

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY HEBREW TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'ĀN¹

Several years ago I wrote an article entitled "Jewish Knowledge of the Qur'ān"² in which I tried to show that many medieval Jewish authors in Islamic lands knew the Qur'ān or excerpts from it, although theoretically they were forbidden to study the Qur'ān and even the Arabic language. In that article I dealt mainly with transliterations of the Qur'ān in Arabic into Hebrew characters, and gave a description of Bodleian ms. Hunt 529. With regard to actual translations of the Qur'ān into Hebrew I mentioned that they were rare, late and inaccurate, they included polemical material about Muhammad, and were not made directly from the Arabic original.³ I wish to describe here, in more detail and more accurately than I did there, one such translation from the early seventeenth century, which may well be the earliest existing Hebrew translation of the whole Qur'ān.

In my above general statement about Hebrew translations of the Qur'ān I follow mainly M.M. Weinstein's article "A Hebrew Qur'ān Manuscript"⁴ in which he mentions, in addition to LC ms. Hebrew 99

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² See the appendix in my *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, 1992), 143-160.

³ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁴ Myron M. Weinstein, "A Hebrew Qur'an Manuscript," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 10 (1971/2), 19-52. The article describes and analyses the history of ms. Hebrew 99 in the Library of Congress (LC), Washington (which is a Hebrew translation of the Qur'ān, made apparently in India in the middle of the eighteenth-century), but includes also very important other material.

which he studied in detail, two earlier Hebrew translations of the Qurʾān (Bodleian ms. Michael 113⁵ and British Museum Ms. Or. 6636),⁶ to both of which I shall come back later. M.M. Weinstein was kind enough also to send me partial photocopies of two other Hebrew translations of the Qurʾān (INA=Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, formerly Institute of the Peoples in Asia, Leningrad, B 155 and B 234). At first the relation of these mss. to the above mentioned translations was not clear, but it seemed possible that both mss., though written in very different Hebrew characters and handwriting, consisted of the same translation of the Qurʾān as that found in the Bodleian and British Library mss., together with other Islamic material which was totally inexplicable to me, at least when I first looked at it.

The colophon of B 155 states in Hebrew: "I have copied this quickly in fifteen days in Amsterdam ... in the month of Shevat [February] of the year HTIG [1653]." The writer added that he had corrected the Hebrew language of the translation of the Qurʾān which he copied, and which was made from the Latin.

In both mss. the Hebrew translation of the Qurʾān comes only after other material which, in its exordium, includes both high praises for "the Prophet Mehmet" as well as some phrases expressing distance from him: "This is the Alkurʾano of the Yishmaelites which has been translated from Arabic to a Christian language and then to Hebrew and it [the book] is divided into chapters." Some terms used point to a Jewish author (for example, the use of the Hebrew words "Torah," "HaShem yitbarakh" ["be His Name blessed" — meaning God], or "Eretz Yitzhaq" ["the Land of Isaac"], and so on. Others obviously reflect Muslim attitudes, though not the Arabic language, when speaking about "the blessings of the light of the Prophet Mehmet," "the last Prophet" or "the undeserving sons of Isaac."

Western foreign words, neither Hebrew nor Arabic, are also used, such as "uraqulu" (oracle). Most unusual are the many personal names listed in a genealogy of Muhammad.⁷ Some of them are clearly Biblical names taken from genealogical lists like Gen.10:21-30 (Adam, Shet, Hanokh, Noah, etc.). Others are corruptions of Biblical names that appear in the same lists ("Qanan" for Qeynan, "Bardi" for Yered, "Arpakhshu" for Arpakhshad, and so on). Still others can be identified through their place in Biblical genealogy: for example, the diffi-

⁵ See A. Neubauer, *Catalogue of Hebrew Mss. in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford 1896), vol. 1, no. 2207.

⁶ M.Weinstein, 20 ff.

