

Orientalism Revisited

Art, Land and Voyage



Edited by
Ian Richard Netton

Orientalism Revisited

The publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 marks the inception of Orientalism as a discourse. Since then, Orientalism has remained highly polemical and has become a widely employed epistemological tool. Three decades on, this volume sets out to survey, analyse and revisit the state of the Orientalist debate, both past and present.

The *leitmotiv* of this book is its emphasis on an intimate connection between art, land and voyage. Orientalist art of all kinds frequently derives from a consideration of the land which is encountered on a voyage or pilgrimage, a relationship which, until now, has received little attention.

Through adopting a thematic and prosopographical approach, and attempting to locate the fundamentals of the debate in the historical and cultural contexts in which they arose, this book brings together a diversity of opinions, analyses and arguments.

Ian Richard Netton is Sharjah Professor of Islamic Studies, University of Exeter. His primary research interests are Islamic theology and philosophy, Sufism, medieval Arab travellers, anthropology of religion, Arabic and Islamic bibliography, comparative textuality and semiotics, and comparative religion. He is the author or editor of twenty books of which the most recent is *Islam, Christianity and the Mystic Journey: A Comparative Exploration* (2011).

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Other books by Ian Richard Netton

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The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East (ed. with Richard Stoneman and Kyle Erickson)
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Introduction

The Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilisation and Religion (ed. Ian Richard Netton, London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 496) defines Orientalism, broadly, as “the study of the culture, languages and peoples east of the Mediterranean ...” The article notes that “Orientalists claimed to be working in an ‘objective’ and ‘unbiased’ fashion, but this claim, [Edward] Said argued, was itself part of the rhetoric of Empire, an attempt to objectify the ‘Orient’”. Since Edward Said’s (1935–2003) seminal work, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), there are few scholars working in the Middle Eastern or Asian fields who feel comfortable adopting the designation of ‘Orientalist’. Yet several, most notably Robert Irwin (*For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies*, London: Penguin Books, Allen Lane, 2006), have pointed out the flaws in many of Said’s polemical arguments.

This volume sets out to survey, analyse and *revisit* the state of the Orientalist debate, past and present. It adopts both a thematic and a prosopographical approach and attempts to locate the fundamentals of the debate in the historical and cultural contexts in which they arose. It presents a diversity of views which are often passionate and dynamic but also scholarly. One of its chief merits is to bring together ‘under one roof’ a variety of opinions, analyses and arguments.

Its most important feature, and that which provides an internal coherence to the whole volume, as well as its originality, is the stress on an intimate connection between art, land and voyage: *Orientalist ART of all kinds frequently derives from a consideration of the LAND which is encountered on a VOYAGE or pilgrimage*. This is the key *leitmotiv* of this book. There have been many books, articles and essays over the years on Orientalism and Edward Said; the man bequeathed a potential industry! None, however, to the best of my knowledge, has attempted to bring together, link and contextualise, in the context of the Orientalist debate, the triple themes of Art, Land and Voyage *in the manner of this volume*.

After this Introduction the volume is divided into five parts as follows:

- I Imagining the Orient
- II Art
- III Land
- IV Voyage
- V The Occidental Mirror

Part I is much concerned with the Orientalist imagination, theories of Orientalism, its impact on a country like the UK or a group like the Sufis, together with a re-evaluation of Edward Said. **Part II** re-evaluates the role of Orientalism in art, ethnography and photography. **Part III** looks both at Said's Palestine and the European and Orientalist images of 'the Holy Land'. **Part IV** concentrates on the voyage and focuses in particular on the travels of two famous medieval Muslim travellers. Finally, **Part V** provides a striking and dynamic 'reverse-mirror' for Orientalism in its examination of a theory of Occidentalism.

