

Peter the Venerable: An Axiological Analysis of His Polemics against the Prophet Muḥammad

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Abstract

Polemics against Islam, the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) are not new in the realm of literature. Nonetheless, the artefacts produced by Peter the Venerable (1092-1156 CE) were seminal and had lasting effects on the perceptions of Islam in the West. His work has been considered prophetic and the line of arguments he developed continued to find space in contemporary Islamophobic literature. His work included translation of the Qur'ān in Latin with the help of his associates and annotations by himself; besides al Kindy, Summa, and Contra, to name a few. This paper analyzes the polemics produced by Peter the Venerable against the Prophet Muḥammad in the twelfth century CE. This analysis encompasses three main dimensions i.e., exploring axiological connections of the polemicist with his chosen area for creating literary artefacts, linguistic techniques and metaphors used, and areas of the personality of the Prophet aimed in the polemics. Further, six main areas of the life of the Prophet have been identified and analyzed, which included polemics against the person of the Prophet; polemics against his family and friends; polemics against his actions; polemics against his regional affiliation; polemics against his prophethood; and the polemics to prove the Prophet a personification of Satan. The paper concludes that the continuation of negativities in such an organized fashion against Islam and the Prophet has transformed Islamophobia into neo-Islamophobia, wherein a socio-cultural and political order seems to have been prevailing in the West.

Keywords

Prophet Muḥammad, Peter the Venerable, polemics, neo-Islamophobia, axiology, Islam, the Qur'ān.

Introduction

Since its birth in the seventh century CE, Islam posed an existential threat to its contemporary religions, which seems to continue unabated

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even today. John of Damascus (d. ca. 749 CE) and other authoritative figures called it a “problem” and punishment for the unscrupulous sins of Christians;¹ and a danger “unpredictable and immeasurable.”² It was, in its early ages, viewed as polytheism and the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) was identified as a god by the clergies to make Islam appear as a demeaning, unworthy, and a bundle of heresies of Christianity and Judaism “bordering on paganism.”³ Islam was revealed to be the diabolic invention of Satan, a beast greedy for human blood.⁴

The expansion of Islam across the continents shook the elders of its contemporary religions, which resulted in multitier strategies to minimize Islam’s reach and eventually eliminate it. In the first few centuries of Islam, it was attacked from all possible fronts political, cultural, social, and academic before crusades were initiated to annihilate it from the world. Failures led to an academic onslaught against Islam, the Qur’ān, and the Prophet Muḥammad to prevent the spread of Islam in Europe and other parts of the world. Polemics were one of the major academic and political weapons, which have since long been in use to asperse the religion in totality. Diverse methods were used to create demonizing and dehumanizing polemics against Islam and the Prophet. Fabrication of facts and propaganda employed in literary artefacts disfigured the image of Islam and its Prophet. Since this polemical literature was mainly produced by worthy elites of Christianity and Judaism, it held great sanctity despite being based on a grudge against Islam and unauthentic sources. Among many proponents of polemics against Islam and the Prophet, Peter the Venerable (1092-1156 CE) enjoys a distinguished status. He significantly participated in producing polemics in the twelfth century CE, which still inform modern Islamophobic literature.

This paper attempts to explore and analyze the personality of Peter the Venerable and his associates and the methods he adopted to wage an

¹ Zafar Iqbal, *Islamophobia: History, Context and Deconstruction* (Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2020), 28.

² Michael Uebel, “Unthinking the Monster: Twelfth-Century Responses to Saracen Alterity,” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 268; Richard William Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

³ Daniel Clement Denet, *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 229.

⁴ Irvn M. Resnick, *The Fathers of Church: Medieval Continuation—Peter the Venerable—Writings against Saracens* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 90-91.

academic onslaught against the Prophet of Islam in his literary artefacts, though his blitz is no less towards the religion of Islam and the Qur'ān. Also, it would explore the relationship between the author and his work (axiological connections) as it is assumed that most of the literature against Islam was produced by the elders of its competing religions and the linguistic techniques were employed systematically to make Islam appear a false religion, the Qur'ān a human creation, and the Prophet as a self-claimed messenger of God.

Methodology

This is qualitative research in nature and employs analytical and interpretative techniques to review the most cited and prominent polemics produced by Peter the Venerable against Prophet Muḥammad. Though he produced extensive work on Islam and the Qur'ān, this paper will analyze his work against Prophet Muḥammad.

Analysis has been done in three main dimensions. The first dimension of analysis aims at identifying and reviewing the literature (polemics) produced with the primary purpose to put the Prophet in dark light. For that, “polemic” has to be conceptualized and operationalized in a scientific fashion to avoid being subjective in sifting out the literature and drawing conclusions.

The polemics are found in writings. Polemical writing, primarily, aims at creating controversy and hostile opinion about something—the subject—and in this case, the Prophet Muḥammad. The construct has emerged from the Greek word “polemikos,” which means warlike, bellicose or aggressive (essentially an idea or ideology). Usually, it appears in controversial rhetoric to make the subject appear belittled, demeaning, and unacceptable. The most conspicuous characteristic of polemical writing is to dispute the subject and attack it to disapprove of its very existence. It appears in a debate form where only the negative side glares and wins eventually.