⁷ See, for example, the first five pages of the ms.

cult Maqilu, which stands for Mehalel. There are, however, many names that seem to defy any linguistic explanation, especially among the sons of Ishmael (Bayran, Qayabir, Damil etc.), their wives ("Tahols from the Land of Isaac," Garaidah, Mashiraq, Ariaah, Adinon, etc.) and the wives of earlier Biblical personalities (Makonsilitah, wife and sister of Shet,⁸ Baqilas, wife of Ishmael and others) and names of Muḥammad himself. Thus, for example, his name in heaven is said to be Nashmis.⁹

Could the text be part of some Jewish anti-Islamic literature? We have some, though not many, examples of Jewish retelling the story of Muhammad in a polemical way, in both Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic.¹⁰ This hypothesis, however, has to be discarded as the text seems to be very Muslim in its reverent attitude to the Prophet of Islam. Could it perhaps belong to some Jewish-Muslim sectarian group, in the existence of which some scholars believe, although we have only speculations to go by?¹¹ Although it may seem odd, this idea seems to fit in well with the time and place the ms. was written: in Amsterdam in 1653. It is the time of Shabbatai Zvi, the Jewish Messiah, who had a powerful impact on Jewish communities all over the world, including Amsterdam, and who converted at the end of his life to Islam.¹² Those of his followers who converted with him and their descendants constitute such a group, the Doenmeh sect.¹³ Shabbatai Zvi, however, converted only in 1666, thirteen years after our ms. was finished, and at the time the ms. was written there was yet no hint of his future conversion. Also, the first Doenmeh believers were apparently only dissimulating Muslims and had no real interest in the Qurʾān and the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁴ So this attractive idea has to be discarded as well; but there still may remain some connection to Shabbatai Zvi: the fact that European Jews

⁸ It is a well known Midrashic motif that the earliest Biblical personalities married their sisters as no other women were available.

⁹ This is apparently a corruption of his *kunya* (surname) Abūl-Qāsim (through Abū-l-Tarazim and Asmet).

¹⁰ See, for example, B. Cohen, "Une légende juive de Mahomet *Ma'aseh Mohammed*," *Revue des études juives* 88 (1929), 1-17; cf. also ms. ENA 2541 (formerly 2554) in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

¹¹ See M.M. Weinstein, esp. 29 and 41; H. Lazarus-Yafeh, 159-160.

¹² See G. Shalom, *Sabbatai Sevi, The Mystical Messiah 1626 1666*, trans. R.J.Z. Werblowsky (Princeton, 1973).

¹³ G. Scholem, s.v. "Doenmeh" in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.

¹⁴ G. Shalom, "The Sprouting of the Horn of the Son of David, A New Source from the Beginning of the Doenmeh Sect in Salonica." *In the Time of the Harvest: Essays in honour of A. H. Silver*, ed. by D. J. Silver (New York, 1963), 368-386.

of his time knew about the Qurʾān and even translated it into Hebrew may have helped to mitigate the shock of his later conversion to Islam.

On closer scrutiny I became convinced that the two other Hebrew translations of the whole Qurʾān in London and in Oxford mentioned above, although slightly different from each other and from both Leningrad mss., are both copies of the same translation of the Qurʾān. They also include much other Islamic material in addition to the translation of the Qurʾān itself. (The identity of the London and Oxford mss. had already been suggested by S. D. Goitein and was accepted by Weinstein.¹⁵) The Bodleian ms., written in Italian Hebrew characters, has a colophon in Hebrew which says: "The book of the Al-Koran translated from Arabic¹⁶ into the holy language (i.e., Hebrew) by the scholar, our very learned teacher and Rabbi the late Jacob from the house of Halevi, here in Venice HSZV [1636]." This Rabbi is identified with Jacob ben Israel Halevi who was born (?) and raised in Salonica, moved to Venice and died there in the year the ms. was copied.¹⁷ Above the colophon is a Hebrew quotation from the beginning of Jes.10 —"Woe to those who write evil writs and compose iniquitous documents"— which seems to express the Jewish translator's or the copier's reservation with regard to the Qurʾān. The translation begins: "The book of the Al-Koran translated from Arabic into a Christian language and then word for word into Hebrew." This seems to be closer to the truth than the corrected colophon as the translation was certainly not made from the Arabic, but clearly seems to have been made from a European language, probably Latin or Italian.¹⁸

