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## THE IMAGE OF MUHAMMAD IN RICCOLDO DA MONTE DI CROCE'S *CONTRA LEGEM SARRACENORUM*\*

The Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula, which had advanced since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and the Crusades in the Middle East increased the exposure of Islam and Judaism to Western Christianity. The efforts to convert the Muslims and Jews who lived in the conquered territories intensified. This phenomenon resulted in the emergence of extensive Latin polemic literature, which was primarily represented by Petrus Alphonsi, Peter the Venerable, Peter of Poitiers, or Ramon Marti. This was also the time when the Latin translations of the Quran were penned by Robert of Ketton and Mark of Toledo<sup>1</sup>, and the Mozarabic polemic literature was

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<sup>1</sup> The translation by Mark of Toledo has recently been published in a modern critical edition, vide: *Titulo Alchoranus Latinus, quem transtulit Marcus canonicus Toletanus. Estudio y edición crítica*, ed. N. PETRUS PONS, Barcelona 2008. Robert of Ketton's translation, on the other hand, is available in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century edition included in the collection *Machumetis Sarracenorum principis vita ac doctrina omnis, quae & Ismahelitarum lex, & Alcoranum dicitur, ex Arabica lingua ante C C C C annos in Latinam translata, nuncque demum ad gloriam Domini Jesu, & ad christianae fidei confirmationem, doctorum ac piorum aliquot virorum, nostraeque adeò religionis orthodoxae antistitum studio & auctoritate, velut è tenebris in lucem protacta atque edita. Quo volumine perlecto, pius & studiosus lector fatebitur, librum nullum potuisse vel opportunè vel tempestivè magis edi hoc rerum christianarum & turcicarum statu. Adjectae quoque sunt annotationes, confutationes, Sarracenorum ac rerum turcicarum à D C C C C annis ad nostra usque tempora memorabilium historiae, ex probatissimis autoribus tum arabibus, tum latinis & graecis, quorum catalogum versa in singulis tomis pagina prima reperies. Item, Philippi Melanchtonis, viri doctis. praemonitio ad lectorem, cum primis pia & erudita. Theodori Bibliandri, sacrarum literarum in Ecclesia Tigurina professoris, viri doctissimi, pro Alcorani editione apologia, multa eruditione & pietate referta, lectuque dignissima: quippe in qua multis ac validiss. argumentis & vitiligatorum calumniis respondetur, & quam non solum utilis, sed & necessaria hoc praesertim saeculo sit Alcorani editio, demonstratur. Cum Caesare Majestatis gratia & privilegio ad septennium*, ed. T. BIBLIANDER, Basel 1543. On the Latin translations of Quran vide: Z. PENTEK, *Ze średniowiecznej recepcji Koranu wśród chrześcijan. Polemiści, tłumacze i wydawcy*, [in:] *Cognitioni*

translated. Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, the author of the anti-Islamic treatise entitled *Contra legem Sarracenorum*<sup>2</sup>, is considered as one of the key polemicists of these times.

Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (ca. 1240–1320) was a Dominican friar who joined the monastery in 1267 and came from the area around Florence. In 1288, he set out for the Middle East to do missionary work and stayed there until approximately 1300, when he returned to Italy. The Dominican devoted his stay in the Muslim countries largely to learning the principles of Islam from within and studying the Arabic language. As a result of the experience he gained in that part of the world, Riccoldo left behind prolific literary output. The works by the Italian Dominican include –aside from *Contra legem Sarracenorum – Epistole ad ecclesiam triumphantem*, a collection of letters written in the form of a lamentation in response to the Crusaders' loss of Acre; *Liber peregrinationis*, a kind of diary from the friar's stay in the Orient; and *Libellus ad nationes orientales*, a polemic treatise targeted at Eastern Christians (the Jacobites and Nestorians)<sup>3</sup>.

*Contra legem Sarracenorum* was written soon after the Dominican had returned to Italy. The fact that a large number of manuscripts has been preserved, that the treatise was referenced by later polemicists (e.g. Nicholas of Cusa), and that it was widely translated (from Latin to Greek, from Greek back to Latin, and later in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to German; the treatise was also quickly translated into Spanish, and there is a Slavonic version based on the Greek translation), all suggest that it is one of the most influential Western medieval anti-Islamic polemics. When writing it, Riccoldo used the Arabic-language Quran (whose manuscript he owned<sup>4</sup>) while

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*gestorum. Studia z dziejów średniowiecza dedykowane Profesorowi Jerzemu Strzelczykowi*, ed. D.A. SIKORSKI, A.M. WYRWA, Poznań–Warszawa 2006, p. 61–64.

<sup>2</sup> The critical edition of the Latin text *Contra legem Sarracenorum* was developed by Jean-Marie Mérigoux, vide: RICCOLDO DA MONTE DI CROCE, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, ed. J.-M. MÉRIGOUX, [in:] J.-M. MÉRIGOUX, *L'ouvrage d'un frère prêcheur florentin en Orient à la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le 'Contra legem Sarracenorum' de Riccoldo da Monte di Croce*, MDom n.s. 17, 1986, p. 60–142 (cetera: CLS). There is also an Italian translation by Emilio Panella, vide: RICCOLDO DA MONTE DI CROCE, O DA FIRENZE, *Contra legem sarracenorum*, trans. E. PANELLA, <http://www.e-theca.net/emiliopanel-la/riccoldo2/cls000.htm> [28 IV 2019].