As I have observed, the primary theme and emphasis in this volume is the perceived link between art, land and voyage. Firstly, however, the whole *idea* of Orientalism requires its context. Thus Humayun Ansari presents *The Muslim world in British historical imaginations: 'Re-thinking Orientalism'* (**Chapter 1**), in which he notes that world-renowned scholars of Arabic and Islamic Studies like "A.J. Arberry (1905–1969) ... while denying that he himself had any political agendas, accepted that politics, nonetheless, intruded upon academic scholarship." Ansari holds that "absolute claims such as these, however, demand closer inspection" and he lays out his position as follows: "What I want to explore in this essay is how far there were scholars who were genuinely 'purely' interested in Islam and Muslim societies and so studied them for their own sake. I will do this by looking at the places that Islam and Muslims have occupied in British historical imaginations from the outset of the early modern period to the present."

Of course, the 'Orientalist' thesis has frequently been wrapped up in, or at least, involved in, debates about knowledge, power and world politics. In his essay entitled *Can the (sub)altern resist? A dialogue between Foucault and Said* (**Chapter 2**), Arshin Adib-Moghaddam cites Michel Foucault's arch-dialectical phrase that "where there is power, there is resistance". Adib-Moghaddam goes on to note that "in *Orientalism*, Edward Said took seriously Foucault's ideas about the way knowledge is implicated in power". But he believes that, in the last analysis, Said "did not fully appreciate that for Foucault power cannot be total". These and related themes are developed in a striking "dialogue between Foucault and Said" which is highlighted with particular reference to the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

The general theme of Orientalism and politics is pursued in our third essay, by Nadia Abu El-Haj, entitled *Edward Said and the political present* (**Chapter 3**). Here the author "offers a reading of Edward Said's legacy. [The essay] engages Said's scholarly and political insights, on the one hand, and his vision of, and life as, an intellectual on the other hand. [The essay] focuses on his broader conceptual and methodological interventions, his analysis of the politics of empire (in the Middle East) and his passionate attachment to the question of Palestine. It also contextualizes Said's work in light of the contemporary political moment, arguing that he, and that for which he is seen to stand, have emerged as key flash points in the latest U.S. culture wars". And, neatly linking to the previous essay, Abu El-Haj cites Stuart Hall's argument that "*Orientalism* was perhaps Foucauldian in inspiration more than in method."

Geoffrey Nash, in an essay entitled *New Orientalisms for old: articulations of the East in Raymond Schwab, Edward Said and two nineteenth-century French*

orientalists (Chapter 4), goes behind Said's seminal text, *Orientalism*, and examines how that text treats two French Orientalists, Renan and Gobineau, as well as "presenting a comparative analysis of Said's *Orientalism* and Raymond Schwab's *Oriental Renaissance*". Nash contends that "in linking Gobineau with what he also termed 'scholarly' Orientalism, Said crucially mistook the orientation of Gobineau's relations with the East".

Of course, the perceived exoticism identified in the Orientalist debate often focused on the more exotic aspects of Islam itself, in particular Sufism (Islamic mysticism). In a wide-ranging and insightful article entitled *Orientalism and Sufism: an overview* (Chapter 5), Linda Sijbrand explores the link between these two *topoi* and reveals the perennial fascination of Western scholars, whatever their intentions and motivations, for this most irenic branch of the Islamic faith. Sijbrand makes several references to Carl W. Ernst's *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (1997), which discusses Orientalist scholars and their influence on Sufi studies. She draws attention to the point which he makes that the Orientalists have had a major influence on how Sufism is seen today and also on how Muslims – non-Sufis and Sufis alike – have viewed Sufism, as well as the distinction which some made between philosophical and practical Sufism. While accepting that this is an interesting stance, Sijbrand believes that it needs to be nuanced, since these Orientalists often based their work on sources written by Muslims and on discussions with Muslims, and thus followed ideas that were already current in the Muslim world, to which they added their own interpretation. Sijbrand therefore chooses to combine the discussion of Orientalism with the discussion of 'anti-Sufism' in the Muslim world.

