



Kitap Deđerlendirmesi / Book Review

Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today

John V. Tolan

Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019). xiv + 309 Pages.

'Literary Orientalism' is defined either as 'the depiction of the Orient/Orientalism in Western literary texts', or simply as 'the study of the (mis) representation of Islam and Muslims in the English (literary) works'. A significant and fast emerging subgenre in the English literature, Orientalism serves as a window 'to view the centuries-long, though mostly hostile, relationship between the two major world religions and civilizations, the Christian/ Western and Muslim Orient'. The Western scholarship (both in prose and poetry) is explicated by this literary genre, and has been rightly labelled by Matthew Dimmock, in his *Mythologies of the Prophet Muhammad in Early Modern English Culture* (2013, p. xii) as "the misrepresentation of a biography" or "the biography of a misrepresentation." There have been many attempts, both in the past and present, by Muslims and non-Muslims equally to explore, examine, and critique the Western, especially English writings falling in the category of 'literary Orientalism'—which ranges from the (mis)representation of Islam, its sources and its last Prophet (pbuh), to Muslims and Muslim societies and their creed, beliefs, traditions, customs etc. "Some of these studies," as Abdur Raheem Kidwai (in his *Orientalism in English Literature*, 2016, p. 253) puts them, "take readers far and deep into Western travellers' imagined and real accounts of Islam and Muslims; some recount their (mis)representation in English, French and American literary texts and movies, and some unravel the cultural apathy of the West in their depiction."

Since the appearance of Norman Daniel's *Islam and the West: Making of an Image* in 1962 (republished by Oxford Oneworld, 2009), which is considered as one of the path-breaking and magisterial works on this discourse and 'holds the distinction of being the first such study', this sub-field of scholarship has grown considerably. In the 21st century, there have been many attempts to gauge

this scholarship, and one latest addition to this scholarship is Tolan's *Faces of Muhammad* (2019; hereinafter shortened as *Faces*).

John V. Tolan (b. 1959), a historian of religious and cultural relations between the West and Islam, is presently Professor of History at the University of Nantes, France and a member of *Academia Europea*. Through his books and papers, he has contributed significantly to the subject under discussion. He is discussed and counted among those Western writers who 'represent the new tolerant perspective which recognizes the Prophet's greatness and glory'. Some of his previous books are *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (2002), *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European Eyes in the Middle Ages* (2008), and *Saint Francis and the Sultan: the Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (2009). Through these works, he has pointed out 'the bias against Islam and the Prophet [pbuh] in the Western writings', as Abdur Raheem Kidwai in his *Orientalism in English Literature* writes,

Notwithstanding the regrettable and deplorable fact the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) has been vilified in the West down the ages, it is indeed gratifying to note that recently a host of Western scholars, alive to this gross travesty of truth, have exposed and refuted many of the misconceptions about the Prophet [pbuh]. Norman Daniel's *Islam and the West* (1961) holds the distinction of being the first such study which has been complemented and supplemented by John Tolan's *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam* (1996) and *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (2002), and more significantly, by ... Frederick Quinn's *The Sum of All Heresies* (2008). (Kidwai, 2016, p. 264)

Having provided this background, it is apt now to evaluate and analyse Tolan's most recent work, *Faces of Muhammad*. Tolan provides a scholarly overview of the history of European perceptions of the prophet of Islam, and has rightly described it as the "fruit of a [long] career working on the history of how European Christians have understood Islam" (p. xi). The prophet of Islam, "Muhammad [pbuh] has always been at the center of European discourse on Islam" (p. 2, cf. p. 259), as he has been 'vilified' variedly in 'changing, complex, and contradictory visions'—ranging from (negative portrayals like) 'a heretic, an impostor and a pagan idol' to (positive depictions such as) 'a visionary reformer and an inspirational leader, statesman, and lawgiver'—in the European and American/ 'Western' literary and academic works. It is this "hostility toward Islam and its prophet" (p. 2) which is narrated, scrutinized, and critiqued by Tolan in this book. In other words, the book is more "about 'Mahomet', the figure imagined and brought to life by non-Muslim European authors," between 12th to 21st centuries, and less "about *Muhammad* [pbuh], *prophet of Islam*" or about examining "the changing faces of Mahomet, the many facets of Western

perceptions of the prophet of Islam” (p. 3; italics are mine).