<sup>3</sup> On the life and work of Riccoldo da Monte di Croce vide: T.E. BURMAN, *Riccoldo da Monte di Croce*, [in:] *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, vol. IV, (1200–1350), ed. D. THOMAS, A. MALLETT, Leiden–Boston 2012, p. 678–691; M. DI CESARE, *Riccoldo of Monte di Croce, Letters to the Triumphant Church; Against the Law of the Saracens; Book of the Pilgrimage*, [in:] EADEM, *The Pseudo-Historical Image of the Prophet Muhammad in Medieval Latin Literature. A Repertory*, Berlin–Boston 2012 [= SGKAKiO, 26], p. 381–382; R. GEORGE-TVRTKOVIĆ, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq. Riccoldo da Montecroce's Encounter with Islam*, Turnhout 2012, p. 1–42; J.-M. MÉRIGOUX, *L'ouvrage d'un frère...*, p. 1–58; E. PANELLA, *Ricerche su Riccoldo da Monte di Croce*, AFP 58, 1988, p. 5–85; J.V. TOLAN, *Saracens. Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*, New York 2002, p. 245–254.

<sup>4</sup> This manuscript has been preserved until this day and is found at the National Library of France (MS Arabe 384), vide: T.E. BURMAN, *How an Italian Friar Read His Arabic Qur'an*, DS 125, 2007, p. 93–94.

also relying on its translation by Mark of Toledo. In addition, the Dominican used the Latin translation of the anonymous Mozarabic polemic treatise *Liber denudationis* extensively<sup>5</sup>. Undoubtedly, Riccoldo must have been familiar with the work of Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle as well. He may also have used other sources, such as *Doctrina Mahumet*, attributed to Muhammad, *Summa totius haeresis Sarracenorum* and *Liber contra sectam sive haeresim Sarracenorum* by Peter the Venerable, *Explanatio simboli Apostolorum* by Ramon Marti, the anonymous treatise *Quadruplex reprobatio*, or *De statu Sarracenorum* by William of Tripoli<sup>6</sup>.

*Contra legem Sarracenorum* represented a didactic method developed by the Dominicans, aimed at converting Muslims and Jews. It was based on refuting Islamic and Judaic dogmas while using rational scholarly arguments along with a simultaneous assumption that true faith could not be proven with mere intellect, although it did not stand at odds with it. In order to educate friars on this perspective, special schools were founded and polemic treatises were created as argumentative guides<sup>7</sup>. In the opening chapters, the author laid out the basic methodical assumptions of his work, reasoning that before you can understand something, you have to believe it, and that lecturing a religious Muslim on the tenets of Christianity will not be successful unless you first raise their doubts<sup>8</sup>. Riccoldo also applied a polemic framework that was present in such works as *Liber contra sectam sive haeresim Sarracenorum* by Peter the Venerable, a Benedictine abbot of Cluny who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and initiated the translation of numerous Muslim sources into Latin. The foundation of this approach was a rational demonstration that in fact, the Quran and its prophet, Muhammad, recognized the authority of the Holy Scripture. Furthermore, the framework involved using Scripture along with logical and moral arguments to negate the truthfulness of Muhammad's teachings, and ultimately, proving the superiority of the Christian faith over Islam<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas E. Burman edited the entirety of the Latin text of the treatise and translated it into English, vide: *An Edition and Translation of 'Liber denudationis siue ostensionis aut patefaciens' (alias 'Contra-rietas alfolica')*, ed. et trans. T.E. BURMAN, [in:] IDEM, *Religious Polemic and the Intellectual History of the Mozarabs, c. 1050–1200*, Leiden 1994, p. 240–286 (cetera: LD).

<sup>6</sup> On the sources and reception of *Contra legem Sarracenorum* vide: T.E. BURMAN, *Two Dominicans, a Lost Manuscript, and Medieval Christian Thought on Islam*, [in:] *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference. Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean*, ed. R. SZPIECH, New York 2015, p. 79–87; IDEM, *How an Italian Friar...*, p. 93–109; IDEM, *Religious Polemic and...*, p. 37–61; IDEM, *Riccoldo...*, p. 688–690; N. DANIEL, *Islam and the West. The Making of an Image*, Edinburgh 1962, p. 239; L. ENSIS, *Preface*, [in:] RICCOLDO OF MONTE CROCE, *Refutation of the Koran*, trans. L. ENSIS, London 2010, p. III–V; R. GEORGE-TVRTKOVIĆ, *A Christian Pilgrim...*, p. 25–27; J.-M. MÉRIGOUX, *L'ouvrage d'un frère...*, p. 27–58; E. PANELLA, *Ricerche...*, p. 19–38.

<sup>7</sup> On the subject of the Dominican polemic strategy vide: J.V. TOLAN, *Saracens...*, p. 233–245.

<sup>8</sup> CLS, III, 3–21, p. 68.

