadâyantum bi-dâyîn ilâ aji musamman fa-uktbûhu wal-yaktub baynakum kâtib bi>l-'adl.

[O you who believe, when you borrow money from each other for a fixed term, do it in writing, and let a scribe write (a contract) between you with impartiality.]

Robert reworks this thoroughly:

Emptionibus ad terminum factis adsit scriba fidelis et deum timens qui nichil addat seu minuat nec quid falsitatis ammisceat.

12 And Mark does this elsewhere. See my "Tafsîr and Translation," 709, n. 27.
13 For a systematic discussion of his translation method, see d'Alverny and Vaida, "Marc de Tolède, traducteur," al-Andalus 16 (1951), 132-40.
14 Robert of Ketton, Lex Mahumet 1 [2]; Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 1162, fol. 27vb.
[Let a faithful and God-fearing scribe, who neither adds anything (to the contract) nor subtracts anything (from it), and who does not mix in anything false, be present at purchases arranged with a term.]¹⁵

As in the example of verse 2:91, Robert has here abbreviated substantially and adopted a rather different construction than the Arabic original had. But he has made at least two changes that seem to go beyond mere paraphrasing and abridging. Why speak of “purchases” (emptiones) rather than borrowing money as in the Arabic? And why specify that the scribe should neither add anything nor subtract anything from the contract, nor mix any falsity into it, when the Arabic had simply called on the notary to do his job “with impartiality” (bi-al-‘adl)? In their specificity and elaboration, these changes bespeak something more than recasting and reshaping.

But this is because they are actually adjustments made to the text in order to make it conform to the traditional Muslim interpretation of this verse. For if we turn to representative, classical Muslim commentaries on the Qur‘ān we find that they point out that when the Qur‘ān says “when you borrow money from each other” it means, as the foundational interpreter al-Ṭabari (838/39-923) put it, “when you sell to each other by means of a loan, or buy by means of a it, or give to each other by means of it, or take by means of it on a fixed term.”¹⁶ In light of this standard interpretation, Robert’s “purchases arranged with a term” makes eminent sense as a translation for the first part of this verse. Similarly, the commentaries explain that when the Qur‘ān insists that the scribe write “with impartiality” it means in particular that, as the twelfth-century commentator al-Ṭabarsi put it, the scribe must write “with justice and equity and truth, not adding to [the contract], and not subtracting from it in quality or extent, not substituting and not writing

¹⁵Robert of Ketton, Lex Mahumet 4, Bibliotheque de l’Arsenal, 1162, fol. 33vb. The emphasis is mine.

anything damaging to one of the two without his knowledge.”

Robert’s amplification of the second half of this passage — “that the scribe should be one who neither adds anything ... nor subtracts anything ... and who does not mix in anything false” — is clearly based on this traditional interpretation of what writing “with impartiality” means in 2:282.

Mark of Toledo’s translation of this passage departs slightly from the Arabic construction, but is still an essentially literal version that, in contrast to Robert’s, includes no explanatory additions:

O uos qui creditis, si debueritis cuiquam soluere debitum ad diem pre-fixum, scribatis inter uos antapocam fideliter.

[O you who believe, if you are obliged to someone to pay back a debt on a fixed day may you honestly write between yourselves a contract.]

This certainly conveys the basic meaning of the first part of 2:282, but it lacks the informing specificity of Robert’s commentary-influenced paraphrase.

And this sort of explanatory adjustment and interpolation based on the traditional Arabic exegesis of the Qur’an shows up throughout Robert’s translation. Repeatedly his paraphrase contains words, turns of phrase, and explanatory amplifications that are based on one or more of the classical Arabic tafsirs, so that Robert’s version is in many ways a translation of the Qur’an as Muslims themselves read and understood it.

Mark of Toledo and Robert of Ketten, therefore, each went to impressive though different lengths to provide their Latin-European readers with accurate versions of the Qur’an. Both translators certainly made sloppy mistakes from time to time, but in general their approaches produced fairly admirable results. And European intellectuals certainly read their Latin Qur’ans. Robert’s elegant Latin translation was widely consulted throughout Europe over the course of six or seven

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18 Mark of Toledo, Liber alchorani 2, BN Univ. F. V. 35., fol. 6vb.

