

I

INTRODUCTION

BASIC WORKS

I have been particularly inspired by Byron Porter Smith's, *Islam in English Literature*, originally presented as the author's thesis and published for the first time in 1939. This book reveals “not only its author's scholarship but also his personal knowledge of Islam and the Arab world in general.”¹ The extract which I felt it expedient to reproduce here deals with the popular picture of the Prophet Muhammad as presented in English Literature.

“Students of English literature will know that the field abounds in references to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Unfortunately, for the most part these references reveal ignorance, or prejudice, or both. Chaucer, Sir John Mandeville (or rather his creator), the medieval [playwrights], Lydgate, Shakespeare and later writers, all make references which show how vast was the gap of misunderstanding. To most of these writers, who had received their information at second or third hand, Islam and its Prophet represented a dangerous semi-pagan element which must at all costs be kept at arm's-length, if not actually destroyed. The Muslim view of Christianity at the time was not more charitable, although the teachings of the Prophet and the Qur'an specifically preach tolerance and respect for the Christian religion. It is tragic and ironic that these two monotheistic religions, which have so much in common, should have hurled the charges of polytheism and idol-worship at each other, and that some of the ignorance and prejudice lasted into the nineteenth century.

The reasons, in retrospect, are not hard to find. They were not, except to a few unworldly men, primarily religious. They were political, military, racial, and also economic. The sudden appearance of a victorious Arab army on the world scene, to be followed after the decline of the Arab Empire by the rise of the Ottomans to power, naturally created panic in the West; and the European reaction and the centuries of conflict which followed, were almost inevitable. Then as now, wars had to be made palatable to those participating in them, and the Crusades, that protracted struggle for power between East and West, had to be presented as a purely religious conflict. Hence the constant emphasis on religious differences. In our shrinking world, in which mutual

¹ S.B. BUSHRUI, A. MELIKIAN (eds.), *Islam in English Literature*, New York 1977, xv.

dependence and understanding are necessary, we should, while realising the differences, make a serious attempt to recognise the basic principles common to the two religions, and thus see the past and its record in history, as well as in literature, in truer perspective.”²

The demonisation of the Prophet Muhammad is not a phenomenon uniquely found in English literature. Most Western European literature promptly follow suit in the exercise in question. Undoubtedly, this image of the Prophet as an impostor has been repeatedly projected throughout European studies and literature. Linked to this matter and often moving in parallel, is the so-called exoticisation/eroticisation of the Middle East Arab territories.³ Equally interesting in this regard is the book *L'Europe et l'Islam* by Hichem Djait which offers a fascinating and analytical study of the image of Islam in the chapter entitled ‘In Another’s Eyes’.⁴

Most inspiring yet polemical is Rana Kabbani's book *Europe's Myths of Orient*. The author explains how “The idea of travel as a means of gathering and recording information is commonly found in societies that exercise a high degree of political power.”⁵ Indeed, in Rana Kabbani's book, “the traveller” becomes a focal point of discussion. While speaking about “The projection of evil onto a faraway culture”, the author says that such a projection

“was also a significant aspect of medieval Europe's bulwark of bigotry. And since it had a portentous opponent in the Islamic state, it fashioned a polemic to check whatever influence such a rival state might have. This polemic was highly charged with hostility, and notable for the fanaticism that engendered it. Islam was seen as the negation of Christianity; Muhammad as an impostor, an evil sensualist, an Antichrist in alliance with the Devil. The Islamic world was seen as Anti-European, and was held in suspicion as such. Christian Europe had entered a confrontation with the Islamic Orient that was cultural,

² Ibid, xv-xvi.

³ “The Muslims did not interest the West for Political, military, religious, and scholarly reasons alone. They also aroused a good deal of curiosity in minds eager for strange tales spiced with the exotic. More detailed and sophisticated information resulted from the increased contacts following the reconquest of Spain, the conquest of Muslim Sicily, and the establishment of Latin states in the East. This did not, however, mark an end to the simplistic attitudes toward Islam as a religion or the widespread fabulous tales that served as popular entertainment. Nevertheless, a great deal was learned, much of it accurate, about the geography of the Muslim world, its climate, its cities, its rule, its flora and fauna, as well as details about its farming and industry. In addition, more information became available about the customs of the Saracens, the Bedouins, and later the Tartars, that is, the Mongols.” (M. RODINSON, *ibid*, 18.); speaking of the Renaissance’s cosmopolitanism and encyclopedism, with the mannerisms of its cultural expression, Rodinson states that “curiosity about the East had not yet turned into exoticism, that is, the thrill of ‘escape’, that sense of being transported through art or lifestyle without ever leaving one’s own culture... [and] while these works of pure fantasy may have thrilled the literary public, no one took them seriously as a source of information about the history or character of the Muslim East.” (Ibid, 38.)

⁴ H. HEINEGG, *Europe and Islam*, California 1985, 9-98.

⁵ R. KABBANI, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, London 1986, 1.

religious, political and military, one that would decide from then on the very nature of the discourse between West and East. Post-Crusader Europe would never wholly emerge from the antagonism its *Holy Wars* had plunged it into. Its old desire to assert itself against its Islamic rival converted easily into a determination to dominate; this would become the psychological motivation of imperialists from Napoleon onwards. In precisely this spirit, the French general Gouraud entered Damascus in 1920: he proceeded immediately to the tomb of Salah al-Din al-Ayoubi, who had defeated the Europeans in the Third Crusade, and announced gloatingly: '*Nous revoilà, Saladin!*'"⁶