General works about the East, whether Orientalist in the Saidean sense or not, could also metamorphose into artistic representations of that same area of enchantment. Regarding his essay entitled *Orientalism in arts and crafts revisited: the modern and the anti-modern: the lessons from the Orient* (Chapter 6), John M. MacKenzie believes that Edward Said's *Orientalism* viewed all representation as actually mis-representation, such that Western writers and, by implication, politicians and administrators, created a fabricated East in order the better to control and dominate it. When Said came to apply this concept to the arts, its weakness became exposed – for example, in his passage on Verdi's opera *Aida* in his later book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). For MacKenzie, Verdi's predilections and the import of that opera were gravely misunderstood in Said's interpretation. Similarly, when these ideas are applied to the extensive production of Orientalist art in the nineteenth century, the Saidean paradigm becomes particularly threadbare. MacKenzie's essay analyses a number of paintings to reveal the manner in which a fascination with the crafts of the Middle East and elsewhere in Asia is repeatedly expressed by many of the painters in the period. And he shows a strong awareness that the interest in 'Middle Eastern' crafts, including carpet making, ceramics, metal work, wood carving and textiles, in fact fed into the aesthetic concerns represented by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement.

Art as expressed in painting is complemented in our own age by photography, and that area of creativity can also fall into what Said might have termed an

Orientalist ‘trap’! In her essay entitled *Visual ethnography, stereotypes and photographing Algeria* (Chapter 7), Susan Slyomovics articulates the problem: “‘The imperial conquest’, Edward Said writes, ‘was not a one-time tearing of the veil, but a continually repeated institutionalized presence in French life, where the response to the silent and incorporated disparity between French and subjugated cultures took on a variety of forms’” (*Culture and Imperialism*, p. 35). In Algeria, Slyomovics tells us, the camera and French conquest “overlapped chronologically”. By exploring “visual cultural forms of biometric technologies that marked the French colonial bureaucratic presence”, this essay first considers tourist postcards of Algeria (*Scènes et Types*) alongside “French-imposed identity photographs and anthropometric classification systems”. What is the legacy of the ‘Orientalist’ image in Algeria?

Algeria, of course, was by no means the only, or even the main, land of the East which infatuated and enchanted Orientalist and other scholars, writers, linguists, artists and photographers. Perhaps because of its role as the birthplace of two of the three great monotheistic world religions, Judaism and Christianity, and the reverence accorded by the third, Islam, to that area – not to mention the overriding significance of Jerusalem – Palestine, or the Holy Land as it became known colloquially, figures largely in any debate about Orientalism and re-evaluation of that *topos*. In his essay entitled *Revisiting Edward W. Said’s Palestine: between Nationalism and post-Zionism* (Chapter 8), Ilan Pappé revisits Said’s Palestine by noting that it is possible “to trace a dialectical relationship” between “Edward Said’s theoretical work on literature and culture” and “his writings on Palestine”. In the light of this, his essay examines “Said’s relationship with Israeli scholarship and academics”. For Pappé, “the crystallization of Said’s universal humanism provided a common basis between him and post-Zionists in Israel”. His conclusion is thought provoking: “Said ... ‘the exile intellectual’ was attractive to Jewish intellectuals far more than Said ‘the Palestinian’. The picture, however, was more complicated as this exilic, almost Jewish intellectual, was still the voice of Palestine in the West. He was still in those days, and until his death, the sharpest critic of Oslo and its follies.”

It is a truism that Palestine is a land which has been visited, revisited, discovered and rediscovered, conquered and reconquered by countless generations of visitors, pilgrims, warriors, merchants and many others down the ages. In his essay *Studies and souvenirs of Palestine and Transjordan: the revival of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the rediscovery of the Holy Land during the nineteenth century* (Chapter 9), Paolo Maggiolini stresses that the revival of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 1847, under the auspices of Uniatism, represented another dimension of the meeting between the West and the East. He analyses the socio-political and cultural implications of this revival which aimed at permanently reunifying the East and the West, and investigates the interactions between memory, historical past and imagined future. The essay reconsiders the consequences of creating a specific image of the Holy Land, deeply rooted in its biblical and pre-modern past, a land to be saved and revived. All these factors give rise to a single question: was this an Orientalist project in the Saidean sense?

