

The Role of the Church in Orientalism through Missionary Movements

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Abstract:

Many studies link the emergence and development of the Orientalist movement, which flourished in modern and contemporary times, to the role played by the Church in the Middle Ages through its interest in Islamic heritage. A current within this movement focused on distorting the image of Islam by maligning its creed, the noble prophetic biography, and Islamic history in general. Missionaries played a significant role in damaging the image of Islam through their activities in the Islamic world, where they concentrated on distorting Islam and its values and promoting Christianity through missionary missions and the establishment of universities. This presentation will focus on examples of missionaries who used Orientalism as a vehicle to defame Islam, spread their ideas, and support missionary activities in Islamic countries.

Keywords: Orientalist movement, The Church, Islamic world, Missionary missions.

1. Introduction:

Orientalism has always been an integral part of the civilizational conflict between two worlds: the Islamic world with its religion, values, and civilization, and the Western world with its materialism and civilization. European and Western perceptions were influenced by Orientalism and Orientalists, unfortunately continuing to distort the image of Islam and

Muslims in the European mind. Consequently, we have witnessed enduring hostility towards Islam and Muslims from those influenced by the ideas of many Orientalists and Western propaganda, which painted Islam as an enemy to be confronted and fought. Despite official rhetoric advocating religious tolerance and cultural dialogue, the reality contradicts this, as evidenced by the Western Christian support for all writings that insult Islam and Muslims. Among many examples, we recall the repeated offenses against the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), especially caricatures, which the West claimed to be part of free expression and Western values. In this article, I will review the image of the East in the Middle Ages and the Church's role in shaping Orientalist thought through missionary movements that led the Church, especially the Catholic Church, to engage with Arab-Islamic heritage.

The advent of Islam marked a significant event in the history of humanity, as a final and comprehensive message. It spread across various lands, particularly after the expansion of the Islamic conquests, which included Egypt, the Levant, and Iraq—regions that were predominantly Christian. This expansion made the Christian world feel threatened as it lost many territories that adhered to Christianity. Thus, the signs of conflict between the Islamic and Christian worlds began to emerge, with many indications pointing to this, especially the growing hostility towards Muslims. This friction ultimately manifested in what is known as the Crusades.*

2. The Crusades:

The Crusades (Runciman, 1978) marked the beginning of actual armed contact between Muslims and Christians, especially since Christian clergy managed to exploit people's emotions and animosity against Muslims (Shauqi, 2009, p 11). The Catholic Church played a significant role, with Pope Urban II (Awad, 2009) notably contributing through his famous speech in Clermont, France, after the Clermont Conference^{1*}, which deeply

* A series of wars fought by Christians against Muslims, known as the Crusades, began with the First Crusade in 1095 and ended in 1291

* The Council of Clermont was held in central France in November 1095, gathering 13 archbishops, 82 bishops, 90 abbots, and the Pope. Pope Urban II made his famous call for the Crusades, initiating the First Crusade, 1095-1102.

moved the public and heightened their enthusiasm to confront Muslims. Despite the multiple Crusades, they ultimately failed to achieve their desired outcomes, as the Church's reasons were insincere, primarily seeking ways to quell public anger and maintain clerical privileges. Additionally, European armies lacked unity, as princes and kings vied for interests and spoils, enabling Muslims to repel the campaigns.

3.Missionary Movements: (Al-Tashu, 1987, p 34-100)

The failure of the Crusades, from 1096 to 1291 AD, significantly influenced the Church to rethink methods to subdue Muslims. Philip Hitti states, "One of the outcomes of the Crusades was the idea of attracting Muslims to Christianity through persuasion rather than force. (Hitti, 1959) "This approach stemmed from the profound disappointment of European armies and the waning motivations for people to join them, leading to the adoption of missionary activities as a new tool in the conflict. The idea originated from King Louis IX of France*, who, after failing militarily and being captured during his campaign in Egypt, continued to harbor animosity towards Muslims despite his defeat and captivity.

4.The Image of the East in the Middle Ages (Methods and Goals of Missionary Work):

Following the Church's significant setbacks and the psychological shock to the Catholic Christian world, the Church sought other tools to mitigate the psychological damage, shifting methodologies, especially with King Louis IX of France, who began devising a different plan while in Egyptian captivity. The analysis revealed the following:

- Religious fervor exploited by the Church to incite enthusiasm had become ineffective.
- The Church's exploitation of war spoils angered the public.