19 I make this case in much greater detail in my “Tafsīr and Translation,” passim.
centuries, and survives to this day in twenty-five manuscripts and two sixteenth-century printed editions: it was something of a best-seller.20

Mark's literal version enjoyed much less success — it survives in six manuscripts— but we know of it being copied and studied as late as the seventeenth century.21 Given the care with which each translator approached his work, it is clear that their numerous medieval and early-modern readers were well-served in many ways.

But not in every way. For, ironically enough, the very methods that Robert of Ketton and Mark of Toledo adopted in order to insure that their Qur'ans were accurate tended in important ways to distort the Qur'an either by cutting Latin readers off from the traditional interpretation of it, or by collapsing the text and the traditional interpretation into one undifferentiated whole.

Mark of Toledo's literal translation periodically gives the reader an accurate translation of the text without making clear how it was understood. This should be apparent already in his translation of verse 2:282 quoted just above, for his version lacks much of the specificity of Robert's translation, thoroughly influenced, as it is, by the commentaries. The same thing happens some forty verses earlier at 2:238-39a where the Arabic text reads:

(238) Hāfizū ʿalā alsalawāt wa ʿl-ṣalā al-wustā wa-qûmû li-Lāh qā nitin,
(239a) fa-in khiftum fa-rijalan aw rukbānan.

[(238) Be attentive in your prayers, and (especially) the middle prayer, and stand up obediently before God, (239a) but if you are fearful, then (do so) walking or riding.]


Mark’s version of these verses is as compact as the Arabic:

(238) Observe orationes et mediam orationem, et surgite Deo confitentes;
(239) si timueritis, pedestres aut equitantes.

[(238) Observe the prayers, and (especially) the middle prayer, and rise up professing God; (239) if you have been fearful, (do so) walking or riding.]

Both the Arabic original and this literal Latin version tell us nothing about why someone who is fearful should pray while walking or riding. The commentaries, however, clarify this. Al-Tabari, for example, tells us in an explanatory paraphrase that this means that if you are afraid on account of your enemies, “then pray walking as an infantrymen on your feet, when you are in the midst of your war and your combat and the jihâd of your enemies, or (pray) while riding on the backs of your beasts.”

Mark of Toledo’s translation is correct in a literal sense, but it does not, therefore, make clear to its readers the specific circumstances in which Muslims believed this provision came into play. Robert of Ketton’s commentary-inspired paraphrase, on the other hand, accomplishes this quite neatly. One must take great care to pray, he tells us,

nisi timoris locus impediat, quo contingente pedes pede miles equo fundat orationes.
[unless the state of fear should impede, in the occurrence of which let the infantryman pour out the prayers on foot, the knight on horseback.]

In these two examples Mark of Toledo’s translation is deficient in not getting across the specific meanings that Muslims believed these somewhat vague Qur’ânic passages had. Much more serious are the passages of his translation where, in failing to take into account the traditional interpretation, his literalism produces a translation that conveys a meaning that is actually different from the one Muslims recognised. His translation of the beginning of Sura 111, one of the very short suras at the end of the Qur’ân, is a good example. “Damnificate sunt manus flammei,” reads his version: “The hands of the flaming one are in-

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22 Mark of Toledo, Liber alchorani 2, BN Univ., F. V. 35, fol. 5vb.
24 Robert of Ketton, Lex Mahumet 3, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 1162, fol. 32ra.
jured."\textsuperscript{25} This is a (barely) allowable translation of the Arabic on strict grammatical and lexical grounds. The corresponding Arabic passage reads, "Tabbāt yadā abi lahab." The subject is yadān, "the two hands," which Mark has got right; these hands belong to someone or something called abūūlahab which literally means "the father of flame," and in the Arabic idiom, such an expression could mean something like Mark's "the flaming one" (flammeus).\textsuperscript{26} The verb, however, is tabbat, which means "to perish" or "to be destroyed", not "to be injured" as Mark has it (dampnificate sunt). But the real problem with this translation is that Abū Lahab, "the father of flame," is really a proper name here and not merely a descriptive term as Mark's translation would lead us to believe. The medieval Arabic Qur'ānic commentators normally explain quite early on in their interpretations of this passage that Abū Lahab was a specific person, otherwise known as 'Abd al-'Uzza, who was called Father of Flame on account of the radiance (ishrāq) of his face. He was, the commentaries go on to explain, full of hatred for the prophet, and thus was to perish.\textsuperscript{27}