In another, complementary, essay, entitled *Arabizing the Bible: racial supersessionism in nineteenth-century Christian art and biblical scholarship* (Chapter 10), Ivan Kalmar argues that “the relationship imagined to hold between the ‘Aryan’ races of Europe and the ‘Semitic’ races of Asia was the latest manifestation of a long, theological tradition of Christian supersessionism. Christian supersessionists believe that the Christian gospels announced the replacement of Judaism and the Old Testament as the vanguard of sacred history, with the place of Israel taken by the Christian Church.” Kalmar stresses that “inherited Christian notions were developed into newer ideas about the Orient. These ideas were expressed in the ostensibly secular, pseudo-scientific vocabulary of ‘race’”. His conclusion is that “the Aryanization of Jesus played an important role in establishing, during the long nineteenth century, the extra-European character of the imagined Semitic ‘race’”.

Parallel to this, Daniel Martin Varisco, in an essay entitled *Orientalism and bibliolatry: framing the Holy Land in nineteenth-century Protestant Bible customs texts* (Chapter 11), detects and analyses “a secret sharer of Said’s Orientalism, the bibliolatry of nineteenth-century Protestant Holy Land and Bible customs texts”. He goes on: “More than three decades after Said’s important, but flawed, intellectual reconstruction of Orientalism” as a hegemonic discourse, there is a need to shift from continued debate over the merits of Said’s argument to one “fleshing out the nuances of an admittedly imagined East versus West dichotomy”. Varisco notes that “absent from Said’s text is the genre that was most widely read in nineteenth-century Europe and America, specifically Holy Land travel texts that cited contemporary customs and manners of Arabs and other groups encountered as illustrations of Bible characters for popular consumption, especially among Protestants”. Varisco’s essay examines two major nineteenth-century texts by William Thompson and Henry Van-Lennep, both for their depiction of contemporary peoples in Bible lands and for the visual illustrations that frame the narrative.

And the land, whether Algeria or Palestine or, as was often the case, Mecca and Medina, as exposed and articulated in text, painting and photograph, necessarily involved and invoked the concept of voyage and travel. Both Eastern and Western writers travelled to explore, to wander, to wonder, to trade or to undertake a pilgrimage among a whole host of diverse objectives. *The land, then, together with its textual or artistic representation, is usually bound up with the voyage.* This *topos* is explored in two major essays in Part IV of our volume.

It is also important to note that we may identify a species of Eastern “Orientalism” at work, where Eastern Islamic travellers exhibited a fascination for the exotic which paralleled that of the Western European traveller. In his essay *The Orient’s medieval “Orient(alism)”: The Riḥla of Sulaymān al-Tājir* (Chapter 12), Nizar F. Hermes argues that “Al-Tajir’s account is a mine of socio-cultural, religious, political and economic information about India and China in the ninth century. In fact, from the beginning of his journey, the merchant seems to abandon his initial trade and become a keen observer and a preoccupied explorer who finds himself captivated not only by the spectacle of the Oriental Other he will soon meet, but also by the authentic ‘ajā’ib/gharā’ib (marvels/wonders) of the Indian ocean”.

Complementing this account, Ian Richard Netton, in a provocative essay entitled *Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in Wanderland: Voyage as Text: was Ibn Baṭṭūṭa an Orientalist?* (Chapter 13), asks whether that most famous of medieval Arab travellers, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (AD 1304–1368/69 or 1377), whose career matched that of Marco Polo, should be considered as an Orientalist in the Saidean sense. Certainly, in his love for the exotic Other, the answer seems to be a resounding “yes”! Indeed, in his probable invention of visits to places such as China, and his definite invention of a visit to Bulghar, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa exhibits an almost painful need to show himself as a connoisseur of exotic lands, people and The Other. Netton’s essay makes comparisons with other writers who also travelled in search of the exotic, such as Marco Polo and Robert Louis Stevenson, as well as with the author of the purely fantastical tale of Baron Munchausen.

