

Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



Tommasino, Pier Mattia. *The Venetian Qur'an: A Renaissance Companion to Islam*. Trans. Sylvia Notini

Frank Lacopo

Volume 41, Number 4, Fall 2018

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1061957ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1061957ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Lacopo, F. (2018). Review of [Tommasino, Pier Mattia. *The Venetian Qur'an: A Renaissance Companion to Islam*. Trans. Sylvia Notini]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 41(4), 280–283.

<https://doi.org/10.7202/1061957ar>

All Rights Reserved © Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance, Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society, Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium and Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2019

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

transition to Hero Chalmers's essay on the aesthetics, ideology, and romance of seventeenth-century women's writing. Chalmers discusses how women's writing was received by readers and how the form and style of romance writing were often dismissed as "foolishness." Two centuries later, Jane Austen wrote *Northanger Abbey*, which Sara Malton argues is an example of how the tension of the "real" and the "representational," as well as fantasy and reality, unfolds in the heroine's plot as elements of romance writing.

Patricia Parker's Afterword places this collection of perspectives in dialogue, which further justifies Stanivukovic's choice to work within the wide boundaries of 1375 and 1940. The editor's Introduction and Parker's Afterword unite diverse arguments in a way that celebrates the innovativeness of romance as a strategic framework while reiterating how the interconnectivity of the essays relies not on genre or temporality, but rather on the use of romance as a writing strategy.

The accessibility of *Timely Voices* makes it a valuable resource to experts, non-specialists, and graduate students alike. "Romance" is a generative framework that continually reinvents central elements of medieval writing. Stanivukovic makes a compelling argument for the longevity of romance as a tactic—one that recognizes the potentiality of "romance" to create new spaces that transcend generic and temporal divisions. *Timely Voices* makes for a pleasurable read that creates space for new insights.

SHEENA JARY

McMaster University

Tommasino, Pier Mattia.

The Venetian Qur'an: A Renaissance Companion to Islam. Trans. Sylvia Notini.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. Pp. xix, 297 + 1 ill. ISBN 978-08122-5012-1 (hardcover) US\$59.95.

Within the past several years, early modern historians have acquired a taste for interreligious and intercultural history that augments and, in some cases, corrects the treatment of linguistic and religious groups in isolation. Sweeping surveys like Nicholas Terpstra's 2015 *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern*

World and more focused studies including Emily Michelson's 2017 article "Conversionary Preaching and the Jews in Early Modern Rome" stand out as exemplars in this broad discussion. Pier Mattia Tommasino's study deserves to be counted among them.

This welcome work combines historical and philological methods in an exploration of *l'Alcorano di Macometto*, a companion to Islam and an abridged translation of the Qur'an from Latin produced in the Venetian publishing house of Andrea Arrivabene in 1547. First, Tommasino dissects the lives and thought-worlds of those who were involved in the creation of this Venetian Qur'an. Special attention is given to Arrivabene and to the text's allusive translator, Giovanni Battista Castrodardo. Second, Tommasino discusses the complex sixteenth-century Mediterranean religious environment that *l'Alcorano di Macometto* inhabited. This section demonstrates the extent to which Abrahamic religious discourses cross-fertilized with each other and with secular literature as they developed across the early modern period. Third and finally, Tommasino shifts his focus from ways in which historical people and intellectual currents influenced the Venetian Qur'an's content to the document's outward impact on its context.

The study begins with a strong revisionist claim, which persuades in favour of renewed discussion of Arrivabene's Qur'an. An orientalist scholarly tradition dating to Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1606) has held *l'Alcorano di Macometto* in contempt owing to the poor quality of the translation into the Italian, which took as its source a medieval Latin rendition instead of the original Arabic. This is an important critical observation. However, it has served to discourage consideration of *l'Alcorano di Macometto*'s broader historical context. Close analysis of the document reveals its place within a burgeoning Venetian publishing market, where production of accessible and lucrative products took precedence over professional humanists' standards. Tommasino employs concise biographical sections, informed by extensive research into correspondence and existing biographical work in Italian and French, to outline important sixteenth-century personalities that feature in *l'Alcorano di Macometto*'s creation and dissemination. Of particular importance is the text's dedicatee, the French diplomat Gabriel Leutz d'Aramon. D'Aramon's career saw him "surrounded by many characters of dubious [Catholic] orthodoxy" throughout the 1540s (45). More importantly, d'Aramon featured as a central figure in negotiating the French–Ottoman alliance against Charles V.

Tommasino thus demonstrates the Venetian readership's openness to and even celebration of cross-religious alliances.

The Venetian Qur'an's second part takes up a line of rigorous philological inquiry to reveal *l'Alcorano di Macometto's* otherwise obscure translator Giovanni Battista Castrodardo and his intellectual context. Immediately before his work on the Qur'an, Castrodardo produced an edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Thus, Castrodardo was steeped in a medieval and early modern literary tradition that accepted the existence of purgatory. Purgatorial motifs also featured within Castrodardo's principal medieval source, Robert of Ketton's Latin Qur'an. Furthermore, Castrodardo drew on popular fifteenth- and sixteenth-century themes like the "Caesarization" of historical and literary figures. In *l'Alcorano di Macometto*, "Muhammad [occasionally] left the company of hideous heresiarchs and brutish pseudoprophets to join Roman generals and Ottoman rulers" by taking on Western heroic characteristics (141). Tommasino thus shows how Arrivabene's text was—to the ire of later orientalist—far removed from the ancient Qur'an. Instead, it constituted a sixteenth-century literary artifact that appropriated and occasionally celebrated Islam for a Christian audience.

The issue of *l'Alcorano di Macometto's* reception occupies the remainder of this study. Tommasino forwards the claim that Arrivabene's publication formed the basis for popular as well as scholarly consumption of Islam in sixteenth-century Europe. The striking similarities between Castrodardo's text and the writings of the popular prophet Scolio of Lucca suggest that Italians' consumption of religious writing contained a substantial dose of Islamic content. Though sparse, evidence also exists that the miller from Friuli named Mennochio—made famous by Carlo Ginzburg—read *l'Alcorano di Macometto*. The impact of Islamic ideas on Mennochio's cosmos has endured as a subject of conversation, and Tommasino's research complements Ginzburg's efforts well. Tommasino concludes with additional research in correspondence and early modern learned texts to show that *l'Alcorano di Macometto* reached audiences as far as Amsterdam and England despite being listed on the Tridentine *Index* of prohibited books.

Overall, this is a productive addition to the ongoing conversation on intercultural encounter in the early modern world. Tommasino's exhaustive research is evident in his rich bibliographical apparatus—which includes no fewer than twenty-five documentary exemplars of the Venetian Qur'an

scattered across Europe and the United States. Sylvia Notini's smoothly readable translation from the original Italian further complements this excellent work. In all, only minor critiques are in order: some passages from Latin and Italian are translated and others are not, while Arabic terms like *mi'rāğ* are italicized in some instances but not others. Less advanced students should also be aware that a working knowledge of Italian and Latin is absolutely required to understand many of Tommasino's arguments. These very minor issues ultimately do not detract from an otherwise excellent study.

FRANK LACOPO

Pennsylvania State University