

Religious Hegemony and the Antichrist Rhetoric in

John Mandeville's *Travels*

. Jamal S. Buresly* - Khaled M. Shuqair**

Abstract

This paper studies the image of the Muslims as the Other and their iconography as Antichristian evil in Sir John Mandeville's *Travels*. In the formation of the image, Mandeville seems to draw on the medieval apocalyptic view of history and the Antichrist rhetoric and discourse that accompanied it. The *Travels* looks back to the past and forward to the future with a unified view of history that tries to discern how the agents of evil work out God's plan. Mandeville, furthermore, presents us with an ambivalent view of history, pessimistic in the idea that the Muslims as the agents of evil are taking over the Christian heritage and the Land of Promise, but optimistic in the view that God will intervene to aid the Christians. Along this line, the Muslims are seen as the hordes of Gog and Magog, the agents of evil, whose cupidity and worldliness point also to and symbolize the roots of the current state of the Western Christian world. At the center of this picture, the figure of Mohammad stands out as the originator of all corruption, his iconography pregnant with all Antichristian evil.

* English Department College of Arts Kuwait University

** English Department College of Basic Education The Public Authority for Applied Education

"الهيمنة الدينية وخطاب المسيح الدجال فى رحلات جون مانديفيل"

جمال بروسيلى – خالد شقير

ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة صورة المسلم كرمز للشر المعادي للعالم الغربى المسيحى فى كتاب رحلات السير جون مانديفيل، ويعتمد مانديفيل فى تكوينه لهذه الصورة على الرؤيا النبوية للتاريخ والحتمية التاريخية التى كانت سائدة فى العصر الوسيط، وما يرافق تلك النظرة من حتمية نهائية الشر (المسلمون كصورة للآخر) وانتصار الخير (العالم الغربى المسيحى كصورة للأننا). ولهذا فإن السرد فى الكتاب يرجع إلى الماضى ثم يستشرف المستقبل لتكوين نظرة موحدة للتاريخ تفسر انتصار قوى الشر على أنه تنفيذ للخطة الإلهية، ويصاحب هذا السرد أيضاً رأى تشاؤلى للتاريخ، فهذا الرأى نشأؤمى عندما يرى السارد كيف أن المسلمين-أي قوى الشر-يهيمنون على التراث المسيحى وأرض الميعاد، ولكنه تفاؤلى أيضاً عند يؤكد لنا السارد أن العون الإلهى سيؤدى حتماً إلى نصرته العالم الغربى. وفى ظل ذلك كله، يمثل المسلمون قوم يأجوج ومأجوج-قوى الشر- التى يسلطها الله على العالم المسيحى والتي هي أيضاً فى جشعها وحبها للدنيا تجسد ما وصل إليه العالم الغربى المسيحى آنذاك من انحطاط أخلاقى.

In his *Orientalism*, Said states that to have knowledge of the orient is for the West “to have authority, which means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to it, since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it.” Knowledge about the Oriental qualities, character, culture and history gives power since it can be “contained and represented by dominating frameworks.” This “reservoir of accredited knowledge,” Said goes on to say, designated the East morally, geographically and culturally and has been employed by Western writers such as Chaucer, Mandeville, Shakespeare, Pope, and others.¹

Two important ideas dominate Said’s remarks here and are pertinent to Mandeville’s *Travels*: knowledge and power. Knowledge about Islam and the Muslims was formulated and accumulated through the theological polemics against Islam, which, for the most part, drew on the Antichrist rhetoric to represent and contain Islam as a confusing phenomenon that seemed both familiar and alien at the same time. This authority, derived from the Christ-Antichrist discourse, not only shaped the attitude towards Islam and the Muslims but also silenced and situated them against the Christian West in some coherent and comprehensible way to the Western mind. In the process of gaining this knowledge, Islam and the Muslims were deconstructed and recreated anew so that they fit the diabolic Antichrist tradition. Hence every detail of Mohammad’s life, every detail in the Islamic history found an ample explanation in the ready-made Antichrist tradition. In short, Islam and the Muslims were tailored to fit this image.