So we have four Hebrew mss. each of which includes a translation of the Qurʾān with much additional Islamic material. It seems that none of the mss. is a direct copy from another, but that all are based on the same translation. Therefore we can suppose that there existed at least one more ms., the autograph. Two of the mss. are dated and both belong to the seventeenth century: 1636 Venice (Bodleian ms.) and 1653 Amsterdam (Leningrad B 155). The British Museum ms. seems to stem from the eighteenth century (India?),¹⁹ although it was considered by

¹⁵ See the end of Goitein's article "Koran" in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and cf. Weinstein, 20.

¹⁶ This is a correction written above words meaning "from a Christian language." See Weinstein, 20-21, and the colophon of ms. Leningrad B 155 quoted above.

¹⁷ See Weinstein, 21 and cf. J. Hacker, "Levi (Bet ha-Levi), Jacob b. Israel" in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Hacker believes that Jacob b. Israel himself translated the Qurʾān from Arabic into Latin or Italian and then into Hebrew.

¹⁸ See Weinstein, 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 21-22.

some scholars to be earlier. The second ms. from Leningrad (B 234) is apparently the latest — perhaps from the nineteenth century, according to the Hebrew characters and handwriting. We do not have the autograph. As far as we know there exists no earlier full Hebrew translation of the Qurʾān and only one subsequent translation (Washington LC 99),²⁰ before scholarly translations from the Arabic start with H. Reckendorf in the middle of the nineteenth century.

How is one to explain this curious fact and the unusual additional Islamic material in these mss.? The colophon of the Bodleian ms. shows the way. It states twice that it was made “from a Christian language,” although on the first page the word “Christian” is crossed out and “Arabic” is put above it. If we follow Weinstein in taking “Christian” to mean Italian we can easily find the Italian source: about a hundred years earlier, in 1547 in Venice, there appeared an anonymous Italian translation of the Qurʾān entitled *Al-Corano di Macometto* which, according to the title page, includes also Muḥammad’s doctrine, life, customs and law (“nel qual si contiene la dottrina, la vita, i costumi et le leggi sue”).²¹ It was wrongly attributed to the printer Arrivabene.²² According to the *World Bibliography of Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qurʾān*²³ it was reprinted in 1574, in spite of the fact that the Venetian inquisition prohibited the reading of the Qurʾān in 1554. This Italian translation was made —with some changes— from the Latin,²⁴ although it also claims on the title page to be a direct translation from Arabic (“tradotto nuouamente dall’Arabo in lingua Italiana”). From this Italian translation a German one was made by Salomon Schweigger, which appeared in Nuremberg in 1616 as *Alcoranus Mahometicus, Der Türken Alkoran/Religion und Aberglauben*, and was reprinted several times in the seventeenth century. Schweigger states explicitly that his translation was made from the Italian, but he apparently thinks that the Italian was made directly from the Arabic: “Erstlich aus der Arabischen in die Italianische: jetzt aber inn die Deutsche

²⁰ Some catalogues mention other additional translations but the information may be erroneous. See Weinstein, *ibid.* 45 note 21. Other mss. may yet turn up.

²¹ This was apparently the Qurʾān which Menocchio the miller possessed. See Carlo Ginzberg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1980), 43.

²² See H. Bobzin, “Latin Translations of the Koran — A short overview,” *Der Islam* 70, (1993), 197.

²³ This publication (Istanbul 1986/1406 AH; ed. İsmet Binark and Halit Eren) enumerates all the printed translations of the Qurʾān from 1515 to 1980, but contains many errors according to Bobzin, 197, note 13.

²⁴ See Bobzin, *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation* (Stuttgart, 1995), 263-268, 360-361.