The second dimension of analysis explores the axiological underpinnings in the selected literature. Axiological analysis of the literature helps us evaluate the value and valuation of the produced work on our chosen aspects in terms of whether the authors (Peter and his associates in this case) did justice to the subject of their writings;⁵ whether their intrinsic inclinations marred the substance they produced; whether their psychological and ideological proximity with

⁵ Michael R. Hill, “Epistemology, Axiology and Ideology in Sociology,” *Mid-American Review of Sociology* 9, no. 2 (1984): 59-77.

their surroundings, ambitions, and religious affinities played any role while inking on the subject(s);⁶ and whether the authors were destined to destroy the image of the subject(s) leaving no space for axiological consideration. Primarily, this dimension finds enough justification on the pretext that a huge number of polemics were produced either by the elders of Islam's contemporary religions or were deputed by the religious personalities to create such literary artefacts.

The third dimension of analysis focuses on linguistic techniques employed in the polemical work against the Prophet Muḥammad. While browsing the most celebrated polemical pieces, it has been found that either the work was a translation of (Islamic) religious literature to misrepresent the facts and identify the contentious elements; or the work appeared in the shape of a dialogue between two or more where Islam stands apologetically justifying itself and is losing on rational grounds in multiple spheres; or the polemical work was aimed at challenging the Islamic tenets, proving the Qur'ān as a human creation and the Prophet Muḥammad as a self-claimed messenger of God and an influential individual; or the work produced was to ridicule the Qur'ān, Islam, and its Prophet; or to establish the superiority of other religion(s) over Islam calling it a heresy of "true religions."

All three dimensions of analysis have been used in the paper. Most prominent and cited polemical pieces of literature have been selected for analysis.

Peter the Venerable and His Associates

Pierre Maurice de Montboissier, later known as Peter of Montboissier was elected in 1122 CE as the ninth abbot of Cluny Abbey, France, built in 910 CE by William I, the Duke of Aquitaine, known to be the holiest place in Christendom after Jerusalem and Rome.⁷ He was only 28 when he was elected as the abbot and was considered to be the most influential person in the monastic life of his time. Fredrick Barbarossa, the emperor of Rome, conferred upon Peter the title of "the venerable," for being the most influential and scholastic priest of his time.⁸ When Peter got elected as abbot of Cluny, it was the capital of the monastic empire with

⁶ Charles Kivunja and Ahmed Bawa Kuyini, "Understanding and Applying Research Paradigms in Educational Contexts," *International Journal of Higher Education* 6, no. 5 (2017): 26-41.

⁷ Hill, "Epistemology, Axiology and Ideology in Sociology," 59-77.

⁸ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 27.

more than ten thousand monks across the Western Christendom, who later became popes, cardinals, and counsellors to kings and emperors.⁹

Peter's grandfather Hugh I, who was one of the greatest abbots of Cluny, devoted him to the church at the age of 16, though he declared him the son of Cluny Abbey much before his birth. Peter's verbal participation and moral backing of twelfth-century crusades against Muslims and Islam proved to be larger than the life of an abbot, and a way towards the destiny where Christianity wins over Islam. His polemics and "verbal martial art" served as a literary effort parallel to the military effort of the crusaders.¹⁰ Nonetheless, he rightly observed that an ideology could not be fought with power only; it has to be defeated at the level of morals and intellect. This made him travel to Spain in 1142-43 CE and commission a team with the financial assistance of Roman Emperor Alfonso VII.¹¹

Peter selected his team of translators and interpreters very carefully during his journey to Spain. His team was comprised of five members, commonly known as Peter of Toledo, Peter of Poitiers, Robert of Ketton, Herman of Dalmatia, and Muhammad. Peter the Venerable used to call Peter of Toledo Master Peter.¹² Less is known about Peter of Toledo. However, his collaboration was mainly on arranging and editing the *Toledon Collections* (translated work by the team). According to some sources, he was a convert from Islam to Christianity and belonged to a Mozarab family.¹³ That was the reason, he knew Arabic better than Latin and his acquaintance with Islamic customs proved to be an asset for Peter the Venerable.

Peter of Poitier played a pivotal role in revising and organizing the *Toledon Collection*. He worked as the notary or secretary to Peter the Venerable and helped him in his assessment of Islam. He travelled with Peter the Venerable to Spain and remained there to collaborate and supervise the translation work. When *Toledan Collection* appeared in a single volume, Peter of Poitier was its editor.¹⁴ He also collected and

⁹ James Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 3.

¹⁰ Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Order & Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam, 1000-1150* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 41.

¹¹ Kecia Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad* (London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 28.

¹² Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, 31.

¹³ Kritzeck, "Peter the Venerable and Toledan Collection," in *Petrus Venerabilis: Studies and Texts Commemorating the Eighth Centenary of His Death*, ed. Giles Constable and James Kritzeck (Rome: Herder, n.d.), 176-201.

¹⁴ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 22-23.

arranged the letters of Peter the Venerable, which he wrote against Islam, the Qur'ān, and the Prophet Muḥammad on numerous occasions, and also organized the *Toledan Collection* in a meaningful sequence.¹⁵ The introductory section of *Contra Sectam Saracenorum* (Against the Sect of the Saracens), one of the most renowned pieces by Peter the Venerable, was organized and edited by Peter of Poitier.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Peter of Poitier was a Christian devotee who inspired Peter the Venerable through his constant encouraging campaign throughout his life. He persuaded Peter the Venerable to confound Muslims just as he confounded the Jews and cut them down with the “sword of the divine word.”¹⁷ He applauded the polemical campaigns of Peter the Venerable by calling him the good son of the mother church.¹⁸

Robert of Ketton was from England, who translated the Qur'ān into Latin and gave it a polemical title *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete* (The Law of the Pseudo-Prophet Muḥammad).¹⁹ It was the first-ever translation of the Qur'ān in any European language.²⁰ The Qur'ān got introduced widely in Europe through this translation and its inscriptions continued to inspire and influence people at large for centuries. The translation was polemical with a designed objective of making Islam a heresy of Christianity and Judaism.²¹ Robert of Ketton enjoyed a unique status in the intellectual history of Europe as an astronomer and geometrician who introduced “sinus” (sine) in trigonometry and later became the first to translate the Qur'ān into Latin.²² Robert of Ketton increased the number of *sūrah*s in the Qur'ān from 114 to 123²³ in the process of translation, which demonstrates his diabolical and inimical attitude towards Islam.