This kind of knowledge, of course, gave to the West power, a feeling of superiority. El-Beshti holds that Said’s theory of knowledge and power has helped exclude the Renaissance (and the Middle Ages) from any Orientalist studies because “Said’s book has succeeded in making it difficult to speak of ‘Orientalism’ outside the vortex of colonial dominance.” However, El-Beshti goes on to say, the relationship between East and West at the time defies Said’s theory of power relations because “what distinguishes the Renaissance Oriental from his successor is the Muslim nations’ position of strength relative to the West.”² True, in the Middle ages, Islam for the most time surpassed the West in terms of political and military power. However, it would be a total misunderstanding of Said’s theory if we take power

to mean just political and military hegemony. The power the medieval Christian West gained from the knowledge about Islam was primarily religious. That is, the West's knowledge about Islam, which was based on the Antichrist discourse, emphasized the superiority of Christianity over Islam because the latter was viewed as a parody of the former, and Mohammad as what Christ is not. Since, in the medieval Christian discourse, Islam is a false religion and Mohammad is at the very most an impostor, Christianity, as the true revelation, and the people of Christ, as the holder of the true faith, must dominate and end this evil. In this sense, all political and military means were subjected and put in the service of this feeling of religious superiority.³ This was basically the idea behind the crusading campaigns against Islam.

This dialectal relationship between knowledge and power created what Norman Daniel calls "a deformed image of Islam" in the conscious European mind.⁴ This paper studies the deformed image of Mohammad (and the Muslims) and his cultural iconography as Antichristian evil in Mandeville's *Travels*.⁵ This iconography, this image, has an interior logic of its own. That is, Mandeville could speak of Mohammad and be understood by their Western audiences. However, whether this iconography corresponds to reality is irrelevant to this world.

Mandeville draws on the apocalyptic view of history and the Antichrist rhetoric that accompanied it. It looks back to the past and forward to the future with a unified view of history that tries to discern how the agents of evil work out God's plan. Mandeville, furthermore, presents us with an ambivalent view of history, pessimistic in the idea that the Muslims as the agents of evil are taking over the Christian heritage and the Land of Promise, but optimistic in the view that God will intervene to aid the Christians. Along this line, the Muslims are seen as the hordes of Gog and Magog, the agents of evil, whose cupidity and worldliness point also to and symbolize the roots of the current state of the Western Christian world. At the center of this picture, the figure of Mohammad stands out as the originator of all corruption, his iconography pregnant with all Antichristian evil.

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The Prologue of the *Travels* sets the scene for the polarization of the Christian-non-Christian category, which remains prevalent throughout the book. At the outset, the narrator seems to be at pains to remind the Western Christians of the religious, historical and symbolic value of the Holy Land, to which purpose he wrote his book so that the Europeans learn the different routes to it and the customs and manners of the people who currently inhabit it. The Holy Land, the narrator addresses his Western audience, is the “Land of Promission or Behest” and the navel of the Christian World, where Christ “would lead his Life and suffer passion and death” in order to “buy and deliver us from the pains of hell.”⁶ Thus Western Christians are entitled to be heirs to this historical and spiritual “heritage” which was divinely promised. At this point, the narrator pauses to reflect upon the contemporary situation:

Wherefore every good Christian man, that is of power, and hath whereof, should

pain him with all his strength for to conquer our right heritage, and chase out all the

misbelieving men. For we be clept Christian men, after Christ our Father.

And if we be right children of Christ, we ought for to challenge the heritage, that

our Father left us, and do it out of heathen men’s hands(Prologue 4-5).

As such, it becomes a religious obligation on the part of the Western Christians to regain this usurped heritage and chase the heathen out. However, the Christian world currently fails to carry out this divine commitment because they are mired deep in sin:

But now pride, covetise, and envy have so inflamed the hearts of lords of the world,

That they are more busy for to dis-inherit their neighbours, more than for to

Challenge or to conquer their heritage before-said (Prologue 5).