Sprache gebracht."²⁵ All these translations include the same other Islamic material (in addition to the Qurʾān) as do the Hebrew mss. They all mention the same corrupted names in that material, and their translations of the Qurʾān itself show an undeniable similarity to the Hebrew mss. None of them was made directly from the Arabic; two of them (the Hebrew and the German translations) are twice removed from the original Arabic (Latin-Italian-Hebrew; Latin-Italian-German), while the anonymous Dutch translation, which was made from the German, is *three* times removed from it. (The later Hebrew translation in LC 99, which Weinstein described, is also twice removed from the Arabic original. It was made from a Dutch translation [Glase-maker] made in turn from a French one [Du Ryer]²⁶.)

The Italian and Hebrew versions show special signs of affinity: the Hebrew mss. use Arabic words with an Italian ending like the Italian translation (Al-Korʾano in the Leningrad colophon; Qurashino in Qurʾān 106 for the tribe of Quraysh, etc.); the Hebrew mss. seem usually to follow the Italian (or earlier Latin) divergences from the Qurʾānic text, but sometimes also slightly change them, especially when the translation becomes too "Christian." Thus, for example, in Qurʾān 112:3, which states "He begetteth not nor was begotten," the Hebrew of course does not mention the "Son," as do the Italian and German translations. In addition the Hebrew mss. skip the long Italian polemical introduction. And they do not accept the Italian enumeration of the Qurʾānic *suras* (which is different from the Latin) nor the division of the Qurʾān into three books; but their enumeration is also different from the Arabic Qurʾān and not consistent with each other.

The Latin translation from which the Italian was made appeared three years earlier in Basel and had a peculiar history of its own. It was based on the translation made four hundred years earlier by Robert of Ketton for Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny (1092-1156) during his visit to Spain.²⁷ This translation and Peter's general ironic approach to missionary efforts to convert the Muslims were never endorsed by the

²⁵ From the German an anonymous Dutch translation was made (see *ibid.* 198 which I have not seen. It has yet to be consulted as one of the Hebrew translations was copied in Amsterdam. The Hebrew, however, does not seem to show traces of the Dutch language.

²⁶ See Weinstein, 23-24. Although Weinstein accepts the supposition that Du Ryer made his translation directly from the Arabic, the additional Islamic material attached to his and Glase-maker's Dutch translation may point to some connection with the earlier Latin translation as well.

²⁷ See M. Th. D'Alverny, "Deux traductions latines du Coran au Moyen Âge," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 22/23 (1947/8), 69-131; J. Kritzek, *Peter The Venerable* (Princeton, 1964); H. Bobzin, *Der Koran ...*, 46-54.

Church. The translation was never printed, although it was copied often and used by some scholars to refute Islam.²⁸ Only in the early sixteenth century was it edited, by Theodor (Buchmann) Bibliander (d. 1564), and in 1543 it was printed for the first time in Basel by the printer Oporinus — without approval of the municipal censors. The printing was halted by the municipality and the advice of experts was sought in order to decide whether the heretical Qurʾān would make dangerous reading for the general public who had no theological knowledge, or whether it would be of help in the attempts to convert the Muslims. Only after Luther himself (and apparently also some Calvinist theologians) recommended the publication of the book in order to fight “Islamisation” did the printing go on.²⁹ At the demand of the municipality the names of the city of Basel and the printer were not mentioned in the book. The translation was a success and was reprinted again in Zurich in 1550.³⁰

The Latin translation of Robert Ketton divides the Qurʾān into 124 chapters (instead of the 114 *suras*) and is not fully literal. It includes inaccuracies, misunderstandings, “corrections” and omissions of the Arabic text. Most important is the additional Islamic material that precedes the Qurʾānic text. This material includes other Islamic, Arabic (?) books translated for Peter by other members of his entourage. Hermann of Dalmatia translated for him a book entitled *Liber generatione Mahumet et nutritia eius*. This book relates at some length the story of the divine spark of Muḥammad’s light which was passed on, together with the divine law, from the first Adam through generations of prophets and saints, down to Muḥammad. The Biblical and other names mentioned here are already very corrupted but will appear slightly more distorted in the later translations into other languages. The Arabic original of this book has never been found, or perhaps never existed. Kritzek identified it with a book called *Kitāb nasab rasūl Al-lāh* (The Book of the Genealogy of the Apostle of God), written by Saʿīd b. ʿUmar. But he found only a Spanish version of it written in Aljamiado (Spanish in Arabic characters).³¹ There exists, however, a book written by or attributed to the famous historian ʿAlī Al-Masʿūdī (d. 996) that includes a Shiʿite version of the same story of the divine spark of light passing through generations of prophets down to the

²⁸ See Bobzin, *Der Islam*, 195.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 195-6.

