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### Translations of the Qurʾān in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia

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## Review Essay

### *Translations of the Qurʾān in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*

#### Consuelo López-Morillas

*El Corán de Toledo. Edición y estudio del manuscrito 235 de la Biblioteca de Castilla-la Mancha.* Gijón: Ediciones Trea, 2011. 605 pp. ISBN 978-8497045759

#### Ulisse Cecini

*Alcoranus Latinus. Eine sprachliche und kulturwissenschaftliche Analyse der Koranübersetzungen von Robert von Ketton und Marcus von Toledo.* Berlin: LIT, 2012. 246 pp. ISBN 978-3643116703

In recent years translation has become an important theme in theoretical discussions in both the study of religion and cultural studies. The public translation of a religious discourse amounts to an act of comparison, which is one of the central tasks of the academic study of religion (Kavka 188) and such translation is the focus of more attention as cultural transfer becomes an increasingly important issue in the post-colonial, globalizing world. One might even speak of a “translational turn” in recent years, a term denoting the attempt to bridge the common distinction between (cultural) transfer and translation by seeing all cultural phenomena as translations in the light of their hybridity and plurality (Cecini 181). In this regard, one can perceive an increasing focus in recent historical studies on “contact zones” or cultural “interstices” (“Zwischenräumen”).

In the framework of religious encounters and cultural transfer, many central religious texts have been translated and interpreted. The two studies reviewed here discuss three translations of the Qurʾān, including two Latin translations and a translation into Castilian, the Romance vernacular spoken in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Castile and Aragon.<sup>1</sup> All translators were active in the Iberian Peninsula. The differences between the translations are considerable. Ulisse Cecini focuses on the translation of the Christian scholars Robert of Ketton (in 1143) and Mark of Toledo (in 1209–1210), while Consuelo

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1 Both authors offer summaries of their studies in Reinhold Gleis, ed., *Frühe Koranübersetzungen. Europäische und außereuropäische Fallstudien* (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftliches Verlag, 2012). See the detailed references below.

López-Morillas edits and analyzes a Spanish translation of the Qurʾān by an anonymous Muslim author preserved in a unique manuscript that was copied at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Not only do the translations differ, but so also do the scholarly studies themselves. Cecini's study clearly aims to contribute to a theoretical discussion within the framework of the aforesaid translational turn, while Consuelo López-Morillas's approach is strongly historical and philological and less focused on theory building or theorization.

Between the eleventh and the seventeenth centuries CE, notions of what makes a good translation changed considerably in the Western world. Whereas scholars in the Christian Middle Ages found a free, paraphrasing style acceptable, in the Age of Humanism the scholarly criterion changed, and scholars adopted the opinion that a good translation should be *de verbo ad verbum* and faithful to the source (Tischler 59). In the Islamic scholarly tradition, discussions about the "translatability" of the Qurʾān, seen as the eternal Word of God by orthodox theologians, stood apart from discussions about other texts. A literal translation of the Qurʾān was never seen as the Qurʾān itself, but was always understood to be merely "an interpretation." In this sense, the Qurʾān could not be translated, and translations were never accepted as substitutes for the Arabic original, even when the knowledge of Arabic diminished, and other languages were spoken, as was the case for the Muslim minorities (Mudejars) in Castile and Aragon between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries CE, which gradually adopted Romance as their spoken language. While the cultural transfer process in the case of the Latin translations took place between the Arabophone culture of Islamic al-Andalus and Latin Christendom, the third translation, preserved in ms. T 235 in Toledo (Biblioteca de Castilla-La Mancha), marked the coming into being of a corpus of Islamic texts in the Spanish vernacular among the Muslim minorities themselves, a process that was rudely interrupted by the expulsion of the Moriscos in 1609.

I will first discuss Cecini's study and then López-Morillas's edition, and will end with some comparative remarks. Cecini's *Alcoranus Latinus* is the edited version of a doctoral thesis defended at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg in 2010. It compares the two said Latin translations of the Qurʾān made by Christian authors. Ketton's translation, the older of the two discussed here, dates from 1143 and was commissioned by Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny. Ketton's translation became part of the so-called *Corpus Cluniacense*, the monumental collection of Latin translations of Islamic texts and texts about Islam such as the influential "Dispute between al-Hāshimī and (pseudo) Al-Kindī" and a number of others. Ketton's translation was followed by another one, that of Mark of Toledo, commissioned by the archbishop of Toledo, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada. The latter had commissioned a translation within the