Robert of Ketton, on the other hand, makes clear that he knows that the phrase "Abū Lahab" is really a name, for he transliterates it, something he does only very rarely:

Nichil unquam sua pecunia siue locrum profuit Avileahab quin sua manus perdita sit.

[His wealth or gain nothing ever benefited Avileahab to the end that his hand would not be destroyed.]\textsuperscript{28}

Robert's readers, therefore, will know that these verses concern a specific person, where Mark's will not.

Another example of how Mark's literalism can result in misleading translation is found in his version of verses 2:229-30. This passage is part of one of the principle discussions of divorce in the Qur'ān, a topic of considerable complexity and with plenty of room for confusion. Mark's version follows the Arabic closely:

\begin{align*}
(229) & \text{ Repudiare bis licet et retinere; honeste autem licentiare benefaciendo; neque licet uobis ut de his que illis contulistis aliquid dematis...} \\
(230) & \text{Quod si repudiaverit [eam] non est ei licita postmodum donec cum alio contrahat uiro. Quod si repudiaverit eam non inhibetur eis ut}
\end{align*}

\textsuperscript{25} Mark of Toledo, Liber alchorani 111, BN Univ., F. V. 35, fol. 84ra.


\textsuperscript{27} See, e. g., al-Tabarsi on 111:1, 5:559; and Ibn Kathir on 111:1, 4:568.

\textsuperscript{28} Robert of Ketton, Lex Mahumet 120, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 1162, fol. 138ra.
For the most part this is quite accurate, though Mark has got the last phrase wrong. The verb here is in the singular in the Arabic (yubayyinuhā) and God is the subject, so we should have “and [God] demonstrates these boundaries to a people who know.” But otherwise there is nothing that can legitimately be objected to — nothing, that is, until we read the passage more closely. For the verses as they stand here do seem to embody something of a contradiction. We are told in 2:229 that it is allowable for the husband to retain his divorced wife after having divorced her twice, but are then informed in 2:230 that this is not, as a matter of fact, allowable except on condition that she first marry another man and then be divorced from him. It seems strange that Qurān should speak with such imprecision in connection with a relatively important point of law.

As it turns out, the Qurān actually is somewhat unclear here, for the Arabic of 2:230 reads exactly as Mark’s Latin version does (“Fa-in ṭallaqahā fa-lā taḥillu la-hu min baʿdu ḥattā tankiha zawjan ghayri-hu... “). But this confusion was universally addressed by the commentators who generally explain that when the Qurān says at the beginning of 2:230, “If he divorces her,” it is referring, as al-Tabarsi put it, to “the third pronouncement of divorce” or “the third repudiation” (yaʿni al-taṭliqa al-thalitha). For, in Islamic law, it is only when the husband has publicly divorced his wife on three separate occasions that he is unable to remarry her, until she has married another husband and been divorced from him. After the first and second times that a husband has pronounced his wife divorced, he has the right in Islamic law to take her back at any time during the requisite waiting period of three menstrual cycles before the end of which the divorce is not final. This limit on the number of times that a husband could divorce his wife and

29 Mark of Toledo, Liber alchorani 2, BN Univ., F. 35. V, fol. 5rb-va.
then take her back was intended, apparently, to keep husbands from using repeated divorce pronouncements and reconciliations as a way of extorting from their wives the bride-price the wives had originally paid or some other financial penalty. Mark’s carefully literal translation of the Qur’ān’s Arabic, therefore, fails to translate the verse’s accepted meaning. The Latin reader consulting his Qur’ān encounters the text of these verses in isolation from their normal Muslim interpretation and thereby remains ignorant of an important aspect of Islamic law.