The usurpation of this heritage becomes a chastisement and punishment for their spiritual indifference. Here Mandeville seems to single out the European rulers, not the common people, as the ones to blame for their indifference to initiate a holy war, for, as he tells us, a group of people without a “devout ruler” is like “a flock of sheep without a shepherd.” The narrator tries to enkindle the crusading spirit at a time (in the year 1322) when the zeal died out.⁷ However, with this pessimistic outlook on the contemporary political situation, the *Travels* juxtaposes another optimistic outlook, derived from the apocalyptic vision that the Christian truth is bound to prevail and triumph as part of the divine plan.

In terms of cultural Otherness, the *Travels* divides the world into the Western Christian world as the “us” and the rest of the world as the “them.” The Rest of the world consists of subcategories like Muslims (the Saracens), Tartarians, Persians, idolators, Brahmans, Greeks, and even the eastern Christian sects, like the Jacobeans and the Christians of Prester John’s Land and the Christians of the church of St. Thomas of India in Jerusalem, who were seen as imperfect Christian sects.⁸ This non-Christian world is seen through the eyes of the narrator, Sir John Mandeville, who identifies himself as:

I, John Mandeville, Knight, albeit I be not so worthy, that was
born in England, in
the town of St. Albans, and passed the sea in the year of our
Lord Jesu Christ, 1322,
in the day of St. Michael, and hitherto have been long time over
the sea, and have
seen and gone through many diverse lands, and many provinces
and kingdoms and
isles and have passed throughout Turkey, Armenia the little and
the great; through
Tartary, Persia, Syria, Arabia, Egypt the high and low; through
Lybia, Chaldea, and

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a great part of Ethiopia; through Amazonia, Ind the less and the more, and a great

part; and throughout many other Isles, that be about Ind; where dwell many diverse

folk, and of diverse manners and laws, and of diverse shapes of men (Prologue 5).

Hence Mandeville does not only place himself in Western Christian experience, but also establishes himself as an “inside” authority, by virtue of his travels, who can inform the Western audiences of other cultures. As such the conceit of the travels becomes important on two levels. First, Mandeville establishes himself as an inside authority on the other cultures, not only by virtue of his being a traveler to these cultures but also by virtue of his long acquaintance and association with the Other. For instance, later we come to know that he dwelt with the Muslim Sultan “as a soldier in his wars a great while against the Bedouins,” and, as the Sultan’s confidant, the Sultan “would have married me full highly to a great prince’s daughter, if I would have forsaken my law and belief; but I thank God, I had no will to do it, for nothing that he behight me” (V: 24). He also considers himself an “inside” authority on the Tartarian culture because he and his

Yeomen served the Great Chan and were his soldiers for fifteen months against the king of Mancy (XXXIII: 143-144). As such, this knowledge and authority about the Other gives him power which, as we shall see, consists in the feelings of religious superiority. Second, as Grady has noted, the conceit of the traveler enables Sir John to place the major themes in the mouths of some other spokesmen, like the Sultan, the Brahmans, and the Cathayans, to criticize and pass judgment on the Western Christians.⁹ It is important to add here that this criticism mainly consists of reminding them of their sins and religious obligations, as holders of the true faith, towards the non-Christians.

Mandeville deals with the Muslim world throughout his description of the various routes to and the places in the Holy Land

and the neighboring areas like Babylon (Iraq), Syria, and Egypt. It is basically in this part of the book that the polarization between Christians and non-Christians becomes most prominent. Historically, the Holy Land is the promised “heritage” of the Christians usurped by heathens-the Muslims. The Other in this sense is not an alien phenomenon, but a real one encroaching upon the Christian geographical and historical heritage. Furthermore, the Other, as the Muslims, claim that they not only share but also should inherit this heritage. This idea is conveyed through the technique of juxtaposing the biblical past with the political present. That is, in the *Travels* the Biblical narratives of the ancient Christian heritage of the Holy Land is most of the time muffled by the presence of the Saracens who are currently in control of this heritage. As such, while, in the city of Hebron, the narrator reminds his audience of the biblical history of the city, and the patriarchs and their wives who dwelt in it-like Adam, Abraham, Isaac, David, Jacob, Eve, Sarah, Rebecca—he at the same time reminds us that the sepulchers are kept by the Saracens who

keep full curiously, and have the place in great reverence for the holy fathers, the

patriarchs that lie there. And they suffer no Christian man to enter into that place,

but if it be of special grace of the sultan; for they hold Christian men and Jews as

dogs, and they say, that they should not enter into so holy a place (IX 44-45).