³⁰ According to the *World Bibliography* it was reprinted twice, in 1550 and 1556.

³¹ Kritzek, 84-88.

Prophet Muhammad and to ʿAlī.³² This book, entitled *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya li-l-imām ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib* (Confirmation of ʿAlī as Heir [to the Prophet Muḥammad]) includes a very long and detailed genealogical list of corrupted Biblical and other names, some of which are close to those in the translations.³³ Other translators translated for Peter the Venerable the *Fabulae saracenorum* which includes stories from Muhammad's biography as told in the *sīra* by Ibn Ishāq-Ibn Hishām³⁴—for example about Halima, Muḥammad's wet nurse; the angels who cleaned his heart with snow (*sharḥ al-ṣadr*); his youth in Mecca and the monk Bahira who recognised the signs of prophecy on him; etc.—as well as some later historical information about the first Caliphs.

Hermann of Carinthia translated the *Doctrina Mahumet* from the Arabic Masāʾil ʿAbdallāh, which contains a well-known polemical dialogue between Muḥammad and the Jew ʿAbdallāh b. Salām (Abdia) at the end of which ʿAbdallāh converts to Islam. Another polemical dialogue in correspondence between the Christian ʿAbd al-Masiḥ al-Kindī and ʿAbdallāh al-Hāshimī was also translated.³⁵ All these translations (together with some writings of Peter himself) came to be known among scholars as the "*Corpus Toletanum*," but in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries all this material, with some minor exceptions, was considered to be part of the Qurʾān itself. There can be little doubt that the Italian translator of the Latin Qurʾān, with the German, Hebrew, and Dutch translators following him, included all this additional material in their translations of the Qurʾān because they thought it was part of the Qurʾān itself. This also seems to be the reason why the material is included, as it appears in the Arabic sources, with great praise and many miracles attributed to Muḥammad, and without any polemical remarks from the translators. This, in spite of the fact, which has been mentioned, that the Italian translator added a polemical introduction and some general information about the Islamic ("Turkish") religion to his translation: "La vera vita di Ma-cometto;" "Della religione de' Turchi;" "Il matrimonio de' Turchi;"

³² See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Mas'udi" (Ch. Pellat); cf. U. Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light," IOS 5 (1975), 62-119.

³³ The book appeared in print in Nadjaf 1955. Its affinity to the book translated by Hermann of Dalmatia has yet to be studied in detail.

³⁴ Muḥammad's earliest existing biography *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* by ʿAbd al-Malik b. Hishām was ed. by F. Wuestenfeld (*Das Leben Mohammed's nach Ibn Ishaq*; Goettingen, 1859), and translated into English by A. Guillaume (*The Life of Muhammad*; Oxford, 1955).

³⁵ See the translation *The Apology of el-Kindi* (London, 1911). This book was apparently written in the tenth century by a Christian author.