While Mark’s literal translation sometimes obscures the Qur’ān’s meaning, Robert of Ketton’s typically clarifies it, relying on the very commentaries that Mark ignores. Here is the same passage in Robert’s version:

(228b) Maritis, etiam si placuerit ipsi namque presunt mulieribus, (229a) secundo derelicte nubant potius quam ceteris, (230) tertio uero sprete nequaquam usquequo maritis alii nupserint et ab illis relicte fuerint. Tunc autem ipse volentes prioribus maritis ante bene reconcilientur, (229b) aut nullis coacte uiribus honeste dimittantur. Aliquid primo datum illis auferre nefas est et inhonestum.

[(228b-229a) Let women who have been forsaken for a second time marry [their original] husbands, if it pleases [the husbands]—for they remain in charge of the women—rather than others; (230) but those who have been abandoned for a third time by no means [may do this] until they have married other husbands and have been abandoned by them. Then women who desire this may be reconciled thoroughly with their prior husbands as before, (229b) or let them be sent away honourably, compelled by no men. It is unlawful and dishonourable to take from them anything given at the beginning.]

This is a wide-ranging paraphrase: Robert has linked 2:228 and 2:229 grammatically and incorporated 2:230 into the middle of 2:229, because of the similar subject matter of the first parts of both verses; and he has also made divorced women in the plural the subject of all but the last sentence, while in the Arabic this is all examined from the point of view of the man. But in the middle of these fairly radical formal changes Robert took the time to clarify these verses just as the Arab-Muslim commentators do: it is “women who have been abandoned for a

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32 Robert of Ketton, Lex Mahumet 3, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 1162, fol. 31va-vb.
third time” who are unable to marry their original husbands until they have been married and divorced from another husband. We no longer have the confusion about who can and cannot marry their divorced wives that Mark’s literal translation gave us.

Mark of Toledo’s Latin Qurʾān, therefore, is a Qurʾān that has been severed to a considerable degree from the living interpretative tradition in which it normally resides. What he offers is a Qurʾān without its readers, a Qurʾān without the accumulated reflection of the House of Islam upon it. Though much of the time this presents no real problem for his readers, at certain critical points it leads him to translate the Qurʾān in a way that conveys a meaning that no Muslim would have believed it had.

Since to a surprising degree Robert of Ketton translated the Qurʾān from within the Muslim interpretative tradition, his Latin version is much better about getting across the accepted meaning of the text; but it is not without problems of its own. Chief among these is that the text itself and the interpretative tradition have been conflated—scripture and exegesis have been collapsed into each other—so that the Latin reader cannot distinguish the one from the other. As the foregoing examples indicate, Robert does not clarify the Qurʾānic text by, say, adding glosses or a marginal commentary. Rather, he does so by actually inserting interpretative matter from the *tafsir* tradition right into the Latin text itself.

Now Robert is hardly alone in doing this. Later translators since at least the time of Ludovico Marracci have likewise clarified the Qurʾānic text by incorporating interpretative material directly into the text, and in this their versions are rather similar to Robert’s.33 George Sale’s version of the same passage reads “But if the husband divorce her a third time, she shall not be lawful for him again, until she marry another husband,”34 while Marmaduke Pickthall gives us “And if he hath divorced her (the third time), then she is not lawful unto him

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33 Marracci fills out his translation with an enormous number of explanatory interpolations in the text itself (these are always in italics and often placed in parentheses as well) and in the notes; and much of this material came directly from Qurʾānic commentaries which he carefully identifies. He did this, he says, in the places where “modi quidem lo-quendi, qui Arabibus proprii sunt, & praesertim qui Metaphoram continent, occurrunt.” In these cases “eos verbis quidem propriis expressi, in Notis tamen vel in ipso Textu Alcorani diverso charactere explicare necessarium putavi.” See his *Refutatio alcorani* (Padua 1698), vol. 2, 13.

thereafter until she hath wedded another husband."\(^{35}\) Sheik Si Boubakeur Hamza does much the same thing in his French version of 1972: "Si l'époux répudie [une troisième fois] sa femme, celle-ci n'est plus licite pour lui..."\(^{36}\) In a very real way then, Robert has anticipated modern translators in his inclusion of interpretative material from the Qur'ānic commentaries.