Consisting of nine (9) chapters, it is preceded by an introduction (pp. 1-18) and followed by a conclusion (pp. 259-63), notes (pp. 265-99), and an index (pp. 300-309). One of the principal goals of this book is restoring “the variety, ambivalence, and complexity of European views of Muhammad [pbuh] and Islam,” as much of “what they [read ‘Westerners’] have to say [about the Prophet (pbuh)] is negative, but much is ambivalent or praiseful”/ praiseworthy as well (p. 16).

In the introductory chapter, the author provides the rationale behind this book, highlights the aim and goals of his study, outlines its structure. He also points out, very precisely, both the Muslim and non-Muslim perceptions of the Prophet (pbuh). “For non-Muslim Europeans and Americans,” Tolan points out, “Muhammad [pbuh] has been the object of everything from indifference, fear, or hostility to curiosity and admiration,” therefore, the author intends “to offer an overview of these ‘Western’ views of Muhammad [pbuh]” (p. 8). It is noteworthy to see that author has not only raised question over, and has given explanation for, the use of the term ‘Western’, but has provided an alternative phrase to it as well (see, pp. 8-9). He prefers to use “non-Muslim European and American perceptions of the prophet of Islam” (p. 9) instead of ‘Western Perceptions’ (pity that he has used the later in the title himself). Keeping such “caveats in mind” Tolan, in chapters 1-9, attempts “to trace the history of European perceptions of the prophet of Islam” (p. 10). Moreover, after providing a succinct outline of the chapters in this “Introduction” (see, pp. 10-15), Tolan claims, “The portrayals of the prophet Muhammad [pbuh] that I address in this book represent *only a sampling of* the rich and varied portraits that European authors and artists have sketched of the prophet of Islam” (p. 15; italics mine). This is out of his humility/humbleness, as this book is a thorough and extensive study, and one might argue that it represents not only a sample but will be a ‘reference work’ in this subject for a long time. One more striking feature on this introductory chapter is that Tolan here provides his own perception, projection and opinion about the Prophet (pbuh) as well (see, pp. 4-8).

Chapter 1, “Mahomet the Idol” (pp. 9-43) illustrates, by presenting and evaluating the works and chronicles like *Chason de Roland*, Jean Bodel’s *Jeu de Saint Nicolas*, and other such writings, how Europeans portray Islam as a cult of idols or as a “debauched form of pagan idolatry” and imagine that “Mahomet” as the “chief idol” of the Saracens (p. 21). In Chapter 2, “Trickster and Heresiarch” (pp. 44-72), the author evaluates the polemical works of polemist like Laurent de Premierfait (1409), Petrus Alfonsi’s *Dialogi/ Dialogues against the Jews* (1110), Riccoldo da Montecroce’s *Contra legem sarracenorum* (ca. 1300), and especially

the crusade chronicle of Guibert de Nogent's *Dei gesta per Francos/ Deeds of God through the Franks* (1109). On the basis of this evaluation, Tolan recapitulates the discussion of this chapter in these words from the 12th to 16th centuries, "the perception of Muhammad [pbuh] that dominates in Europe is that of a heresiarch and false prophet," (p. 48) first presented by Nogent and reworked by Laurent, John Lydgate, and others, revealing that these "polemical legends ... prove[d] even more tenacious" than the legends of the Prophet as 'idol' (pp. 71-72).

Chapter 3, "Pseudoprophet of the Moors" (pp. 73-100) focuses on the works of 13th to 16th century "Christian Iberian authors ... jurists and chroniclers," (p. 74) like Rodrigo Jimenez de Rada, the archbishop of Toledo, Mark, Alfonso el Sabio, Pedro Pascual, Jean Germain, Nicola of Cusa, Juan de Segovia, Cardinal Juan de Torquemada, and Juan Andres, and evaluates their denigration and (mis) representation of Prophet's narration "in order to justify the conquest of Muslim territory and the submission of Muslim subjects to the power of Christian kings" (p. 74). For example, Mark was commissioned by Rodrigo to "translate the Qur'an in Latin" (p. 75) and in the preface of this translation he presents "a brief hostile biography of 'Mafometus', [as] a skilled magician," who "seduced barbarous peoples through fantastic delusions" (p. 76). Rodrigo, in his *Historica Arabica/ History of the Arabs*, offers a biography of "Mahomat" with the purpose "to show the reader 'how, through false revelation the sly man Mahomat from his heart crafted a pestilential virus'" that clearly shows as Tolan highlights, "the essential image is same: a pseudoprophet who concocted bogus revelations in order to obtain power" (p. 76). Sabio's *Esoteria de Espana* "paints Mahomat as a heresiarch" (p. 80), but is "relatively free of many legendary polemical elements" as it includes "elements from Muslim tradition" like "the story of angels purifying his heart, ... [and] the story of the *miraj*" (pp. 80-81). Pascual's anti-Islamic tract *Sobre la seta Mahometana*, includes "a hostile description of the life and teachings of 'Mahomat,'" which is "invariably hostile to the prophet" as he intends to "discredit Islam in the eyes of his Christian readers" (pp. 82, 84, 85). Germain, in his *Debat du Chrestien et du Sarrazin* (1451), describes the prophet of Islam as "vile and dishonest Mahomet" (p. 88) and urges Christians "to wage a double war against the 'Saracens': by the sword ... and by the pen" (p. 86).