“L’afflittione de’ Christiani schiavi;” “Il conditione de Christiani ne paesi di Turchi;” and so on. But he apparently did not want to interfere with the text of the Qurʾān itself, and he must have thought that the additional material was part of it. Schweigger did not translate the long polemical (and informative) Italian introduction into German, but he stated his polemical intentions very clearly in the title of his translation: *AlCoranus Mahometicus, Das ist der türken Alcoran / Religion und Aberglauben*; and on the title page: “Auss welchem zu vernemen/ Wann und woher ihr falscher Prophet Machomet seinen ursprung oder anfang genommen / mit was gelegenheit derselb diss sein Fabelwerk / laecherliche und naerrische Lehr gedichtet und erfunden ...” etc.³⁶ Following the Italian version, he also added at the end of his translation that there were some more verses that he did not translate, and that he finished this work “zu ehren Jesu Christi / und zur verdamnuss dess Teuflischen Propheten / und Anti-Christischen vermaledeyten Botschaffters.”³⁷ Yet the Hebrew mss. include neither the long Italian polemical introduction nor any shorter polemical announcement like that inserted by both the Italian and German translators at the end (they do mention, like the others, that the Qurʾān includes some additional verses that they did not translate, which seems in any case strange as all the translations end with *suū as* 113 and 114). The Hebrew mss. start right from the beginning of the additional material and include it and the following Qurʾānic text without any polemical remarks (except perhaps the verse from Isia. 10 on the title page, mentioned above). It is therefore difficult for the reader to understand for what audience these Hebrew translations were made and for what purpose. Why would a Greek Jew in Venice (if the translator was indeed Rabbi Jacob ben Israel Halevi) translate the Qurʾān into Hebrew and for whom? Who would read the Hebrew translation, and why would Jews in Amsterdam copy this translation at least twice? Jews in seventeenth-century Venice or Amsterdam had no reason to polemicise against the “Turks” who provided them with asylum after their expulsion from Spain and Portugal, nor were they interested —like the Christians— in converting them!

Here we need to take a more general look at seventeenth-century European attitudes towards Islam. It was a century of great changes and contrasts in this regard. The deep fear of the Ottoman Turks (who were

³⁶“The Koran of the Turks / Religion and Superstition, from which one can understand whence and where their false Prophet Muḥammad took his start and at which opportunities he invented his ridiculous and crazy doctrine . . .”

³⁷ “in honour of Jesus Christ and for the damnation of the Satanic Prophet and the cursed Anti-Christ Apostle.”

identified with the Arabs and Islam) was still very strong, based on their conquests in the Balkans and eastern Europe, and on the siege they had laid on Vienna in the previous century (1529) and were about to attempt once more at the end of this one (1683). Islam was still considered to be the archenemy and Antichrist and some Protestant writers, following Luther, took pleasure in likening the Catholic church to it. There was also fear of what one may term "theological Islamisation" and influence on Christian heretical thought³⁸ as well as of general Turkish cultural influence. This seems to have been very strong in Poland,³⁹ for example, where the imitation of Turkish habits spread very widely; but Turkish dress and other customs were also widespread in cities like Venice. On the other hand, as people learned more about Islam it came to be thought of in some circles of intellectuals as being a religion of reason and tolerance (and an admirable civilisation of unlimited eroticism!) quite unlike the repressive Catholic church with its myths and irrational dogmas.⁴⁰ It certainly was true that in the Ottoman Empire persecuted members of the new Protestant churches had found asylum and religious freedom while the Church was hunting witches in the European west.

To these attitudes one has to add the more general impact of the Reformation and the establishment of the new Protestant churches. The endless religious debates and the long bloody wars seem to have undermined the zeal of religious convictions on both sides⁴¹ and may have helped to arouse some kind of general intellectual interest in religious issues. In some cases this was reinforced by the needs of new commercial contacts with the future colonies of European countries, such as the Netherlands' in Indonesia.

All these and other reasons combined to awaken in the seventeenth century in some European countries a new interest in Islam very different from the earlier medieval misconceptions of it.⁴² Several new translations of the Qurʾān into Latin were made, though most of them were

³⁸ See the excellent examples in Ginzberg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, esp. 11, 30 and 42. Ginzberg identifies certain Islamic ideas in the Miller's heretic world view, but more can be found therein. See also, above, Luther's reason for endorsing the print of the Latin Qurʾān translation.

³⁹ See S. Schreiner, "Polnische antiislamische Polemik im 16/18 Jahrhundert und ihr Sitz im Leben," *Gnosisforschung und Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift fuer Kurt Rudolph* (Marburg, 1994), 515-527.

