

ary since the Battle of Mohács in 1529, in which King Louis II lost both his kingdom and his life. This had major political implications

2. In addition to the *Tractatus*, Luther also took note of a work that is now considered one of the most influential tracts in (inter-)religious studies: Nicholas of Cusa's exploration and evaluation of the Qur'an, *Cribratio Alkorani* (1461). In all likelihood, Luther came into contact with this work even before he had read the *Tractatus*. Luther did not actually make use of the *Cribratio*, even though he recognizes the efforts of its author to deter Christians from Islam and to lead them back to their faith.⁴
3. The *Confutatio*, Riccoldo's major work against Islam, assumed major significance in Luther's work. Two points are of central importance: Luther suggests that by 1530, he had tried numerous times to get his hands on a copy of the Qur'an—to no avail—and that he distrusts Riccoldo's *Confutatio*, which he had read multiple times. He believed that it had been written with the intention of painting a negative picture of Islam—to the benefit of the Pope (!). He also could not believe that Islam was as irrational as Riccoldo portrays it. The situation changed drastically in 1542. Having seen a disputable Latin translation of the Qur'an, Luther starts trusting the *Confutatio*. Thus, Riccoldo, to whom Luther refers as "Richard", becomes Luther's primary witness against Islam, with the *Confutatio* serving as Luther's main text to denounce Islam. Once more, Luther is keenly interested in finding out "what Mohamed's faith is. Everybody was content to know that he was [just] an enemy of the Christian faith. But where and how [and] piece by piece has not been heard, even though it needs to be known."⁵

DID LUTHER KNOW THE QUR'AN?

Riccoldo becomes Luther's key witness because of the supposed congruence of the former's works with the Qur'anic doctrines. Luther states this quite clearly, but it is still a problematic postulation. Luther reports reading the Qur'an on Shrove Tuesday (21 February) 1542, but it is unclear what should be gleaned from this fact. On the one hand, seeing that Luther, based on his own accounts, had not known the Qur'an prior to this reading, it is not clear on what Luther's negative assessment of the Latin

4 Cf. WA 30/2, p. 205.

5 Cf. WA 53, p. 272.

translation is based. On the other hand, there is no bibliographical record of a Qur'an edition in Wittenberg. Therefore, I maintain that Luther was studying Islamic traditions, but not the Qur'an itself as it was printed shortly afterwards in Basel (1543).⁶ At best, it is possible that he had access to handwritten excerpts, possibly a collection of texts assembled by Heinrich of Eppendorf and printed in Strasbourg in 1540. Resolving this question is almost impossible. It is crucial for the reception of Riccoldo that Luther recognizes Riccoldo's polemics printed in 1542 as an authentic reproduction of the Qur'an, and he therefore bases his own refutation of Islam on the *Confutatio*: "I have learned that this Brother Richard [i.e., Riccoldo] has not fabricated his work, but writes in accordance with the Qur'an. And it can be stated that Brother Richard lived 200 years ago in the time of Albert, when the Dominican Order was still young."⁷

Luther rightfully pointed out that Riccoldo's opponent was Islam rather than the Turks. This is because the Turks had not even been heard of during that time, in contrast to the rule of the Saracens, which had been known for centuries.

RICCOLDO'S *CONFUTATIO* AND LUTHER'S REFUTATION

It is well known that Riccoldo Pennini OP engaged in the "mission to the Mohammedans". He had travelled extensively enough to emphasize his knowledge of the Arabic language and Islam confidently. Whether these claims are accurate is not of concern for now. But it is crucial that Riccoldo penned an extensive, refuting work, which he finalized in Florence in 1300. As a careful reader of the *Doctor Ecclesiae* Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Riccoldo's goal was to refute Islam by taking recourse to scholastic theology, which owes methodological leanings to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, positing connections and differences. Muslims are mistaken, Riccoldo believes, but there are ethically sound Muslims and wavering ones who are secretly Christian and who are but a small distance removed from the "truth" (and baptism). There is, however, no possible salvation for Muslims devoid of ethical boundaries—by which Riccoldo means Christian norms.

What was Luther, reformer, enemy of scholastic theology and critic of Aristotle, supposed to do with such polemical work? After all, the *Confutatio Alcorani* had been published almost 250 years before Luther's lifetime. Luther was sceptical. As mentioned before, he had read it numerous times and found that it was too critical of Islam and overly intent on portraying Islam in too negative a light in comparison to the papal Church. Thus, Luther took somewhat of a "historical-critical" perspective.