framework of his call for a crusade against the Almohads on the one hand and his cultural and ideological politics within Christian Spain vis-à-vis the religious minorities on the other. Conversion and interreligious communication in the pursuit of cultural and religious unity were important goals of these policies, and the translation was to serve both (Cecini, 96ff., in particular 99). The two translations seem to be unrelated. Cecini does not offer explanations for this, but Thomas Burman pointed out that Robert's translation was not available in Toledo at that point (Burman, *Reading the Qur'an* 17). According to Tischler, the lack of diffusion of Robert's translation can be explained by the opposition against transmitting the Latin translation in Peter the Venerable's own religious community; only later was any interest revived by the mendicants orders, in particular the Dominicans (Tischler 40ff). Before they made their translations of the Qur'an, both Robert and Mark had mainly been interested in the study of Arabic astronomy (Robert, evincing interest in particular in Ptolemy's *Almagest*) and medicine (Mark). Robert was only prepared to turn away from these studies after Peter had offered him a considerable sum of money. Mark had studied medicine and had enjoyed a classical education. He had also studied Arabic, something that seems to have sprung from his interest in the medical sciences (Cecini 104–105). While Mark probably worked mainly on his own, Robert worked in cooperation with Christians as well as a Muslim. The latter is merely referred to as "Muhammad" in the sources (Cecini 85). Nothing is known about the part he played in the translation process.

In what does Cecini's contribution consist? A number of authors, including the late Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, who devoted a number of seminal articles to these medieval Latin translations, criticized the quality of Ketton's translation and its polemical tone. In doing so, she had continued earlier criticisms such as those by the Arabist Adriaan Reland who had qualified it in 1717 as the worst Latin translation of the Qur'an he had ever known (Cecini 16). Thomas Burman, however, saw that the negative qualifications stemmed in part from a misunderstanding of the intentions of the author. Burman showed that, in fact, Robert intended to reflect the Islamic exegetical tradition in his work, and for that reason often offers paraphrases (including explanatory glosses) rather than mere literal (*de verbo ad verbum*) translations (Burman; Cecini 17; Tischler 59). Cecini's work builds on these earlier studies, in particular that of Burman, but has as one of its explicit aims (as evident in the title) to contribute to the theorization of the phenomenon of culture transfer and cultural dynamics. A further aim is to offer a comparative study of both translations in the light of the aforesaid processes of cultural transfer. However, critical editions of both translations do not exist yet, so that in order to compare the text, a preliminary study of the texts was necessary. The preceding factors led the author to

divide the work into the following three parts (see also his overview on p. 12). A first part is devoted to the notion of cultural transfer and the stages that can be distinguished in it (selection-mediation [“Vermittlung”] and reception, see 21) and to an overview of theoretical notions of translation in the Middle Ages. Then it proceeds to determine the parameters for critical editions of both texts. On the basis of these preliminary investigations, critical editions of the introductions and a selected passage from the translations themselves are offered. These are: Robert’s introduction to his Latin Qur’ān translation; and secondly, Mark’s introduction to his translation and to his edition of the creed of the Almohad Messiah Ibn Tumart (the founder of dynasty of the Almohads, the main opponents of Castile at the time of archbishop Jiménez de Rada; see also 107) and, as a case study, Sura 29, verses 1–40 (the rationale for this choice is discussed on 12). The second part introduces the two translations, their authors, and their social and political background. In the third part, the translations are systematically analyzed in comparative perspective. Conclusions are offered in a final section, entitled “Mark and Robert as translators of the Qur’ān.” There are two appendices in which German translations of the most important sources are offered: appendix 1 includes translations into German of the introductions to the two translations of the Qur’ān; appendix 2 provides the critical editions of the two Latin texts of sura 19, verses 1–40. The appendices are followed by two tables, indices of Qur’ān passages, and a bibliography.