Louis IX, King of France, born April 25, 1214, died August 25, 1270, led the Crusade against Egypt, which ended in failure after his capture and subsequent release upon his country's payment of ransom. He was one of the most hostile figures towards Islam, advocating corruption and bribery to disrupt Islamic governance and the need for new military strategies after the failure of the Crusades. See: Muhammad Mustafa Ziyada, "The Campaign of Louis IX against Egypt and his Defeat in Mansoura," 1st Edition, Higher Council for the Care of Arts, Literature, and Social Sciences, n

- The Church alone could not sustain the conflict.

Based on this analysis, the new strategy involved:

- Converting military Crusades against the Islamic world into non-military campaigns.

- Recruiting numerous missionaries for a peaceful battle to defame Islam and undermine it.

- Establishing a base in the Islamic world to launch all political, religious, and military campaigns. (Al-Saleh, 2010, p 31-33)

Thus, missionary work aimed to achieve several goals: mitigating the psychological shock to the Christian world, seeking revenge against Islam, and laying the groundwork for colonization (Al-Bahi, n.d, p 6). Missionary plans began in the midst of the Crusades and continued to strengthen thereafter. In 1154 AD, monks in the Holy Land established the Carmelite Order, named after Mount Carmel in Lebanon, which spread to most regions like Tripoli. By the mid-13th century, two more orders were established: the Franciscans* and the Dominicans (Rustam, 2005), focusing on regions with significant Christian populations.

Prominent figures pushing this new direction included King Louis IX of France, defeated during the Seventh Crusade, Roger Bacon (Saman, 2012), who advocated learning Arabic as a key to conversion, and missionary Raymond Lull, who learned Arabic in Andalusia, encouraged widespread study of Islamic heritage, and mastered Arabic. These circumstances motivated the Catholic Church to support these missionaries, especially in the Eastern Islamic lands, where there were many Christians.

Missionaries focused on distorting the image of the East and attempting to destroy its values and principles, particularly targeting the creed. Post-crusade defeat, defaming the creed became the primary goal, with claims that the Quran was merely a Jewish book replicated by Muhammad, that Islam was a materialistic religion lacking spirituality, promoting worldly

* The Franciscans, a Christian sect founded by Saint Francis of Assisi in northern Italy in 1208, had their laws ratified by Pope Innocent III in 1209, gaining church recognition. The Dominicans, a Christian order founded by Friar Dominic in 1215, aimed primarily at missionary work in the Middle East

pursuits over spiritual purity(Al-Bahi, n.d, p 1), and that Islam encouraged violence and harshness towards non-Muslims.

Exploitation of Missionary Ideas

Missionary organizations often exploited these ideas, particularly in orphanages, feigning compassion and care while providing some aid in schools and hospitals to attract people. They fought against Islamic thought, considering it merely Greek philosophy written in Arabic script.(Al-Bahi, n.d, p 1)

The primary objective of missionary work was to alleviate the military defeats the church suffered during the Crusades through a systematic effort aimed at converting Muslims from Islam or leading some to Christianity. This mission also sought to distort the true image of Islam, thus attempting to depict the East according to the goals set by the church through missionary activities.

5. Definition of Orientalism

In Arabic linguistic dictionaries, the term "Orientalism" is derived from the verb "Istashraq" which means "to seek the East." Its root is the tri-letter verb "Sharq," augmented with the letters "alif," "sin," and "ta," akin to "Istaghfara" (to seek forgiveness) and "Istafhama" (to seek understanding). It stems from "Sharqat" (the sun rose) (Ibn Manzur, 2008, 856-857), indicating direction rather than a clear conceptual meaning of Orientalism, which generally refers to a geographical orientation.

However, the prevalent terminological meaning refers to the study of Eastern civilizations in their intellectual, cultural, artistic, literary, scientific, and religious aspects, focusing specifically on the Islamic world with its diversity, richness, and distinction. The concept evolved as studies diversified.

The "World Arabic Encyclopedia" defines Orientalism as follows: "Orientalism involves academic global studies conducted by foreign researchers, particularly people of the book, on Islam and Muslims from various historical, doctrinal, jurisprudential, cultural, and civilizational perspectives, and on Eastern civilizations in general." (Global Arabic Encyclopedia, p. 676)

No study can precisely pinpoint the exact beginning of Orientalism due to various reasons, including the absence of a unified definition among researchers. Each researcher arrives at a specific definition based on their study and opinion. Some trace its origins back to Pope Sylvester II, evolving into academic studies by a decision from the Church Council of Vienna in 1312 AD.

