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Islamophobia Abroad and Anti-Catholicism at home: The Making of the English Nation

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One major feature of printing and publishing in England in the 16th and 17th centuries and repeated in subsequent centuries was that of travel tales to foreign spaces where Protestant males not only met believers in Islam but also encountered other Europeans (mostly Catholics) in those foreign spaces. This paper will attempt to show those travellers' tales written by Englishmen of the early modern period as well as subsequently were not only based upon Protestant foundations but also contributed to the making of the nation.

Keywords: Islamophobia, anti-Catholicism, travel writing, Englishness, national identity

Introduction

In comparison with practices in recent as well as present-day operation (Blaut, 1993), it was not only the complexity of printing and bookselling in the early modern period but also how those texts were used in those times in the making of the English nation in subsequent years (Cawley, 1967; MacLean, 2004; Mather, 2009; Matar, 1999; Sharpe, 2000; Tracy, 1990; Trevor-Roper, 1988): Not only in the present-day with its past, but especially of Protestantism in these islands compared with versions of Christianity (especially Catholicism in mainland Europe) as well as in relation to perceptions of Islam in places such as Turkey and Persia (as Iran was called in those days), that is of interest.

Travellers' Tales

Anti-Catholicism

While the titles of some of publications that deal especially with Islamophobia will be given below, brief examples of English Protestantism in contention with Catholicism might be discerned in these two letters.

William Harborne, probably best-known as the first English ambassador to Turkey, sent a letter to Richard Forster in 1577, when the latter has been appointed as consul in Tripoli in Syria, in which the former writes to the latter:

Touching about your demeanour after your placing, you are to proceed wisely, considering that both French and Venetians will have an anxious eye on you; whom if they perceive wise and well advised, they will fear to offer you an injury. But if they shall perceive an insufficiency in you, they will not omit any occasion to harm you. They are a subtle, malicious and dissembling people, where you must always have their doings suspected, and walk warily in all actions. (Harborne, 1577, Vol. 2, pp. 68-71; Parker, 1999, pp. 48-53)

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Richard Wragge, who was one of the travellers who helped to deliver the present send by Queen Elizabeth to the Emperor of Turkey, Murad Khan via the ambassador Edward Barton, explained that what happened was that “At the departure of Sinan Pasha, the Chief Vizier (and our Ambassador’s great friend) towards the wars with Hungary. There was another Pasha appointed in his place: the churlish and hard-natured man who, upon certain Genovese escaping out of the castle standing out towards the Euxine Sea (now called the Black Sea) there imprisoned, apprehended and threatened to execute one of our Englishmen called John Field because he was taken thereabouts and known, many days before, to have brought a letter to one of them...”, which event culminated with the ambassador going on horseback to the residence of the new Grand Vizier to whom the ambassador promised that he would send a cloth of gold—which promise not only resulted in the ambassador being embraced by the new Grand Vizier but whose action was also interpreted as a sign of reconciliation but also as one of: “no small admiration of all Christians who had heard of it: especially of the French and Venetian Ambassadors, who never in the like case against the second person in the Turkish Empire durst have attempted so bold an enterprise with hope of so friendly an audience, and of so speedy redress” (Wragge, 1598, Vol. 2, pp. 303-307; Parker, 1999, pp. 54-60).

To place these remarks by English ambassadors in context, it might be useful to refer to the observations by the Sherley brothers—especially those by Anthony Sherley who had been awarded a minor honour by Henri IV of France following his services working under the Earl of Essex in that country. While there is some evidence that Queen Elizabeth had asked Anthony Sherley to forswear allegiance to a foreign monarch, he not only insisted that he be addressed as “Sir Anthony”, but also that he as well as his brothers Thomas and Robert would go on to serve successive Persian monarchs in those rulers with their counterparts in Europe. Not only would Anthony write to make the claim that the Persian monarch would send him as ambassador to those rulers whom he described as “The Princes of Christendom”, he would be later on write the story of his encounter with two friars (one from Portugal, the other described as an Armenian from Jerusalem) who had brought with them a message from another friar who claimed that the last-named had been the Inquisitor-General of the Indies but who had been ordered by the Pope to return to work in the Christian lands of Europe. However, since that friar did not want to undertake what Sherley described as “the tedious voyage of the Portuguese by sea”, he went on to state that, “as a Christian held in high regard by the Persian monarch” that friar would welcome his intervention—to which Sherley (1613) responded to the two friars in Latin which might be translated as follows: “When Gods authority is cited as justification, one is always afraid that, instead of exposing a human wrong one might be violating a divine one”—and as one consequence of which he had asked the Persian monarch to send him as ambassador to his Christian counterparts in Europe.