6 Cf. Ehmann 2008, pp. 419–422.

7 Cf. WA 53, p. 272.

Subsequently, Luther translates this scholastic critique of Islam from Latin into German and, at the same time, from a medieval scholastic style into reformatory language. Luther adheres to the Dominican friar Riccoldo's view of Islam while writing a current reformatory text—a highly fascinating process because Luther, with the help of countless omissions and additions, succeeds in turning this minutely detailed indocination into a “book of consolation” for the evangelical community.

It is a piece of good fortune that the genesis of Luther's text can be traced quite accurately. His refutation (*Verlegung*) of Islam is not only part of his reformatory oeuvre, but also part of Riccoldo's reception history.

In using the *Confutatio* as the centrepiece of his refutation, Luther inserted himself into the complex tradition of the work of a Dominican friar from the High Middle Ages. Riccoldo's work was published with the title *Contra legem Sarracenorum* in 1300. Around 1350, it was translated from Latin to Greek by Demetrius Kydones (1324–1397), who equipped it with a new function by turning it into a text opposing the Ottomans, who were threatening the Byzantine Empire. Then it was translated back into Latin—the original might have been lost—by Bartholomeus Picens of Monte Arduo, now as a polemic against Islam and as a call to crusade directed at King Ferdinand, duke of Calabria. This text—only now entitled *Confutatio Alcorani*—not only survives to this day, but Luther's own personal copy is stored in the Saxon State and University Library in Dresden.

This shows how Luther acquired and worked with the *Confutatio*. Luther adopted the table of contents of the *Confutatio* as well as the printed marginalia; at the same time, he made handwritten additions. In order to give structure to his thinking, he scribbled questions (even polemical ones) and notes, swear words and terms of disgust (mostly regarding sexual matters) into the margins. Crucial passages are underlined, dispensable and vague ones crossed out.

Most notable about his revision is that Luther consistently deletes all of Riccoldo's ontological and speculative inquiries.⁸ These deletions are accompanied by additions (on roughly the same scale) that—amplified by Luther's metaphorical language—radically change the rhetorical mode of the *Confutatio*. In the time of the Reformation, this scientific inquiry into Islam from the High Middle Ages is turned into an inquiry into the persuasions of faith of a Protestant community. As in the works on Turks that had preceded it, this was about solidification and solace, about denouncing a crusade and supporting resistance at the same time, but now—and this is what sets the *Verlegung*

8 For example, Luther discarded the parts of the *Confutatio* which show the Qur'an's irreconcilability with the Aristotelian doctrine of virtues. Cf. WA 53, pp. 373–375. Ehmann 2008, pp. 94–99.

apart—it becomes about opposing the core of the Islamic faith as a fanatic and religion centred on law, about defending against a “carnal” religion preoccupied with women, murder and spoils. Subsequently, Islam is faithlessness that destroys ethical and political pillars by doing away with divinely ordained classes (church, magistracy, marriage). Further, the church is destroyed through the misguided teaching of arrogated signs in the Qur’an, the magistracy by way of warfare; the institution of marriage through polygamy and stipulations in sexual law.

Ultimately, Luther clings to the medieval polemical tradition from the point of view of religious studies. He cannot arrive at a different, new or—based on today’s standards—“appropriate” understanding of Islam. He brings back the old view of Islam as (only) Christian heresy and criticizes the irrationality as well as the suprarationality of Islam sharply. This irrationality Luther saw in the Islamic rites; suprarationality he saw in the monism of its theory of God, which attempts to perforate the mystery of God. Being a polemic, Luther respected few boundaries, particularly when criticizing Mohammed. Nevertheless, it needs to be stated that at issue were age-old questions of different systems of faith.

This is not meant to be an excuse. But still, a historically just judgement has to take into account that the complex history of Riccolodo’s work was not beneficial to a measured portrayal of Islam either. What Luther deems absurd is often the result of opaque written traditions (following multiple translations) that were clearer in the original of 1300.

The intention of Luther’s text was not that of Riccolodo’s. Luther penned a book of consolation based on Riccolodo’s work, complete with a preface and an epilogue that suggest a decidedly apocalyptic vision. The Protestant community of the 1540s is threatened by the military success of the Turks, by the reports of pillaging, rapes and abductions in the conflict areas. It is under pressure from orthodox magistrates, but at the same time obliged to carry out its duty in fighting the Turks. But—this is the challenge facing Luther—there are even people that are yearning for Turkish rule and for a faith promising success, money and women. This, however, is just one side of the coin. Increasingly, Luther associates opposition to Islam with the pope’s agenda. Indeed, the pope is worse than Mohammed and the Turk. This is because the pope murders the human within (the soul) by preventing the proclamation of the Gospel, whereas the Turk only murders the outer being (the flesh) with his military aggression.

Subsequently, Mohammed and “the Turk” fit into the nervousness about the end-times and may play the role foreseen for them by God. Mohammed is not the Anti-christ; that role is filled by the pope. Thus, at this stage, Luther’s arguments clash with Riccolodo’s original work.

