

The 'Idol' of Prophet Muhammad in Greene's *Alphonsus*

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Abstract- *The image of Prophet Muhammad (570-632) is entirely inaccurate in Early Modern Drama. A ridiculous form of the name of the Prophet, 'Mahomet', was an artifact of abuse, distortion and misrepresentation placed at the focus of Western prejudgment of Islam. It is worth exploring the way myth works in relation to Greene's Alphonsus, in order to understand better Renaissance views of Prophet Muhammad. His only prejudice seems to be against Prophet Muhammad in representing his image in a speaking brazen head. The Mediaeval tradition maintained its dislike of the Prophet himself as a dreadful deity who had established his doctrines by his resolution and his arms, but whose faith subsequently became more generous of error than he would have adored. Greene presented a striking antipathy to the Prophet and Islam. It is a heathenish image to tarnish the Turkish theology. Greene's Amurack essentially represents Islam for the Elizabethan audience in which he was defeated in front of the Christian hero Alphonsus. Greene's play influences the political and ideological conflicts between the Turks and the Christendom.*

Keywords- *Prophet Muhammad; idol; brazen head; Alphonsus; Amurack; Ottoman; Turks*

1. INTRODUCTION

The framework of the Western custom of Islam was established itself through the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries and the earlier part of the fourteenth by the engagement of Eastern and Byzantine Christian traditions. By the middle of the fourteenth century, the Western model conclusively established a Mediaeval tradition in Europe. Many Europeans liked to insist that Islam is a work of Muhammad's, because it is very suitable for ridicule like the Prophet's human weaknesses, as well as such supposed turpitude as his failure to arrest the practice of magic among the Arabs, among whom paganism thus survived. Christian statements about Muhammad must always be rich soil for the Christian who seeks points of difference. Therefore, the distortion extended to include Islam as a social religion (due to its focus on group life rather than individualistic one), which has shaped its own cultural identity, and which is meant to be upheld by Muslims (Nurallah, 2008:46). Otherwise, for Muslims, Muhammad is a human Messenger of God the Creator, and monotheism is the core of his mission to humanity. Muslims believe in God, the Creator: "Say, "He is Allah, [who is] One, Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is begotten, Nor is there to Him any equivalent" (The Glorious Qur'an, 112:1-4).

The idea of Muhammad as a false Christ was often present in Christian minds (Daniel, 1993: 87). The negative Christian attitude was because of the general ignorance of Islam. For instance, the general mediaeval belief was that Muslims were idolatrous: Geoffrey Chaucer, the father of English literature, chose the oath by Mahomet, Termagant, Apollin and Jupiter. The derivation of the English word 'momet' is well-known as a corrupt

model of Muhammad the god of the Saracens. The propaganda of the First Crusade in Europe aroused accounts about idols of Muhammad worshipped in mosques. The origin of these ideas were the false agenda of the church to distort Islam. During the early fifteenth century into the early seventeenth century, the English felt fear, awe and envy towards the undefeated Ottoman Empire. It had instigated them to impose negative stereotypes on the Turks and their culture. The representation of negative stereotypes of the Turks is understood in relation to a contextual framework where the Ottoman Empire is perceived as an intimidating superior power to Britain.¹ Linda Colley finds it challenging to consent to the starring role of stereotyping as a compound for occupation, disagreeing that stereotypes of the "other" are not the individual cause of violence. Yet, these descriptions, along with other reasons, could be used to simplify and explain the use of imperial force on those who are comprehended as inferior (Colley, 2002:102).

Greene's *Alphonsus* is an Oriental play. The plot is located in Europe and Constantinople, displaying the King of Naples coming from Alphonsus' domains to the Turkish territory. The Sultan Amurack has a vision of his overthrow. The vision takes him to rail hostilely against Muhammad, labelling him a proud mysterious god whose unsuccessful and mythical prophecies have led him to a

¹ See Gerald MacLean, "Ottomanism before Orientalism? Bishop King Praises Henry Blount, Passenger in the Levant" in *Travel Knowledge: European Discoveries in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna G. Singh (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the New World, 1600-1850*; Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999)

doleful case. The dream becomes a reality in the last act and Alphonsus achieves victory and has taken Amurack's daughter, Phigenia, as a bride. The Elizabethan image of Prophet Muhammad is as a deceiver and a seducer (Whetstone, 1586:57). It emerged in the newssheets, travellers' accounts and the literary writers on the London stage. Its impact included the image of Muslims as corrupt, and on Islam as a religion as being either instrumental or tolerant of this treachery. Therefore, the great success of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* influenced the popular Robert Greene to reproduce *The Tragedy of Alphonsus King of Arogoe*, which acknowledged with less appreciation (Al-Olaqi, 2012:198). Greene responds to the unsuccessful charge of the untruthful divinity of Muhammad frequently stated in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. Greene's idol of Muhammad instructs the Turkish priests and their emperor whereas in *Tamburlaine* Prophet Muhammad is absent and does not respond to the Turks. John Churton Collins notes that the tragedy is by no means a contemptible performance (Collins, 1965:112). The audience seemed to be unfamiliar with the presentation of Muhammad as a speaking idol. The lack of true information is a main aspect in establishing an inadequate impression. The appearance is similar to that of Greene's Idol. In fact, Englishmen had a strong faith in witches, ghosts, sprites, fiends, beasts, foresights, and visions. The Mediaeval representation of Prophet Muhammad established the same image with a tendency to demean him.