The term "Orientalism" first appeared in the mid-18th century, specifically in 1766, in a Latin encyclopedia referring to Father Paulinus. Some authors argue that the English usage of the term began in 1779 or 1780, appearing in French in 1799. The term "Orientalist" entered the French Academy Dictionary in 1837 (Zaqzouq, 1984, p 20-21) and the Oxford Dictionary in 1812 (Romani, 2014, 176). According to the Oxford Dictionary, the most significant area of knowledge in Orientalism focuses on language and art, then other characteristics of Eastern countries. An Orientalist is defined as someone who studies the language and art, as indicated in the English term "The person who studies the language and art." (Romani, 2014, 179).

6. Definition of Orientalists

Orientalists are individuals interested in studying the East and its civilization. The term "Orientalist" was reportedly first used in 1630 by a member of the Eastern Church. The Oxford Dictionary defines an Orientalist as anyone who has studied and learned Eastern languages and literature. Ultimately, an Orientalist is an academic specialist who has mastered one or more Eastern languages and studied one of the Eastern sciences, thus being recognized as an Orientalist. According to English Orientalist Arberry (Badawi, 1993), the designation of Orientalist is not achieved unless the scholar is deeply versed in Eastern languages and literature.

German Orientalist Albert Dietrich (Al-Aqqi, p 797) views an Orientalist as a researcher striving to understand the East (Al-Kabsi, 2005, p 22). Edward Said (Said, 1995, p 38) defines an Orientalist as anyone who teaches about or writes on the East, whether specializing in anthropology, sociology, history, or philology in its specific and general aspects. (Said, 1995, p 38)

7. Motivations and Objectives of Orientalism

The objectives and motivations of Orientalism and Orientalists can only be determined through the historical development of Orientalism. Given that historical phenomena are not explained by a single cause, the motivations for Orientalism are varied, evolving with the need for Orientalist studies, particularly with major transformations accompanying the civilizational conflict between the East and the West. Here, we summarize these motivations and objectives, eventually linking them to the content discussed in the research.

7.1 Religious Missionary Motivation

Some believe that the interaction between Muslims and Christians in Andalusia opened the eyes of many monks to the rich knowledge, science, and heritage of Islamic civilization, presenting an opportunity to explore and transfer Islamic heritage to Europe. Meanwhile, some exploited this chance, especially those who learned Arabic, to use their knowledge to propagate Christianity (Fawzi, 1998, 31-34). The Crusades motivated many to delve into Islamic heritage to discredit the Arabic language and Islam, particularly the biography of the Prophet Muhammad. (Al-Bahi, n.d, p 18)

7.2 Political and Colonial Motivation

The contact with Muslims during the Crusades provided substantial opportunities for Christians. Many bigoted writers sought ways and means to penetrate the Islamic world, eager to exploit its wealth and resources (Fawzi, 1998, p262 and beyond). Hence, many worked to understand Eastern customs and traditions and identify ways to infiltrate the Islamic world. Some Orientalists supported colonial thought, which became highly active after the Industrial Revolution. Many Orientalists fueled the colonial spirit, with some aligning their activities with colonialism.

7.3 Commercial Motivation

Some Orientalists focused on introducing the East by highlighting its resources and wealth, influencing colonialists, adventurers, and opportunists who found these writings tools and keys to subjugate Muslim lands (Fawzi, 1998, p262 and beyond). They wrote extensively about Iraq, Egypt, and the Levant. For example, during Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt (Memoirs of an Officer of the Campaign, 2005), many writers who later wrote about Egypt and its civilization accompanied him.

7.4 Scientific Motivation

The scientific drive led many Christian writers to study the East and its civilization. However, for many, this was not a purely scientific goal. Thus, the scientific motivation is divided into two elements:

A. Pure Scientific Objective

The aim was to transfer and preserve Islamic heritage as it is, highlighting Muslims' role in human civilization and their contributions to various sciences like medicine, mathematics, philosophy, and different knowledge fields. Many contributed to preserving Islamic heritage and rare Islamic manuscripts now kept in numerous world libraries. Despite some inaccuracies in their writings, this does not negate their genuine intentions, especially considering some did not master the Arabic language fully.