The most notable outcomes of the comparative analysis (space prevents me from offering a full discussion) are that Robert and Mark appear to have used different hermeneutical approaches. Mark’s translation offers fewer digressions and paraphrases than Robert’s and attempts to keep closer to the Arabic text, to be more *de verbo ad verbum* (“eins zu eins,” 164). Robert often paraphrases (e.g. by using more than one word for certain Arabic expressions, 165), often taking several sentences together. In this way, he adapts the text to the literary taste of his Christian Latin readers. Paradoxically, this does not mean that Mark’s translation is more faithful to the meaning of the Qur’ān. Cecini argues that Robert was more faithful to original (171) and discussed at length the example of the translation of the word *imām* in sura 2:124 where Ibrahim is called “an imam to the people” (*li-l-nāsi imāman*) in the context of a passage that tells how God puts Ibrahim to the test. (As is well known, Islamic Traditions assume that one of the rituals referred to here is circumcision.) The word *imām* is translated by Mark as *sacerdos* (‘priest’: *et quando examinavit Abraham creator suus per uerba que adimpluit dicens “prefaciam te gentibus sacerdotem”*), but is translated by Robert in a paraphrastic way (thus altering the literal meaning) as *rector et doctor* (*Abrahae praecepta divinitus petita complenti, sese rectorem doctoremque statuere deus iniunxit*; 183–184). Following

Imtiyaz Yusuf's article in the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* (s.v. *imām*), it can be noted that the Qur'anic meaning of *imām* is 'leader, guide, and example', but does not have the meaning of 'prayer leader', which it may have as well. Mark may use a term familiar to his Christian readership, the Christian equivalent of the prayer leader in Islam, the priest. Hence, Cecini, concludes, Robert's translation seems to create more "interspace," more of a gap in meaning, than Mark's translation does. In some respects, Robert's work seems more polemical than that of Mark, but the polemical aspects remain, according to Cecini, mainly limited to the introduction, and not the translation itself (170). It is a pity that Cecini does not comment upon the very important question of to what extent Robert follows the Islamic exegetical traditions, leaving that aspect out of his discussion about the differences between his translation and that of Mark. It seems to me that this is an important omission. Nevertheless, it is clear that the book marks the promising first stages of an important research project into the extant Latin corpus of medieval writings on Islam, which will hopefully result in complete critical editions and exhaustive philological and cultural analyses of both texts (see for a full description p. 168).<sup>2</sup> It is a careful and promising study and hopefully the author will be able to carry out his ambitious plans in the field.

López-Morillas, professor emerita of Spanish at Indiana University, focuses on one manuscript in particular, ms. T 235, a Spanish translation of the Qur'an. The manuscript in question had been published before in a rather uncritical way, without methodological reflection and a very brief and superficial introduction by Roqué with an introduction by Vernet (*Alcorán*). López-Morillas's edition, by contrast, is preceded by a rich introduction, the edition is of a high quality, and the book itself edited in a beautiful way. There is a considerable time gap between the date of the preface (2005) and the publication date (2011). This explains why (as we shall see below) an important publication of 2009, that of Roth and Gleis, which reported the discovery of important fragments of the lost Latin translation of Juan de Segovia's trilingual Qur'an, is only briefly referred to and not fully discussed.

Ms. T 235 was probably copied in Villafeliche (Aragon) between April and June 1606 (25), i.e. within a period of three months, as the different colophons it contains demonstrate. The anonymous copyist, who had the manuscript copied while on loan for a brief period, excuses himself for omitting the Arabic text of the Qur'an in his copy. For the sake of time, he only copied

2 At the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, a critical edition of Robert's translation is also being prepared by Professor José Martínez Gázquez and an edition of Mark's translation has already been completed as a doctoral dissertation under his direction by Nàdia Petrus Pons in 2008.

the translation. He also excused himself for using Latin characters instead of Arabic letters. Interestingly he frames these characters in terms of letters of the Christians and Muslims justifying this by referring to a (apocryphal) hadith of the Prophet Muḥammad, who said that the best language is the one that one understands (25). As López-Morillas demonstrates, the copyist who copied T 235 also copied two other manuscripts known to us, also Islamic texts, written in Latin script as well. López-Morillas argues that the copyist might have been the wealthy Morisco Muhammad Rubio. We know that Muhammad Rubio originated from Villafeliche and later, after the expulsion of the Moriscos in 1609, lived in Tunis. There, he commissioned the Morisco Al-Ḥajārī to translate religious works from Arabic into Spanish for aged Moriscos who only read that language. The Spanish Islamic texts which circulated among the Moriscos in Tunis were also predominantly written in Latin script. Although I am not convinced that the identification of Rubio as the copyist is correct, it is clear that at the end of the sixteenth century Moriscos made increasingly frequent use of Latin characters for their religious works in Spanish, and continued to do so after their expulsion from Spain. From several remarks of the copyist, it becomes clear that he was not the author of the translation into Spanish. It seems unlikely that T 235 ever left Spain. It was owned for some time by a branch of Spain's ruling Bourbon dynasty (29). The manuscript is thus material evidence of a development inside the Morisco communities in the early seventeenth century towards the use of Latin script for their Islamic writings, and a clear sign of a process of acculturation towards the majority Spanish culture. That such Moriscos were, in spite of this, pious Muslims is clear evidence that integration of Moriscos into Spanish life did not mean that their conversion to Christianity was imminent.