<sup>9</sup> Vide: A. CERBO, *Cultura e religione islamica nella letteratura italiana del Trecento*, [in:] *Europa e Islam tra i secoli XIV e XVI (Europe and Islam between 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, vol. I, ed. M. BERNARDINI, C. BORRELLI, A. CERBO, E.S. GARCIA, Napoli 2002, p. 38; R. GEORGE-TVRTKOVIĆ, *A Christian Pilgrim...*, p. 27; J.V. TOLAN, *Saracens...*, p. 252.

The author of *Contra legem Sarracenorum* considered the negation of the Quran and its teachings as the central element of criticism targeting the Islamic doctrine. He also relied on the extra-Quranic tradition (mainly via *Liber denudationis*), largely to enhance the multi-layered criticism of the Holy Islamic book<sup>10</sup>.

Scaffolding the treatise around the criticism of the Quran had an undeniable impact on the image of Muhammad painted by Riccoldo. The criticism of the prophet in *Contra legem Sarracenorum* was usually not the primary goal but was generally aimed at undermining the authority of the book revealed to Muhammad and its teachings. In addition, the unambiguously didactic and classical nature of the author's work influenced his attitude towards the figure of Muhammad. Individual chapters offered a set of responses to specific problems relating to the Quran and Muslim doctrine, which could be encountered in a debate with educated Muslims. Argumentation of a uniform and repetitive nature tended to be useful when discussing distinct issues featured in Riccoldo's criticism of the Quran. This involved copying certain threads, including those directly concerning the person of Muhammad, in subsequent chapters<sup>11</sup>. All of the above produced a rather blurry image of the prophet in Riccoldo's work.

According to Michelina Di Cesare, several types of representation of Muhammad (a false prophet, the anti-saint, the precursor to the Antichrist, the final manifestation of the Antichrist, a pagan deity, or a heresiarch) were dominant in the medieval Latin literature. However, the researcher considers this division as inadequate due to the fact that these types overlap. She is more inclined to classify the literary representations of the prophet based on the subject and chronology of the work where his figure appears (in the case of Riccoldo's work, it ought to fall in line with the pseudohistorical representations of the prophet)<sup>12</sup>. Despite the unquestionable usefulness of these observations, it seems that at least three autonomous, if overlapping, dimensions linked to the image of Muhammad emerge from *Contra legem Sarracenorum*: a heresiarch, a false prophet, and a bad human being.

<sup>10</sup> On the Quran as the main subject of Riccoldo's criticism and the author's extremely limited use of the extra-Quranic tradition vide: T.E. BURMAN, *Two Dominicans...*, p. 81–82; R. GEORGE-TVRTKOVIĆ, *A Christian Pilgrim...*, p. 82–88.

<sup>11</sup> The didactic and repetitive method was negatively evaluated by N. Daniel, who concludes that the argumentation developed by Riccoldo da Monte di Croce is too profuse, the repetitions are redundant and at times contain elements of low reliability. However, the author seems to ignore the fact that such a methodical and problematic approach, even if literarily clumsy, could have rendered *Contra legem Sarracenorum* effective in potential polemic debates, vide: N. DANIEL, *Islam and the West...*, p. 239.

<sup>12</sup> M. DI CESARE, *The Prophet in the Book: Images of Muhammad in Western Medieval Book Culture*, [in:] *Constructing the Image of Muhammad in Europe*, ed. A. SHALEM, Berlin–Boston 2013, p. 10–11. A more limited palette of dominant types has been offered by John V. Tolan, who distinguished the image of Muhammad as a deity and a heresiarch, noting, however, that these types could undergo modifications, vide: J.V. TOLAN, *European Accounts of Muhammad's Life*, [in:] *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ed. J.E. BROCKOPP, Cambridge 2010 [= CCRe], p. 226.

In the first chapter of his work devoted to the similarities between Islam a number of Christian heresies, Riccoldo examined the prophet through a very traditional lens, showing him as a heresiarch. The approach wherein Islam was treated as yet another Christian heresy was characteristic of the polemic texts written in Byzantium during the Muslim expansion – a quintessential example of this type of literature were the works by John of Damascus – but also in a great deal of later Latin polemics, including those written by Dominicans<sup>13</sup>. Although Riccoldo treated Islam as a separate religious system and he used a noticeably different tone, he did not depart from this line of thinking altogether. For instance, Riccoldo claimed that Muhammed is the accumulation of all the villainy that the devil had spread via previous heresies. He then moved on to list all the similarities<sup>14</sup>. This thread, however, is only a marginal element in the work otherwise focused on the criticism of the Quran, and not on expounding Christian dogmas to Muslims who were unprepared for it. Therefore, he does not make any more references to it in the following chapters, which have a rather strong practical application<sup>15</sup>.

