Cándida Ferrero Hernández/Óscar de la Cruz Palma (ed.): *Vitae Mahometi*.
Reescritura e invención en la literatura cristiana de controversia (Nueva Roma 41), Madrid: CSIC, 2014, 386 pp., 18 figures

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It is clear that the convention of Christian biographies of the Muslims' Prophet originated in the Middle Ages and lasted far beyond them. At first glance, it was not a particularly sophisticated group of narrations although it was bound to adhere to a certain canon which usually included a list of literary topoi such as Muḥammad's birth in a pagan milieu, his contacts with a Christian teacher (a sorcerer, according to some sources), his marriage to a rich widow, his preaching being preceded by a series of disturbing seizures and so forth. Some of those motifs were a sheer commonplace, constructed around the principle of taking a Christian virtue, such as truthfulness, and juxtaposing it with a vice, in this example lying, and then recounting an episode of Muḥammad's life that would prove him to be inherently immoral. Interestingly enough, there was another group of motifs that derived from the Islamic tradition, episodes which were translated and culturally adapted in order to fit into the moulds of Christian-Muslim polemics.

The genre of Christian biographies of the Muslims' Prophet has long been the subject of study for the research group Islamolatina,¹ and especially of one of its most distinguished members, Óscar de la Cruz Palma. Thus, the volume under review collects the proceedings of a conference that took place in 2013 at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona under the auspices of the research group in question.

It can be assumed that the objective of this collection of essays was to present the Christian biographies of Muḥammad within a broader context, tackling them from various perspectives, not only from the premise of literary analysis. The authors who collaborated in the proceedings constitute an international and heterogeneous group of scholars, although the majority comes from the field of Latin Philology.

In the opening chapter by Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, titled "Trazos maniqueos en el retrato de Muḥammad realizado por autores siríacos y árabes cristianos" (p. 25–39), the author strives to trace the trajectory of themes such as خاتم النبيين

¹ Homepage: <http://grupsderecerca.uab.cat/islamolatina/>.

(‘Seal of the Prophets’), a term used to indicate that according to the Muslim creed there will be no further prophets after Muḥammad, or “παράκλητος” (‘Paraclete’), in order to pinpoint how these concepts percolated into Christian literature. The study “Un gioco di specchi. Interazioni e influenze tra l’immagine di Musaylima nella letteratura islamica e l’immagine di Muḥammad nella letteratura latina medievale” by Michelina Di Cesare (p. 41–53) is one of the few chapters, along with the one previously mentioned and that authored by Roberto Tottoli, which deal directly with Arabic sources. Di Cesare demonstrates the analogies between the narratives about Musaylima who was a false prophet from the Muslim vantage point and Muḥammad whose prophethood was false according to the Christian authors. Therefore, according to Di Cesare, the Islamic biographer Ibn Ishāq, whose *Sīra* was one of the most popular sources for Christian authors, through his description of Musaylima actually influenced the way in which Muḥammad was portrayed in the Latin texts.

The section of essays devoted to the medieval Christian sources begins with Óscar de la Cruz Palma’s contribution titled “Mahoma latino. La percepción del Profeta Muḥammad en las fuentes medievales. Primeras notas” (p. 55–68). In this study, de la Cruz Palma presents some general observations regarding the collection of European sources in addition to their classification into typologies. Kenneth Baxter Wolf in his study “Tocando con sordina. Recuperando una imagen cristiana alternativa del Islam” (p. 69–84) explains how Christian authors such as Eulogio de Córdoba felt at a loss whilst trying to present Christians as martyrs in al-Andalus under Muslim rule. What follows is the study “Comentari estilístic de la ‘Vita Mahumeti’ d’Embricó de Mainz” by Josep M. Escolà dedicated to Embrico of Mainz’s poem *Vita Mahumeti* (p. 85–99). Escolà provides us with a literary commentary, generously sprinkled with textual quotations, in which he highlights the characteristics he detects as pertaining to the cultural Renaissance of the twelfth century. Eustaquio Sánchez Salor aims at presenting a wider panorama of Latin texts dealing with Muḥammad. The range of authors covered in his contribution “La ‘Concordia contrariorum’ y los textos sobre Mahoma en el siglo XII” (p. 101–123) stretches from Peter Abelard through Peter the Venerable to Goliardic poetry.

Sánchez Salor stresses the fact that Christian authors regarded the Qur’ān as an authoritative source of information, and indeed, a volume devoted to Christian biographies of Muḥammad cannot dispense with papers that tackle the Latin translations of the Qur’ān. Two studies springing from research on the translations of the Qur’ān into Latin are Ulisse Cecini’s “The Qur’ān translator Mark of Toledo and Muḥammad. Between polemic and ‘philology’” (p. 125–138) and Roberto Tottoli’s “La vida de Muḥammad y sus fuentes en las obras de Ludovico Marracci, según sus manuscritos personales” (p. 291–304). Cecini

deals with the life of the Prophet as described in the prologue to the second Latin translation of the Qur'ān, delivered in 1210 by the canon Mark of Toledo.² On the other hand, Tottoli describes in his study the Arabic sources that the author of the last Latin translation of the Qur'ān had at hand while compiling Muḥammad's biography in the preface to his translation (1698).