2. IMAGE OF THE MEDIAEVAL IDOL OF MUHAMMAD

The Mediaeval accounts of Islamic religious doctrine and practice made by early modern Orientalism were totally inaccurate. In popular folklore, poetry and drama, pagan Saracens pay reverence to an idol called Mahoun or Mahound, who is repeatedly part of a pagan pantheon that contains Apollin, Termagant, and other devilish idols. One such image of these "paynim knights" and their religion is perceived in a metrical romance entitled *The Sowdone of Babylon*. In this poem, when the Sowdone or Sultan Laban is crushed by the Romans, one of his aides shouts at him, "To tell the truth, our gods hate us.\ Thou seest, neither Mahoun or Apollin is worth a pig's bristle" and when the Sultan has the idols carried before him, he says to them:

*Fye upon thee, Appolyn.
Thou shalt have an evil end.
And much sorrow shall come to thee also,
Termagant.
And as for the, Mahound, Lord of all the reste,
thou art not worth a mouse's turd.²*

² As Bernard Lewis states: Europeans in various parts of the continent showed a curious reluctance to call the Muslims by any name with a religious connotation, preferring to call them by ethnic names, the obvious purpose of which was to diminish their stature and significance and to reduce them to something local or even tribal. At various times and various places, Europeans called

He then has his idols crushed with sticks and thrown out of his tent. Muslims (or "Mahometans," as they were called) were not simply defined as pagans; there was as well a trend to discount their holy identity for a label that showed a "barbaric" culture.

The idea of Muhammad (Pbuh) not only as a false prophet, but as a god or idol to be adored, found frequently in chansons de geste, not unexpectedly reappears in many Italian texts such as *Orlando*—Muhammad is expressly called false and fallacious (Falso Malchometto" *Orl.* VIII, 39, 5; XIX, 7, 1). Prophet Muhammad is called "Muhammad God" or "Muhammad our god" on several occasions in Pulci's *Morgante* (Macometto Iddio" *Morg.* IV, 43, 2; VIII, 9, 6). Not coincidentally, the notion of the falseness of the Islamic "gods" is stated explicitly several times in *Morgante*: "O Muhammed, you are a false god!"; "Apollino and the other vain gods"; "false and wicked Muhammed" (Macon fallace" *Morg.* I, 56, 4). The falseness of the Islamic faith itself, often implicit in these texts, is spelled out in *Ansuigi* when a Christian champion declares to a Saracen ruler: "Your faith is false and vain" (La vostra f. 4v). Two unusual ideas pertaining to Muhammad's supposed deity—the "feast day of the god Muhammed" and "the sacred books of Muhammed"—are found in *Rambaldo* and in its model *Guerrino*. "La festa del iddio Maumetto" *Ramb.* f.2r). Subsequently, the conventional Old French Saracen trinity—Mahomet, Tervagant, and Apollyon—recurs in most of the Italian texts, but often only two of the three are named in a single passage (*Ramb.* f. 22v). Muslim idols are at times called Jupiter, Apollo, or Mahomet; chroniclers of the First Crusade occasionally refer to their adversaries as "Mahummicolae", "Muhammad-worshippers."³ Burton detects the material of these texts as comprising 'an inventory of inherited, even cherished, fictions in the guise of truth' which 'reached back at least as far as the seventh century to debunk the rise of Islam with ideas about the charlatanry of Prophet Muhammad' (Burton, 2005:23). Norman Daniel had previously established the practice of polemic biography. Burton calls the material of these texts as being 'Tales of Muhammad's falseness, lechery, violence, and sordid lineage' which were then and there 'corroborated with specious biblical exegesis, and then projected forward onto the Ottomans' (Burton, 2005:23). Nabil Matar identified the tradition as imitating the pattern of a progressive interpretation, in which the historical galaxy between Muhammad and that of the Turks was distorted (Matar, 1998: 153-167).

Muslims Saracens, Moors, Turks, Tartars, according to which of the Muslim peoples they have encountered (Vitkus, 2000, 45).

³ The term occurs six times in Raoul de Caen's *Gesta Tancredi* (*Recueil des historiens des croisades: historiens occidentaux*), 5 vols. (Paris, 1844-95), hereafter abbreviated RHC occ, 3:620, 670, 679, 691, 698, 705). The anonymous *Tudebodus imitatus et continuatus* contains the term "machumicolae" twice (RHC occ. 3:220, 227).

The fact is that these Oriental characters are pagan, that they adore idols such as Apollyon, Tervagant and Mahomet, but are not convincingly understood, in scholarly literature (Jones, 1942:201–25). R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, claims that such a mistaken idea could spread itself as a myth established on the ignorance of the spectators for general literature (Southern, 1978:121). Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*, rejects the idea that the concept of Saracens as idolaters was a material of ignorance; he proposes, instead, that it was a thoughtful narrative projected to amuse (Daniel, 1978:121). The adjective “pagan” does not essentially refer to an idolater in mediaeval sources. However, for many playwrights it seems to be no more than a substitute for non-Christian. While they remain to treat the Saracens as idol worshipers, in these later classics, the Saracens are even more mischievously described and brutally canned than in the *Chanson de Roland*. Meredith Jones finds that these Oriental Saracens in the *Chanson de Roland* are displayed as biblical, though they are heathen idolaters (Jones, 1942:225). They are the authors of all evil, despising God and vigorously seeking Satan. They eat their hostages, contradict their words, buy and sell their own womenfolk. The “pagans” are prosperous and fight heroically but they are dreadful, idolatrous, weird, outrageous, obsessive, and disposed to catastrophe. Their divinities, such as Mahomet, Cahu, Apollyon, and Tervagant, are mortal and some of them are Greek idols. The deity Mahomet was “often made part of a heathen pantheon that also includes Apollin, Termagant, and other devilish idols” (Vitkus, 2000: 9). Mediaeval Oriental pagans seem to have faith in a kind of dualism—with God elsewhere from the earth, and Muhammad’s law is on the earth.