Muhammad, however, is featured in the majority of the chapters in *Contra legem Sarracenorum* as a false prophet while in some fragments, he is directly presented as Satan's emissary. This approach, whose strongest accent is put on presenting the founder of Islam as a usurper of prophetic features, became prevalent from the 12<sup>th</sup> century in the Western texts devoted to Islam<sup>16</sup>. In chapter 13, Riccoldo concludes that Satan – knowing that after Heraclius' defeat of the pagan Persians, Christianity's position was too firm to be reverted to pure idolatry – decided to create something that would constitute an intermediate system between the New and Old Testament: the Quran. For this purpose, he chose a diabolical man (*hominem diabolicum*) – Muhammad. Satan would have rather entrusted this task to someone of a good reputation. Similarly, he would have chosen a different animal than a snake to tempt the first man (one that could have concealed its villainy more easily). However, since he was not allowed to do that, he was limited to flooding the world with teachings whose false nature was easily exposed, largely due to the vile person of Muhammed. Having enriched himself via his marriage to a widow, Muhammad wanted to become the leader of the Arabs but they did not want him

<sup>13</sup> I.S. LEDWOŃ, *Średniowieczna apologia chrześcijaństwa wobec islamu*, PST 29, 2015, p. 200–204; J.V. TOLAN, *Saracens...*, p. 135–169.

<sup>14</sup> *CLS*, I, 3–77, p. 63–67.

<sup>15</sup> In this context, it is surprising that M. Di Cesare devoted quite significant attention to this depiction (considering that her second work cited earlier criticizes this type of classification) in her rather sparse characterization of Muhammed's image in *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, vide: M. DI CESARE, *Riccoldo of Monte di Croce...*, p. 382.

<sup>16</sup> Vide: J.A.H.M. CRUZ, *Popular Attitudes Toward Islam in Medieval Europe*, [in:] *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe Perception of Other*, ed. D.R. BLANKS, M. FRASSETTO, New York 1999, p. 65; N. DANIEL, *Islam and the West...*, p. 17–20; J.V. Tolán emphasized that the image of Muhammed as a false prophet was present in *Contra legem Sarracenorum* but he did not analyze it, vide: J.V. TOLAN, *European Accounts...*, p. 236.

due to his bad reputation. This is when he supposedly decided to become a prophet. Epilepsy, from which he purportedly suffered<sup>17</sup>, made his goal easier. He used his seizures to pretend that it was an angel speaking to him. Since he was not an educated man, the devil surrounded him with a variety of heretics who helped him create his teachings<sup>18</sup>. Chapter 10, on the other hand, talks about the devil prompting Muhammad to spread Islam by the sword and kill the defiant and the infidels<sup>19</sup>.

An important argument (extensively discussed in chapter 3), which according to Riccoldo attested to the falsehood of Muhammad's revelation, was the fact that neither the Old nor the New Testament contained any announcement of his coming. This contradicted the Biblical practice wherein each subsequent prophet was announced by the previous one. Moreover, each prophet was supposed to announce the coming of Christ. While no prophet announces Muhammad, there are warnings against false prophets. Riccoldo makes a reference to Jesus' words, according to which John the Baptist was the last of the prophets after whom no more laws were revealed. In light of these assumptions, Muhammad could not be a prophet but only a fraud. Applying argumentation based on the Bible would obviously be absurd to Muslims; although they recognize the Old and the New Testaments as the word of God, they believe that it has been distorted by Jews and Christians, and as a result, omits Muhammad<sup>20</sup>. This problem, however, could be solved by applying the aforementioned method of the prophet himself affirming the message of the Bible<sup>21</sup>. He was supposed to instruct Muslims who were in doubt to seek advice from those who had previously read the Book – that is, Jews and Christians. According to Riccoldo, this was to signify that Muhammad fully recognized the authority of the Bible because otherwise, he would not have instructed Muslims to seek advice from those followers of the religion for whom the Bible was (or part of it was) a holy book. Furthermore, Muhammad supposedly said that he would not engage in settling disputes between Jews because they already had their own

<sup>17</sup> The story of Muhammed as an epileptic was quite widespread in the Christian part of Europe. It probably first appeared in Theophanes the Confessor's *Chronicle*, and was disseminated thanks to the Latin translations of his work (a similar mention is also encountered in *Liber denudationis*, which was used by Riccoldo, vide: *LD*, IV, 7). The fact that Riccoldo referenced it seems rather unwise from the point of view of polemics because it was not based on the Islamic tradition, and as a result, it was unlikely to convince a religious Muslim, vide: N. DANIEL, *Islam and the West...*, p. 239; J.V. TOLAN, *European Accounts...*, p. 227.

<sup>18</sup> *CLS*, XIII, 11–40, p. 117–118.

<sup>19</sup> *CLS*, X, 17–24, p. 109–110.

<sup>20</sup> Riccoldo references the fragment of the Quran, according to which Jesus in fact announced the coming of Muhammed: *Euangelizo uobis de legato Dei qui ueniet post me, et nomen eius Machomettus*, cf. the Quran, LXI, 6. According to William Montgomery Watt original quranic accusations intentionally concerned misinterpretations of some passages of the Scripture made by Jews and Christians. With time Muslim accusations evolved into opinion that Jews and Christians changed and corrupted original text, vide: W. MONTGOMERY WATT, *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford 1956, p. 205–206.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the Quran, V, 42–43; X, 94.

law sent from God<sup>22</sup>. This, on the other hand, was to prove that he affirmed the Old Testament. It led to the following statement: if Muhammad, recognized by Muslims as the unchallengeable authority, deemed the contents of the Old and the New Testament as absolutely true, the followers of Islam should also consider them as such. Consequently, if the Bible provides arguments undermining the truthfulness of Muhammad's teachings, Muslims should accept them. The cited examples and logic used in this fragment by the author of *Contra legem Sarracenorum* were not a product of his independent reflections. Nearly identical argumentation had previously been used by the creator of *Liber denudationis*, and Riccoldo only adapted it for his purposes<sup>23</sup>.