BASEL COUNCIL (MAGISTRATE) FOR THE PRINTING OF THE QUR'AN

One might think that Luther not only discarded the Qur'an, which he called "an abominable book", but tried to suppress it.⁹ But this is not the case. When Robert of Ketton's (faulty) Latin translation was reprinted in Basel without permission of the magistrate, which led to the incarceration of its printer, Oporinus, Luther defended the printer and even saw to it that a new preface was added.¹⁰ Luther believed that any sane person would react with disdain and indignation upon perusing this text, which is why a reprinting could be condoned. These might not be the right reason for a printing of the Qur'an, but the Basel Qur'an printing from 1543 is still part of the history of slowly evolving Islamic studies in the Western world. Apologetic polemics might be one thing, but freedom and courage to achieve an accurate understanding of Islam quite another.

Undoubtedly, Luther was not able to achieve an authentic understanding of Islam in his time. He was too dependent on sources of which he could not yet gain a critical understanding. At the same time, he clearly intended not to fight the inter-religious war by unconscionable means, but instead tried to attain knowledge about Islam. That his polemic against Islam often ventures into crude and obscene territory is probably not to be excused, but at least this can be explained if one takes the historical context into account. After all, Luther believed that he knew the "real" Islam based on a proper reading of the Qur'an and that he was exposing it as a religion of debauchees and imperialist barbarians. Consequently, he fights with all his rhetorical might "until death against the Turks and the Turk's God",¹¹ as he puts it elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

Any historical analysis requires putting events into context. As regards the study of Luther, this entails the methodological perception of Islam as a religion of the Turks, setting it against the backdrop of Turkish imperialism in the 16th century. In addition, there is a dependence on the scholarly tradition of the Middle Ages, namely Robert of Ketton's translation of the Qur'an (12th century) (albeit indirectly), Ric-

⁹ Cf. WA 53, pp. 569–572.

¹⁰ This does not, however, answer the question of whether Luther knew this edition (no later than 1543).

¹¹ "Ego vsque ad mortem luctor aduersus Turcas & Turcarum Deum." WA.BR 5, 166,1–167,19.

coldo's *Confutatio* (1300), Nicholas of Cusa's *Cribratio* (1460/1461) and George of Hungary's *Tractatus de ritu et moribus Turcorum* (c. 1481).

Incidentally, Luther's approach regarding the Turks and Islam differs decidedly from his approach regarding Jews. His analysis of the Jews, theologically speaking, deals primarily with the great promise and delivery, which makes it about graphology. With respect to the Turks, however, he is interested in the relationship between indulgence and crusade (topics within Christianity), then the legitimacy of military opposition (ethics), and only after 1529 is he concerned with the "religion". A crucial difference lies in the fact that, from a theological standpoint, the Jews are regarded as a biblical chosen people that defies its (fulfilled) promise (thus losing its promise) while Islam is treated as heresy from a religious-historical standpoint.

Luther draws on medieval tradition for rhetorical ammunition to back up his reformatory refutation of the Islamic, i.e., the Qur'anic, truth claims centred on Mohammed. Luther's reception (1542) of Riccoldo da Monte di Cruce's *Confutatio Alcorani* (1300) is a salient example of this.

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Riccoldo after Riccoldo

The Liber peregrinationis and Its Vernacular Translations

It is not necessary to summarize Riccoldo's *Liber peregrinationis*, his travel account. Here I will only briefly recap that in the first part of his travel account he describes his pilgrimage in the Holy Land; then follows a long section dedicated to his encounter with Turks, Mongols, Kurds, and the three Christian heresies of Jacobites, Maronites and Nestorians; finally, the last section presents the Islamic religion, seven of its virtues and six of its—principally theological—faults.

As far as we know, during the Middle Ages Riccoldo's *Liber peregrinationis* was translated three times, twice into Italian vernacular and once into French. Today we know seven Latin manuscripts, three Italian and seven French: seventeen in total, enough for it to be considered a well-known text. In the following pages, through the six journalists' questions of "who, what, when, where, why and how?", I will examine the different types of reception of Riccoldo's work across the Middle Ages. First, I will try to examine the Latin manuscripts and their relations, the period when they were copied, who decided to copy and assemble them with other texts, and try to see how Riccoldo's text changed depending on the context of its circulation. I will apply the same method to the Italian and the French translations, and will conclude with the aim of understanding how the language, the period and the region can change the reception of Riccoldo's account.

THE LATIN MANUSCRIPTS

In 1967 Father Antoine Dondaine was one of the first to study the Latin manuscript tradition of Riccoldo's *Liber peregrinationis*, following on from the 19th-century