While Anthony Sherley appended a copy of the so-called “privileges” that he had obtained from “The Great Sophy” (as he called the Persian monarch) as well as a copy of the “free privileges” for all Christians to trade in Persia as well as in that country’s dominions, with immediately thereafter a copy of his Letters of Credence given by that same Persian monarch and addressed to those rulers called “the Christian princes” (Sherley, 1613; Parker, 1999, pp. 61-82; Collier, 1863, Vol. 3; Day, William, & Wilkins, 1607; Nixon, 1607).

Bear in mind that there were at that time a number of European Christians who were permanent residents in the Near East, especially in Turkey, Persia and Syria. For instance, William Biddulph, a preacher to the English merchants in Syria, reminded readers that the capital of that country, Tripoli, was near Damascus, and that the Pope had sent a bishop from Rome to seek to be persuaded members of the Maronite sect there to convert to Catholicism, and that sect had, after lengthy deliberation, decided against the request by that

Pontiff—in part, because the people whom Biddulph described as “a very simple and ignorant people” are at the same time praised as being “civil and courteous to strangers”, and that they were, whether Christian or not, governed by an Emir, who was an Islamist. Biddulph also went on to relate how his group of Protestant Christians had observed the religious services of these people, the Maronites, conducted in what he called the Syriac tongue—both read and sung very reverently; with prayers of thanksgiving, the Psalms of David sung and of chapters of both the Old and New Testaments “distinctly read”. About which practices Biddulph went on to observe that these are “... too much neglected in England, God grants reformation thereof”. Bear in mind that several centuries before that it was the Pope Hadrain who had approved the translation into and use of vernacular Slavic for those who could not worship in either Greek or Latin or Hebrew (Herrin, 2007).

When William Biddulph went on to comment on other groups encountered in the Near East, his views on Jews are worthy of recall. Not only does he mention that “... there are many Jews in Constantinople, Aleppo, Damascus, Babylon, Grand Cairo, and every city and great place of merchandise throughout all the Turkish dominions ...”, he went on to assert, later on about Jews that “... to this day they have neither king nor country proper to themselves; but they are dispersed throughout the whole world”. And in every place they come, they are contemptible of base account, according to the cry of those crucifiers: “His blood be upon us and our children”. Which is fulfilled this day in our eyes and ears. They are of most vile account in the sight of Turks than Christians; insomuch that if a Jew would turn Turk, he must first turn Christian, before they would admit him to be a Turk

... I have sundry times had conference with them. And some of them, yea, the greater part of them, are blasphemous wretches, who, when they are pressed with an argument which they cannot answer, break out into opprobrious speeches, and say that Christ was a false prophet and disciples stole Him out of His grave while the soldiers who watched Him, slept; and that their forefathers deservedly crucified Him; and that if He were living now, they would use Him worse than did his forefathers. (Biddulph, 1609, pp. 1324-1353; Osborne, 1745; Parker, 1999, pp. 83-107)

While Biddulph (1609) had a great deal more to say about Christians, particularly about the differences between those of who are “sojourning” in Aleppo (whom he named as Nostranes or Nazarins; Chelsalines; Greeks; Franks), he made further distinction between those Christians born in those spaces and those who had come there for trading purposes only. While, about the first-named he made a further distinction that while they abide by the ecclesiastical rules laid down by their patriarchs, in civil matters, they as well as their patriarchs, are subject to and obey Turkish laws; which distinction makes him to conclude that “... they are all slaves unto the Great Turk, whom they all call the Great Seignior”—a term not very different from that used by Anthony Sherley.

Travel Tale Differences

It might be an appropriate moment to introduce differences as described by English travellers between not only Turks and Persians but also Kurds as a prelude to those travellers’ comments on Islam in those spaces those travellers had visited. First of all it is the observation by the Trinity College Cambridge-educated Sir Henry Blount (1602-1682) who told his readers that “the most important part of all states are four: arms, religion, justice and moral customs” (Blount, 1636; Pinkerton, 1810-1812, p. 197; Parker, 1999, pp. 175-194).

Then there is William Lithgow, a Scotsman born in Lanark *circa* 1582, who not only told his readers that while the Duke of Moldavi had “turned Turks” and that that Duke had been circumcised and had been given an annual pension, that defection had been greatly regretted by Christians resident in Constantinople

(Lithgow, 1632; Phelps, 1974; Parker, 1999, pp. 149-174). Especially noteworthy in the context of Biddulph's characterisation of the Turks as "... a people who have not the generosity of mind to temper felicity, to be glutted with the superfluous fruits of doubtful prosperity", Lithgow asserted that while Turks do not have a feature he described as "... patient resolution to withstand adversity, nor hope to expect the better alteration of time...", he went on to claim that Turks will also demonstrate a feature he described as "their excessive cruelty"—especially to those whom he called "poor Christians, who are either severely punished, if not put to death".