The idea of Muslim characters swearing by Greek fabulous deities, by Muhammad, also by ‘Alcaron’ (the Qur’an), or even by Jesus, is a Medieval idea about Saracens. The material of these gods is made of gold and silver or precious stones. Porter Smith states that the Mediaevals assumed that these ‘idols were being kept in temples or synagogues where the Saracens come to adore them in rituals and seeking aid before battle’ (Smith, 1977:2; Daniel, 1993:310). Muhammad is preserved as an idol worshipped by the Saracens, Turks, Moors and heretics. The popular work of the William Langland *Piers Plowman* is of ‘a fled cardinal from Rome after he had failed to become a pope; in Arabia, he revolts against Christianity in order to become the prophet of a new dogma:’

*Men fyndep pat Makamed was a man ycrystred,
And a cardinal of court. A gret clerk with-alle,
And porduede to have be pope, pryns of holy
church.(Passus XVIII, ii, 165-167)*

This concept was a comprehensive information in the early fourteenth century and was in use up to the seventeenth century. Chaucer expresses of ‘mammatte’ that had developed a myth in *The Man of Law’s Tale*. Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* talks about an unseen idol in the temple of

the Saracens. After a downfall, the gods are cursed, disrespected, pulled down in the dirt or even wrecked to fragments and taken as fake gods (Al-Olaqi, 2010: 56). This is echoed in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* and Greene’s *Alphonsus*: when the Turkish Sultans are overwhelmed they violently abuse the Prophet. In Elizabethan drama, Oriental characters blurt out malicious speeches against Islam and its Prophet.

Occidental and Oriental authors who used anti-Islamic accounts twisted them, making Muhammad into a god and Muslims into fools. Craig Hanson remarks that the Eastern Medieval Christian tradition claims that Muhammad’s God was a pagan, materialistic god, derives primarily from Nicetas of Byzantium, whose ninth-century polemics were widely influential and whose views stemmed not only from the earlier writers but also from his knowledge of the Qur’an (Hanson, 1996:55–82). In *The Way of the World* William Congreve says: “Let Mahometan Fools Live by Heathenish Rules” (4.1.402-3). In the process of racial and cultural discrete of the Muslim peoples, the length of centuries is huge between the life of Muhammad and the early modern requirement of counterattacking Turkey, ‘the greatest terror of the world’ (Knolles, 1603:42). As Knolles describes the Ottomans, the European views of Prophet Muhammad confined in the Western polemic biographies on Muhammad which operated as the initial perceptions in the construction of the ‘nature’ of Ottomans and of the ‘natures’ of other Muslims.

3. GREENE’S BRAZEN HEAD OF THE IDOL OF MUHAMMAD

The portrait of Prophet Muhammad (570-632) is exclusively erroneous in English literature. The English people’s reaction to the Turkish menace is evidently echoed in the early modern age. Consequently, Norman Daniel remarks that ‘the use of false evidence to attack Islam was all but universal’ (Daniel, 1993:267). Horace Howard Furness refers to the account as ‘an error and injustice to apply to Islam and its Prophet whose chief and characteristic glory is to protest against all idol worship’.⁴ Prophet Muhammad has been described as an imposter, a false prophet and a wicked creature. The Elizabethan views imagined the Prophet as an idol esteemed by Muslims in their mosques (Al-Olaqi, 2011:96). He is also exemplified on London stage as a disguising ‘Brazen Head’ or ‘Pow’ that voices to his priests and teaches the Turkish emperors.⁵ Smith remarks that most of the accounts on the Prophet ‘in and before Renaissance are all unjust’ (Smith, 1977:4). There was conversion from the idea of Mahomet as a wizard to that of Muhammad as divinity.

⁴ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. H. H. Furness (New York: Dover, 1963) (3.5.184), p. 210.

⁵ Robert Greene, *The Plays and Poems of Robert Greene*, ed. J. Churton Collins (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), Vol. I, p. 112.

The authority of discourse settled by an idol in Greene's *Alphonsus*, is associated with that of Muhammad. The statue is displayed on the stage, talking predictions on the Ottoman Sultan Amurack. The advent of a 'Brazen Head' of 'Mahomet' befalls in *Frier Bacon and Frier Bungay*, and Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turk* and *Valentine and Orson*.⁶ Daborne's *A Christian turn'd Turke* (1609) shows a scene of conversion ceremony for Captain Ward who embraced Islam. A Priest steps up the stage with a 'Mahomets head' in which Ward swears on it to be a Turk. A mythological component is presented in Peele's poem *A Forward...to the Generalls*. Peele refers to Mahomet's Pow saying: Theaters and proud tragedians,/Mahomet's Pow, and mighty Tamburlaine,/King Charlemagne, Tom Stukeley, and the rest.⁷ Whether these references are to the plays or to their heroes, three of the four are simply particular; but 'Mahomet's Pow' is a grotesque and unlikely name for a tragedy and an awkward name for a tragic idol. For instance, the Elizabethan dramatist William Percy's (1573-1648) *Arabia Sitiens*, more recently known by the title *Mahomet and his Heaven* (1601), is of interest because it gives some insight into contemporary English attitudes to Islam (Dimmock, 2006:19). The play impersonates uniquely Prophet Muhammad. The hero is Mahomet and is placed on the stage (Dimmock, 2006:20). William Percy breaks up the forbids of the visible depiction in representing sacred persons in the theater. It took place in the mind; Percy changes the tale in the spirit of "medieval anti-Muslim refutation that depends upon exposing absurdity and comedy at the heart of Islamic theology" (Dimmock, 2006: 22). George F. Reynolds remarks that William Percy's *Mahomet and His Heaven* is an enigma in its origins, textual and literary accounts.⁸ The play is the only existing play of its time in which Muhammad appears as a central character in the dramatis personae list. In Robert Greene's *Alphonsus*, *King of Aragon* the Prophet speaks through a 'brazen head' but remains invisible. A significant example of European Crusader pictorial and written poems in which Muhammad is portrayed as an idol, is essentially due to his empathy with the Antichrist. Greene's hatred for Prophet Muhammad and the Turks far outstrips the attitudes expressed by English Churchmen. Matthew Dimmock comments that the image of false Muhammad lives in the English mindset:

This fabricated figure and his spurious biography were endlessly recycled, but also challenged and vindicated, and the tales the English told about him offer new perspectives

on their sense of the world – its geographies and religions, near and far – and their place within it (Dimmock, 2013: 20).