However, in the works of Nicholas and Juan de Sagovia, one observes, "quite different approach" (p. 87) especially in former's *De Pace Fidei* (1453), the Prophet (pbuh) is mentioned in "very neutral terms, as one whom the Arabs believe has transmitted divine commandments" (p. 87). About Nicholas, Tolan writes that he is "the first Latin Christian author to see the prophet's life and mission as positive" (p. 90). Similarly, Torquemada, in his *Contra principales errors perfidy Machometi* (1459)—a long and verbose diatribe—"seeks to identify Machomet with the Beast from the earth (Revelation 13: 11) and

structures his tract accordingly” (p. 89); and Andres’s *Confusion o confutaction ... del Alcoran* (1515), who was reportedly a convert from Islam to Catholicism, is (in his own words) a collection of the “fabulous fictions ... absurdities, filthiness, impossibilities, lies and contradictions that Mahoma” prepared, principally from the “Alcoran,... in order to dupe simple people” (p. 93). It became “a best seller” work, which “offered a view of Muhammad [pbuh] and the Qur’an ... based on Muslim sources” (p. 95).

This chapter ends with a note on 17th century Spain, a land that had seen “nine centuries of Islam” turned into a “purely Catholic country” which is “at pains to expunge remaining traces of Judaism and Islam,” and thus replaced the “Morisco Muhammad with the charlatan and false prophet of northern European legend”—the “Mahoma” (pp. 99, 100).

Chapter 4, “Prophet of the Turks” (pp. 101-131), looks at “how Catholics and Protestants used the prophet as a rhetorical tool in their polemics against Christian adversaries and how the study of Islam, in particular the Qur’an, served to feed these polemics” (p. 103). The authors/ polemical works evaluated in this chapter are Hans Schiltberger, Martin Luther, Calvin, Guillaume Postel, William Rainolds, Theodore Bibliander, etc.

Take here, for example, the portrayals provided by Bibliander—whose translation of the Qur’an became “an important source of information on Islam and Muhammad for generations of Europeans” (p. 119)—from his *Ad nominis* (1542) in which he described the prophet of Islam as a preacher, reformer, and visionary (see, pp. 111, 113). Tolan, thus, concludes with these remarks:

The prophet was a figure of contention among rival Christians, Protestants and Catholics.... Muhammad [pbuh] was a positive (if flawed) figure for a few of these reformers, and even more so for Unitarians” and this portrayal is totally in contrast with “Medieval Christian portrayals of Muhammad [(pbuh) which] were almost invariably negative (Tolan, 2019, p. 131).

Chapter 5, “Republican Revolutionary in Renaissance England” (pp. 132-154), evaluates the writings of some prominent figures of 17th century England, including Henry Stubbe, Humphrey Prideaux, Thomas Ross, etc. Among these Stubbe (1632-1676), the author of *Original & Progress of Mahometanims* (1671), is credited, in the analysis of Tolan, for having produced a “glowing portrait of the prophet of Islam, indeed the first wholly positive biography of Muhammad [pbuh] written by a European Christian,” in which he presented the “Muslim prophet as a reformer and visionary” (p. 133). For Nabil Mattar, Stubbe effected a “Copernican revolution in the Study of Islam” by undertaking a “complete reassessment of Muhammad’s [pbuh] mission and life,” by basing his study on

Arabic sources translated into Latin (mostly), and thus “vindicating him against earlier Christian polemicists” (p. 142). Stubbe presents the Prophet (pbuh) as “an ‘extraordinary person’ with a ‘great soul’”; one who is “sagacious and just ruler” one who erected a “prophetic monarchy” in Madina; and this “Mahomet is unrecognizable to those familiar with standard European Christian polemical biographies” (pp. 142, 44, 45). In contrast to this, Ross, who is famous for his *Alcoran* (1649), described the Prophet (pbuh) as a “vicious pagan” (p. 137), but it was Stubbe, and his description and depiction of the Prophet (pbuh), which “transformed the prophet of Islam into a republican revolutionary, and subsequent writers ... would confirm and elaborate upon this transformation” (p. 154).