But there is one crucial difference between his approach and that of such modern translators. In one way or another Robert's successors carefully distinguish the interpolations based on the exegetical tradition from the Qur'ānic text itself. Marracci and Sale place such interpolations in italics; Pickthall and Hamza surround them with parentheses or brackets. Robert does nothing of the kind. In the earliest, and apparently original, manuscript of his translation there is nothing — no underlining, no different-coloured ink, no punctuation — that distinguishes commentary from original text. And this is true of all the other manuscripts and the printed editions of his Latin Qur'ān as well. The reader of his version is getting a Qur'ān that is not divorced from the traditional interpretative tradition, but he has no notion of this: text and interpretative tradition have been merged into one.

As we might expect therefore, readers of Robert's version were unable to separate out the original Qur'ānic text from the interpretative additions. They treated both as sacred text. That this is so can be seen, for example, in a table of contents preserved in a sixteenth-century manuscript containing Robert's *Lex Mahumet* (Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, 120b).\(^{37}\) This lengthy (thirty-six folios) list of the contents of Robert's Latin Qur'ān frequently quotes directly from the Latin text, and in many cases it reproduces passages that are substantially influenced by Arabic commentaries. We are told, for example, that near the end of the Qur'ān, there is a discussion of how a "Fountain in Paradise was prepared for Muhammad" ("Maumeti fons in paradiso iam paratus erat").\(^{38}\) This is a paraphrase of Robert of Ketton's translation of the first verse of Sura 108: "Tibi iam fontem in paradiso prepara"ms."\(^{39}\) Now what Robert has translated as "fountain in paradise"


\(^{37}\) On this manuscript see F. Schnorr van Carolsfeld, *Catalog der Handschriften der Königl. Öffentlichen Bibliothek zu Dresden*, vol. 1, (Leipzig, 1882), 55-56.

\(^{38}\) Anonymous, *Tabula*, Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, 120b, fol. 72v.

(fons in paradiso), however, is in Arabic al-Kawthar, a rare and vague word literally meaning something like “abundance”, and the subject of a great deal of discussion in the commentaries. The commentators, in fact, had a number of varied opinions regarding what exactly it meant, but the most common view was that it meant “a river in paradise” (nahr fi al-janna), as al-Ṭabarsi put it. Robert’s version, therefore, is substantially influenced by this commentary tradition, but the anonymous compiler of this exhaustive Tabula cannot tell Qur’anic text from what is derived from traditional interpretation: he treats the whole as sacred text.

That Robert thoroughly conflated text and commentary should not cause us to ignore the great pains he took to make his paraphrase accurate and intelligible by filling it out with glosses, explanations, and interpretations drawn from the Arabic commentaries. In fact, his willingness and ability to do this stand as a massive refutation of the widespread contemporary view that pre-modern Europeans were simply not capable of learning from Muslims themselves about what the Qur’ān means. Edward Said has asserted, for example, that Europeans did not begin “to let Muslim commentators on the sacred text speak for themselves” until the eighteenth century. Robert could indeed let Muslim commentators “speak for themselves” about the meaning of the Qur’ān; and he did so in the twelfth century. But because he made no distinction in his text between Qur’ān and interpretation, he made it impossible for his readers to see that he had done so.