This distorted image became one of the received ideas of the West and formulated the Western line of thought about Islam and the character of its Prophet (Gunny, 2010:26). Maxime Rodinson finds that the rise of the field of study of Orientalism mainly originated in Europe in the Middle Ages and that the field was born out of pragmatic necessity and the result was a greatly distorted vision of things (Rodinson, 1988:117). Western approach to the personality of the Holy Prophet has been vitiated by prejudice, hatred, and bigotry, and they have presented a highly distorted picture of his life and teachings to suit their vested interests (Rehman, 1992:27). For instance, Prophet Muhammad is portrayed as anti-Christian. It appears clear that on the source of the negative representation of Prophet Muhammad in the speech of Sultan Amurath that there is a substantial impact of previous images tracing back to the medieval sense of Islam connected with tyranny:

Devil incarnate, a false prophet and a charlatan. Islam, viewed as a politico-religious unit, which was how Europe, as Christendom, saw itself, was thus identified as the spiritual and political enemy against which Christians should fight (Bennett, 1991: 6-7).

Robert Greene, in his play *Alphonsus of Arragon* (1589) offered a dramatic prophecy of Islam's Prophet speaking to his idolatrous devotees through a 'brazen head' that blows out 'flakes of fire' (IV.i.29), an alert reappearance to the anti-Muslim polemic of the Middle Ages. Likewise, in the renovation dumb show of Scene 8 in Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk* a stage course instructs that 'a Mahomet's head' is fetched on the stage in order to be sworn upon (possibly satisfying the protagonist of the 'Alcoran' in comparable scenes). As Daniel Vitkus points out, this misunderstanding of 'Islamic idolatry' 'goes back to the *Chanson de Roland* and other mediaeval romance tales' (Vitkus, 2000:236). As Dessen and Thomson note in *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama 1580-1642*, the usage of a "brazen head" only appears in these two Greene's plays (Dessen and Thomson, 1999:131). The rarity of this "brazen head" and the connection between the Queen's Men and the only other play which requires such a prop, *Frier Bacon and Frier Bungay*, in my opinion, suggests a very plausible relationship between *Alphonsus King of Aragon* and the royal troupe (Yeh, 2011:100).

Greene's *Alphonsus* interrogates the enmity between Christians and Turks. Early modern accounts of Turkey exist chiefly as the description of a certain understanding of an affiliation between the Turks and the Europeans. This relationship is marked fundamentally with violence, the result of an essential hatred that dominates all other interests for the history playwright, and tells every detail of his work. This Elizabethan sense of enmity is taken as a pattern applicable to trace the history of the Turks back through the Saracens to Prophet Muhammad. The historical materials are explored in Hugh Goughe's

⁶ Greene, *Works*, ed. J.C. Collins, Vol. I, *Alphonsus*, pp. 114 and 73; compare Chew, p. 395

⁷ See *The Life and Minor Works of George Peele*, edited by David H.Home (New Haven, 1952), 11. 20-3).

⁸ George F. Reynolds asserts that 'the literary value of Percy's plays is nil', 'William Percy and his plays, with a summary of the customs of Elizabethan staging', *Modern Philology*, 12 (1914-1915) pp. 241-60, p. 111

Ofspring of the House of Ottomano (1600), Peter Ashton's *A Shorte Treatise upon the Turkes Chronicles* (1546), John Shute's *Two Notable Commentaries* (1562), Carr's *Mahumetane or Turkish Historie* (1600), Thomas Newton's *Notable Historle ofthe Saracens* (1575), and Knolle's *The History of the Saracens*. Carr's work contrasts the formula to some extent by appealing the Theological prophecy of the four kingdoms, 'Of the Originall and beginning of the Turkes, and of the foure Empires which are issued and proceeded out of the superstitious sect of Mahomet'.⁹ The Turkish Sultan Amurack is represented as a malevolent Muslim. Amurack's ancestors and he counsel 'Mahomet' who 'rules all the skies'; and Mahomet 'most speedily' sends his prophecy of victory (iii, ii, 25-7). In another line 'Mahomet' is portrayed as 'proud injurious god, [Mahound ..., [of] vain prophesies' (iii, ii, 50-1). It is not accidental that the Elizabethan concept of the pagan meaning of the term "mammet" calls to mind Peele's villain, Muly Mahamet. The image of 'mammet' is a witchery idol or a puppet. Shakespeare goes a step further in describing the Prophet as 'a wretched puling fool, \ A whining mammet'. (*Romeo and Juliet*, 3.5.184-185). The father of Juliet, Capulet insults 'mammet' (Muhammad) when he is upset over his daughter's reluctance to her marriage. Therefore, he thinks pessimistically about her future, which he fears would be worse than that of Muhammad. On the other hand, Greene primarily identifies the Prophet in *Alphonsus* as 'holy', 'heavenly,' 'mighty' and 'sacred'. All the Muslim and Non-Muslim characters including Alphonsus himself, show some respect to Muhammad.

