Review Essay
Translations of the Qurʾān in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia

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

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

¹ Both authors offer summaries of their studies in Reinhold Glei, ed., Frühe Koranübersetzungen. Europäische und außereuropäische Fallstudien (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftliches Verlag, 2012). See the detailed references below.
López-Morillas edits and analyzes a Spanish translation of the Qurʾān by an anonymous Muslim author preserved in a unique manuscript that was copied at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Not only do the translations differ, but so also do the scholarly studies themselves. Cecini’s study clearly aims to contribute to a theoretical discussion within the framework of the aforesaid translational turn, while Consuelo López-Morillas’s approach is strongly historical and philological and less focused on theory building or theorization.

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

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