The edition is divided into an introduction, a section devoted to the codicological and paleographical aspects of the manuscript and its history, a third part devoted to the authorship and the textual relations between T 235 and other Spanish and Aljamiado translations and commentaries, a fourth section analyzing the translation (syntax, morphology, lexicon), a fifth part that analyzes the commentaries used, and a sixth part that analyzes the language of the text (phonology, morphology and syntax). The edition itself, plus a (selective) glossary and a bibliography, follow this.

One of the main questions that López-Morillas raises in her introduction is the problem of the authorship of the translation. In an earlier publication, the author of the present review argued that the translation included in T 235 might well have stemmed from ʿĪsā of Segovia's translation. ʿĪsā was a faqīh (Sp. *alfaquí*) from Segovia (Castile), a city that boasted important Muslim and

Jewish aljamas. The earliest evidence about him suggests that in the first half of the fifteenth century, he was for some time part of the official religious and Islamic judicial hierarchy, which consisted of an *alcalde mayor* (Islamic judge, or *qāḍī*), a court official, at the top, and local *alcaldes* in the towns and other places. In 1455–1456, ʿĪsā travelled to Aiton (France) and translated the Qurʾān into Castilian upon the request of Juan de Segovia (1393–1458), who on the basis of that Romance translation made a Latin. ʿĪsā’s translation is usually said to be the first translation of the Qurʾān into a European language, but recently Nikolas Jaspert discovered that at the end of the fourteenth century the king of Aragon, Peter the Ceremonious, gave order to translate the Qurʾān into Catalan on the basis of a Latin translation (perhaps that of Robert), a translation that indeed came into being, but which is now lost (Jaspert). In his best known *Breviario Sunní* (1462), ʿĪsā sets out the reasons he had had for translating the Qurʾān into Romance, namely, the deterioration of the situation of Muslims living under Christian rule, their loss of wealth as a result of heavy tax burdens, the loss of (Arabic) learning, and “calumnies,” probably polemical allegations. The translation ʿĪsā made (as well as Juan’s trilingual Qurʾān, including Latin, Romance, and Arabic) have long been considered lost. López-Morillas’s method in tracing the author is mainly a textual comparison between T 235 and a number of other Spanish and Aljamiado commentaries (including translations). The outcome of these investigations remains inconclusive with regard to the question of whether it is ʿĪsā’s translation or not (p. 42: “no es posible confirmarla ni negarla en el estado actual de nuestros conocimientos”). Needless to say, ʿĪsā’s translation is not the only one that López-Morillas considers. Another (lost) translation is that by the Mudejar religious scholar Juan Andrés who converted to Christianity in 1487 and is said to have made a translation of the Qurʾān into Aragonese around 1510 (43). From a comparison between T 235 and some quotations found in Andrés’s writings, it is clear that the former cannot be the author. Similar and meticulous comparisons are made with other available translations with commentaries. On the basis of these comparisons, the author reaches the conclusion that whereas nearly all translations and commentaries, numbering twenty-five (including T 235), converge in a way that implies that they all belong to one family, the translations by Juan Andrés remain outside that family (78–79) and so does a manuscript copied outside Spain, preserved in a Spanish translation of the Qurʾān preserved in the French National Library (no. 447). Interestingly, López-Morillas argues that the influence of ʿĪsā’s translation alone cannot explain the diversity of versions within the converging body of texts within the larger family. Therefore, she posits yet the existence of another, unknown Mudejar translation (next to ʿĪsā’s), which



she says explains the diversity of translations-cum-interpretations extant in the corpus of Spanish Islamic texts (78)!

Another, very valuable aspect of López-Morillas's analysis is found in part five, which is devoted to the influence of Qur'anic exegesis (*Ar. tafṣīr*) upon the Toledan Qur'ān (101ff). López-Morillas makes clear that the use of vertical slashes and red ink mark offer numerous interpolated commentaries, but that pieces of commentary do not remain limited to demarcated passages or sentences, and in numerous cases they are also tacitly introduced in the text. Where they derive from known authorities, both Andalusian (e.g. Ibn ʿAtīyya (1088–1151) and Ibn Abī Zamanīn of Elvira (d. 1008) and non-Andalusian (Al-Zamakhsharī (1075–1144)) and duly annotated by her in the text edition itself). However, her study makes clear that the anonymous author himself added all sorts of smaller clarifying notes as well. Undoubtedly, no other known manuscript from the Muslim Spanish/Aljamiado family is as complete or faithful in presenting the translation of the Qur'an as T 235.