Rana Kabbani goes on to say that

“In the European narration of the Orient, there was a deliberate stress on those qualities that made the East different from the West, exiled it into an irretrievable state of *otherness*. Among the many themes that emerge from the European narration of the Other, two appear most strikingly. The first is the insistent claim that the East was a place of lascivious sensuality, and the second that it was a realm characterised by inherent violence. These themes had their significance in medieval thought, and would continue to be voiced with varying degrees of forcefulness up to the present time. But it was in the nineteenth century that they found their most deliberate expression, since that period saw a new confrontation between West and East - an imperial confrontation. If it could be suggested that Eastern peoples were slothful, preoccupied with sex, violent, and incapable of self-government, then the imperialist would feel himself justified in stepping in and ruling. Political domination and economic exploitation needed the cosmetic cant of mission civilisation to seem fully commendatory. For the ideology of empire was hardly ever a brute jingoism; rather, it made subtle use of reason, and recruited science and history to serve its ends. The image of the European coloniser had to remain an honourable one: he did not come as exploiter, but as enlightener. He was not seeking mere profit, but was fulfilling his duty to his Maker and his sovereign, whilst aiding those less fortunate to rise toward his lofty level. This was the white man's burden, that reputable colonial malaise, that sanctioned the [subjugation] of entire continents.”⁷

This is no doubt why

“The European in the East was preoccupied with his stature and status. He remained terrified of crossing racial barriers abroad as he had been of crossing class barriers at home. Afraid that he would somehow lose caste, he had to cling, as Norman Daniel has pointed out, to the idea that Westerners were

⁶ Ibid, 5.

⁷ Ibid, 5-6.

intrinsically different from Easterners, in order to preserve intact the wholeness of the imperial myth.”⁸

Therefore, according to Rana Kabbani,

“It was thus that the 'Orient' fulfilled those many needs that the European brought to it. The word itself evoked so many instant epithets (Saracen [interestingly often a positive figure], impostor, Arabian Nights, desert, dance, odalisque, Crusade, Bible), that it took a very determined and collected mind to be able to see beyond such sensationalist surplus to the starker reality in question. Obviously enough, not all the representations that resulted were pernicious. There were some European minds that could perceive the common humanity in East and West. W.S. Blunt was such a mind, a staunch defender of Eastern rights against his own nation.”⁹

The French historian and sociologist Maxime Rodinson [1915-2004], a renowned specialist on Islam and the Arab world,¹⁰ assures the reader that

“a knowledge of Islam and the images of Islam, particularly in these times, could be an important key to the understanding of this world. There are many people who are now afraid of Islam. It is terribly true that many frightening acts are committed in the name of Islam, but these are no worse than those committed in the names of Christianity, Judaism, Freedom, and so on. Islamic peoples form a part of the world's underprivileged masses. [Economic argument may contradict this.] They quite naturally long to improve their situation and will employ any means, right or wrong, to achieve that goal.

⁸ Ibid, 8-9.

⁹ Ibid, 12.

¹⁰ Professor Maxime Rodinson's Marxism meant that he studied Islam in terms of economic and social history, distancing himself from the tradition of those who studied the subject in terms of belief and its comparison with Christianity. The first public demonstration of this approach was his biography Mohammed (1961), which has been revised and reprinted many times. Rodinson always spoke more about Muslims than about Islam, and this book is a key to his whole work. He did not ignore Islamic texts and, in later publications, claimed it was only by the misuse of certain texts that some Muslims sought to justify terrorism. Rodinson was an active presence in public debates and controversies, sometimes inadvertently. Indeed, in 1999 Mohammed was withdrawn from the curriculum of the American University in Cairo after it was attacked by a newspaper columnist, and banned by the Egyptian minister for higher education amid charges that it "denigrated the Islamic faith". In 1967, on the eve of the six-day war, Rodinson became well known in France when he expressed a certain reticence about Israel, despite himself being Jewish. He had always been suspicious of Zionism and considered those who expressed enthusiasm for Israel were indulging in a belated form of colonialism.

But Israel existed and could not be abolished. Therefore, a Palestinian state had to be created and supported. So, in 1968, with Jacques Berque, the specialist on Algerian history, Rodinson set up a study group to work for a Palestine state. That year, too, his *Israel Et Le Refus Arabe*, was published. In 1973, his *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* appeared in English. Among his other works were *Islam Et Capitalisme*, (1966, English edition, 1974); *Marxisme Et Monde Musulman* (1972); *Les Arabes*, (1979); *La Fascination De l'Islam*, (1980); *L'Islam: Politique Et Croyance* (1993); and *Europe And The Mystique Of Islam* (published in English, 1989). (J. DOUGLAS, *The Guardian*, London 3/6/ 2004, article history.)

This is a fundamental rule of all human nature. Many of our countrymen are therefore convinced, just as so many of our forefathers were, that the struggle against Islam is a moral obligation. It is not very difficult to discover that behind this presumed moral obligation, at least some are prompted by their desire to defend (justifiably, of course) their own more or less relative welfare against the impending attacks of the underprivileged.”¹¹

Yet another author who also deserves to be quoted is Derek Hopwood.¹² The gist of his discourse, which I frankly think could reasonably be applied to the Maltese perception of the Arabs, reads as follows:

“Everyone should be aware of the perils that such images carry... The British public at least must carefully review its prejudices. The stereotypes we have

¹¹ M. RODINSON, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, Washington 1991, xiii-xiv; according to Ellis Goldberg, “*Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, was written as part of his contribution to our understanding not only of the Arab world but of ourselves in relation to it.” (Ibid, 163.); for the benefit of the reader, I would like make extracts from Max Rodinson’s book: “Western Christendom perceived the Muslim world as a menace long before it began to be seen as a real problem... Apparently, few questions were raised about this people. To the Christian countries of the West, they were a plague like so many other barbarian groups... Christians had known of the Saracens, or Arabs, long before the rise of Islam, and at first the Saracens’ conversion to Islam went virtually unnoticed. A fourth-century description of the world, for example, stated that the Saracens got *by bow and plunder all they required to live*. There was no need to know any more about them. Only scholars theorized about the origins of the name Saracen, which they believed came from Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Their other name, Agareni, however, seemed to indicate they were descended instead from Hagar, the slave girl who was driven into the desert along with Ishmael, her son by Abraham. This inconsistency did little to clarify the issue... The image of Islam was not drawn simply from the Crusades, as some have maintained, but rather from the Latin Christian world’s gradually developing ideological unity. This produced a sharper image of the enemy’s features and focused the energies of the West on the Crusades... For Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land, the Saracens were little more than faceless creatures, uninteresting infidels, or incidental rulers... In reality, Christian Europe did not, as is commonly assumed, have one, but several images of the hostile world with which it clashed. Until this point, scholars had concerned themselves for the most part with European perceptions of the Muslim religion. However, it was the Muslim world in all its aspects that confronted Christians, much to their amazement and horror. The European understanding of the Muslim world is discernible in three general areas. The Islamic world was first and foremost a hostile political and ideological system; but, it was also an utterly different civilization, and it was a remote and foreign economic range of reactions and questions.