Our volume ends, fittingly, with an essay about the reverse side of the Orientalist coin: Occidentalism. Zahia Smail Salhi, in her essay *The Maghreb and the Occident: towards the construction of an Occidental discourse* (Chapter 14), has, as her starting-point, Said’s *Orientalism*, in which Salhi perceives “the seeds of Occidentalism, both as a concept and as a natural reaction of the people of the Orient to the host of stereotypes and (mis) representations which were created and propagated by some Orientalists about an Orient they often did not know very well. It is the aim of this essay to ponder the concept of ‘Occidentalism’ and its multifarious meanings as defined by critics from both the Orient and the Occident with a special focus on the Maghrebi experience of the East–West encounter which ultimately resulted in the creation of an Occidental discourse in the Maghreb.”

Orientalism and Occidentalism! Have we come full circle? The reader will decide. This volume is presented as an exciting and dynamic aid to that further scholarly and popular reflection.

Professor Ian Richard Netton
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 University of Exeter
 1 May 2012

Note on the text

The authors of the essays contained in this volume come from a diversity of backgrounds and degrees of linguistic experience. Consequently no attempt has been made to enforce a common system of transliteration from Arabic and other languages, nor to impose diacritics where none were preferred. American spellings have been retained in essays by American authors and, in one case where an essay is a reprint from an American journal, a mixture of textual and endnotes has been permitted. Finally, the views of the authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor nor of their co-authors.

Part I

Imagining the Orient

1 The Muslim world in British historical imaginations

‘Re-thinking *Orientalism*’?

K. Humayun Ansari

Ever since the publication of *Orientalism* in 1978 there has been a great deal of debate about Edward Said's thesis and propositions. His study has provoked much controversy but it has also generated an immense amount of positive intellectual development across many humanities and social sciences disciplines. Said's objective was to explore the relationship between power and knowledge; between imperialism and scholarship. He thus viewed 'Orientalism' as a Western discourse that essentialises the Muslim world in pejorative ways, one intimately entwined with imposition of imperial power and offering ideological justifications for it.¹

While a wide range of academics have subsequently developed or refined Said's framework, others have challenged and, indeed, denounced it, as Robert Irwin puts it, as a perverted muddle of 'malignant charlatantry'.² In terms of the production of historical knowledge about the peoples, politics and cultures of the Orient, the disagreements have been to do with approaches, sources, and interpretive paradigms. An increasing number of scholars more generally have come to accept that knowledge is socially constructed and that complex developments contribute towards shaping our understandings of the world.³ Hence, social and political interests play a significant role in the adoption of one way of construing reality rather than another. Others claim that they tell it like it is; they allow facts to speak for themselves, and have no interest in the social utility of the historical knowledge that they produce. Intellectual curiosity, the lust for knowing, is their only drive.⁴ Bernard Lewis, thus, defended Orientalism as 'pure scholarship', a discipline that strove towards objectivity.⁵ On the other hand, A.J. Arberry (1905–1969) in his compilation, *Oriental Essays: Portraits of Seven Scholars* (1960), while denying that he himself had any political agendas, accepted that politics, nonetheless, intruded upon academic scholarship.⁶ Indeed, it could be argued that politics is always present, but not necessarily where people claim to locate it, since politics has less to do with interactions than actions and results, which are always unpredictable. It is thus difficult to put intentions on trial.⁷

Absolute claims such as these, however, demand closer inspection, and so what I want to explore in this essay is how far there were scholars who were genuinely 'purely' interested in Islam and Muslim societies and so studied them for their own sake. I will do this by looking at the places that Islam and Muslims have occupied in British historical imaginations from the outset of the early modern period to the present.

One of the key reasons for examining the past is to uncover the shape of human experience: can we discern any patterns in it, and how can we make sense of it through time? For many centuries, in the context of Britain, ‘the march of history’ was understood in sacred terms. For Christian writers historical knowledge bore witness to the grand theme of Creation and the Last Judgement. But as Islam spread through the Mediterranean, posing a potentially lethal theological and political threat as it conquered the bastions of Eastern Christendom, the mysterious rise of this ‘falsehood’, against the truth of Christianity, compelled an explanation. How to stem its rising tide and protect Christians and Christendom [and convert Muslims] from this scourge?