In Alexandria, he describes a very beautiful ancient church, but also reminds us that this church, like all other churches in the area, is from within painted white to “for do the images of saints that were painted on the wall” (VIII: 38).¹⁰ At Nazareth, the narrator describes the place where the Virgin Mary received God’s word through Gabriel; however, he then pauses to reflect upon the current political situation:

And the Saracens keep that place full dearly, for the profit that they have thereof.

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And they be full wicked Saracens and cruel, and more despiteful than in any other

Place, and have destroyed all the churches (XIII 75).

Such juxtaposition between the Biblical past and the political present creates a tension, prevalent throughout this part of the book that looks backward to the Prologue and is relieved in the culminating scene where the narrator has a private conversation with the Sultan.

Though the narrator expresses his admiration for the Sultan, his Saracens' adherence to their law and his political administration (i.e., his ability to manage his realm effectively), overall he pictures the Muslim world as, for the most part, a world of carnal desires and earthly pleasures. The Sultan of Babylon lives luxuriously in a fair and strong castle with six thousand people to keep it. He is married to four wives, three of them Muslims and one Christian, who live in different parts of his kingdom, but are at his service when he needs one of them. In addition to his wives, he has as many paramours as he likes, chosen from the nobility of his people. These are the same sentiments which have always been noted in the medieval Western historical accounts of Mohammad's life which are here clearly elaborated on. In the following scene, the narrator capitalizes on the Sultan as an image of lechery:

And when he will have one to lie with him, he maketh them all to come before him,

and he beholdeth in all, which of them is most to his pleasure, and to her anon he

sendth or casteth a ring from his finger. And then anon she shall be bathed and

richly attired, and anointed with delicate things of sweet smell, and then led to the

soldan's chamber, and thus he doth as often as him list, when he will have any of them(VI: 26).

The Sultan's tyrannical lust for power also becomes a major concern of the narrative. No stranger can come into the Sultan's presence without being dressed all in clothes of gold in the Saracens' manner. Upon seeing the Sultan, all people, no matter where they are, should fall down upon their knees and kiss the earth. When ambassadors of other countries come to see the Sultan, all of his guard would stand around the ambassador carrying their arrows and axes and ready to shoot at the first word that displeases the Sultan. This image of tyranny is also accompanied by Mandeville's relating a lengthy history of the Sultanate, which is a litany of patricide, fratricide and assassinations.

Mandeville seems to say that this image of carnality and tyranny can be traced back to Mohammad, the promulgator of the Saracens' law. It is not difficult here to discern the affinities and the correlation the author of the *Travels* draws between the image of the Sultan and the Muslims and the iconography of Mohammad established in medieval polemics. Mohammad, according to the *Travels*, renowned as a necromancer, had a great appetite for wealth and power, which he gained when he got married to the wife of the deceased prince of his country. He had a sickness called "the falling evil" (epilepsy), but he calmed his wife down by explaining he was in the possession of the Angel Gabriel, who was revealing to him a great destiny as founder of a new dispensation. He commanded in his Quran that every man should have two or three or four wives, but the Saracens after his death started marrying as many as nine in addition to other paramours. To lure people to his creed, Mohammad pictured a paradise as a place for carnal desires. He forbade wine because once in his drunkenness he thought he slew a hermit he used to love very much. However, it was in fact Mohammad's companions who did because they were jealous of the monk.