In Chapter 6, “The Enlightenment Prophet: Reformer and Legislator” (pp. 155-183), Tolan focuses on 18th century France, with reference to the works like *The Treatise of the Three Impostors* (1719), *Vie de Mahomed* of Henri, Count of Boulaimvilliers (1730), *The Koran* by George Sale (1734), *De religion Mohammedica* of Adrian Renald (1705), *Le fanatisme* of Voltaire (1741), etc. While Henri, in his work, presents the Prophet (pbuh) as “a model of religion free from ‘priestcraft’” (p. 159) and as “a reformer who abolished the power of clergy in order to return to direct relationship between God and His faithful” as well as “an enemy of idolatry” (p. 160); Sale, whose new translation of the Qur’an “represented a landmark in the European study of Islam”, presented a “scholarly presentation of the life of Muhammad [pbuh]” (p. 160) for he had a different perspective which was influenced by the works/ scholars who had “much more positive view of Islam” (pp. 162, 63). Though Sale presents the Prophet (pbuh) as a “great law giver” (p. 164), and has admire him, and the Qur’an as well, but he sees Qur’an as his handiwork, and not word of God (p. 166). Similarly, Renald, a Professor of Oriental languages at University of Utrecht, wrote *De religion* in 1705, which served as a “mine of information for Enlightenment readers with an interest in Islam” (p. 163). Voltaire (Francois-Maried Arouet), in his drama *Le fanatisme* (1741), presented the Prophet (pbuh) as “archetype of fanaticism” and “as a crass impostor, [and an] incarnation of fanaticism.” However, for Tolan, what is “much less known” is that in his *philosophe* he “subsequently revised his view of the Muslim prophet” and came to “see Muhammad [pbuh] as a sort of role model, a great man” who shaped history and reformed religion and as a “figure of renewal, a foil against fanaticism” (p. 168).

However, it was Edward Gibbon; the British parliamentarian, essayist, and historian, who in his fifth volume of *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1788) provides a “detailed portrait of Muhammad [pbuh] and the rise of Islam” (p. 176), and while reading his description it becomes evident that, unlike his predecessors or contemporaries, Gibbon is “doing history” (p. 182), and

these statements from his *History* (3: 176, 177; as quoted in Tolan, pp. 178-79) are testimony to it, "From his earliest youth Mahomet [Muhammad (pbuh)] was addicted to religious contemplation The faith which, under the name of Islam, he preached to his family and nation, is compounded of an eternal truth ... The creed of Mahomet is free from suspicion or ambiguity; and the Koran [Qur'an] is a glorious testimony to the unity of God. The prophet of Mecca rejected the worship of idols and men, of stars and planets, on the rational principles ..." Tolan describes Gibbon's narrative as "a simple, graceful reproach to the polemical tales" (p. 181) and his presentation, though not fully free from polemical, as "a meticulous scholarship and careful exposition of the errors of his predecessors" (p. 182). He concludes this chapter with these remarkable insights, "In the Enlightenment, Mahomet and Islam are objects of intense interest and debate" because for the writers' of this period, "Islam is 'good to think with'; it helps them imagine ... better ways of regulating the relations between political power and religious authority" (p. 183).

Chapter 7, "Lawgiver, Statesman, Hero: The Romantics' Prophet" (pp. 184-209) focuses on the works of Napoleon Bonaparte, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Victor Hugo, Alphonse Lamartine, Thomas Carlyle, etc.—the "romantic authors" who present the Prophet (pbuh), mostly, in a positive way. While evaluating the works of these writers, Tolan is of the opinion that Napoleon made the Prophet (pbuh) "something of a role model," Goethe was fascinated by Prophet's "eloquence" and saw him "as a poet and a prophet," and Carlyle, Hugo, Lamartine, and others "dismissed the traditional Christian polemics against the prophet [pbuh]" and presented him as a "sincere, virtuous visionary, one of the great figures of history" (p. 185). For instance, in Goethe's writings, the "Muslim prophet [pbuh] and the Qur'an were recurring themes" (p. 195). He finds, and presents, the Prophet (pbuh) as a "reformer and legislator," "archetypal figure of the prophet and patriarch," and above all, "as a prophet and poet" (see, pp. 195, 96, 98, 202). Goethe equally admired the Qur'an when he writes, "The style of the Qur'an, in keeping with its content and purpose, is stern, majestic, terrifying, and at times truly sublime" (p. 197). He also considers the Qur'an as "miracle" of the Prophet (pbuh) calling it "the prophet's poetic genius" (p. 197), but he considers it as his own work, not a revealed Book.