The West often learned of the political divisions of the Muslim world from first-hand experience. Still, it was also understood that, for all those divisions, there was an underlying and comprehensive solidarity united behind a common ideology and faith, which could be mobilized at any moment against the Christian world. Although the Muslim states formed a hostile complex, their rivalries could occasionally be turned to the West’s political advantage through temporary alliances. Christians sometimes served Muslim rulers, as the *chanson de geste Mainet* describes. There, the young Charlemagne loyally serves Galafre, the Saracen king of Toledo. Charlemagne eventually marries Galafre’s daughter, who naturally converts to Christianity. In reality, episodes of this sort often did occur in Spain and the East, but nonetheless there was always a latent hostility threatening to resurface.” (M. RODINSON, *ibid*, 3-8.)

¹² Derek Hopwood is an Emeritus Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford, and University Reader in Modern Middle Eastern Studies. His publications include: *Sexual Encounters in the Middle East: The British, the French and the Arabs* (1999), *Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia: The Tragedy of Longevity* (1992), *Egypt, Politics and Society, 1945-1990* (3rd edition 1992), *Tales of Empire: The British in the Middle East* (1989), *Syria, 1945-1986: Politics and Society* (1988), and *British Images of the Arabs* (1980). D. HOPWOOD in *WIKIPEDIA: The Free Encyclopedia*, U.S.A. 5/5/2008.

of other peoples are rooted in the national psyche and are based on a mixture of fact and fantasy, prejudice and ignorance... Anxiety, fear and dislike of the *other* influence our attitudes, yet if collective and individual anxieties are reduced, then prejudice and discrimination may also be reduced. Otherwise, society accepts the stereotypes, generalizations and prejudices that are offered to it by education, literature, politics and the media and they are integrated into the national psyche. The British have stereotyped attitudes towards immigrants in their midst... and to those abroad".¹³

Hopwood admits that although the paper presented by him is entitled *The British Image of the Arabs*, yet

“we immediately encounter the difficulty of quite defining who are the Arabs we have the image of... The image is really an amalgam in which Arab and Muslim are merged, Arab and Turk become as one, the Sudanese tribesmen, the Bedouin, the Egyptian town dweller are lumped together and this leads to massive and wrong generalizations. What may be true of the educated Cairene cannot be true in the same way of an Omani tribesman. We can, however, try to discover what generalizations have become accepted as true and how they have arisen...

There are two main strands discernible in the British attitude towards the Arabs - the political and the romantic. Both are complexes of numerous images, events, feelings and influences although the roots of the political attitude are to be found much further back in history - in fact in the seventh century. The Arab Muslim invasion of the Christian Mediterranean world opened up the political relationship and was the cause of many centuries of intolerance, mutual misunderstanding and actual hostility... But fear of Muslim domination was implanted in the European mind, a fear that was fed by the inability of medieval Christian theologians to accept Islam as a genuine religious revelation. The Prophet must, in their view, have been an impostor and his Arab followers treacherous or at best misled. The very term used, Mohammedanism, implied that Muslims were merely a sect following one fraudulent man.

The Arab Muslim was seen as a threat to European civilization and *Mahoud* as the anti-Christ. Dante was not the only one to consign him to hell. While the theologians tried to expose this 'imposture', the Crusades were Europe's political answer to the threat of the Islamic Arab world...

¹³ D. HOPWOOD, *The Arabs and the West: The Cultural Divide in Arab Affairs*, I, ii, (Dorking 1986) 30-31.

The Arab military threat to Europe had soon receded and Christendom rejoiced in the final expulsion of the Moors from Spain in 1492. At precisely the same time, the Ottomans entered European politics as a factor in the balance of power. By 1529 they were besieging Vienna. European fear of the Muslim had been transferred from the Arab to the unspeakable Turk but as there were then Turks throughout the Arab lands there grew up a confusion in the popular mind. Arab or Turk, they were both Muslim, oriental, and to be feared.”¹⁴

ORIENTALISM: CONCEPT AND IMPLICATIONS

The above-mentioned scholars were well aware of the negative aspects of Orientalism.¹⁵ This influential discipline, or rather an attitude, has been thoroughly investigated by Edward Said [1935-2003], a Palestinian American literary theorist, cultural critic, political activist and an outspoken advocate of Palestinian rights.¹⁶ He describes it as a corporate institution encompassing a set of generalizations, structures, relationships, texts; the whole forming a discourse which defines the Orient and Orientals for the West. The function of Orientalism, as expressed by Said, is “to understand, in some case [sic] to control, manipulate, even incorporate, what is a manifestly-different world.”¹⁷ The general basis of Orientalist thought is described by Said as “imaginative and yet drastically polarized geography dividing the world into two unequal parts, the larger, different one called the Orient, the other, also known as our world, called the Occident or

¹⁴ Ibid, 31; “In the Middle Ages, Islam had been considered a schism, a kind of perversion of Christianity. This was, for example, how Dante regarded it. It was a time of an increasing number of schisms within the Church, expressed not only by religious differences but by political ambitions as well. This was the case with Islam, and indeed, it could now be seen as a mere schism, one of many such, and necessarily the most dangerous.” (M. RODINSON, *ibid*, 35.)