The response of medieval and early modern Christian scholars was to create ‘a body of literature concerning the faith, its Prophet, and his book, polemic in purpose and scurrilous in tone, designed to protect and discourage rather than to inform’.⁸ Attacks on Islam were in part a way of propping up ideological conformity among various Christian denominations, in Britain as elsewhere.⁹ With military power unable to withstand Islamic expansion, refutation through argument and missionary work was considered the best option for overcoming the challenge, for which knowledge of the Muslim adversaries, their beliefs and practices, was considered crucial. The lengthy title of William Bedwell’s (1562–1632) best-known work – *Mahomet Unmasked. Or a Discoverie of the manifold Forgeries, Falsehoods, and horrible impieties of the blasphemous seducer Mahomet. With a demonstration of the Insufficienie of his Law, contained in the cursed Alcoran. Written long since in Arabicke and now done in English* – underlined its similar polemical rationale.¹⁰ In much of this scholarship, therefore, a repertoire of Christian legends nourished by imaginative fantasies, rather than hard historical evidence about Islam and Muslims, served the purpose. While the explanations provided were never fully satisfying, writers such as Bedwell succeeded in creating a portrait of an exotic, and deluded, ‘other’ – and helped to embed a negative perception in the ‘British’ social imaginary, something that possesses considerable emotional resonance even to this day.

That said, when we look at the early modern period, we find that, in the British Isles at large, there was little popular awareness of, let alone curiosity about, Muslims – and even less so in serious literature. Most of those who had sufficient resources and interest to sponsor Arabic studies were either churchmen (as was the case with most forms of learning, not just this field) or closely aligned with their causes who, while acknowledging that acquisition and study of Arabic manuscripts was useful insofar as they contained much valuable scientific information,¹¹ primarily aimed at producing materials to achieve salvation of oneself and of wayward Middle Eastern Christians and Muslims.¹² Thomas Adams (1586–1668), a wealthy draper, created the Chair of Arabic at Cambridge in 1632 in the hope that he might, through his patronage, contribute to converting Muslims.¹³ Four years later, William Laud (1573–1645), Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor of the University of Oxford, established its Professorship in Arabic, primarily as part of the struggle against Catholicism.

In the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, those in Europe who studied Islam tended to do so not out of interest in that faith per se, but primarily to pursue

intra-confessional polemic.¹⁴ During the Reformation, Islam was frequently used by one group of Christians to criticise another. Protestants were likened to Muslims for deviating from and perverting the true faith. Such developments, of course, need to be located in the context of Ottoman expansion in competition with other European states. It is noticeable that, while there was considerable conflict between the states, it did not take the form of 'Islamdom' versus 'Christendom'.

The 1600s are credited with having marked the beginning of 'modern' British historical writing.¹⁵ The confident authority of the Christian world-view began to crumble as secularised interpretations of history, centred on human rather than divine activity, gained ground. Reason combined with empirical evidence was coming to be accepted as the final authority for deciding what was historically credible. Scholars now increasingly possessed the resources and linguistic potential to investigate more rigorously than before the nature of Muslim beliefs, history, traditions and practices. Hence, writings on Islam became contradictory, reflecting the fragmented views held by Europeans on the subject, influenced by political thinkers such as Descartes and Spinoza.¹⁶ The old stereotypes were repeated by most writers, but now alongside newer observations that found favourable things in Islam. For example, there was *The General Historie of the Turkes* (1603) by Richard Knolle (c. 1540–1610). A fear-inducing chronicle, it was filled with accounts of Ottoman atrocities, cruelties and torture. Knolle, like earlier English writers, called the Ottoman Empire the 'great terror of the world', Islam the work of Satan and Muhammad a false prophet. But – here is the difference – Knolle also acknowledged Turkish determination, courage and frugality, and the massive twelve hundred-page account contained much positive information about Muslims, until then considered mortal enemies.