Peter the Venerable declared Robert of Ketton and Herman of

¹⁵ Giles Constable, *The Letters of Peter the Venerable* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 2:47.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 11-13.

¹⁸ Resnick, *Peter the Venerable against the Inveterate Obduracy of the Jews* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 11.

¹⁹ Mustafa Ghani, “The Narrative Assault on Islam,” *Constellations* 3, no. 2 (2012): 135.

²⁰ Ian Jenkins, “Writing Islam: Representation of Muhammad, the Quran and Islamic Belief and the Construction of Muslim Identity in Early Modern Britain” (PhD diss., University of Cardiff, 2007), 53.

²¹ Ghani, “Narrative Assault on Islam,” 133.

²² George Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science* (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1962), 174.

²³ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 21.

Dalmatia brilliant scholars. Herman translated *Kitāb Nasab Rasūl Allāh* and *Masā'il 'Abd Allāh b. Salām* and titled them *Liber Generationis Mahumeth* and *Doctrina Muhammad* respectively.²⁴ Robert and Herman were close friends and worked together for many years, but they were originally genius in astronomy and mathematics.²⁵

The fifth partner of the team was known to be a Muslim; namely, Muhammad, who was an Arabic-speaking individual hired to help the team members to understand the cultural traits of the Arabic world in the process of translation and interpretation.

Peter the Venerable and his team produced high-impact literature in a short period, which influenced the Western world for centuries. Even contemporary anti-Islam literature follows their footprints and employs the arguments they produced in the twelfth century CE. The whole sum of literature produced by Peter and his associates may be categorized into three sections: the *Toledan Collection*; Peter's polemics against Islamic doctrine and the Prophet; and the collection of Peter's letters and treatises. The *Toledan Collection* is a translated and interpreted work of Islamic literature, which appeared in five texts. First, *Fabulae Saracenorum*, a tale that explained how the world was created, included the stories of earlier prophets, the Prophet Muḥammad, and the first four caliphs. Second, *Liber Generationis Mahumeth* was a translation of *Kitāb Nasab Rasūl Allāh*, which recounts the story of a light (*nūr Muḥammadī*) passed through the generations of ancestors until its corporeal realization in the person of the Prophet Muḥammad. Third, *Doctrina Muhammad* was a translation of *Masā'il 'Abd Allāh b. Salām*, which was an apocryphal tale of four Jews posing questions to the Prophet Muḥammad and the latter's alleged responses—many of which are, at best, problematic theologically. Fourth, Ketton's translation of the Qur'ān was titled *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete* (The Law of the Pseudo-Prophet Muḥammad). Fifth, *Risālat al-Kindī*, an early Christian polemic against Islam, was translated into Latin as the *Epistola Saraceni et Rescriptum Christiani*, fictional correspondence between a Muslim 'Abd Allāh b. Ismā'īl al-Hāshimī and a Christian al-Kindī.

Most influential polemics against Islam and the Prophet Muḥammad by Peter the Venerable were titled *Summa Totius Haeresis Saracenorum* (A Summary of Entire Heresy of the Saracens), hereafter referred to as *Summa* and *Contra Sectam Saracenorum* (Against the Sect of the Saracens), hereafter referred to as *Contra*. In *Summa*, Peter aimed to prove the

²⁴ Ghani, "Narrative Assault on Islam," 134.

²⁵ Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, 66.

Prophet Muḥammad to be a pseudo prophet and Islam to be a summation of Christian heresies.²⁶ In *Contra*, which he completed in 1155-56 just before his death in 1156, Peter aimed to establish the supremacy of the Bible and Christianity over the Qur'ān and Islam.²⁷ He declared his work as a bulwark to the Church against the heretic views of Islam²⁸ and believed that the pagans must be opposed through (written) polemics.²⁹ It is important to note that Peter was systematic in his approach to the process of fighting against Islam. His attempts focused on his audience. He wrote *Summa* for the Christians to prevent them from embracing Islam and wrote *Contra* for Muslims and others to persuade them to join Christianity. In *Contra*, he tried to make Muslims read his arguments impartially as the Qur'ān itself testifies and authenticates Christian scripture.³⁰

Peter's literary legacy continued to mar the relations between Christianity and Islam even after his death. Out of two collections of his letters, one was compiled either shortly after his death or a little before. However, the first collection of his letters addressed to kings, cardinals, and other notables appeared in 1142 CE. The second collection of his letters, poems, and treatises took shape of six books/volumes, containing about 196 letters and several treatises. It included letters addressed to Bernard of Clairvaux asking him to launch literary and intellectual offensives against Islam and its Prophet and a long letter to King Louis IX to persuade him to start a second crusade against Muslims.³¹ These collections demonstrate that Peter wanted a war waged against Islam on all fronts whether intellectual, political, or military. His letter collections first appeared in print in 1522. They were compiled and organized by Peter of Poitier.³²

Peter's Polemics against the Prophet Muḥammad

Lexical choices and referential strategies by the authors greatly influence their views and attitudes towards the subject of study and reveal at the same time how they would like their readers to understand

²⁶ Ibid., 136.

²⁷ John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 246.