¹⁵ “The term *Orientalist* appeared in English around 1779 and in French in 1799. The French form, *orientalisme*, found a place in the *Dictionnaire de l'Academie Francaise* of 1838. The idea of a particular discipline devoted to the study of the ‘Orient’ was taking shape. As yet, however, there were not enough specialists to warrant forming associations or publishing journals exclusively devoted to one country, people or region of the East. The intellectual range of every scholar extended over several domains, not all of which could be studied with the same depth. From here on, one was simply an Orientalist.” (M. RODINSON, *ibid*, 57.); after defining the Orientalist, Rodinson, goes on to define Orientalism. He states that “There does not exist an Orientalist ‘science’ whose limits have been defined by God or by the nature of things. What does exist is a multiplicity of issues coming under the jurisdiction of many general disciplines. These issues emerge from varied phenomena found in certain countries previously grouped under the questionable rubric of the East.” (Ibid, 81.); Rodinson concludes by saying, that, “The pursuit of Oriental studies, and especially Islamic studies, has, therefore, become more complex and less isolated. Contact with other disciplines, once considered a luxury, is now an urgent necessity. The promise for progress is impressive. The price to be paid is not too high.” (Ibid, 82.)

¹⁶ **Edward Wadie Saïd** (Arabic: **دي عيس عي دو دراودا**; transliteration: **Idwārd Wadī Saïd**) was University Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, and is regarded as a founding figure in postcolonial theory.

¹⁷ E.W. SAID, *Orientalism*, London 1987, 12-13.

the West.”¹⁸ Islam, of course, falls into the realm of the Orient and as such becomes a phenomenon to be studied.

However, the treatment it has received within the scope of Orientalism has been, in my opinion, one of degradation. As already mentioned, there may be many religious, psychological and political reasons for such treatment but all these, according to Said, stem from one root problem and that is the challenge and threat posed by Islam to Christianity. To place this tension in its proper context and to understand from whence came this animosity, it is essential to retrace the historical relationship between Islam and Christianity on the broad lines I have already indicated.

In recent years, Orientalism has been heavily criticized for its subjective views on Islam. Its claim has always been that of objectivity, yet the reality is that the works of Orientalist writers incorporate both explicit and implicit statements about Muslim beliefs which are false and offensive. The majority of them try to disguise their subjectivity by the application of various empirical and non-empirical methodologies. This, in my opinion, is the major distinguishing factor separating the modern day Orientalist from the scholar of the Middle Ages.

A.L. Tibawi is of the opinion that Orientalists seem to disregard the rules of objectivity especially when they discuss the role of Muhammad as the messenger of God and the nature of the message enshrined in the Quran.¹⁹ Now for the Muslims, these are the fundamental tenets of their belief. Consequently, any scholar, be he a believer or otherwise, who fails to take note of these beliefs when writing about Islam runs the risk of being unobjective. The scientific approach to the subject of Islam would be to state the Muslim view in its entirety. Having done this, the author would be fully justified in presenting and elaborating his personal view on the subject even if such a view contradicts the believer’s opinion.

The dilemma, in the case of Orientalism, is that the Orientalist begins with, for example, the premise that the Quran is Muhammad's own composition. From such a premise he proceeds to make other historical, theological, and literary judgements. How then can we progress from this obstacle? Are there any alternative methods of looking at Islam? Some scholars such as C. Adams and W.A. Bijlefeld have suggested the phenomenological approach. Without venturing into uncalled - for detail, it will suffice to mention the objective of a phenomenologist when studying Islam, or, for that matter any other religion. In so far as his objective is to understand the beliefs of those studied, his approach does not prohibit him from focusing attention on varied or controversial interpretations within a tradition but it does forbid him from taking sides or excluding any

¹⁸ E.W. SAID, *Covering Islam*, London 1981, 4.

¹⁹ A.L. TIBAWI, *English-Speaking Orientalists: A Critique of their Approach to Islam and Arab Nationalism*, in *The Muslim World*, LIII, 3 (Hartford, USA, January 1963) 191.

positions clearly represented within the tradition.²⁰ It seems to me that a step in this direction would indeed lead to a better and more objective (exhibiting actual facts untainted by the exhibitor's feelings or opinions) study of Islam. But, alas, a hundred per cent objectivity is never possible for we all have our own bias in one form or another. Thus, we are driven back to the heart of the problem as expressed by Tibawi:

“Religious perception is a spiritual, intuitive experience. It cannot be comprehended by analytical or critical methods. Those outside a religious system can never capture the significance of the experience of those inside it.”²¹

DISPARAGING VIEW OF ARABS, TURKS AND MUSLIMS

Let us now turn to Malta, which is my main area of interest. In researching for this subject in question I have come to feel very strongly indeed that in order to arrive at a significant understanding of the Arab and the wider Muslim world, one must overcome the “fortress mentality that understandably developed in the past”.²² We must also dismantle the so-called defence mechanisms that likewise and understandably developed in the past.

From my childhood and student days I can still recall the antipathy my contemporaries had for Arabs, Turks and Muslims undoubtedly communicated to them by the whole environmental organisation of their own society. Like the rest of Europe, the Maltese had associated Arabs with the Muslim faith. The words Arab and Muslim had the same connotation. We often mistakenly refer to Muslims as Arabs, forgetting that the Islamic faith is embraced by an extensive amount of non-Arabs.

Few Maltese have ever realized that,

“The Arab nation was among the greatest nations in history. It had a civilization prior to Islam, and a much more developed one after Islam. [That] Christians had participated in the development of Arab civilization before and after Islam; and [that] this civilization was not a purely religious one, as the ignorant imagine, but exhibited numerous traits which had no connection with religion whatsoever.”²³

²⁰ W.A. BIJLEFELD, *Islamic Studies within the perspective of the History of Religions*, in *The Muslim World*, LXII, 1 (Hartford, USA, January 1972) 4.

²¹ A.L. TIBAWI, *ibid*, 202.