Mandeville sees Mohammad as a man who misled a whole nation through his carnality and worldliness. Mandeville presents us with a narrative about Mohammad's prophethood derived from medieval historical accounts and polemics. He was not a Christian cardinal, rather he was an impostor who forged his religion by partaking of

Christian tenets. In his childhood, Mandeville tells us, Mohammad met a Christian hermit¹¹ on his way to Egypt, and afterwards he proclaimed himself prophet, in order to try to explain away his “fall-of-evil” fits. Hence Mandeville offers an explanation for the proximity of Islam to the Christian doctrine. The Muslims, he says, believe in one God, all-powerful and prominent, and in the punishment and reward of the Day of Judgment. They also believe in Christ's immaculate birth, and his miracles. However, they deny his divinity, his crucifixion and the Trinity. In this sense, as Grady notes, the Muslim's religious authority becomes subject to a strategy of containment. The very proximity of Islam and Christianity undermines Islam's claim to integrity and self-sufficiency, as if by some process of selection it will simply develop into orthodox Christianity.¹² This representation and containment of Islam gives power to the Westerners, derived from the conviction that Christianity is the superior religion and Islam is, at the very most, a synthetic religion. The medieval Christians, who believed themselves the possessors of the only true faith, and who were told a man like Mohammad was behind the rise of Islam, naturally regarded Islam, not as a new religion, but as a new schism, and attributed to it diabolical impulses and altogether human motives arising from carnal desires:

And because that they go so nigh our faith, they be lightly converted to Christian law when men preach them and shew them distinctly the law of Jesu Christ, and when they tell them of the prophecies(XV:91).

Another strategy of containment in the *Travels* is the construction of Muslims' speech in such a way that it must unspeak its own idiosyncrasy and reconstitute itself into a self-abnegating rhetoric. The effect, of course, is the circumscribing of the moral and political threat of Islam. The Muslims themselves, as the narrator says, believe that Mohammad's law is bound to fail and Christianity will prevail:

And also they say, that they know well by the prophecies that

the law of Mahomet

shall fail, as the law of the Jews did; and that the law of Christian people shall last to the day of doom(XV: 91) ¹³.

This self-abnegating rhetoric reaches a culminating point in the scene when the narrator has a private conversation with the Sultan of Egypt. In its political and religious iconography, the dialogue confirms the superiority of Christianity against Islam and condemns, through the Sultan's words, the whole Muslim race as a lost nation. In the scene, when asked about the Western Christian rulers, the narrator answers with complacency (reminiscent of Gulliver's when questioned by the Brobdingnagian King) that they are "right well, thanked be God." However, the Sultan is well informed of the affairs of the Christian rulers to know this is not true.¹⁴ According to him, instead of setting a good example for the "lewd" people-the Muslims-and undertake their religious duty of converting them, they are mired in their world of sins:

Truly, nay! For ye Christians men ne reck right nought , how untruly to serve God!

Ye should give ensample to the lewd people for to do well, and ye give them ensample to do evil(XV: 92-93).

The Christians, the Sultan goes on to say, have deserted charity as a way of life and embraced cupidity which has proved to be their end. The Christian world of cupidity described by the Sultan recalls the Muslim world dwelt upon earlier.

For the Commons upon festival days, when they should go to church to serve God,

then go they to taverns, and be there in gluttony all the day and all night, and eat

and drink as beasts that have no reason, and wit not when they have enough. And

also the Christian men enforce themselves in all manners that they may, for to fight

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and for to deceive that one that other. And therewithall they be
so proud, that they
know not how to be clothed; now long, now short, now strait,
now large, now
sworded, now daggered, and in all manner guises. They should
be simple, meek
and true, and full of alms-deed, as Jesu was, in whom they trow;
but they be all the
contrary, and ever inclined to the evil, and to the devil. And
they be so covetous,
that, for a little silver, they sell their daughters, their sisters and
their own wives to
put them to lechery. And one withdraweth the wife of another,
and none of them
holdeth faith to another; but they defoul their law that Jesu
Christ betook them to keep for their salvation (XV: 93).

The Sultan here also ventriloquizes the narrator's words in the Prologue when he considers the loss of the "land of Promission" as a chastisement for the Christian sins and moral depravity. He and his people are currently controlling the Holy Land, not because they are righteous, but because God willed them to be his scourge till the Christians amend:

And thus, for their sins, have they lost all this land that we hold.
For, for their sins,
their god hath taken them into our hands, not only by strength
of ourselves, but for
their sins. For we know well, in every sooth, that when ye serve
God, God will help you; and when he is with you, no man may
be against you (XV: 93).