²⁸ Jenkins, "Writing Islam," 10.

²⁹ Tolan, *Saracens*, 251.

³⁰ Ibid., 252.

³¹ Ibid., 202.

³² Constable, *Letters of Peter the Venerable*, 45.

and evaluate the subject. Quite often, writers confound the discussions and attempt to fleece their postures and selves behind the subject of study. Peter the Venerable, nevertheless, did not seem to be hiding his locus when it comes to disputing Islam, the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad. He used compound referential connotations of polemical nature to identify the Prophet. He more often spelt the Prophet, the most revered personality of Islam, as Mohammed and derogatorily used Heresiarch, Mahoumet, Saracen, Ishmaelite, Mahomet, Mahon, Mahoum, Mawmet, Pagan, and Idolater.³³

Peter repeatedly constructed the image of the Prophet in almost all of his writings as being the one who sought assistance from Sergius I (d. 638 CE) and Baḥīrah to manufacture a bundle of heresies from Jewish and Christian scriptures and called it Islam.³⁴ He was, Peter concluded in *Summa*, one of the cleverest men that the world has ever witnessed, “advanced from low birth and poverty to wealth and renown,” and “since his power by the sword availed nothing, he tried to become king under the cloak of religion and by the name of divine prophet.”³⁵ In an attempt to make Islam appear as a demeaning and human creation, he posed the Prophet as the “god of Moslems,” an “Idolater of idolaters,” a heretical monk, barbarous, a wicked man,³⁶ adulterator,³⁷ wretched and impious,³⁸ evil spirit,³⁹ to name a few polemical titles attached to him by Peter.

Understanding whom Peter wanted to educate about the Prophet Muḥammad in the entire body of literature he produced is of paramount significance. A deeper analysis suggests that it was primarily the Christians whom Peter targeted in his literary artefacts to preclude them from turning to Islam, with certain exceptions where he seems to be inviting those who converted to Islam either from Judaism or Christianity to revert to their previous religions. For both reasons, Peter criticized Islam and the Prophet Muḥammad in an exceedingly non-

³³ Ghani, “The Narrative Assault on Islam,” 135; Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2000), 338; Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*; Resnick, *Fathers of Church*; Jenkins, “Writing Islam.”

³⁴ Michelina Di Cesare, *The Pseudo-historical Image of the Prophet Muhammad in Medieval Latin Literature: A Repertory* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 149.

³⁵ Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, 58.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 132-33.

³⁷ Arent Jan Wensinck, *A Handbook of Early Mohammadan Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 117.

³⁸ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 36.

³⁹ Cesare, *Pseudo-historical Image of the Prophet Muhammad*, 147.

scholastic and jingoistic manner without much focus on logical reasoning, and civility, by concocting the facts and without offering cogent foundations to his arguments. Owing to this, we can compartmentalize his polemics into quite a few categories like polemics against the person of the Prophet Muḥammad; polemics against his family and friends; polemics against his actions; polemics against his regional affiliation; polemics against his prophethood; and polemics to prove him a personification of Satan.

Polemics against the Person of the Prophet Muḥammad

In *Summa*, Peter fabricated Prophet Muḥammad as a “drunkard, epileptic and pupil of a heretic monk”⁴⁰ and “possessed by an evil spirit,”⁴¹ elucidating that Muḥammad presented his emotional and physical imbalances as intuitional revealing and his direct connection with his God. In a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux to convince him to launch an academic onslaught against Muslims and Islam, he explained to him that he “had translated from the Arabic into the Latin language also all the unholy sectarian doctrine, the life of the nefarious man, and the law, which he called the Koran, that is, ‘a collection of precepts.’”⁴² Peter also caricatured the representation of the Prophet Muḥammad in the form of “a fish with a human head” in the *Liber Generationis Mahumet*. While shedding a dark light on Prophet Muḥammad, Peter contrasted his claims (sayings) about Christ and other messengers of God like “Christ was born of a virgin” and “Moses was a prophet”⁴³ and tried to prove that at the same time the Prophet Muḥammad “denied all the sacraments of Christian piety,”⁴⁴ to emotionally charge his Christian readers against him.

In the prologue of *Summa*, Peter outright introduced the Prophet Muḥammad to his readers by saying that “who [Muhammad] was, and what he taught, so that those who will read that book [the Koran] may better understand what they read and know how detestable were his life and his teachings” and in a hateful manner described him “a poor, vile, unlettered Arab who achieved wealth and power through bloodshed, thievery, and intrigue.”⁴⁵ To create an intense abhorrence among his

⁴⁰ Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, 18.

⁴¹ Cesare, *Pseudo-historical Image of the Prophet Muhammad*, 160.

⁴² Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, 32.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 132-33.

⁴⁴ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 36.

⁴⁵ Cesare, *Pseudo-historical Image of the Prophet Muhammad*, 146.

Christian readers against the Prophet, he used all literary and polemical means to create religious controversies and then associated them with the Prophet of Islam who led Christians astray like Arius and Antichrist.⁴⁶ Arius is remembered as the one who generated Christian theological controversy about God the Father and God the Son; while Antichrist, as per Christian eschatology, would oppose Jesus during his return to the world. Peter's detestation of the Prophet did not seem to have boundaries and scholastic underpinnings. He adopted all possible connotations, which could generate a high amount of hatred towards the Prophet among the Christians. Though he at places explained that he translated the Qur'ān and other significant Islamic books to expose (filthy and frivolous) heresies called Islam to the people's scrutiny.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, he never tried to hide his feelings as being the greatest enemy of Islam and the Prophet, leaving aside the axiological contemplations during the process of creating literature for his people and followers as being the most important cleric of his time.