²² J. AQUILINA, *Meeting People*, in *The Sunday Times* (Malta, 18/7/1989) 22-23.

²³ K. SALIBI, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*, London 1988, 209.

Many Maltese remain unaware of the presence of Christian communities in Arab and Islamic countries, such as Cyprus, Egypt, the Holy Land (Israel and Palestine/Occupied Territories), Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey²⁴ - to mention but a few.

They developed derogatory terms for the Arabs such as Saracens, Turks, Infidels, Barbarians, Moors, Corsairs, Muhammedans, and so on. To prove this, it will be sufficient if we look up these words in a Maltese dictionary, such as the dictionaries respectively written by Erin Serracino-Inglott and Professor Joseph Aquilina. The following definitions, which I am reproducing, make it clear that the meaning these names convey in Maltese (and also the definition sometimes attributed to the author) are mostly negative, disparaging and derogatory.

MALTESE PROPER NAMES AND EXPRESSIONS

Barbar/u/Barbru (Barbarian): a person whose behaviour and life-habits are far from civilized; a savage, harsh and cruel foreigner; uncivilized person; barbaric;²⁵ *Barbarija* (Barbary): *qisu Tork ta' Barbarija* (he resembles a Barbary Turk): said of a swarthy, fiercelooking man.²⁶

Għarbi (Arab): born in or hailing from Arab territory, Arabia; bred in Arab countries; conversant with the language spoken throughout the countries bordering the shores of Western Asia and North Africa; the mother tongue of the inhabitants of these countries and one of the two main languages from which the Maltese dialect derived a lot of vocabulary;²⁷ *qisu Għarbi* (he looks like an Arab): he doesn't understand, without a head - meaning he has no intelligence, no mind, or similar to the Arabs, their head is "tied" because they wear the turban - meaning that their mind is set on one thing - they are incapable of (objective) thinking; *Għarbi bej* (an Arab Bey): dark coloured, very brown;²⁸ Arab vendors, carrying *ħabbażiż*, *lakumja* (Turkish delight) oil jars, etc. are frequently referred to as: *It-Tork* (the Turk), and children usually greeted them with this cry: *Alla kbir - Mawmettu ħanżir* (God is great – Mohammad is a pig).²⁹

²⁴ Discussion/meeting on *Oriental Christian Communities*, SOAS (London) 4/3/1991; see also: *Part V: The Countries*, in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of The Middle East and North Africa*, Cambridge 1988, 292-473.

²⁵ E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *Il-Miklem Malti*, I, Malta 1975, 109.

²⁶ J. AQUILINA, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, I, Malta 1987, 79; *Tork ta' Barbarija*: is the Maltese equivalent of Barbary corsair, and denotes a cruel man (J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *Pirates and Turks in Maltese Tradition*, in *Scientia*, XIII [Malta, 1947] 189.)

²⁷ E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, III, 185; see also J. AQUILINA, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, II, Malta 1990, 976.

²⁸ G. & A. MUSCAT AZZOPARDI, *Kif Nghiduha*, Valletta 1975, 44.

²⁹ J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *ibid*, 189.

Infidil (Infidel): who doesn't profess our faith; who professes a religion different from ours, particularly those having no belief in Christ; unbaptized, non-Christian; e.g. Christians call Muhammedans “infidels” and we are likewise called so by the Turks!³⁰

Kursar (Corsair): one scouring the seas with contraband goods on board even with a view to seizing ships; pirate; sea-pirate; a naval unit captained by Corsairs which in the old days menacingly stopped and looted galleons and galleys that came its way; a wicked and stout-hearted fearless fellow; one mentally gifted for sagacity; a shrewd person;³¹ *Dak Kursal* (He is a corsair): is the name applied to a clever person not easily outwitted; the connexion with the crafty corsairs of old times is obvious.³²

Mislem/Misilma/Misilmin (Muslim): *Musulman* - a term given by none but Vassalli which denotes “Muhammedan Turk” (“*turco maomettano*”): one professing belief in the Muhammedan religion, a follower of Muhammad's religious tenets;³³ *Mawmettan*: one embracing the Islamic faith or one who professes the religion of Muhammad; *Mawmettaniżmu* (Muhammedanism);³⁴ *jien għamilt bħal Mawmettu jew bħall-muntanja ta' Mawmettu* (I followed the example of Mohammad or same as Mahammad’s mountain): we use this saying when instead of waiting for an answer to our question we seek out the person from whom we expect the answer; we also attribute it to an occasion when instead of waiting for somebody to call on us, we instead call on him; Muhammad, once, reputedly, ordered a mountain to approach him and when the mountain, naturally did not budge, he approached it instead.³⁵

Saraċin (Saracen):

³⁰ E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, IV, 301.

³¹ *Ibid*, V, 221.

³² J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *ibid*, 189; see also: K. VELLA HABER, *Wirt it-Torok fl-Ghidut Malti*, in *Magazin (it-Torċa)*, (Malta, 5/9/1965) XIII.

³³ “*turco maomettano*” (E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, VI, 163.)

³⁴ *Ibid*, VI, 226; see also J. AQUILINA, *ibid*, II, 793.

³⁵ G. & A. MUSCAT AZZOPARDI, *ibid*, 79; it would be sensible to include a reference related to an outstanding character in Islamic-Folkloristic Literature, traditionally known by the Maltese as “Gahan” - described by Dr. Galley as “a very popular folk hero known from the East to the West of the Mediterranean countries”. (M. GALLEY, *Two Folkloristic Articles*, in *Journal of Maltese Studies* 7 [Malta, 1971] 64-76.) In a recent article Dr. Galley has shown that the anecdotes of Gahan were collected as early as the 9th century in the book entitled *Kitab nawadir guha* which is referred to in *Kitab el-Fihrist* and that therefore Guha was already a popular folk hero in the Arab countries at that time. In North Africa Gahan is known by one or other of the names Goha, Gha, Guha, or Si Goha. In Sicily his name is Giufa, in Calabria Goga, in Trapani Giuca, in Tuscany Giucca, in Albania Giucha... According to Prof. J. Aquilina, “Gahana is a purely Semitic name and cannot have been introduced into Malta from Sicily...” (J. PULLICINO CASSAR, *Studies in Maltese Folklore*, Malta 1976, 52; G. CASSAR PULLICINO, *Il-Folklore Malti*, Malta 1975, 85-86, 88.) According to tradition Gahan was by profession an Imam. For the Maltese, Gahan is not just a humorous character; indeed, the mention of the name necessitates the idea of a stupid person. It stands for the “idiot of the village”. (D.A. AGIUS, *Il-Praspar ta' Nasr id-Din Hoġa*, Malta 1980, IX.)