Riccoldo da Monte di Croce believed that the falsehood of Muhammad as a prophet was evidenced by the fact that he performed no miracles and that he resorted to violence in order to spread his faith. Chapter 7 discusses this issue most extensively. Muhammad claimed that God forbid him from performing miracles so he would not suffer what other miracle-performing prophets suffered, still unable to convince the disbelievers. In this situation, Allah's emissary was to spread Islam with the power of his army<sup>24</sup>. This was contradictory to the claims made by Muslims themselves who argued that the story in which Muhammad supposedly cut the moon in half could be classified a miracle. The lack of miracles was to render Muhammad completely unreliable compared with other prophets, such as Moses or Elijah who performed them in abundance. According to Riccoldo, miracles would have attracted people more effectively than coercion. Moreover, using military power and violence cast Muhammad in a very negative light compared with other prophets, who reached their goals peacefully. The author of *Contra legem Sarracenorum* also notices a certain contradiction in Muhammad's supposed actions: on the one hand, he refused to perform miracles; on the other, such an event as the so-called nocturnal journey, which the prophet was to make from Mecca to Jerusalem on the back of a fantastic mount named Al-Buraq to ascend into Heaven<sup>25</sup>, could be treated in the category of a miracle. In this case, Riccoldo based his deduction regarding Muhammad's lack of miracle-performing powers on the contents of *Liber denudationis*<sup>26</sup> (he quoted the Quranic verse on the prohibition to perform miracles, made a similar reference to Muhammad's journey to Jerusalem, referenced the supposed cutting the moon in half and condemned the violence-based conversion). Other fragments of *Contra legem Sarracenorum* also touch upon Muhammad's non-performance of miracles and his embarking on the path of violence that was worthy of condemnation<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> *CLS*, III, 5–53, p. 70–72.

<sup>23</sup> *Vide*: *LD*, III, 1–3, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the Quran, XVII, 59; XXI, 5–7.

<sup>25</sup> *CLS*, VII, 3–95, p. 87–90.

<sup>26</sup> *Vide*: *LD*, III, 5; IV, 1, 2, 6, 7.

<sup>27</sup> *CLS*, I, 78–79, 99–101, p. 67–68; XV, 301–303, p. 135.

Chapter 4, devoted to the criticism of the literary dimension of the Quran, discusses the aforementioned story (which comes from the extra-Quranic tradition) about the prophet's cutting the moon in half. Asked by his companions to demonstrate a miracle, Muhammad split the moon in half, tucked its hemispheres in his shirt sleeves, and purportedly put it back together. This motif was considered by Riccoldo as a pure fairytale, almost frivolous and at odds with the literary style known from the Bible, which the author deemed to be one of the indicators of the revelation's truthfulness<sup>28</sup>. However, in this fragment, Riccoldo commits a serious logical fallacy (most probably due to a non-reflexive adaptation of the approach used in *Liber denudationis*). Specifically, he uses this story to criticize the literary dimension of the Quran while being aware that this narrative is merely an extra-Quranic commentary on a deeply enigmatic verse<sup>29</sup>. This miracle is again mentioned in chapter 15, where it is described as outright impossible<sup>30</sup>.

Chapter 14 is entirely devoted to the description of the nocturnal journey, which is a commentary on the verse according to which Muhammad was transferred from Mecca to Jerusalem so God could bestow his blessing upon him<sup>31</sup>. The narrative about the instant journey of the prophet on the back of a fantastic mount known as Al-Buraq and Muhammad's experiences in Heaven was treated by Riccoldo as fairytale-like and incoherent with the teachings of Islam's founder. It was to stem from the fact that Muhammad, who described himself elsewhere as an ordinary man, simultaneously puts himself above angels, and, although he claims that he performs no miracles, he reaches Jerusalem and Heaven in a way that could undoubtedly be deemed as miraculous<sup>32</sup>. However, the inconsistency which Riccoldo finds between the story about the nocturnal journey and the declaration about the non-performance of miracles does not seem well-grounded. The narrative does not suggest that the journey and Muhammad's stay in Heaven, despite bearing the obvious marks of a miracle, were an effect of the prophet's miraculous powers but merely that their supernatural character was a result of God's doing as well as his helpers', such as archangel Gabriel or Al-Buraq. This story is also discussed in one of the chapters of *Liber denudationis*<sup>33</sup>. Most probably, it was the main inspiration for Riccoldo, although the Dominican might have learned this story in a different way. At that time, the story about the nocturnal journey was

<sup>28</sup> *CLS*, IV, 53–62, p. 78. J.-P. Mérioux believed that Riccoldo referenced the story based on *Liber denudationis*, vide: *CLS*, footnote 19, p. 78–79. Although a large section of the narrative demonstrates an unambiguous dependence from the Mozarabic treatise, the fact that *Liber denudationis* does not contain the information about how the moon was put together may raise some doubts. This suggests that Riccoldo may have been familiar with another tradition, cf. *LD*, IX, 11–16.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the Quran, LIV, 1.