As I briefly mentioned above, the period between the writing of this study and its publication took considerable time. In 2009 Ullie Roth and Reinhold Gleis ("Die Spuren", "Eine Weitere Spur") identified some fragments that had remained unidentified so far as small parts of the Latin translation of Juan de Segovia (Seville, Biblioteca Colombina, ms. 7–6-14, f. 21r) made by John of Segovia on the basis of ʿĪsā's Spanish version, resulting in the trilingual Qur'ān Juan wanted for his mission to peacefully convert the Muslims (*per viam pacis et doctrinae*). The discovery by Roth and Gleis which appeared to be very relevant for the discussion about the author of T 235 came at a time referred to on p. 43, note 6obis. The footnote in question refers to the fact that Gleis and Roth discovered a new manuscript of Juan de Segovia and that their study "descarta la posibilidad de que el ms. T 235 descienda de la traducción", i.e., excludes the possibility that T 235 can be linked to the translation by ʿĪsā; the work under review was already in press at the time.

There can be little doubt that Gleis and Roth's articles, which offer a new interpretation of a manuscript of which the value and meaning had remained unknown to earlier scholars, is an important contribution to the discussion. Indeed, their findings seem to falsify the hypothesis that T 235 is related to ʿĪsā's translation. At the same time, their contributions open new ways to approach the issue of the influence and meaning of John and ʿĪsā's collaborative translation project. For, if T 235 is not related to ʿĪsā, might it be possible that any other of the extant twenty-five Aljamiado and Spanish Islamic *tafṣīr* manuscripts shows similarities with the fragments discovered? And what about other manuscript collections possibly preserving copies of this text? It is very interesting that López-Morillas discovered that the famous Granadan

archbishop Hernando de Talavera very likely possessed a copy (33). Further work needs to be done.

Be that as it may, it is interesting to see then how in recent research (including the works under review here) it seems to appear that the translations by Robert, Mark and our anonymous Mudejar author came into being without much influence from other existing translations. López-Morillas describes how in Morisco (and I would certainly add: Mudejar) Spain, manuscripts of the Qurʾān and its translations and commentaries circulated, passing from one group to another, were lent to other students of the texts for some time, and were copied and further commented upon in a piecemeal and highly eclectic way (78). Yet, if it is correct that there was no influence on T 235 of the earlier translation by such famous an author as ʿĪsā of Segovia, as in later commentaries and translations, we have to conclude that T 235, too, remained isolated. Whether that also holds true for the influence of T 235 upon later writings remains to be studied. If López-Morillas is right that the copyist of T 235 is Muhammad Rubio, it might be worthwhile to study whether this particular translation influenced Morisco writings in Spanish in the Diaspora, in particular Tunis, where it remained in use for several decades and a large number of religious texts in Spanish came into being.

In conclusion of this review, let us briefly return to the translation of the term *imām*. How does T 235 deal with this issue? The said verse in T 235 reads: “Yrreprobó a Ybrahim su Señor con mandamientos que los cumplió. Dixo: “¿Yo te e puesto de las jentes alimem?” It can be seen that in this case the Morisco left the word untranslated, or rather used the Spanish calque, with which the fifteenth and sixteenth-century Mudejar and Morisco readership was probably familiar, and avoids the problem of translation. In the glossary at the end of the book the author gives as meaning of *alimem* in this particular case as “the person who leads the prayer in the mosque,” but in view of our discussion, it can be doubted whether that is the way the Mudejar or Morisco reader would have understood this particular passage. The case is probably quite typical for the relation between Arabic and Romance in processes of cultural transfer within the Muslim communities themselves over the generations: Romance religious culture remained close to its Arabic heritage and the two were never separated, a situation quite unlike the processes of transfer between Arabic-Islamic culture and Latin Christendom in which, in spite of the existence of a shared, intermediary space, polemics and conversion dominated. In conclusion, the two studies discussed here, each in their own right are both very valuable and careful contributions to the study of the processes of cultural and religious transfer that took place on the Iberian Peninsula.

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