Robert Greene made 'The Temple of Mahomet' a setting of a scene in *Alphonsus*. A temple is a religious place for pagans and Jews. It was later that the word 'mosque' was introduced in English. Louis Wann comments that the replacement of temple in place of a mosque is inaccurate, a part of showing the Turks as more superstitious than the Europeans. (Wann, 442-3). For the audience, "the temple of Mahomet ... [is] as a shrine dedicated to the worship of the idol, Mahomet" (Vitkus, 2000: 146). Marlowe mentions the image of the holiest Islamic site of 'Mecca's temple' as a sacred site. In *Tamburlaine* (Part I) an early English account, which is evidently inappropriate, by the Elizabethan traveler William Lithgow repeats a similar idea. Some Turks had told to Lithgow that they had understood that the Prophet's coffin was charmingly up in the air between the roof of Makkah's temple and the sky (Daniel, 1966, 24). The same report is authentically repeated by Marlowe in *Tamburlaine* (Part II, 1.2.64). In the Temple of Mahomet, there is a brazen head fixed in the middle of the place ahead on the theatre, out of which cast 'flakes of fire from the mouth\Of Mahomet, that god of peerless power' (iv, ii, 23-4), drums grumble within. After a ringing sound, the witchery brazen head talks to the Turkish priests and

teaches them to ask the Amurack to attend to his holy house (IV, ii, in *Alphonsus*). The shaking of the brazen head is the eclipse of the Prophet at the time of receiving revelation is represented by Greene as madness. At this point in the Medieval tradition, Huygens states "Muhammad broke out into such madness that he dared to lie that he was a prophet" (Huygens, 1986:21). In the scene, Mahomet is unseen but his speech claimed to come out of the juggling brazen head. He says:

*You cannot tell, nor will you seek to know:
Oh perverse priest[s], how careless are you
waxed,
As when my foes approach unto my gates,
You stand still talking of "I cannot tell".
Go, pack you hence, and meet the Turkish kings
Which now are drawing to my temple ward;
Tell them from me, God Mahomet is disposed
To prophesy no more to Amurack,
Since that his tongue is waxen now so free,
As that it needs must chat and rail at me.
Kneel down both. (iv, i, 25-35)*

The speech of the disguising brazen head is of a necromancer. It looks confusing and upset with his private priests. It rebukes them for their carelessness as his Christian foes approaching his temple and the priests are embarrassing whether the idol is going to speak or not. At the same time, Mahomet's priests appear stupid and disrespected or ungrateful to him. The idol instructs the priest how to behave with itself 'kneel down both'. Mahomet's idol is unhappy with the Great Turk Amurack who seems ignoring to him and does not remember him. Therefore, Mahomet is not going to prophesy anymore to Amurack. The idol is really a conjuror. For Christian knowledge, Doane remarks that the anti-Christ, religious teachers, leaders of factions, necromancers or wonder-workers are mentioned in *Matthew*: "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (*Matthew*, xxiv. 24). Dr. Conyers Middleton describes their works, saying:

"It was universally received and believed through all ages of the primitive church, that there was a number of magicians, necromancers, or conjurors, both among the *Gentiles*, and the *heretical Christians*, who had each their peculiar *demon* or evil spirit, for their associates, perpetually attending on their persons and obsequious to their commands, by whose help they could perform miracles, foretell future events, call up the souls of the dead, exhibit them to open view, and infuse into people whatever dreams or visions they saw fit, all which is constantly affirmed by the primitive writers and apologists, and commonly applied by them to prove the immortality of the soul." (Middleton, vol.i. 1752:54).

In fact, some additional material from Higden's *Polychronicon* includes the name of Muhammad as a 'nygromancer' in its subtitle (Higden, 19). In William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (c. 1380), it is stated in the

⁹ See R[alph] Carr, *The Mahumetane or Turkish Historie* (1600), Book 1. On the four kingdoms of Daniel.

speech of Anima from Passus XVII, that Muhammad himself was a renegade Christian:

Me fynde wel fat Macometh was a man ycristened
And a cardinal of court, a gret clerk withalle,
And persuade to haue be pope, prince of holy chirche.
(*Plowman*, II.165-8)

Greene depicts the occultist Mahomet as a necromancer through its speaking out of the brazen head. The idol conjures false prophecies by his name and 'By all the gods, and chiefly by myself':

*Make haste [then] kings, lest when the fates do
see
How carelessly you do neglect their words,
They call a council, and force Mahomet
Against his will some other things to set.
Send Fabius back to Amurack again,
To haste him forwards in his enterprise;
And march you on, with all the troops you have,
To Naples ward, to conquer Aragon.
For if you stay, both you and all your men
Must needs be sent down straight to Limbo den.*
(iv,i, 67-76)