“D'Aleppo says: *a noi piace assumere come etimologia 'xerqijin', e non 'sareqin', primo: perche gli arabi in Sicilia esercitarono atti di civilta' e non di ladronaggio, secondo: perche' in Oriente questi popoli sono chiamati 'ismaelijin', e 'xerqijin' dovettero chiamarli senza dubbio gli occidentali, cioe' gli abitanti del settentrione dell'Africa, i Magrebini passati nell'isola!* I am pleased to concur with D'Aleppo for if the Saracens in the time of the Crusaders were looters in their piratical expeditions across the Mediterranean, even if in Sicily and Malta which they subjugated they left no traces of looting (we weren't robbed of anything not even our Christian faith; on the contrary they left us as legacy our mother tongue), no one can deny that they were *xerreqin* and not *gharrebin*, notwithstanding that they were derived from the same lineage and embraced the same faith of the other Mohammedan Arabs!...): an appellation of a splinter of an Arab race who came down from the Levant as were likewise known by the other part of the Arab race from the Maghrib; notorious Arab mariners who occupied the Mediterranean coastline, even Malta; Muslims; by extension Mohammedan turks; harsh and mostly hard-hearted arch-enemies towards those professing the Christian faith (mostly in the time of the Crusades)”.³⁶

Tork (Turk): one who dwelt or was brought up in Turkey or in the Ottoman Empire; one unbaptized, non-Christian; Muhammedan, Muslim; an incredulous, faithless person; a stiff-necked, hard-hearted, merciless fellow; Arab, slave, negro, black, inhabitant of Ethiopia, Abyssinia; enemy; an ugly, fearsome person; bogey; with the article *it-*: the native language of the Turks; e.g. *Mela qed titkellem bit-Tork, jew?* (Are you speaking in Turkish, or what?): I do not know what you mean! Speak to me in a way that I can understand you well!;³⁷ *Ras ta' Tork* (Head of a Turk): in times past it was a common utterance, though nowadays we cannot say that it has been totally forgotten: our forefathers knew to their cost what a Turk's head meant: the Turks were endowed, above all, with a strong-willed mind and nobody could budge them: they were persistent and were not easily deterred and so when the Maltese nicknamed someone so it was as if he was insulting him: in fact to attribute to him characteristics which were unpleasant to

³⁶ E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, VIII, 53; concerning the word Saracens the historian Fr. M. Magri gives the following definition: “The epithet of Saracens as meant by the Maltese when speaking their native tongue has absolutely nothing to do with the way Arabs are referred-to in European languages. The word Saracens by renowned scholars is held to be a derivative of *Xarakijun*, denoting people of the *Xarq* or of the Levant... Whatever it is, the appellation *Xarakijun*, in Latin *Saracheni* found its way to neighbouring countries after the occupation of Palestine by the Romans, that is, in the year 63 B.C. However, it was a word which did not connote, exactly, a particular people. We can safely maintain that it designated Eastern people, inhabitants of *Surija* and among those known as *il-Feneh*. Evidently, it did not denote an Arabic name at least prior to the year AD 700... Accordingly, the Maltese claim that the Saracens were those people of bygone days who dwelt in caves, who built with huge stones; also that they were accustomed to have their parents walled up in such caves when these attained a great age, that they used to carry out burials in rock-hewn tombs, that they sailed in galleys or overland by wagons, that they possessed golden calves still concealed and also that they worshipped the gods” (G. CASSAR PULLICINO, *Hżuż Manwel Magri*, Malta 1991, 45-46.)

³⁷ E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, VIII, 474.

him;³⁸ *Iswed Tork* (black as a Turk): utterly black; totally black as a negro or African who dwelt in countries within the Ottoman Empire;³⁹ *Ipejjep daqs Tork* (he smokes like a Turk): he smokes (a cigarette or narghile/water-pipe) unintermittently, one after the other;⁴⁰ he is a chain-smoker;⁴¹ *Sar Tork* (turned Turk): changed over into a Muhammedan; abandoned the Christian faith he professed; became an unbeliever, without faith; *Twieled Tork* (was born Turk): was (and is still) spoken when we were under the Arabs and while we still retained slaves, denoting a very rare occurrence e.g. a shower of rain at one and the same time that the sun is shining;⁴² said of a rare event such as rain while the the sun continues shining;⁴³ *It-Tork iġhid min iġarrab jagħraf, aħseb u ara n-Nisrani!* (the Turk has it that whoever undergoes suffering comes to his senses, more so if he is a Christian);⁴⁴ *Għadu Tork!* (he is still unbaptized) refers to non-baptized children;⁴⁵ *Tork Imġammed* (a baptised Turk): this is said of a baptised Turk who seems to be living our (Christian) life, who all of a sudden will be plotting with his fellow Turks and will easily plot against you: bitter experience taught our forefathers that a baptised Turk is not to be wholly trusted, neither in belief nor in loyalty towards his Christian master;⁴⁶ mothers usually frighten their children or lull them to sleep by saying to them: *Ara ġej it-Tork għalik!* (Mind! The Turk is coming for you.)⁴⁷

Torok (Turks): *It-Torok* (by the Turks): spoken in amazement or disapproval during a conversation or while something is done; e.g. By the Turks! what has befallen me... I stepped on something and nearly slipped;⁴⁸ used merely as an exclamation indicating impatience without any awareness of the literal meaning;⁴⁹ *Haqq it-Torok!* (cursed be the Turks!): signifying impatience or opposition; e.g. by the Turks! today the number five was drawn! I have been taking this number for two months on end! today I forgot to take it; *Qattus it-Torok!* (to hell with the Turks): is a mild imprecation very common in

³⁸ K. VELLA HABER, *ibid*, XIII.