⁴⁰ See F. Gabrieli, "Islam in the Mediterranean World," *The Legacy of Islam* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1974), esp. 37-42; cf. also M. Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (London, 1987), 45-47.

⁴¹ See, for example, Pieter Geyl, *The Netherlands in the Seventeenth Century 1609-1648* (London, 1936) and G. F. Pijper, *Islam and the Netherlands* (Leiden, 1957).

⁴² See N. Daniel, *Islam and the West* (revised ed., Oxford, 1993).

never printed.⁴³ The most famous of these translations is Ludovico Marracci's (d.1700). It was made in a scholarly way from the Arabic and printed with the Arabic text in Padua in 1698. Its main purpose, however, was polemical ("ad refutationem Al-Corani Pseudoprophetae") and therefore each section of the translation is presented with its refutation. The Qurʾān was also printed in nice Arabic characters without any translation by Hinckelmann, in Hamburg in 1694. (He also mentions the "pseudoprophetae" on his title page.) This shows that by the end of the century the study of the Arabic language had spread, although mainly for polemical reasons. Some theological students studied it and parts of the Qurʾān in Hebrew characters (like medieval Judaeo-Arabic), perhaps because it was easier to find printers for Hebrew or in order to avoid studying the complex Arabic script.⁴⁴ But most of the translations of the Qurʾān made in this century and earlier were not made directly from the Arabic. Yet all of them were extremely popular and were reprinted unbelievably often in this same century (the number of books printed each time must have been low, otherwise it would be very difficult to explain for which audience these reprints were intended). Thus, for example, Du Ryer's French translation from the Arabic (1647) was reprinted in the seventeenth century at least ten times, while Glasemaker's Dutch translation made from it (1657) was reprinted in the same century eight times! An English translation from the French, made by A. Ross, was printed in London in 1648: "newly Englished for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities, to which is prefixed the Life of Mahomet, the Prophet of the Turks and author of Alcoran with a needful caveat or admonition for those who desire to know what use may be made of it or if there be danger in reading the Alcoran." It was soon reprinted twice. Schweigger's above mentioned translation of the Qurʾān from Italian into German (1616) was also reprinted several times

⁴³ Bobzin, "Latin Translations," 200-202.

⁴⁴ One such widespread textbook of the Qurʾān in Arabic in the Hebrew Rashi script with a partial translation into Latin was published by Christianus Ravius, Professor of Hebrew in Amsterdam (!), in 1646. There exist several mss. of it. See, for example, Bodleian ms. Arab.e.240(8). Bound along with Ravius' textbook is other, later, material for the study of Arabic (as well as Persian and Turkish) and of Islam as well as some *sūras* of the Qurʾān in the Arabic script with Latin explanations. Another example of the Qurʾānic text printed in Hebrew characters is to be found in M.F. Beckius' Latin translation of *sūras* 30 and 48. See M.F. Beckii (Beck), *Specimen Arabicum...Bina Capitula Al-Corani....* Augsburg, 1688). Cf. also Bobzin, "Latin Translations," 204-206.

in the same century and another Dutch translation was made from it.⁴⁵ The seventeenth-century is also the century wherein several of the most important European university chairs for the study of Arabic were established: Leiden in 1613; Cambridge in 1632; Oxford in 1634.⁴⁶ Although these too adhered for some time to the old polemical and missionary theological agenda, they signify without doubt the beginnings of a new era of truly scholarly studies of Arabic and Islam in Europe. This is also the century of the purported composition of the *Letters writ by a Turkish Spy who lived five and forty years undiscovered in Paris 1642-1682, written originally in Arabick, translated into Italian and from thence into English*.⁴⁷ Although polemical writings, both religious and secular, against Islam continued to flourish, the seventeenth century is without doubt a century of intensive scholarly European interest in Islam and especially in the Qurʾān.