Whereas Lithgow spent some time outlining his sense of the Turkish legal system—for instance that, whereas men are allowed by the Qur'an to marry as many women as they wish, should a Turkish woman (and he makes it clear that he means either a wife or a concubine) prostitute herself to a man who is not her husband, that husband "... may bind her hands and feet, hang a stone about her neck and cast her in the river".

Other travellers, such as Fynes Moryson (1566-1617), who, although had been elected a fellow of his college, preferred to travel and, in the process, highlighting one feature, which he described as the "covetousness of the Turks" (Moryson, 1617; Hughes, 1903; Parker, 1999, pp. 128-148). Similarly, John Cartwright (1611) could describe the Kurds as a "... most thievish people..." about whom, he asserted, "... adore and worship the Devil, to the end [that] he may not hurt them or their cattle". Furthermore, Cartwright will claim that Kurds are "... very evil to all sorts of Christians, yet they live under the commandment of the Great Turk, but with much freedom and liberty"—especially when compared to what he describes as "the miserable thralldom of the Christians under Turkish tyranny". Cartwright also made distinctions between Turks and Persians—with the latter, in his view, being superior to the former.

Islamophobia

A somewhat lengthy quote from his concerning Muhammad is offered here. He is clear that "it shall not be amiss to insert a word or two of Muhammad and his superstitions, who was born in this country, and has seduced the greatest part of the world with his abominable religion..." Not only does Muhammad, according to Cartwright, claim that the Devil is circumcised, and that a man can have many wives as he wishes, but also that a man can "couple with brute beasts also", and that whereas Muhammad had come with "force to obey his law, whereas the Truth draws men of their own accord", so that finally, according to him, finally, he can draw the distinction between Christianity and Islam—or more precisely between his country, England, and those elsewhere. Cartwright asks his readers that they should "... utterly detest that religion", by which he meant Islam (Cartwright, 1611; Parker, 1999, pp. 106-127).

While Harborne, mentioned at the outset, had noted that he had gone to visit Santa Sophia, formerly a Christian place of worship, now a mosque, in which place he was asked to take off his shoes so that he would not profane the mosque because he was a Christian, both Biddulph and Litghow are, broadly speaking, in accord with the sentiments expressed by Cartwright. While for Biddulph it was probably the Devil himself who had "used the false prophet Muhammad as its instrument to broach it [Islam] abroad", he not only argued that Muhammad's parents were from different religions with his father being Arabian and his mother Jewish; who, after the death of her husband the widow would not only make her son Muhammad "lord and master of her person and her substance", but that, at more or less the same time, according to Biddulph, Muhammad, having come to an agreement with Sergius (who is described as an Arian—thus another so-called heresy from Christianity that begun in those parts of the world around the 4th century AD) those two Muhammad and Sergius—concocted a form of religion that was different from Jewishness as well as Christianity. Later on,

according to Biddulph, Muhammad would be further assisted by Sergius and the Jewish Talmudist, John Nestorius, so that Muhammad... this champion, first a thief, afterwards a seditious soldier, then a renegade, after that a captain of a rebellious host, persuaded lightheads, enemies of the true religion [Christianity] that he is the Messenger of God; whereby we may gather how great the power of Satan is in them who embrace not the truth.

Conclusions

According to Biddulph (1609), those who “embrace not the truth” are not only Muhammad and the views that he developed for Islam but also Catholics. While the first-named was found to be largely in the Near East and the latter on the Continent of Europe, English travel writing was of enormous assistance to Protestantism not simply in resistance to these religions but particularly in the making of foreign policy at home (Pincus, 1966)¹.

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¹ This is a version of a paper read at the *Renaissance Old Worlds: English Encounters From the Levant to the Far East* Conference jointly organised by The British Library and the University of Liverpool, 2012.

- from Scotland, to the most famous kingdoms in Europe, Asia and Affrica...wherein is contained an exact relation of the laws, religion, policies and gournment of all their princes, potentates and peoples. Together with the grievous tortures he suffered by the Inquisition of Malaga in Spaine, his miraculous discovery and delivery thence. And also his lastest and late return from the Northern Isles.* London: Imprinted at London by Nicholas Oakes (To be sold by Nicholas Fussell and Humphrey Mosley at their shop in Paules church yard, at the Ball and White Lyon, 1632; newly imprinted and enlarged by the author, with certain relations of his second and third travels, 1623; Glasgow: James MacLehose, 1932; reprinted in facsimile Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum/Norwood N. J.: Walter J. Johnson, 1997).
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