Peter took the emergence of Islam and the Prophet Muḥammad as a continuity of heresies and heretics that damaged Christianity for more than one thousand years like Basilides, Apelis, Marcion, Hermogenes, the Cataphrygians, Encratites, Montanus, Novatian, Eunomius and many other freaks, but none could stay long like Islam and its Prophet.⁴⁸ Also, none had ever debilitated Christianity and the church of God to such an extent, as did Islam and its Prophet. Employing this strategy of equating the Prophet of Islam with notorious heretics of Christian history was nothing but making Islam appear as merely a time of test for Christianity and its Prophet as its crafter.

Polemics against the Family and Friends of the Prophet

The campaign of indignation by Peter the Venerable against the Prophet Muḥammad did not exclude his friends, associates, and family members. Nonetheless, his wives were mostly discussed and polemicized in Peter's literary artefacts. Declaring him a "fraud," Peter said that Muḥammad "tricked a wealthy widow into marriage,"⁴⁹ which was nothing but unflattering posturing of the facts to prove his case to his Christian audience. Interestingly, Peter promised his readers in the translation of

⁴⁶ Tolan, *Saracens*, 10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴⁸ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 52-53.

⁴⁹ Sameul C. Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 398.

al Kindy that he would not like to be offensive to Al-Hāshimī's Prophet but would only scrutinize his credentials as a prophet and summarize facts about his personal life. However, in reality, he lodged an offensive charge sheet against the Prophet by fabricating facts and creating polemics of the highest order to put him in dark light. While doing so, Peter has quite often been found bringing the Prophet's family affairs into his discussion and criticized his character for "taking many beautiful women to wife."⁵⁰ He declared it neglecting God's instructions for His prophets as none of the prophets had ever done anything like what he did.

It is always convincing to take living examples from one's religion and compare them with competing religious ideologies to validate one's argument. The same technique Peter employed to challenge the prophethood of Muḥammad. As some of the wives of the Prophet Muḥammad were divorced and more than one at a time were in a spousal relationship with him, Peter made it an unquestionable case of "adultery."⁵¹ He related this aspect of the Prophet's life with his explanation of Paradise where a Muslim would have the loveliest women and virgins for their sensual satisfaction. Not only this, he declared it the "gluttony libidinal pleasure" and alleged that Muḥammad had eighteen wives at a time that too under the divine command.⁵² Peter considered it a fomenting temptation to embrace Islam, a religion that guarantees sexual pleasures in this life and life hereafter in Paradise. To further the dehumanization process, he misquoted and misinterpreted the divorce of one of the Prophet's companions who later became his wife.⁵³ His structure of arguments is adopted by many orientalist and polemicists, which is based on baseless narratives to dispute the personality of the Prophet Muḥammad. This adulteration and misinterpretation of facts on part of Peter are nothing but a sheer injustice to his readers who were and are unable to understand the Qur'ān by themselves; hence, they are at the mercy of their religious leaders who could translate other religions for them. This historical misinterpretation continues in contemporary literature, wherein polygamy and the culture of

⁵⁰ *The Apology of al Kindy, Written at the Court of Al Mâmûn (Circa A.H. 215; A.D. 830), in Defence of Christianity against Islam, with an Essay on Its Age and Authorship Read before the Royal Asiatic Society by Sir William Muir*, 2nd ed. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1887), 50.

⁵¹ Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, 137.

⁵² Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 44.

⁵³ Tolan, *Saracens*, 54.

concubinage are deeply associated with the life of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Polemics against the Actions of the Prophet Muḥammad

Prophethood was challenged and criticized, the divinely revealed book was declared a human creation and Islam was labelled as a bundle of heresies by the elders of other religions; and within this realm, all actions, whether public or private, of the Prophet were considered either for worldly gains or by an “extremely clever” person.⁵⁴ The life of the most sacred personality of Islam has been conceived from “that of a heretic to that of a fraud”⁵⁵ who, according to enemies of Islam including Peter, in the garb of changing the moral lives and beliefs of Arabs sanctioned raids, plundering, and lengthy military expeditions.⁵⁶ While translating *al Kindy*, Peter underlined that Muḥammad was the only prophet of God, who did not demonstrate a single miracle but rather disavowed miracles.

In *Summa*, Peter constructed the image of the Prophet as being an “extremely clever” person, who frequently attacked those close to him, “particularly close-relatives with wives, robberies, and invasions, killing whomever he could by stealth”⁵⁷ to increase his terror among the people. According to Peter, the ultimate objective of the Prophet was to hold kingship, which he could not hold through his mischievous actions, and on failing he wore himself “the cloak of religion” and declared himself a “divine prophet.”⁵⁸ Continuing this line of argument, Peter attempted to mock Prophet’s stance towards Qur’ānic injunctions about Jesus (peace be on him) and prophets with Jewish lineage and the laws they presented. Without putting the facts into their true contexts and perspectives, Peter mocked the Prophet’s praise for Christian and Jewish laws and said that instead of upholding them, he rejected them, which is highly reprobate behaviour. Similarly, Peter impersonated the Prophet as the one who loves worldly pleasures and promises his followers the eating of meat, fruits, rivers of milk and honey, and “sensual satisfaction of the loveliest women and virgins” in Paradise.⁵⁹ He denied the entire narration of Paradise as faulty and labelled it as the pleasure-seeking

⁵⁴ Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, 124-27.

⁵⁵ Chew, *Crescent and the Rose*, 398.

⁵⁶ *Apology of al Kindy*, 52.