<sup>30</sup> *CLS*, XV, 303, p. 135.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the Quran, XVII, 1.

<sup>32</sup> *CLS*, XIV, 3–85, p. 122–125.

<sup>33</sup> Vide: *LD*, XII, 1–7.



widely known in the North-Italic intellectual circles (the Latin translation of the story known as *Liber scale Muhammadi* and created by Bonaventure de Siena already existed), which is evidenced by Dante's work, for instance<sup>34</sup>.

Riccoldo da Monte di Croce is convinced that in the Quran, when Muhammad commanded belief in God and his messenger<sup>35</sup>, he postulated equaling his person with God. Such an interpretation would be at odds with the prohibition on worshipping anyone else but God, articulated by the founder of Islam as well as with the actions of other prophets, none of whom made similar claims<sup>36</sup>.

The falsehood of Muhammad's revelation was also supposedly evidenced by the fact that in the Quran itself, the figure of the prophet was presented in a much less laudable manner than that of Jesus. In order to demonstrate the inferiority of Islam's founder in relation to Christ, in chapter 15, Riccoldo performed a comparison of the Quranic contents that reference them, again heavily leaning on the contents of *Liber denudationis*<sup>37</sup>. While Jesus was the Son of God, presaged to his mother via the Annunciation and consecrated with the Holy Spirit, Muhammad was described only as an orphan and a wanderer. While Christ was the Word of God, Muhammad was merely an uncertain prophet, unable to say whether he was on the right path or what would happen to his followers after his death. Jesus came from the line of Isaac, the faithful heir to Abraham; Muhammad, on the other hand, from the line of banished Ishmael. Whereas Christ was immaculate and performed miracles, Muhammad was a sinful man who did not perform miracles. Jesus was also presented as a great teacher inspired by the Holy Spirit, which put him in contrast with the illiterate Muhammad. According to the Quran, Jesus did not die and, as a result, did not rise from the dead. Instead, he was ascended into Heaven by God (*Deus assumpsit eum*). Muhammad, by contrast, died (several sentences earlier, Riccoldo cites a belief that his death was not very dignified – the prophet was supposedly poisoned by a Jewish woman)<sup>38</sup>. Also in this analysis, Riccoldo da Monte di Croce was not impervious to several logical inaccuracies. He based his value judgement of Isaac and Ishmael's bloodlines on the argumentation drawn from the Bible (cited from *Liber denudationis*), and not the Quran<sup>39</sup>. The inclusion of Muhammad's supposed poisoning is also extra-Quranic in nature.

<sup>34</sup> A. CERBO, *Cultura e religione islamica...*, p. 34–35.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the Quran, IV, 136.

<sup>36</sup> *CLS*, XV, 254–271, p. 133–134. Depicting Muhammed as one of the deities worshipped by Muslims, and the Islam as the idolatry, was popular in the early Western texts discussing this type of subject, such as *The Song of Roland*. The cited fragment of *Contra legem Sarracenorum* undoubtedly draws from this archaic, from the perspective of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, approach, vide J.A.H.M. CRUZ, *Popular Attitudes...*, p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> Vide: *LD*, X, 5–7; cf. also the Quran, IV, 158; V, 110; XXXIV, 24; XLVI, 9; XCIII, 6–8.

<sup>38</sup> *CLS*, XV, 273–323, p. 134–136.

<sup>39</sup> Riccoldo omitted the fact that although borne out of a slave, Ishmael was the first-born son of Abraham. Riccoldo also does not mention the Biblical foreshadowing of the greatness of Ishmael's descendants.

The most serious accusation towards Muhammad, contrasted with the perfection and mercy of Christ, was made by the author of *Contra legem Sarracenorum* in chapter 10, where he called the prophet a precursor to the Antichrist. A similar fragment also appears in chapter 1<sup>40</sup>.