³⁹ According to Gino & Anna Muscat Azzopardi, "*din hija wahda mit-tixbih falz fl-Ilsien Malti.*" (G. A. MUSCAT AZZOPARDI, *ibid*, 130); concomitant with the aforesaid, Aquilina writes in his dictionary that, "here the word Turk is misused for Moor or Berber who, unlike the Turks, are dark-skinned." (J. AQUILINA, *ibid*, II, 1466.)

⁴⁰ E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, VIII, 474.

⁴¹ J. AQUILINA, *ibid*, II, 1466.

⁴² E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, VIII, 474.

⁴³ J. AQUILINA, *ibid*, II, 1466; however, according to Gino & Anna Muscat Azzopardi, "*din il-frazi jgħiduha t-tfal, ma nafux l-għala, meta tinżel ix-xita u tkun ix-xemx.*" (Children normally give utterance to this saying, without knowing the reason why, when it rains and at the same time the sun shines.) (G. A. MUSCAT AZZOPARDI, *ibid*, 130.)

⁴⁴ E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, VIII, 474.

⁴⁵ J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *ibid*, 190; see also: G. MIFSUD CHIRCOP, *Manwel Magri: Hrejjef Missirijietna*, Malta 1994, 587.

⁴⁶ K. VELLA HABER, *ibid*, XIII.

⁴⁷ J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *ibid*, 189.

⁴⁸ E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, VIII, 474.

⁴⁹ J. AQUILINA, *ibid*, II, 1466.

these islands;⁵⁰ *Għand it-Torok* (to the Turks!): a country inhabited by incredulous folk, where a Christian would not like to go; e.g. am sending you packing to the Turks! e.g. am sending you where you would not like to go;⁵¹ *It-Torok Jieħduk!* (that the Turks may carry you away): our history teaches us that no Turk ever set foot on our island to give us anything; the Turk always came here for plunder; they used to approach our land and when our forefathers got wind of them took refuge hastily behind the bastions, leaving behind them most of their belongings; the Turks used to land, pillaging and destroying to their heart's content and carry away whatever they liked, people, animals and goods; they captured thousands of slaves, about whom we possess many tales and legends; therefore when a Maltese curses you in this way, that the Turks may take you, he can wish you nothing worse;⁵² *Xit-Torok trid?* (what on earth do you want?)⁵³ this saying seems to fulfill what we said about “a Turk's head!”⁵⁴ *La Torka* (the Turkish way): in a manner practised by the Turks; he sat the way the Turks are wont to do; he squatted on the ground; he stood in a squatting position;⁵⁵ *It-Torok imorru fejn seħet Alla* (the Turks make for places placed under a divine curse) (Agius de Soldanis);⁵⁶ we call those who do not believe in God: *it-Torok ta' bla knejjes* (Turks without churches): a dying survival of popular ignorance and intolerance.⁵⁷ Also related to the “Turkish theme” is the following nursery rhyme “*Dgħajsa galjotta / Dgħajsa xanbekkin; / It-Torok kanalja / L-Insara qaddisin.*” (A galleon boat / A chebec boat; / The Turks are villains / The Christians are saints.)⁵⁸

Donnok Kanu! (you look like a Kanu!) This is the appellation given to a dull-witted helpless individual. It originated from the name of one Kanu who, during the siege of 1565, managed to upset a cauldron full of boiling pitch within the fortifications of Birgu.⁵⁹

Indeed, the use of these terms was (and still is) a common currency for our parents which they inherited from previous generations. But beyond the mere words they used to address the Arabs, Turks and Muslims, there existed a tradition of hate and antipathy, which has sadly endured to this day. This tradition was communicated to them either orally or through the written word. It was handed down to them as part of their national

⁵⁰ J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *ibid*, 189.

⁵¹ E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, VIII, 475.

⁵² K. VELLA HABER, *ibid*, XIII.

⁵³ J. AQUILINA, *ibid*, II, 1466.

⁵⁴ K. VELLA HABER, *ibid*, XIII.

⁵⁵ E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, VIII, 474; J. AQUILINA, *ibid*, II, 1466.

⁵⁶ E. SERRACINO INGLOTT, *ibid*, VIII, 474.

⁵⁷ J. AQUILINA, *ibid*, II, 1466; it was further reported by Ġuzè Diacono that whenever a phantom used to appear in haunted houses, it closely resembled a Turk wearing the fez etc., “Mummy, here’s a Turk! A Turk!” (G. DIACONO, *Lil Hinn mill-Ħajja Materjali*, in *It-Torça Il-Ħadd Magazine* [Malta, 2/4/1995] 13.)

⁵⁸ G. CASSAR PULICINO, *Il-Folklore Malti*, *ibid*, 58.

⁵⁹ J. CASSAR PULICINO, *ibid*, 190.

and ‘sacred’ heritage, so that, in their own turn, they could transmit it to future generations.

ARABS, TURKS AND MUSLIMS IN MALTESE TRADITION

The use of these terms still is a common currency inherited from previous generations. But beyond the mere words they used to address the Arabs, Turks and Muslims, there existed a tradition of hate and antipathy which has sadly endured to this day. This tradition was communicated to them either orally or through the written word. It was handed down to them as part of their national and ‘sacred’ heritage, so that, in their own turn, they could transmit it to future generations.