⁵⁷ Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, 124-27.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

nature of the Muslims' prophet, which he used to allure Christians and Jews to embrace Islam. To him, Muslims' observance of circumcision was nothing but to attract the "carnal minds."⁶⁰

While explicating the reason for translating the Arabic Islamic literary artefacts into Latin and writing the *Summa* for his Christian readers, Peter informed his audience that the Prophet mixed good and evil and created a monstrous cult, "similar to the animal Horace described with a human head, a horse's neck, and feathers."⁶¹ Probably, there had never been such an attempt in history to caricature a prophet of God to exhibit one's hatred. Contemporarily, the caricature competition announced by Geert Wilder and the publishing of blasphemous cartoons by *Jyllands-Posten* (Denmark) and *Charlie Hebdo* (France) and many others followed the same historical pattern to vilify the sacred religious personalities and disparage their actions.

The Prophet's call for non-believers to embrace Islam was all through peaceful means, which has been testified by many scholars except those who positioned themselves to denigrate him; nonetheless, small-scale wars during his time were primarily for self-defence before Islam reached its near completion at the time of triumph voyage to Mecca, which was bloodless. For Peter, the whole life of the Prophet was ordered by force and violence to preach that he was a prophet of God while enjoying "theft and rapacity."⁶² Counting on it further, he said that "Mohammedan madness" corrupted the entire world including Persians, Medes, Syrians, Armenians, Ethiopians, Indians, kingdoms of East, and the whole of Asia and made them surrender to his evils designs "not through gentle reason but by violent incursion."⁶³ Quite interestingly, through these arguments, he attempted to humiliate almost the entire world as being fragile enough to change their religions and bow their heads to the violence of a small group of people who rose from the Arabian Peninsula and reached all nooks and corners of the globe. For Peter, the message of Islam is that God had no power, rather power rested with the violent acts of Muḥammad and with a few of his companions who converted staunch followers of Judaism, Christianity, and other beliefs to Islam. Peter's arguments reflect a trounced mindset that is hell bound to show Islam and its Prophet as an emblem of violence to his readers.

⁶⁰ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 44.

⁶¹ Tolan, *Saracens*, 158.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 149.

⁶³ Resnick, *Peter the Venerable against the Inveterate Obduracy of the Jews*, 65-66.

Polemics against the Regional Affiliation of the Prophet Muḥammad

Arabian Peninsula was going through the darkest of its times when Islam took rebirth with the emergence of the Prophet. On the other hand, Europe had established institutions and powerful empires. Knowledge of its scholars like Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, and other Greek philosophers was exploring new worlds and its cities were the hub of economic activities. Ethics, ontology, metaphysics, and logic were the subjects being discussed in their educational institutions. The rise of Islam from Arabia in the early seventh century CE quaked the entire world and challenged the supremacy of the West. Power balance shifted, centuries-old empires got quashed, and the simplicity and bravery of Arabs set new standards in the world. It made Islam appear as an existential threat to the West and all its standards and ruined the grandeur it attained in and maintained for centuries. Thus, the polemicists did not only dispute the religion of Islam and its Prophet, but also the region it emerged as being the most backward and underdeveloped; anything coming from there is much inferior to Western civilization and ideologies. Peter did not lag behind in this wake and employed geographic affiliation of the Prophet and Islam with his messages to demonstrate to Westerners that Islam is nothing but a bewildered cry of the desert, lesser in belief and dogmatic in nature. He opined that the Prophet Muḥammad was one amongst the Ishmaelites, corrupt, polygamous, circumcised, and a plunderer.⁶⁴ Arabs were more often labelled as low birth and worshipers of idolatry, illiterate, only active in business rather shrewd; and they were hell-bent to reach out of their region to gain control of Christian lands and wealth and make Christian women their concubines. This appeal also found space in the arguments by Peter the Venerable while preparing a case against Islam and its Prophet. Geographic and nationalist clichés often prove to be strong bulwarks in the process of change and Peter employed them intelligently by attaching negativities and historical misunderstandings with Islam and its Prophet.

Arabic as a language of the peninsula was regarded as barbaric and imperfect in the West. Taking advantage of this cliché, Peter attacked the Qur'ān as being written by a human with imperfection using loanwords. He used some injunctions of the Qur'ān to prove that the language used in it was borrowed from pre-Islamic poets and demonstrate that even the individuals were superior to the Qur'ān and called it a breach of good manners.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 65-66.

⁶⁵ *Apology of al Kindy*, 83.

Polemics against the Prophethood of the Prophet Muḥammad

Another noticeable political and intellectual assault by Peter the Venerable was on the prophethood of the Prophet Muḥammad. Taking examples of prophets from the past, Peter tried to prove that God's gift in the shape of miracles, divine scriptures, God's protection of the chosen ones and His direct revelations to His prophets are some of the fundamental signs of prophethood, of which Muḥammad was devoid. Building a case against the prophethood of Muḥammad, Peter said that he was never bestowed with any divine miracle nor did he enjoy God's protection, alluding to injuries the Prophet suffered in the battle of Uḥud. Unlike other prophets of God, Peter argued, Muḥammad's claims of prophethood were enforced by the sword and temptations for a sensual Paradise. He was an "idolater among idolaters;"⁶⁶ his friends were "hypocrites, renegades and apostates;"⁶⁷ and he was ignorant of divine and human laws. Peter tried to convince his audience through his writings that the Qur'ān is a diabolical scripture; the Prophet Muḥammad produced it with the assistance of the best Jewish, Christian, and heretical doctors, weaving the fables and trifling songs of the heretics together to concoct a "wicked scripture."⁶⁸ Quoting from the Qur'ān and interpreting it in an antagonistic manner, Peter made a case of calling the Prophet of Islam a false prophet who was pleased to describe the torments of Hell and painted Paradise a place for sensual pleasures,⁶⁹ which had never been done by earlier prophets.