European Jews and especially Italian Jews apparently were deeply influenced by this general trend and followed it. The contacts between the Jewish elite and the Gentile Italian surroundings were unusually strong even in the sixteenth century, when Jews were expelled from Napoli (1541), the Talmud was burned (1569), and the Ghettos established in Venice (1515) and Rome (1555).⁴⁸ In the seventeenth century these ties became much stronger and permeated even the realm of religious sermons, in which Jews used not only the Italian language but explicit Christian motifs as well, in a way unheard of in any other Euro-

⁴⁵ The numbers are taken from the *World Bibliography of Translations* where the dates of print are given. Even if the data is not exact (see Bobzin's discussion cited above, n. 23) the fact remains that there were an unusually large number of translations and reprints.

⁴⁶ See P.M. Holt, *Studies in the History of the Near East* (London, 1973), pt. i, 27-49; A. Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge, 1993), 13. The first chair of Arabic studies was established in Paris already in 1539.

⁴⁷ The book comprises several volumes with different dates, which also do not add up to 45 years (1645-1682, 1649-1692). It was apparently composed later by different authors in various languages and was printed several times in the eighteenth century. I used the 1753 print made by A. Wilde in London. It is an amalgamation of true and concocted information about the Ottoman Empire and Islam (also about Judaism), written without doubt by a European who had some knowledge of both. See P. Hazard, *La Crise de la conscience européenne (1680-1715)* (Paris, 1935), vol 1, 20, 23 ff. According to Hazard the first book was written by G.P. Marane from Genoa (d.1692), after he had spent some time in Egypt. Cf. also R. Popkin, "A Gentile Attempt to Convert the Jews to Reformed Judaism," in *Israel and the Nations: Essays in honor of Shmuel Ettinger* (Jerusalem, 1987), English Section, xxv-xlv.

⁴⁸ See Ruderman's Introduction to David B. Ruderman (ed.), *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto* (Los Angeles, 1992), 1-20, esp. 1-9; and cf. M. Idel, "Judah Moscato: A Late Renaissance Jewish Preacher," *ibid.* 41-66, esp. 47-8, 51, 56.

pean Jewish community.⁴⁹ It should therefore come as no surprise to find a Jew from Venice (?) translating the Qurʾān from Italian into Hebrew. The fact that he did *not* translate the polemical introductory sections into Hebrew and the fact that copies were made later of this Hebrew translation in Amsterdam and elsewhere seems to be proof of the positive Jewish attitude toward the Ottoman Empire and Islam.⁵⁰ As always Jews followed the general trends around them but in doing so adhered also to their own Jewish agenda.

Appendix

Here are three examples of deviation from the Arabic text in the Hebrew translation of the last short *sūras* of the Qurʾān. Some of them are to be found already in the Latin and Italian translations. Thus the word used to translate “figs” (*tīn*) into the Hebrew —“afarsekim” (peaches)— in Qurʾān 115:1 is based on the Italian (“persichi”) which is taken from the Latin (“persicos”). Schweigger’s German translation also has “pfersiche.”

In the same way the corruption of Abū Lahab’s name into the unrecognisable “AlMulākar” in the Hebrew translation of Qurʾān 111:1 is based on the Italian “Amilcar” which is taken from the Latin “Amileah.” The German has also Amilcar. It is a curious fact that many of the corrupted names in the Hebrew mss. are already corrupted in the first Latin translation. Although the additional translations corrupted them even further they are not the result of passing through several languages and scripts, as one would tend to think.

In Qurʾān 109 the number of verses is shorter and the last verse states “you persecute my religion; therefore your religion will not remain,” which seems to be very different from all the other translations.

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⁴⁹ See M. Saperstein, “Italian Jewish Preaching — An Overview” (*ibid.*), 22-40 and E. Horowitz, “Speaking of the Dead: The Emergence of the Eulogy among Italian Jewry of the Sixteenth Century” (*ibid.*), 129-162.

⁵⁰ See, for example, J. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro* (Oxford, 1989), 253. Isaac (Beltazar) Orobio (1617-1687) thought, according to Kaplan, that although Islam is “swamped with impurities and abominable features . . . it is not a barbarous faith” and that “the source of Muhammad’s teaching is divine although the Koran is a purely human product.” This, in contrast to Christianity, which was usually considered to be sheer idolatry.