The Sultan ends the conversation with an apocalyptic vision consistent with the other visions deployed throughout the *Travels*:

And that know we well by our prophecies, that Christian men shall win again this land out of our hands, when they serve God more devoutly; but as long as they be of foul and of unclean living (as they be now) we have no dread of them in no kind, for their God will not help them in no wise(XV: 93).

This prophecy represents the culmination of other similar prophecies Mandeville highlights in previous episodes. In his description of the Mount of Mamre near Hebron, he relates to his audience the story of the Dry Tree, which has been there since the beginning of the world and dried when Christ was crucified. The Muslims revere and worship this tree because they believe by their prophecies that

a lord, a prince of the west side of the world, shall win the Land of Promission that is the Holy land with the help of Christian men, and he do sing a mass under that dry tree; and then the tree shall wax green and bear both fruit and leaves, and through that miracle many Saracens and Jews shall be turned to Christian faith(IX: 46).

And of the fair palm trees that grow inside the city of Cairo, the narrator says: "And men make always that balm to be tilled of the Christian men, or else it would not fructify; as the Saracens say themselves for it hath been often-time proved" (VII: 34).

The deployment of the apocalyptic vision throughout the *Travels*, which reaches its culmination in the self-abnegating rhetoric of the Sultan, brings to a relief the tension created by the juxtaposition between the Biblical past and the political present. The past confirmed the Christian heritage and the "Land of Promission" as divine. However, the political present reveals a moral threat posed by the heathen, or the Muslims, whose moral danger consists in holding a parodic creed of Christianity and are mired in cupidity through a materialistic or literal, rather than spiritual, understanding of the scriptures. This moral threat, the *Travels* seems to say, is divinely willed as the scourge of God to chastise the Christians for their cupidity and sins and for their religious negligence to convert the

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heathen. The future confirms the prevalence of the Christian truth and the triumph of the righteous.

Mandeville then, draws on the apocalyptic view of history and the Antichrist rhetoric that accompanied it. It looks back to the past and forward to the future with a unified view of history that tries to discern how the agents of evil work out God's plan. Mandeville, furthermore, presents us with an ambivalent view of history, pessimistic in the idea that the Muslims as the agents of evil are taking over the Christian heritage and the Land of Promise, but optimistic in the view that God will intervene to aid the Christians. Along this line, the Muslims are seen as the hordes of Gog and Magog, the agents of evil, whose cupidity and worldliness point also to and symbolize the roots of the current state of the Western Christian world. At the center of this picture, the figure of Mohammad stands out as the originator of all corruption, his iconography pregnant with all Antichristian evil.

On the whole, Mandeville exploits Mohammad's traditional iconography as established by medieval Christian historians and polemicists. In this iconography, Mohammad, together with the Muslims, stands for cupidity, lechery, hypocrisy, deception, tyranny, and deadly sins. His life is brought in sharp contrast with that of Christ and the lives of Christian saints. In this capacity, he becomes an embodiment of all the evil prevalent in the contemporary medieval culture. This polarization between the Mohammadan qualities and Christian ones is underlined by a feeling of religious superiority and takes the form of a religio-political conflict between forces of evil and the people of Christ.