Peter's polemicist predecessors from Europe and epic poets did not opt for a different position on Islam's Prophet rather most of them showed Saracens worshipping the Prophet.⁷⁰ While encouraging an academic and political onslaught against Islam, the Prophet, and Muslims, the Council of Vienne referred to Muslims venerating their Prophet like a god. Ridiculously, many epic plays in English literature showed the Prophet being worshipped not only by the followers of Islam but also by Roman epic characters like Alexander the Great, Julius

⁶⁶ Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, 124-27.

⁶⁷ *Apology of al Kindy*, 86.

⁶⁸ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 40.

⁶⁹ William Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald, trans. and eds., *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa 'l-Mulūk)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 6:xxxii, 132.

⁷⁰ M. Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 142-43.

Caesar, and some renowned saints.⁷¹ Though these characters from Macedon and Rome lived long before the birth of Christ, showing them in such a state was an effort to ridicule the prophethood of Muḥammad, calling him “God Mahon”⁷² even though playwrights knew it well that the Prophet was a human, not god and that he had forbidden idolatry.

While translating *al Kindy*, Peter seems to have been giving special attention to highlighting that the Prophet had failed to be resurrected like Jesus. Abandoning the traditional way of burial, *al Kindy* explained, the Prophet told his Companions that his body would be shifted to Heaven by the Angel Gabriel. However, on the third day, they found it a lie and buried him.⁷³ Unfortunately, this episode of extreme blasphemy got extraordinary significance in the literature produced later, rather quite recently, such a claim of *al Kindy* and Peter’s explanation of it helped to produce a doctoral dissertation at Princeton University under the mentorship of Patricia Crone and Michael Cook.⁷⁴

Huge literature followed Peter’s line of argument to establish that Muḥammad was a false prophet, that Muslims worshipped him, and that this cult is unlike true prophets of God. In his writings, Peter associated the Prophet Muḥammad’s life with lootings and killings with no miracle by God as it used to be with the prophets in the past, no visits were made by Angel Gabriel and the Qur’ān was his own creation. His arguments for negating the prophethood of Muḥammad found space in Western literature.

Polemics to Prove the Prophet Muḥammad a Personification of Satan

In *Summa*, Peter employed tools of excessive insolence to disfigure the personality of the Prophet Muḥammad by describing him as a companion of Satan, and in many places, he personified Satan as being the Muslims’ Prophet. According to Peter, heresies were initially connived with Arius, escalated by the Prophet of Islam, and would eventually be completed by the diabolical design of the Antichrist.⁷⁵ Though Peter was not the first in the line who denigrated the Prophet of Islam in such a fiendish fashion, his knowledge of history made him

⁷¹ Jennifer Bray, “The Mahometan and Idolatry,” *Studies in Church History* 21 (1984): 89-98.

⁷² Tolan, *Saracens*, 127.

⁷³ Krisztina Szilagyi, “After the Prophet’s Death: Christian-Muslim Polemic and the Image of Muhammad” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2014), 14.

⁷⁴ See *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Tolan, *Saracens*, 158; Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 144-45.

construct arguments to convince his readers that Muḥammad created a history of error with Satan's guidance. Plagued by Arius and Arian, he argued, the Prophet produced and spread the greatest of heresies infecting more than one-third of the world population with a "lethal draught administered by Satan."⁷⁶ His raving-mad tales of the day of judgement, eternal life after death and description of Heaven all were Satan's conceived dogmas, which pushed the innocents to the brink of Hell, Peter remarked while concluding the first chapter of *Summa*.⁷⁷

Condemning the holy wars by Muslims, Peter called it the "work of Satan"⁷⁸ and "a bestial cruelty and detestable wickedness."⁷⁹ He argued that Satan invented *jihād* to satiate his base greediness for human blood in the guise of the Muslims' Prophet.⁸⁰ *Jihād* or holy war, as Peter claimed, was a symbol of the fiasco that the Prophet advocated due to his inability to challenge the firmness and strong foundations of Christian laws, and resorted to satanic ways of controlling lands and minds. Muḥammad prohibited his followers from debating with Christians and Jews, lacked confidence, and said things that he and his followers could not defend. These were the reasons that made him resort to the sword calling it a holy war instead entering into a dialogue.

While associating the Qur'ān and some of its inscriptions being stolen from the Old and New Testaments, Peter rejected the prophethood of Muḥammad and called it Satan's success who introduced monk Sergius, a renegade but among the first few deacons of the Church, to Muḥammad and jointly they concocted the Qur'ān.⁸¹ According to Peter, the Prophet had never been able to write the Qur'ān by himself, utterly denying to accept it as a divine holy book, but Sergius with the help of Satan bestowed success upon an error by explicating the sacred scriptures into a somewhat meaningful compilation that later appeared as the Qur'ān.⁸² Earlier, Peter associated heresiarch Nicholas, commonly known as the "proselyte of Antioch," with the Prophet, who was a renegade of the Church and a much-disliked figure in Christianity. Through these associations, with Satan, Sergius, Nicholas etc., Peter

⁷⁶ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 66.

⁷⁷ Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, 103.

⁷⁸ *Apology of al Kindy*, 47.

⁷⁹ Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 91.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*; Wensinck, *Handbook of Early Mohammadan Traditions*, 129.