In chapter 6, Muhammad is portrayed as a supposedly false prophet due to the circumstances in which he created his book. The fact that he only spoke Arabic and claimed that it was in this language that the Quran was revealed to him was to undermine his universality and mission to speak to all peoples. When certain people – a Persian, a Jew, and a Jacobite (according to Riccoldo, the latter was the legendary monk Bahira)<sup>41</sup> – came to the prophet, an accusation was made that Muhammad's teachings were not his but that they were passed on to him. He was to reply that it was not possible because the visitors did not speak Arabic. However, he could not produce a counterargument to the rebuttal that he could have heard the relevant ideas in another language and translated them into Arabic<sup>42</sup>. In chapter 13, Riccoldo emphasizes that Muhammad was illiterate and mentions again that he was tutored by Jews and Nestorians (from whom he supposedly borrowed the belief that Jesus was not God but human) as well as Jacobites (the author offers here more information about Bahira, who was to remain loyal to Muhammad until his death, which according to some, came at the hand of the prophet himself). The truthfulness of Muhammad's mission was also supposedly subverted by the fact that the prophet's successors were only able to write down the Quran after intense disputes and that there were several versions of it. In this light, the book did not deserve to refer to itself<sup>43</sup> as testimony sent from God, who will protect it (*nos descendere fecimus recordationem, et nos eam custodientes erimus*)<sup>44</sup>. The fragment regarding the Jew, the Persian, and the Jacobite was also drawn from *Liber denudationis* with some modifications made by the author of *Contra legem Sarracenorum* (e.g. in *Liber denudationis*, Bahira was not accompanied by a Jew or a Persian). Furthermore, the part referring to Bahira's death as well as Riccoldo's narration about the process of the creation of the Quran are also largely dependent on this source<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> CLS, I, 35–40, p. 65; X, 25–27, p. 110. In his article's brief note on Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (which does not refer directly to *Contra legem sarracenorum* but is implied) Fahd Mohammed Taleb Al-Olaqi suggests that the Dominican depicted the prophet as the Antichrist, vide: F.M.T. AL-OLAQI, *Western Polemic Writings about Muhammad's Prophethood*, ASSRJ 3, 5, 2016, p. 143. However, this seems inaccurate because although Riccoldo does emphasize Muhammed's supposed connotations to Satan, nowhere does he call him the Antichrist but only the Antichrist's precursor.

<sup>41</sup> On the figure of Bahira vide: A. БАҢКОУ, *The Monk Encounters the Prophe – The Story of the Encounter between Monk Bahira and Muhammad as It Is Recorded in the Syriac Manuscript of Mardin 259/2*, CRS 3, 2015, p. 349–357; B. ROGGEMA, *The Legend of Sergius Bahira. Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, Boston–Leiden 2009, p. 11–210.

<sup>42</sup> CLS, VI, 57–78, p. 85–86.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. the Quran, XV, 9.

<sup>44</sup> CLS, XIII, 41–79, p. 118–120.

<sup>45</sup> Vide: LD, V, 1, 2; VI, 1, 3.

*Contra legem Sarracenorum* also paints the image of Muhammad as simply an evil man, who not only was not inspired by God but who was a deeply immoral and degenerate person. All this stripped his teachings even of purely utilitarian value, which could be found in the works by pagan philosophers who were respected in the Christian world<sup>46</sup>.

Riccoldo viewed Muhammad as a man who did not understand the notion of virtue. He supposedly equaled happiness with fleeting sensual pleasures and material goods. Neither did he derive it from an intellectual act, as ancient philosophers did, nor from learning about God, as Christian thinkers did. The laws he created were supposedly tailored to his personal desires and appetites, and allowed him to justify his offenses (it was even specially modified for that purpose). Muhammad was a sinner who did not even try to repent for his wrongdoing, which sharply separated him from the sinful but repentant rulers of Israel, such as David or Salomon<sup>47</sup>. The thread of Muhammad's immorality is undoubtedly intertwined with the narration about his approval of violence and treating it as a key means of spreading Islam.

Riccoldo da Monte di Croce devotes a great deal of attention to Muhammad's sexual promiscuity. He cites the story in which the prophet, having felt lust for Mary the Copt, supposedly laid with her, which was disapproved of by his wives. He promised them that he would never do it again. However, it was difficult for him to deliver on this promise, as a result of which, he announced that God released him from all the promises. His wives did not deem this declaration believable, suggesting that Muhammad contrived it. Having heard it, the prophet was purported to become enraged and speak with the voice of God, ordering them to regret their words, which the terrified women did. The author references another story with a similar overtone, in which the prophet desired to marry the wife of his adopted son – Zaid. He supposedly received God's permission, who told him to fear God, and not people. When obtaining Zaid's consent to surrender his wife, the prophet was to additionally lie to him, claiming that he wanted to marry her not out of his own whim but because God himself instructed him to do so<sup>48</sup>. These stories, commenting on rather vague Quranic verses<sup>49</sup>, are quoted by the author of *Contra legem Sarracenorum* on the basis of *Liber denudationis*<sup>50</sup>. Riccoldo emphasizes that lust was generally condemned by philosophers and fathers of the Church. In contrast to them, Muhammad boasted his potency, which was rather surprising, considering the fact that he only fathered one daughter<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> M. Di Cesare noted the presence of such a depiction in *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, however, she did not analyze it in any depth, vide: M. DI CESARE, *Riccoldo of Monte di Croce...*, p. 382.

<sup>47</sup> *CLS*, V, 3–33, p. 80–81; VIII, 3–22, p. 90–91.

<sup>48</sup> *CLS*, VIII, 22–57, p. 91–92.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. the Quran, XXXIII, 37; LXVI, 1–5.

<sup>50</sup> Vide: *LD*, VII, 1–10.

<sup>51</sup> *CLS*, VIII, 58–66, p. 92. In fact, according to the Muslim tradition, the prophet fathered more offspring, however, his sons died during infancy, and his daughters in their pre-adolescent years.