The dominant European discourse is that the Turk is the child of the devil or the follower of the impostor prophet. Greene looks on the followers of the Prophet with prejudice and distaste. Belinus defies Alphonsus since he has a prophecy from the brazen head of 'God Mahound' 'on [his] side,\[The victory must needs to us betide' (iv,i, 28-9). Greene displays the Prophet as a seducer to the Turks. Muhammad is perceived as the author of the Turkish law and policy, rejecting any impossibility of its divinity. The play *Alphonsus* is expanded by ironic condemnation from blasphemy as assessment of the prophecies and more magic is hosted in Mahomet's Temple where a magical brazen head of Mahomet provides uncertain advice to the Turks and the Christian noble, Belinus (iv,i, 30). However, another portrait of the future is untaken by Carinus, whose fortunately prophetic dream promises magnificence for his son. The purpose is to assemble armed forces to support Belinus, the king of Naples, to bring back his kingdom that has been occupied over by Alphonsus. At the opening Amurack looks as a spiritual sultan who claims that he should be confident of Mahomet's approval to launch the battle on Alphonsus because he would 'not set foote forth of this land,\[If Mahomet our journey did withstand' (iii,ii, 24-5). He attributes his victories to Mahomet's help. Yet, after Mahomet incorrectly prophesies the victory of Belinus, Amurack turns against him, calling him a 'cursed god' (iv,iii, 32). Likewise, he orders his men to ignore Muhammad as he was taken by his pride and to 'Mount on your Steeds, take Launces in your hands; \[For Amurack doth meane this very day\ Proude Mahomet with weapons to assay' (1421-23). Notwithstanding, these few distinguishing features in Amurack's characterization, such as his supremacy and his relationship to the rather ambiguous God Mahomet, the Sultan remains sketchy like other Oriental characters in this play (Belgasem, 2013:148). Peter Heylyn in his *Microcosmos: A little*

description of the great world (1625) treated Prophet Muhammad as an epileptic and deceiver. Heylyn argues that Muhammad was 'well seen in Magick' and that through this means and 'and help of the Devill' he 'taught a white Pigeon to feed at his eare, affirming it to be the Holy Ghost, which informed him in diuine precepts' (Heylyn, 1625:617). At this point Heylyn passed in the myth of Muhammad's dove, which was perceived many times in early modern texts such as in Shakespeare by portraying him as the prince of darkness. A. W. Verity embraces that the terms 'Modo' and 'Mahu' are hired in Harsnett as fraud of 'Mahound', that is 'Mahomet' (Verity, 1988:178 & 244). Edgar says: 'The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman,\[Modo he is called and Mahu' (*King Lear*, 3.4.135-136).

The Medieval claim that Prophet Muhammad had trained animals including a dove, a camel and a bull, were essentially exposed as being used by Prophet Muhammad to teach him the *Qur'an* (which features as a perfect text) as the word of God to a naive Arabian audience (Higden, 1527:19 & 35). The 'Pseudo-Prophet' Muhammad is blasphemous for claiming to Prophethood. This is a Christian reaction to the divine sanction in Christianity in which Churchmen thought that Prophet Muhammad's claim to it is of the opportunist (Ross, 1688:v). In William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, a similar version is outlined that Muhammad himself was a renegade Christian; he makes Muhammad entirely responsible for the deception (Skeat, 1886:89). Shakespeare refers to a Mediaeval distortion about Muhammad and false revelation by a dove (Daniel, 1993:282). The myth states that a dove used to sit on Muhammad's shoulder telling to him the *Qur'an*. When La Pucelle in the First Part of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* wishes Dauphin to drive the English from the blockade of Orleans, Charles screams out in wonder and calls linguistically Muhammad. Shakespeare's arguments portray Prophet Muhammad as being taught the holy *Qur'an* by a dove: 'Was Mahomet inspired by a dove?\[Thou with an eagle are inspired then' (1.2.119-120). The fable of the pigeon is of Mediaeval creation tossed to misrepresent Islam and to disfigure the Prophet's image. Greene's *Selimus'* denial of religion similarly does not follow the pattern of frustrated providential faith mostly found in mediaeval portrayals of Muslim rulers in mediaeval writings. Muslim leaders such as xx ins *chanson se geste*, the Souldan in *Sowdowne of Babylone*, Amurack in *Alphonsus*, Selimus in *Selimus* and Bajazet in *Tamburlaine* discard their faith in loss. For instance, at the beginning of his ascension when his discourse is assumed, Sultan Selimus abuses his religion and its Prophet as a feature of Tamburlaine's denunciation of Islam by 'daring' 'God out of heaven' (Part I, 1.2.156).

4. MUHAMMAD AND THE TURKS

The Turkish success in Europe is considered as ultimately attributable to European disunity. The Ottoman Turkey casts a considerably longer shadow of threat in

Europe. Therefore, the history of the Turks is embedded within that of Christendom to produce something that resembles a being alongside. Greene's strong unprejudiced pledges in religion and politics, could have involved in historiography about the Turks simply to afford a display for the estimate of national anxieties. Greene chose for his subject the life of Alphonsus V of Aragon (1416-1458) who ruled Naples from 1442 until his death. Greene presents Amurack with individualistic characteristics, merits and faults. After Alphonsus has rewarded his loyal followers with crowns, including that of the recently regained Aragon, he announces a more ambitious goal: "Alphonsus shall possess the diadem\ That Amurack now wears upon his head (iii, I, 27-8). The European dream to overwhelm or wipe out the Turkish power was a popular wish. Therefore, Greene draws the attention of the fall of Sultan Bajazet in the play, an attendant is called Bajazet. For instance, a supplementary preparation for his confrontation with Alphonsus, Amurack sends an attendant named Bajazet to a list of mysterious lands which he controls. This geographical list (ii,iii, 10-12) is a delicate attempt to advocate geopolitics on a measure comparable to that of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*.

The bluster and pride of Greene's Amurack resembles Marlowe's Bajazeth in *Tamburlaine*. At the same time, Alphonsus looks like Tamburlaine who defeated Bajazet and took him in a cage. Alphonsus defeated Amurack who was also humiliated and taken to prison along with the other Oriental kings. Moreover, by placing sympathetic comments into the mouths of other characters, Greene averts pity for Amurack, which is entirely pertinent: Amurack remains bold even in captivity and wants not pity but autonomy and dignity. In order for Alphonsus to accomplish a triumph, nevertheless, he must overwhelm not only Amurack and his influential monarchs but also Fausta, now leading armed forces of Amazons, and Iphigina in single combat. Like Zenocrate in *Tamburlaine*, Iphigina dreads to be taken as a concubine but when the Turkish imperial clan is combined in custody and Carinus is reunited with his descendant, the marriage of Alphonsus and Iphigina is an announcement to end the show. The father of the bride, like Marlowe's Soldan of Egypt, is released and he undertakes to offer as dowry the Turkish Empire to his forthcoming son-in-law.