Mark’s Liber alchorani, therefore, is a Latin Qur’ān largely extracted from its traditional interpretative framework; Robert’s Lex Mahumet conflates the two into one. For centuries, therefore, the only available Western versions of the Qur’ān either excluded or concealed the voices of Muslim interpreters. Though there is still far too much research to be done before it is possible to speak definitively about the long-term significance of all this, some tentative observations seem ap-

42 and there are other examples of medieval and early-modern Latin Christians doing likewise. Mark of Toledo himself clearly drew on the Arabic exegetical tradition occasionally (see my “Tafsir and Translation”). Moreover an anonymous late-medieval or early-modern translator of the Qur’ān (into Latin as well) drew heavily on the Arabic commentaries in the explanatory glosses he added to his translation. This remarkable work is found in a single manuscript, Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Mm. v. 26, on which see A Catalogue of the Manuscripts Preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge, vol. 4, (Cambridge, 1861), 335.
appropriate. For the interpretative traditions that gradually build up around sacred texts are more than just the academic views of an isolated coterie of scholars. Rather in some real sense they embody and represent the extended reflection of the believing community as a whole on its holy book. If the sacred text is the origin and foundation of the community's faith, then the commentaries on it provide both believers and unbelievers with an account of that community's reflection on its holy book. The original text may well be the principle inspiration of the community of believers; but it is in the commentary tradition itself that we most clearly see the inspired community actively working through the text it reveres.

This is certainly true in the case of Arabic commentaries on the Qur'an. To read, for example, al-Tabari's massive tafsir is to encounter real Muslims on nearly every page. We are reminded over and over of the names and opinions of earlier authorities — Qatada, 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Abbâs, Sufyân al-Thawrî, Mujâhid— who struggled to come to a deeper understanding of their Book. And every time al-Tabari points out that the interpreters disagree about the meaning" ("wa-ikhtalafa ahl al-ta' wil fi ma'nan") of some term or usage — and there is probably no phrase used more frequently in his commentary — we remember that the early authorities had varying views, and that these views must be carefully considered before the correct one can be identified. Then, after examining these opinions and the traditions that are adduced as evidence, we are allowed to see al-Tabari do just this — decide which interpretation or interpretations conform best with the Qur'ânic text and the Traditions of the Prophet. To read this commentary, then, is to witness generations of Muslims thinking about the Qur'an. Here, therefore, one confronts not only the Qur'an, but the community who venerates it: The House of Islam itself.

To cut off the Qur'an from the tafsir tradition as Mark does, therefore, or to conceal that tradition as Robert does, has the effect of keeping Islam at a distance even as its Book itself is brought near and made available. The Qur'an is visible, but Islam as a living, believing, interpreting entity is obscured. That this is so must certainly, though subtly, have influenced the ways in which their readers thought about Islam and its sacred text, and there is much work for scholars to do in trying to delineate these influences.

For now it will suffice, perhaps, to suggest one way in which all this should compel us to rethink the history of the study of the Qur'an in Western Europe. It is notable that later translators, such as Marracci and Sale, did in fact supply their readers with the Qur'an and allow them to confront Islam at the same time. They amplify the texts of
their translations with explanations and interpretations drawn from Muslim commentaries, and they also provide further copious notes based on these same commentaries, making clear all the while which Muslim authorities they are drawing on.\textsuperscript{43} This suggests that the real difference between the medieval translators, Robert and Mark, and their seventeenth and eighteenth-century successors is not so much that these later translators were, as modern thinkers, somehow more inclined to disinterested Qur'ān study—for we have seen that Robert and Mark are both quite concerned to convey accurately the meaning of the Qur'ān—but rather that they are much more willing to provide their readers with both a sound version of the Qur'ān and the record of living Muslims thinking about it and interpreting it. Modern scholars attempting to understand the evolution of European attitudes toward the Qur'ān and Islam, therefore, would perhaps do well to focus their energies not on explaining why early-modern scholars were more objective than medieval thinkers in their approach to the Qur'ān—for they were not—but rather on understanding why these seventeenth and eighteenth-century Qur'ān translators were willing to let their readers encounter the Muslim voices that traditionally explain the Qur'ān, while their predecessors were not.

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\textsuperscript{43}See G. Sale, \textit{The Korān}, passim; and Ludovico Marracci, \textit{Refutatio alcorani}, vol. 2, passim.