⁸² Resnick, *Fathers of Church*, 39.

attempted to place the Prophet of Islam low in dignity and a pupil of the renegades of Christianity. All his efforts were to prove that Satan, historically, is at war with the Church and changing his appearances constantly; and a new and the most dangerous one has appeared in the shape of the Prophet of Islam.

Conclusion

The Council of Vienne in 1311-12 CE adopted the strategic design formulated and implemented by Peter the Venerable as a future course of action to contain the spread of Islam and the influence of the Prophet. The council recommended a political and academic onslaught against Islam to stop its spread in the world, of which footprints were available in Peter's work.

Peter enjoyed a prophetic status as an elder of the Church. His responsibilities essentially included spreading the message of his religion and protecting it from ideological invasions; nonetheless, debacles in the crusades and the fast-paced spread of Islam made him fearful, thus, he took Islam as an existential threat to Christianity. Islamophobia forced Peter to launch extreme offensives against Islam even though his social and religious position compromised his offensives on axiological grounds. Hardly it could be seen in literature that the work produced by the radicalist was applauded as being impartial, unbiased, and following the tenets of academic honesty. So has been the case with Peter who declared Islam a theological gibberish, its Prophet a pseudo-prophet, and the Qur'ān a human concoction, grossly violating fundamental principles of intellectual honesty.

Peter along with his associates produced literature which may broadly be categorized into three areas: the *Toledan Collection*, Peter's polemics against Islamic doctrine and the Prophet, and Peter's Letters Collection and Treatise. Most of his work was translation work, which he described further to make it appear a classic piece of polemics, whose influence has deeply affected Western literature whether classical or contemporary and contemporary media discourses alike.

The scholarly and polemical methods Peter employed to attack Islam, the Qur'ān, and the Prophet included translation of *al Kindy* in which two persons, one Muslim and other Christian, entered into a dialogue, proving one (the Muslim) absolutely false and other (the Christian) unquestionably right; highlighting those points from the Qur'ān and Islam where ordinarily less evidence is available among the common people; disputing the facts by comparing them with established and accepted notions in Christianity and Judaism; depicting the Qur'ān

as a human creation and a stolen work from the New and Old Testaments; glamourizing the things prohibited in Christianity but normal in Islam like polygamy, and avoiding debates by common people with the experts of other religions; highlighting *jihād* with sword as a source to reach people and forcibly altering their minds; misinterpreting the facts and narrations by the Prophet; associating renegades of Christianity and Satan with Islam and the Prophet; highlighting that Islam spread through looting, plundering, and killing; and other possible means to keep people from accepting Islam and posing the religion and its Prophet as a pseudo-prophet.

Mainly, Peter's scholarly and polemical blitzkrieg against the Prophet has been found in six key areas covering his life, which included polemics against the person of the Prophet; his family and friends; his actions; his regional affiliation; his prophethood, and the polemics to prove that he was a personification of Satan. It demonstrates that Peter's obvious objective was to demean, dehumanize, denigrate, and vilify the Prophet of Islam from all possible angles of his personality, family, friends, associates, and prophethood.

The original contribution that Peter made was a first-ever translation of the Qur'ān in any European language, for which he commissioned four renowned scholars of his time spending huge sums of money, contributed by the king and church both. While giving explanations to the translation, which itself has been subject to criticism by scholars as being misleading and polemical, he added comments and made caricatures of the Prophet in annotations. Probably, this was the first-ever effort to make caricatures of the Prophet Muḥammad, a practice that is continued in contemporary times.

Though there have been some other renowned polemicists who produced voluminous work disparaging the Prophet of Islam; nonetheless, no work had as far-reaching effects as that of Peter. He attributed all possible deleterious connotations to the Prophet and used innovative techniques to lower his status among the Westerners. In terms of approaches, methods and quantum of work, Peter stands second to none; and his work has since long been taken as prophetic and authentic, while he hardly used authentic and scholarly sources in his writings, letters, treatises and sermons. Nevertheless, his polemics are commonly referred to as authentic and scholarly work without giving any consideration to axiological connections, weakness of sources, and purpose for which they were produced. The work produced by renowned clergymen or apologists from Christendom like Vertot (1655-1735), Saint-Pierre (1658-1743), Jean Gagnier (1670-1740), W. M. Murray (1779-

1838), Aloys Sprenger (1813-1893), William Muir (1819-1905), and S. W. Koelle (1820-1902), to name a few from past few centuries or historians like Humphrey Prideaux (1648-1724), Comte de Boulainviller (1658-1722), Voltaire (1694-1778), Jean Antoine Guer (1713-1764), Claude Savary (1750-1788), Caussin de Perceval (1795-1871), Noel Desvergers (1805-1867), Louis P. Sedillot (1808-1875), Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844), and P. Henry Delaporte (1816-1877) almost all followed Peter the Venerable's driven narration and images of the Prophet. His devotional work, though, lacked scholarly and authentic sources and was dedicated to preventing Islam from spreading in Europe and was aimed at proving Muḥammad a pseudo-prophet and Islam a bundle of heresies. But, the line of arguments he developed against Islam, the Qur'ān, and the Prophet has been orchestrated tremendously by scholars throughout history and remained the major building block of Islamophobia in the West. Contemporarily, such polemical work has transformed traditional and historical Islamophobia into neo-Islamophobia—a new socio-cultural and political order of the West, particularly aimed at Islam and Muslims in most of the Western world. In a way, neo-Islamophobia symbolizes a collectivist character and mobilizes national hatred for Islam, leading to a psychosocial phenomenon. These symptoms extend beyond existing definitions of Islamophobia, serving as a political strategy for the racially embedded process of securitization. The pillars of such social order and structure are built by the polemicists like Peter the Venerable.

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