The Turkish critic, Sila Senlen claims that in the Renaissance the conflict between the Orient and the Occident was not merely an encounter of challenging powers but also an encounter of ideologies and contrasting social, economic and political systems (Senlen, 2006:388). Both Latin Christendom and the Ottoman Turks assumed they were involved in a conflict for existence. Both sides proclaimed they were indicted with a divine mission and that "their respective regimes offered the best hope for humanity" (Schwoebel, 1967:10). Amurack remarks that his "mighty force doth terrify the gods"; and Alphonsus calls him a "pagan dog" (iv,iii,30, 39). The author's hostile attitude towards Islam and Prophet Muhammad is to be expected but his representation of the Ottomans as

renegade is rather unusual. Bauschke remarks that the anti-Ottomanism represented "the Pope is the soul of the Antichrist, the Turk is the flesh of the Antichrist" (Bauschke, 2007:167). The Medieval tradition of anti-Ottomanism extends its scope over the Turkish spiritual symbols. For instance, Prophet Muhammad is a great religious symbol to the Turks and other Muslim nationalities. The play of *Tamburlaine the Great* dubs the Prophet with uncivilized disregards. The name of 'Mahomet' is recited thirty-six times in altered situations and is associated with the name of Tamburlaine whose work is full of butchery, tyranny, and violence (Hunter, 1997:50).

These misjudgements had made the West attack Prophet Muhammad as a part in the early modern resistance to Turkey as the 'the greatest terror of the world' (Knolles, 1603:42). The Elizabethan polemic perceptions of Prophet Muhammad functioned as the initial models in the construction of the 'nature' of Turks and other infidel Muslims. In fact, the gloomy representation of Greene's play denotes to the concocted images conventionally linked to the Ottomans, the communal foe of Christians, such as their 'evilness', 'treachery' and 'lust', etc. shared with material and accounts presented by Richard Knolles (Senlen, 2005: 379-393). Nabil Matar recognised these judgments in Western eschatological use of 'the Prophet' (Matar, 1998:153-184). The awareness had created an outline of depictions of Muhammad in the polemic lifetime history into more inclusive representations of Muslims and of Islamic cultures through the early modern period, essentially that of the Ottoman Turks. The unchanging place of Muhammad establishes as an initial, and a historic prototype in the establishment of structures and stereotypes of Turks and of the cultures of the 'Islamic World'. Lozarro Soranzo describes the traits 'fraud and deceit as a thing most proper to a Turk' (Soranzo, 1603:33). There were two ways in which these former Christians had come in touch with their new coreligionists, which also determined their reasons to adopt Islam. The first is related to the Turkish expansion movement towards Europe. As Vitkus notes,

The Ottoman Turks were rapidly colonizing European territory. Thus, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Europeans were both colonizers and colonized, and even the English felt the power of the Turkish threat to Christendom (Vitkus, 2000:53).

Matthew Dimmock, for instance, sustains that in this play the difference 'between the conventional doctrine of the 'Christian' and this deeply alien set of Islamic beliefs is intentionally profound' (Dimmock, 2005: 180-81).

The deficiency of any clear pious identity can be embodied by the King of Naples' belief in Mahomet. Belinus asks Mahomet's support of the imminent combat because he does not want Amurack to 'displease the Gods' (817). He previously visits Mahomet's temple to snoop to his prophecy and proclaims, 'And since we have God *Mahound* on our side, \The victories must needs to us

betide' (iv,i, 28-9). For Dimmock, Prophet Muhammad is considered as a divinity and idol because Alphonsus constantly dubs Amurack 'pagan' (Dimmock, 2005: 180). On the other hand, Amurack calls Alphonsus a 'blasphemous dog' because Alphonsus mistreats Mars by claiming that he is the god of war (iv, iii, 84-87). Alphonsus uses the same terms for Amurack because the sultan 'did brall and raile\ Against God Mars' (v,iii,20-1). In fact, there is no difference between dramatic persons in the play. The Oriental characters behave like Occidental characters. Therefore, Jonathan Burton describes the association between Iphigina and Alphonsus as a love between Muslims and Christians (Burton, 2005: 33). Moreover, in an Elizabethan introduction to 'Mahomet' in Cartwright's *The Preachers Trauels* (1611), in the context of describing Arabian society, John Cartwright observes that:

[...] it shall not be amisse to insert a word or two, of Mahomet and his superstition, who was borne in this country, and hath seduced the greatest part of the world with his abominable religion (Cartwright, 1611:105).