B. Suspect Scientific Objective

This stream may be the most influential and numerous in Orientalism's history, as it accompanied colonialism and portrayed Islamic nations as inherently backward(Fawzi, 1998,p34). This stream focused on distorting Islamic history, questioning it, particularly the Hadiths and the Qur'an, often influenced by Jewish interpretations relying on the Talmud and the Torah. Many explicitly express these views in their writings, depicting Islam as a newly founded religion based on force and fanaticism (Al-Jundi, 1985). Figures like "Coley" in his book "The Quest for the True Religion" mock Islam, referring to it as a new enemy in the seventh century AD, founded on strength and extreme fanaticism(Al-Bahi, n.d, p 37). Edison accuses the Prophet Muhammad of having a distorted understanding of Christianity, which he based his religion on. (Al-Bahi, n.d, p 37)

Under this suspect objective, this research explores the propositions of one of the most famous Orientalists, Joseph Schacht, whose potent influence and views significantly distorted the biography of the Prophet Muhammad.

8. Origins and Development of Orientalism

Determining a precise date for the beginning of Orientalism is challenging. However, it can be said that the initial contact between the Islamic and Christian worlds dates back to the Crusades (Al-Siba'i, n.d, p 18). Mustafa al-Sibai states that the Crusades created a psychological gap between Muslims and Christians(Al-Siba'i, n.d, p 18), ceasing the prior spontaneity

between the East and the West. This period saw Christians focus on criticizing Islamic knowledge, often maligning it, especially amid growing religious fanaticism and the acknowledgment that military confrontation with the Islamic world was unfeasible. Hence, attention turned to weakening it from within its doctrinal, intellectual, and social structures.

Many scholars consider the Christian interest in Islam to have originated during this period, particularly as this new religion brought different values and ideas unacceptable to the church. Therefore, the interest in Islam began through the activities of missionaries and Christian clergy under the church's patronage. Some suggest that the journey of the French monk Orbac from France to Cordoba in the second half of the tenth century may mark the beginning of Western Christian exposure to Muslim culture and heritage. Initially seeking knowledge and wisdom, Orbac spent three years in Cordoba learning from its scholars before traveling to Rome with the Saint of Barcelona. He later became the Pope of the church in Rome and was instrumental in translating numerous books and accessing Latin books translated into Arabic, marking this as the inception of Orientalism, which emerged within the Western church. (Areebi, 2017, p 136)

After the fall of Granada in 1492, considered the last Islamic stronghold, Western thought gradually liberated from ecclesiastical dominance due to transformations in Western Europe, such as the Renaissance and the Reformation. By the 16th and 17th centuries, Western writings underwent significant changes, with Orientalist thought crystallizing through scientific writings, leading to meticulous scrutiny and comparison, establishing Orientalism as a discipline based on scientific principles and methodologies. Its schools proliferated across Europe, yet many biased Orientalists, nurtured in the ecclesiastical and colonial spirit, emerged, particularly after the Industrial Revolution, alongside growing colonial and nationalist sentiments in Europe. Western apprehension towards the Islamic world intensified as the Ottoman Empire became a formidable force, even besieging Vienna in 1529. (Said, 1995, p 38)

Many scholars draw a strong connection between missionary work and Orientalism. While Orientalism evolved into a scientific discipline for some

serious Orientalists, missionary work remained focused on its initial objectives, targeting the same primary goals.

9. Missionary Work and Orientalism: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Although missionary work predates Orientalism, it's essential to acknowledge that Orientalism emerged within the confines of missionary activities, sharing the same goals and motivations. At a certain historical point, Orientalism adopted a scientific approach to studying the Islamic world, with many Orientalists acknowledging the contributions of Islamic civilization. However, many others followed the path of missionaries, with their writings filled with venom, often driven by ecclesiastical directives.

- Missionaries and some Orientalists worked with colonial authorities, aiming to distort the image of Islam and justify the colonization of the East. Their writings often depicted Muslims as backward and sought to undermine their cultural and intellectual heritage.

9.1 Islam: A Pagan Religion

In the medieval period, Christian Europe constructed a narrative about Islam that intertwined true information with distorted facts, intentionally leaning towards misrepresentation. Islam was presented in ways that contradicted its essence and principles. For instance, they claimed that the Qur'an is a Jewish book copied by Muhammad (Al-Bahi, n.d, p 01). While Islam is fundamentally based on monotheism, which is the cornerstone of its creed, the Christian discourse adopted by the Church through its missionaries and monks promoted a different narrative. This narrative falsely claimed that Islam is a pagan religion advocating polytheism, and that its founder was a charlatan, magician, and renegade. In any case, they argued that he could not possess the qualities of prophethood, which were already doubtful. The assertion that Muhammad was sent to correct the distortions in Judaism and Christianity, and that everything good in the Gospel is found in the Qur'an, was deemed a false claim stemming from "undeniable delusion and madness."