Edward Pococke's *Specimen Historae Arabum* (1649), while casting Islam as the religion of the false prophet, likewise managed, by deploying Arabic sources and historians, to avoid the distortions of medieval polemic and presented what was, for its time, an arguably more balanced view of Muslim society.¹⁷ A little later Paul Rycaut, in *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668), drew a picture of Ottoman despotism, unequivocally corrupt and backward, straight out of the old stock of ignorance and fear. But it also recounted accurate, knowledgeable and insightful details of Turkish life and history, of Ottoman political, military and religious organisation, of the diversity of Islamic beliefs and traditions. In it there was also acknowledgement of mutuality of commercial interests and benefits and admiration of many aspects of Islamic culture.¹⁸ Most importantly, having been written by British men, these histories inevitably lacked the breadth of understanding of Muslim societies that women travellers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) would contribute, thanks to their experiences of spheres of life to which they, as females, had exclusive access.

By the end of the seventeenth century, while the intellectual climate had changed significantly in favour of 'freethinking', both orthodox Christians and so-called 'deviants' continued to critique each other. Humphrey Prideaux's (1648–1724) *Life of Mahomet* (1697) aimed to uncover 'The true nature of imposture fully displa'd in the life of Mahomet, with a discourse annex'd for the vindication of

Christianity from this charge',¹⁹ while Henry Stubbe's (1632–1676) anti-Trinitarian tract, *Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism* (written in 1671 but not eventually published until nearly 250 years later),²⁰ trenchantly challenged 'the fabulous inventions of the Christians'²¹ in the light of reason, contrasting this with his positive assessment of the life of Muhammad and Islam's rationality.²² What is particularly interesting is that both these authors used Pococke's work and sources extensively but interpreted them in radically different ways to arrive at the opposite poles in their conclusions – one hostile (it should be added, largely in response to the challenge of Deism rather than Islam), the other sympathetic, to Islam and Muslims.²³

What we see emerging out of these controversies by the eighteenth century are more sophisticated understandings of Islam, though, given the broader religious context in which they were operating, their authors could hardly be expected to write wholly positively of a religion that had proved 'the first ruin of the eastern church'.²⁴ So, while in Simon Ockley's (1678–1720) *The History of the Saracens* (2 volumes, 1708–1718) Mahomet, as for Prideaux, remained 'the great Imposter'²⁵ and the Arab conquests 'that grievous Calamity',²⁶ there is patent admiration for the martial and moral qualities and learning of the Arabs.²⁷ Similarly, while George Sale (1697–1736), in the *Preliminary Discourse* to his translation of the Qur'an (1734), again followed Prideaux by saying that the Arabs 'seem to have been raised up on purpose by GOD, to be the scourge to the Christian Church',²⁸ his use of Muslim sources of history marked an enormous advance.

The late eighteenth century was a period of transition in British imperial history, and, not surprisingly, this had an impact on how Islam and Muslims were viewed by contemporaries. The East India Company (EIC) from the mid-eighteenth century had been steadily establishing dominance in India, often taking power from Muslim rulers in the process, but it was still navigating its way towards finding the right strategies in order to establish firm control. Many who ran the EIC in India admired and appreciated indigenous cultures, saw merit in their history and assimilated.²⁹

William Robertson (1721–1793) was one Enlightenment historian who expressed an early willingness to value Indian culture and society as the development of an equivalent and equally valid civilisation to that of Europe. However, whereas Europe was seen to have 'progressed', India was perceived to have 'stagnated' in relative terms. Hence, Robertson believed that India should be facilitated but not coerced in its socio-economic and cultural development by a form of imperial rule and commerce that demonstrated respect for India's cultural heritage.³⁰

This development approach to history associated with the Scottish Enlightenment, in the works of Adam Smith (1723–1790), David Hume (1711–1776) and Robertson, from the 1750s to the 1790s, concluded that the human record was one of material and moral improvement, of cultural development from 'savagery' and 'barbarism' to 'civilisation', and that their society stood at the pinnacle of achievement.³¹ Since Muslim societies were judged as, at best, semi-barbaric, colonialism – Empire – was justified. Alexander Dow (1735/6–1779), another secular enlightenment historian, accepted that the Mughal Empire,