Tatiana Wolff remarks that the juggling idol is informed by Tamburlaine who says that 'in vain, I see, men worship Mahomet'.¹⁰ Garleen Ibrahim comments that the divinity of Muhammad is a repeated conception in the Elizabethan age (Ibrahim, 1996:33). R.W. Southern finds that it is not first-hand to Elizabethan drama; he states: 'It had come simultaneously of Mediaeval ones to allure a pure invention, which has no written sources' (Southern, 1978:30). Therefore, Venus states that

*Amurack and his wife abuse Muhammad:
Doth rule and govern all the warlike Moors,
Are sent as legates to God Mahomet,
To know his counsel in these high affairs.
Mahound, provok'd by Amurack's discourse,
Which, as you heard, he in his dream did use,
Denies to play the prophet any more:
But by the long entreaty of his priests,
He prophecies in such a crafty sort,
As that the hearers needs must laugh for sport.
(iv, i,10-18).*

There can be no doubt that Greene's play is controversial. Prophet Muhammad remains to have a vigorous attendance in the lives of Muslims across the world as 'comforter, friend, intercessor' and 'family member' (Dimmock 2013: xii). His biography 'reminds the faithful of God's presence' (Dimmock, 2013: xii). Muhammad's condemnation in the Christian ethnicities is influenced by an assumption of his significance within Islam. So Muhammad was re-portrayed as 'Mahomet,' as an inversion of Christ, and 'Mahomet' developed an evangelical device, 'an essential disproof of the Islamic claim to revelation' (Dimmock 2013: xii). In larger expressions, the description of the life, whether as prophet, saint, fighter or king, had long been a main outlet for the diction of history and cultural significance. Of entirely

non-Christian lives known to late Mediaeval Englishmen, Mahomet's was by extreme the best familiar. It was always told and retold, frequently in enthusiastically changed environments. In a very diverse way, it was a vital manifestation in their lives. The Western depiction of Prophet Muhammad displays a strong hatred and is curiously tough to be changed.

5. CONCLUSION

Greene's *Alphonsus* is a Christian tragedy with anti-Ottoman sentiments, reflecting the Christian thought of the world and proving the supremacy and victory of Christendom over 'Mohametanism'. The Western prejudice against Prophet Muhammad is anchored in misapprehension and misrepresentation of Prophet Muhammad. The anti-Islamic propaganda focused on the Prophet is represented in polemical accounts in Elizabethan literature. The Orientalism of the Elizabethan drama is marked by the voice of the anti-Turkish passion continuing treatments that sometimes belong to traditions, which are based on the Medieval treatments (Said, 1978:192). As a result, for example in *Alphonsus*, Greene focused on the war against the Turks with a compromise after the battle and the union of a reconciling West and a sympathetic Orient. Elizabethan dramatists do not afford a perfect and inclusive assessment of its Prophet and its sorcery brazen head. The report of an idol of Muhammad stood and worshipped by Muslims in the mosques vanished in the Elizabethan literature. The anti-idolatrous religious affinity between Protestantism and Islam was recorded in the economic and political communication between the Turkish Sultan Murad III, and the Queen Elizabeth in 1570 (Burton, 2000: 129). A conflict between the West and Islam is portrayed in Greene to remind the Elizabethan audience of early traditional encounters. In fact, Prophet Muhammad as a symbol of the Islamic culture has come into conflict with the Western culture (Stone, 2006:00). Armstrong, a British historian of Islam, remarks that the life of Prophet Muhammad was a tireless campaign against greed, injustice, and arrogance" (Armstrong, 2006: 7).

The Western encounter caused a wave of hatred and hostility among Europeans against Islam and Prophet Muhammad (Adnan, 41). Greene dealt with Prophet Muhammad "with a prior prejudice", and launched "a critical onslaught on Islam" (Adnan, 1985: 82). Greene's image of Muhammad is made to tarnish the reputation of the Prophet of the Turks and other Muslims by associating him with paganism. Accordingly, Greene shows the Turks seduced by a false Prophet. Greene makes no effort to eliminate the theological errors and superstition of the Turks. Many dramatic texts introduced Prophet Muhammad as a heretic. It shows that there was a real debate about Islam in the Elizabethan Age as the Queen went in diplomatic relations with the Islamic World. Therefore, the distortion of the image of the Prophet on London stage was a part of defending Western values. It is

¹⁰ Marlowe, *Tamburlaine*, ed. T.A. Wolff (Part II, 5.1.177), p. 208

an alarm to the English as a number of Christian elite embraced Islam including the English ambassador to Egypt (Matar, 1988:226). At the same time, the concern of the Church is mirrored in brochures and pamphlets in order to threaten the English from the growth of 'Mahumaten sect' in Britain (Chew, 1965:157). On the other hand, the English interest in the Ottomans, their culture and religion were on the rise. Some Turks whose heavenly message of liberty was not of any difference of race or class, projected many advantages to Britons to convert them to Islam. Sir Thomas Arnold has observed that English sailors who were caught by Muslims, chose to embrace Islam after perceiving life in Muslim societies and contrasting it with the life in Britain (Arnold, 2000: 173-5). The Turkish material increased extremely in the seventeenth century. The play *A Christian Turn'd Turk* (1612) is the story of Captain Ward who has been embraced and befits ethically a pro-Turk. Moreover Professor Watt calls for a complete rejection of the medieval charges of "imposter" and "liar" levelled against Muhammad explaining that contemporary sound scholarship does not accept such frivolous charges anymore (Watt, 1992:58 & 60). However, the truthful personality of Prophet Muhammad are advantageous for all human knowledge.

The Western consensus made faults and deformities of opinion on Prophet Muhammad. It was universal to defame him. Norman Daniel remarks that the unpleasant image of Islam that the Christians drew was drawn to seem unpleasant to the Christian eye (Daniel, 1993: 264). Therefore, Greene's polemic on Prophet Muhammad was really intended to defend Christianity or Western civilization. Therefore, it is significant to note that this kind of dehumanization and demonization of the Other is not unique or inherent to Western thought or literature (Said, 1978:191). The Islamic World itself has frequently been the object of such demonization in the Western cultures (Vitkus, 1992:209). Today, the West is mainly eminent in its dehumanization of the Other for the reason that it is a dominant, comprehensive culture and supremacy. Thus, the West's cultural apparatus of demonization is more evident in the world and is maybe a more destructive problem in the Western culture.

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