Jaume Medina in his essay "Mafumet. La seva vida i els seus ensenyaments segons el 'Llibre de doctrina pueril' de Ramon Llull" (p. 139–148) underscores the typically polemical motives in chapter 71 of Llull's work *Llibre de doctrina pueril*. Moving from Catalan to Italian literature, Roberta Morosini analyzes in her paper "'Sapientia vincit malitiam'. Informing and deforming knowledge. Dante's 'Inferno' XXVIII and the anti-Muḥammad legend of the bull and the holy book. A schismatic ... in the 'ream'" the significance of Muḥammad's apparition in Dante's *Inferno* XXVIII (p. 149–168). Thereupon, Antoni Biosca identifies in "Biografia de Mahoma en la 'Disputatio Abutalib'" the sources for Muḥammad's biography in the *Disputatio Abutalib*, an alleged Latin translation of a correspondence between a rabbi and a "faqih" in which both Judaism and Islam end up losing (p. 169–177). The contribution "Rodrigo Fernández de Santaella, 'Comissarius Sanctissimae Cruciatæ' en Sicilia. En torno a la copia mandada sacar por él del 'Tractatus contra principales errores perfidi Machometi' del Cardenal Juan de Torquemada" by José María Maestre presents some documents referring to Rodrigo Fernández de Santaella and his copy of the *Tractatus contra principales errores perfidi Machometi*, a fifteenth-century treatise by Cardinal Juan de Torquemada (p. 179–208).

The rest of the volume is devoted mainly to sixteenth and seventeenth-century literature with the exception of the last chapter that focuses on a nineteenth-century text. In "Observaciones sobre Juan Andrés y su libro 'Confusión dela secta Mahomatica' (València, 1515)", Hartmut Bobzin emphasizes the Islamic undercurrents visible in Juan Andrés' *Confusión dela secta Mahometica* (p. 209–222). Bobzin's work can be regarded as a call for further studies on Juan Andrés and his polemical treatise.³ In the essay "Muḥammad e la cerva di Quinto Sertorio" (p. 223–235), Pier Mattia Tommasino argues for medieval historiography being adjacent to but independent of religious polemics. In

2 The critical edition of this translation has been recently published by NADIA PETRUS PONS: *Alchoranus latinus quem transtulit Marcus canonicus Toletanus*. Estudio y edición crítica (Nueva Roma 44), Madrid 2016.

3 See, for example, RYAN SZPIECH: "A witness of their own nation. On the influence of Juan Andrés", in *After conversion. Iberia and the emergence of modernity*, ed. by MERCEDES GARCÍA-ARENAL (Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700), Leiden/Boston 2016, 174–198; TERESA SOTO/KATARZYNA K. STARCZEWSKA: "Authority, philology and conversion under the aegis of Martín García", in *ibid.*, 199–228.

“Mahoma como personaje teatral de una comedia prohibida del siglo de oro, ‘Vida y muerte del falso profeta Mahoma’” (p. 237–254) Cándida Ferrero Hernández highlights a Spanish Golden Age comedy titled *Vida y muerte del falso profeta Mahoma*. Patrick Henriët in his study “Mahomet expulsé d’Espagne par Isidore de Séville. Sur la postérité moderne d’un épisode hagiographique rejeté par les Bollandistes” (p. 255–275) presents a literary topos of Muḥammad visiting, albeit briefly, the Iberian Peninsula. An appendix follows the study with the relevant quotations extracted from the early modern sources. In “Muḥammad y ‘The Order of the Inspirati’. A propósito de algunos retratos del profeta derivados de un dibujo de Rembrandt” (p. 277–289), Fernando González Muñoz analyzes a twist in the way Northern European Christians perceived Muḥammad’s prophetic capacity. By using a group of the Prophet’s portraits as a guiding thread, the author explains how gradually Muḥammad’s ability to perceive messages from the Other World was considered authentic, even though brought on by evil spirits. In “Una ‘Vita’ novelada de Mahoma en un manuscrito neogriego del Monte Atos” (p. 305–338), Pedro Bádenas de la Peña provides us with a Spanish translation and edition of a Greek narrative about Muḥammad. In his introduction, he relates the text to the visionary and eschatological Greek nationalism of the nineteenth century.

Two main issues arise upon reading this volume. Firstly, this publication would greatly benefit from highlighting the continuities and parallels between the variety of the presented texts. It is left to the reader to decipher which sources were influential or which did not circulate widely, or to strive at grouping them according to their level of hostility or accuracy with regard to the Muslim tradition. This lack of guidance is also felt in more trivial details such as the transcription of proper names, in Spanish texts e. g. we can encounter both Muḥammad and Mahoma or Jadiya and Khadija (especially p. 317).⁴ Secondly, one feels that the Muslim point of view is lacking; the volume does not mention any examples of Muslim polemics towards Christians nor does it bring forward any Muslim responses to Christian virulence. Moreover, none of the contributing authors comes from a Muslim or Arabic background. Certainly, cultural diversity is not a requirement for fruitful scholarly debate but it is beneficial and constructive when the topic is cultural interactions. Nevertheless, with these caveats in mind, it is a useful book for anyone interested in the history of Christian-Muslim relations, in the literature of religious polemics, and in the European circulation of knowledge. Finally, the collection is also complemented by a rich bibliography of texts and studies as well as relevant websites.

⁴ This example comes from a translation from Greek. Nevertheless, it remains unclear if the original offered two versions of the name of the Prophet’s first wife.