The gist of historical events suiting popular taste and living up to the expectations of popular imagination, has been handed down to us through tradition.⁶⁰ This notwithstanding, tradition remains invaluable inasmuch as it keeps alive important happenings that have influenced preceding generations “in the form of generalised and transmuted truths” orally handed down to succeeding generations. In the meantime, particular stress has been laid on such matters that revolutionised the day-to-day life of the masses, ultimately giving rise to still surviving folk-stories.⁶¹

This is the case in Malta where certain legends or traditional tales are embedded in the national psyche. The exact details have been forgotten but the Maltese and Gozitans have shown a remarkable tendency to “pick on a few landmarks or personages typifying the period in which they occurred or lived, and enshrine them in place-names, local

⁶⁰ “We listened to ‘documentaries’ about Malta’s history which usually emphasized the arrival of St Paul in Malta when according to tradition, he bequeathed forever the Catholic religion to Malta. We listened to radiodramas about the First Great Siege, and the ordeal suffered by Malta during the Second World War – added to which there came longwinded melos about Catholic saints who were then quite popular, like St Rita of Cascia, St Dominic and of course St Paul himself. Needless to say, this hagiographic mish-mash deeply coloured my perceptions of the world outside our shores.” (A. SANT, *Confessions of a European Maltese*, Malta 2002, 11); to further emphasize the Pauline cult, Dr. Alfred Sant refers the reader to an article published in *National Geographic* by David S. Boyer (a journalist-photographer), wherein Boyer wrote, that “The diminutive island of Malta was the happiest surprise on my entire trip in the lands of the Apostle Paul. Half the Maltese men I met, it seemed to me, were named Paul. Malta is fiercely proud that the Apostle converted the island 1,900 years ago.

Mention of St. Paul’s name lighted the eyes of everyone I talked to. Church after church carried his name, and nowhere did I find greater reverence for the saint, nor a greater profusion of mosaics, frescoes, statues and portraits portraying his life. Certainly the most startling discovery of my long journey was made here, in Valletta’s richly decorated Church of St Paul Shipwrecked. On the high altar, encased in gilt and silver, stood a relic venerated as a bone from the arm of St Paul.

The arm brings to mind the founding of the Maltese Christian church. On the day St Paul struggled ashore from the wreckage of the grain ship, friendly Maltese lighted a fire for the passengers and crew. As Paul laid some sticks on the fire, a viper attached itself to his hand. He shook it off without ill effect, and the miracle set the stage for the conversion of the entire island.” (Ibid, 17.)

⁶¹ J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *Pirates and Turks in Maltese Tradition*, ibid, 164.

legends and folk-songs”.⁶² As a notable instance, regarding areas of special interest, the collective memory has picked out: the shipwreck of St. Paul and the island's subsequent conversion to Christianity (see chapter 2); the memory of Count Roger the Norman, represented as the ideal hero who succeeds in overcoming the detestable rule of the Arabs and Islam, thus giving rise to the dawning of a new era of peace and prosperity (see chapters 2 and 3); the piratical incursions of the Moorish corsairs and the Turkish raids which reached a climax in the Great Siege of 1565 (see chapters 2 and 3); the long reign of the Knights of St. John; the terror of the Inquisition and the short but catastrophic French rule from 1798 to 1800.⁶³

ARABS, TURKS AND MUSLIMS IN MALTESE HISTORIOGRAPHY

History can be viewed under two sub-headings: history as a recollection of past events and history as an attempt to give shape and meaning to the past. My main concern in writing this book is also directed to the second meaning of history. This is a description, reconstruction and interpretation of events that happened in bygone days and still exists. To elaborate still further, this means a continuous effort in scholarly fashion to establish definite rules, sift and interpret evidence that traces its origin to the material at source.⁶⁴ This research is not just a history of Malta, but a critical study of different views of Maltese history, wherever Arabs, Turks and Muslims are mentioned. I believe, that in order to move from dialogue to relationship with the Arab and wider Muslim world, it is necessary to reach a concurrence of opinion on the contributing factors.

There has always existed disagreement between the Maltese about their country's history. Indeed, the pro-Europeans have stressed that whatever the Maltese can claim as being purely their islands' history, actually forms part of a broader European history. However, confusion still remains as to what really constitutes European history, owing to the basic historical links forged between Europe and Christianity.

Nigel Dennis, a ‘settler’ and writer,⁶⁵ comments that,

“each generation makes its spasmodic attacks on the subterranean mysteries, and each emerges with its own story; but with each discovery the mysteries take on another aspect and require the story to be re-told. No story of Malta - of its pre-history, its people, even its language - holds water for very long;

⁶² Ibid, 164.

⁶³ Ibid, 164-165.

⁶⁴ A. MARWICK, *Introduction to History*, Milton Keynes 1977, 13.

⁶⁵ who like other ‘settlers’ and writers, namely Anthony Burgess and Nicholas Monsarrat, “commented in various ways about the life [he] discovered around [him].” (A. SANT, *ibid*, 31.)

each in its turn must become as fanciful in its notions as Abela was in his. A litter of discarded theories trails across the whole island like a mad paper-chase, a grief to the devout, an amusement to the sceptic.”⁶⁶

History aims at bringing to the fore the causes and effects of events and at the same time relating important occurrences of a fixed period to the daily rhythm of social life in a particular environment. History deals with experiences of general importance to a particular nation; in the meantime analysing them impartially.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ N. DENNIS, *An Essay on Malta*, London 1972, 6; Dennis adds that, “until recent years, all Maltese history has been clerical history, except when politicians and foreigners have written it. Today, a certain division is apparent between the clerical historian and the lay professor, with the cleric still disposed to trace a Christian and European line from early times to the present day and the professor taking more pride in following whatever line is indicated by language and archaeology. Each draws on Abela according to his needs, but the cleric is still much closer to his 17th century predecessor than the professor is. One reason for this is that though Abela could be described as a religious historian, he could never be described as an historian of the Maltese. His true interest was in the people who were the least Maltese of all - the upper class and the higher clergy.” (Ibid, 22-23.)

⁶⁷ J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *ibid*, 164.