Notes

- ¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 31-40.
- ² El-Beshti, Bashir Mohammad, *The Displacement Towards the East: The Oriental in English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, Unpublished Dissertation, (Berkley: University of California, 1989), pp. 1-3.
- ³ In medieval literature, this religious superiority is clearly seen in the Middle English romances, which present an idealistic enactment of the crusades where the Christians must emerge victorious because they are the holders of the true faith.
- ⁴ Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1960), p. 8.
- ⁵ *Mandeville's Travels* has no fixed form; it survives in a great variety of versions in about three hundred manuscripts, in many European vernaculars and also in Latin. In England it seems to have begun circulating about 1360. Its author may have been, as he claims, a knight "that was born in Englonde in the town of Seynt Albones, and passed the see in the yeer of oure lord Ihesu Crist m.ccc and xxii [1322]" (Prologue, p. 3), to embark on a series of journeys that took him through most of the known world; or he may have been a Frenchman pretending to be that English knight. But we do not know whether either of those identifications is really true, nor do we know whether "Mandeville" really undertook the journeys he describes (For details, see A.C. Spearing, "The Journey to Jerusalem: Mandeville and Hilton," *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 25(2008):1-17). Earlier readers, including Christopher Columbus, believed that he did (See Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Imaginative Landscape of Christopher Columbus*, Princeton, 1992), but modern scholarship indicates that, as Iain Higgins puts it, he "may never have traveled anywhere (except to a good library)," and that most if not all of the book was compiled from his reading, the chief sources being French versions of two Latin works by William of Boldensele and Odoric of Pordenone (Iain MacLeod Higgins, *Writing East: The "Travels" of Sir John Mandeville*. Philadelphia, 1997, p. 8). One scholar who has argued that some details in the *Travels* cannot have been taken from books is Dorothee Metlitzki, (*The Matter of Araby in Medieval England*, New Haven, 1977, chap. 7).
- ⁶ *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville with three narratives in illustration of it: The Voyage of Johannes de Plano Carpini, The Journal of Friar William de Rubruquis, The Journal of Friar Odoric*, New York: Dover Publications, 1964. Hereafter cited in the text by chapter and page number.

⁷ Frank Grady (“Machomete” and Mandeville’s Travels, ” in Tolan, p. 278) states otherwise: “ The recourse to prophecy allows the author of the *Travels* to assert the moral successes of the virtuous heathen while yet containing them within a larger Christian context, and ultimately an orthodox one. Indeed, speculation about the inevitable if historically indeterminate ... demise of Islam not only diminishes the urgency of the call for a crusade or an elaborate program of proselytizing, it also reduces the duty of the Christians interested in the intractable problem of the Saracens to the mere maintenance of the orthodox faith, which is bound to triumph by its very nature.” However, Mandeville in the Prologue, and later in the chapters that deal with the Muslims, refers unequivocally to the urgency of a crusade on the grounds that the Christian heritage of the Holy Land is usurped and the Western Christians, rather than liberating it, are mired in their sins and cupidity and fight each other. In this sense, the prophecies are deployed by way of giving assurance to them that if and when they amend, God will help them and fulfill His promise. Placed in this context, it becomes significant to know that the early fourteenth century (Mandeville gives the year 1322 when he made his travels) witnessed lukewarm interest in initiating any crusade to the Holy Land from the western rulers who became busy fighting each other (see Peter Pently, “The Mediterranean in the Age of the Renaissance 1200-1500”, in George Holmes (ed), p. 252), a state which Mandeville laments in his *Travels*.

⁸ For instance, Mandeville tells us that the Christians of Prester John’s land, who “believe well in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit” even though “they have not all the articles of our faith as we have (XXX:179); and that the clergy of the Church of St. Thomas of India in Jerusalem pray “not after our law, but after theirs; and always they make their sacrament of the altar, saying, *Pater Noster* and other prayers therewith” for they “know not the additions that many popes have made” (X:53)

⁹ Grady, p.274.

¹⁰ Mandeville is referring to the prohibition of images in Islam.

¹¹ It seems here that Mandeville’s narrative is one version of the legend that Mohammad collaborated with a Christian hermit or heretic to devise his own religion (see Chapter I, p. 10-11).

¹² Grady, p. 272

¹³ Manseville’s observation here about the Muslim faith is derived from an account of Islam written by William of Tripoli in 1273. William was a Dominican who lived in Acre in the second half of the thirteenth century. He reported that the Muslims are convinced that Islam, like Judaism, is soon to come to an end, leaving Christianity as the true faith that will prevail at the end (See Southern, p.

62-63). This idea is most probably a distorted version of the Islamic apocalypse, which also holds that toward the end of time Christ will come back and kill the Antichrist.

- ¹⁴ Later, we come to know that the Sultan is well informed of the affairs of the Western Christian rulers through his spies who go to the West disguised as merchants. The Sultan and his merchants, Mandeville tells us, speak fluent French, which makes their espionage mission easier.

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