9.2 Islam: A Religion of Violence

Islam is perceived as a religion symbolized by the sword, war, and combat, which are directly opposed to Christianity. In the Church's view, Muslims

were merely warriors—fierce, savage, committing all kinds of plunder and torture, leaving behind untold misery and suffering. "To them, Islam is a religion inclined towards aggression and assassination, urging its followers to be harsh towards non-Muslims." (Al-Bahi, n.d, p 01) Thus, Muslims were seen as embodiments of all aggressive expressions, driven by a strong inclination towards killing. As a result, power became a fundamental element of the Islamic religion and an obvious mark of deviation.

9.3 Islam: A Religion of Sensuality*

Christian writers crafted their own biography of the Prophet Muhammad, where imagination played a decisive role in producing images and fabricating stories by blending some close-to-true details into a fictional framework that exaggerated and magnified them, aiming to generate aversion and rejection. According to them, Prophet Muhammad was a man of "sensuality," indulging in the realms of pleasure absurdly, advocating for polygamy and enjoying life with women. In the Christian tradition, which calls for piety, asceticism, and abstention from pleasures and marriage, this behavior represented the pinnacle of moral decay and dissolution. Christians exploited this in their writings to cast doubt on the Prophet's prophethood, believing that defaming him without evidence was the best way to undermine Islam, destroy the credibility of its message, and sow doubt among its adherents, thereby keeping the hope for a missionary project alive.

9.4 Islam: A Religion of Instinct and Animalistic Pleasures

To complete the picture, the Western Church resorted to all forms of defamation and propaganda. In this portrayal, as in the previous ones, Muslims were labeled as engaging in sexual perversion, unabashedly making sex a vital issue in their relationships and existence. This, they claimed, reflected their weakness and inability to resist their instincts and

* Many missionaries and orientalists have accused Islam of being a religion that calls for sex, pleasure, desire, and animal instincts, exploiting the concept of polygamy, depicting Muslims as lustful and accusing the Prophet (PBUH) of seeking sexual gratification, ignoring the true reasons for allowing polygamy.

desires. "Islam, in their view, calls for animalism and immersion in worldly pleasures(Al-Bahi, n.d, p 01)," such as wealth and women, particularly attacking the Prophet Muhammad regarding the issue of polygamy. They attempted to convince people of the Prophet's non-prophethood, arguing that neither he nor his followers could claim to bring a divine project while unable to rise above basic instincts and free themselves from the temptations of transient pleasures.

9.5 Islamic Thought as Greek Thought

The final image promoted by the Church and its missionaries was the refusal to acknowledge Islamic thought, particularly Islamic philosophy. "They considered that what the Muslim Arabs brought was merely Greek thought written in Arabic letters (Al-Bahi, n.d, p 01)." Given that biased Orientalism is essentially a continuation and extension of a group of missionaries whose primary concern was to undermine the sanctity of Islam and the biography of the Prophet Muhammad, some of these bigots followed in the footsteps of the missionaries. Among these biased individuals were Hamilton Gibb, an English orientalist with several works including "Modern Trends in Islam" and "Mohammedanism"; Ignaz Goldziher, who dedicated most of his life to attacking Islam with works like "A History of Islamic Schools of Interpretation"; and one of his most famous students, the German orientalist Joseph Schacht, known for "The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence." Other prominent figures include the English orientalist D.S. Margoliouth, author of "Early Development of Mohammedanism" and "Mohammed and the Rise of Islam," and the French orientalist Louis Massignon, known for his extreme bias.

10. Conclusion

The intricate relationship between missionary work and Orientalism has deeply influenced Western perceptions of the Islamic world. The initial curiosity and desire to understand Islamic knowledge have often been overshadowed by religious, political, and colonial motivations. While some scholars genuinely sought to preserve and appreciate Islamic heritage, many others used their studies to serve colonial interests and propagate negative stereotypes about Islam and its followers. Understanding this historical

context is crucial in critically assessing the legacy of Orientalism and its impact on contemporary East-West relations.

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