To recapitulate, *Contra legem Sarracenorum* presents the image of Muhammad as a heresiarch, a false prophet, and an evil, immoral man. Though distinct, these depictions blur together and their individual elements overlap at times. Notably, Muhammad is described as an emissary of Satan and the precursor of the Antichrist, which in *Contra legem Sarracenorum* constitutes a part of a more general characteristic of the founder of Islam as a false prophet. Muhammad also appears, although to a marginal degree, as a person usurping divine features. According to M. Di Cesare, both these threads were considered as distinct types of the prophet's depiction in medieval literature, although in Riccoldo's work, they have no such character and only complement his image of a false prophet. The image of Muhammad in *Contra legem Sarracenorum* reveals an unambiguous reliance on the text of *Liber denudationis*, which provided Riccoldo da Monte di Croce with a key source of information on the subject of the prophet. The author seems to depend more on the Mozarabic treatise than on the direct text of the Quran, which is frequently quoted via none other than *Liber denudationis*<sup>52</sup>. Aside from the depictions characterized which refer directly to the prophet, Muhammad is presented in *Contra legem Sarracenorum* predominantly as the creator of the Quran (even taking into consideration the controversies surrounding the participation of his followers in the composition of the book's contents), which is the focal point of the author's interest and which Riccoldo describes as irrational and false. In this case, however, it is difficult to speak of an attempt at outlining a concrete image of Muhammad because these reflections apply less to the person of the prophet and more to the contents of the work that he supposedly created, which is largely analyzed (with certain, above-mentioned exceptions) in isolation from the figure of the creator himself.

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The only daughter who outlived her father was Fatima. Perhaps these circumstances confused Riccoldo da Monte di Croce and led him to believe that Muhammed had only one daughter. On the subject of the prophet's offspring, see M. RODINSON, *Mahomet*, <sup>4</sup>Paris 1994, p. 79–80; *Women in Islam. An Anthology from the Quran and Hadiths*, trans. et ed. N. AWDE, London–New York 2000, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Vide: T.E. BURMAN, *How an Italian Friar ...*, p. 100–105.

Kultur des islamischen Orients, 26], p. 366–379 (passages concerning prophet Muhammad selected from the edition by T.E. BURMAN).

### **RICCOLDO DA MONTE DI CROCE, *Contra legem Sarracenorum***

RICCOLDO DA MONTE DI CROCE, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, ed. J.-M. MÉRIGOUX, [in:] J.-M. MÉRIGOUX, *L'ouvrage d'un frère prêcheur florentin en Orient à la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le 'Contra legem Sarracenorum' de Riccoldo da Monte di Croce*, "Memorie Domenicane" n.s. 17, 1986, p. 60–142.

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### **Quran**

*Machumetis Sarracenorum principis vita ac doctrina omnis, quae & Ismahelitarum lex, & Alcoranum dicitur, ex Arabica lingua ante C C C C annos in Latinam translata, nunquam demum ad gloriam Domini Jesu, & ad christianae fidei confirmationem, doctorum ac piorum aliquot virorum, nostraeque adeo religionis orthodoxae antistitum studio & autoritate, velut è tenebris in lucem protacta atque edita. Quo volumine perlecto, pius & studiosus lector fatebitur, librum nullum potuisse vel opportunè vel tempestivè magis edi hoc rerum christianarum & turcicarum statu. Adjectae quoque sunt annotationes, confutationes, Sarracenorum ac rerum turcicarum à D C C C C annis ad nostra usque tempora memorabilium historiae, ex probatissimis autoribus tum arabibus, tum latinis & graecis, quorum catalogum versa in singulis tomis pagina prima reperies. Item, Philippi Melanctonis, viri doctis. praemonitio ad lectorem, cum primis pia & erudita. Theodori Bibliandri, sacrarum literarum in Ecclesia Tigurina professoris, viri doctissimi, pro Alcorani editione apologia, multa eruditione & pietate referta, lectuque dignissima: quippe in qua multis ac validiss. argumentis & vitiligatorum calumniis respondetur, & quam non solum utilis, sed & necessaria hoc praesertim saeculo sit Alcorani editio, demonstratur. Cum Caesare Majestatis gratia & privilegio ad septennium*, ed. T. BIBLIANDER, Basel 1543.

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**Abstract.** *Contra legem Sarracenorum* written by the Dominican Riccoldo da Monte di Croce was considered one of the most influential medieval Christian anti-Islamic polemics. The treatise was devoted to criticism of the Quran, which was also reflected in the way Muhammad was presented there. It offers an image of the prophet that is rather blurry considering that the author's focus is on the contents and the form of the book. Despite that, at least three distinct categories regarding the image of Muhammad can be distinguished in *Contra legem Sarracenorum*. He was portrayed, first and foremost, as a heresiarch, as a false prophet (most of the information about the prophet included in this work is used to support that view), and simply as an evil man. The image of Muhammad outlined by Riccoldo is largely dependent on the contents of the Mozarabic polemic treatise *Liber denudationis*, which the author used profusely. Muhammad is present in *Contra legem Sarracenorum* mainly in an indirect way as the creator of the teachings contained in the Quran. Generally speaking, in this specific aspect, one cannot speak of constructing an image of the prophet because in these fragments, the polemic conducted by Riccoldo focuses not so much on the person of Muhammad as on the contents of the book ascribed to him, in isolation from the creator.

**Keywords:** Christianity, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, Islam, Muhammad, anti-Islamic polemic, Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, Medieval religion.

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