Besides Napoleon and Goethe, numerous other 19th century "writers of Romantic movement" portrayed the Prophet (pbuh) "in both veins, echoing the assessment of Gibbon that he was a 'great man', or, in the words of Thomas Carlyle, a 'hero'" (p. 202). Carlyle, for instance, in his *Lectures* (1840) rejects the "ridiculous legends of Mahomet the impostor," and presents him "as a hero and indeed the archetype of prophet" (p. 203). Similarly, Lamartine presents the Prophet (pbuh) as "a convinced ecstatic, a visionary of good faith, a political

enthusiast" (p. 206) and refuses, in Tolan's observations/ judgment, "to see in Mahomet an impostor or hypocrite," but sees him as "the greatest of men" (pp. 206, 07); and on the same lines, Hugo's Muhammad (pbuh) is a figure of "modesty and asceticism" and "a pillar of sagacity and justice" (p. 207).

Tolan ends the chapter by asserting that the Romantic writers "painted Muhammad [pbuh] as inspired poet, legislator, genius of the Arab nation"—"A genius and a reformer, yes, but, to his nation, the Arabs" (p. 208).

Chapter 8, "A Jewish Muhammad ..." (pp. 210-232), focuses on what the subtitle clearly reveals, "The view from Jewish Community of nineteenth-century Central Europe" (p. 210). It evaluates the works of Abraham Geiger, Gustav Weil, Heinrich Graetz, and Ignaz Goldziher, revealing how "inevitably linked" are their portrayals of Islam and Muslims, especially the Prophet (pbuh), to the "social and intellectual upheavals in Europe around them" (p. 210).

Geiger, a leader and a founding member of 'the reform movement in Judaism', portrayed prophet in a positive way, and calls him a reformer who was "inspired by Jewish teachers" and "transmitted to the Arabs versions (sometimes modified) of biblical narratives and laws" (p. 212); Weil, for Tolan, is the "first non-Muslim author to take a close look at Muslim traditions," (p. 217) who presents the Prophet (pbuh) not as an "impostor, but a sincere reformer" (p. 219); and Graetz, in third volume of his massive 11-volume *History of the Jews* (1863-70), describes him in these words, "Mahomet, the prophet of Mecca and Yathrib, was, it is true, no loyal son of Judaism, but ... was induced by it to give the world a new faith, founded on a lofty basis and known as Islam" (p. 222). Moreover, Goldziher, the first European enrolled in Al-Azhar, who is famous for his *Muhammedanische Studien/ Muslim Studies* (1889-90), portrayed the Prophet (pbuh) as "the bearer of a universal message of pure monotheism" (p. 225), and he confesses that he "believed in the prophecies of Muhammad [pbuh]" (p. 226). It was his view of "Islam," and "his vision of Muhammad [pbuh] as reformer and purifier of Abrahamic religion," which, for Tolan, "clearly played a role in his conception of the reform needed for Judaism" (p. 229).

Thus, according to Tolan, for these writers, "thinking and writing about Muhammad [pbuh] and Islam is inseparable from thinking and writing about Judaism and Christianity. ... Just as contemporary European Christians looked to Muhammad [pbuh] as a spiritual hero ... for some nineteenth-century Jews the Muslim prophet could serve as a heuristic model for reforming Judaism" (p. 232).

In Chapter 9, "Prophet of an Abrahamic Faith" (pp. 233-258), Tolan assesses and evaluates the works of some prominent 20th century Christian writers who "tried to reconcile their Christian faith with the recognition of the positive,

spiritual nature of Muhammad's [pbuh] mission," and thus, begins with "French Orientalist" Louis Massignon (d. 1962) and his followers like Giulio Basetti-Sani (a Franciscan who studied theology and Arabic in Paris) and Hans Kung (a Swiss-Catholic theologian), and finally ends with Montgomery Watt (d. 2002), the "distinguished scholar of Islam and priest of the Scottish Episcopal Church" (p. 237).

For instance, though Kung raises the question of "Muhammad's [pbuh] status as a prophet," yet he compares him with other "biblical prophets," and considers him "a model and an inspiration" for Muslims, "In truth, Muhammad [pbuh] was and is for persons in the Arabian world, and for many others, *the* religious reformer, lawgiver, and leader; the prophet *per se*" (p. 244; italics in original). Tolan concludes their evaluation with these remarks, "Watt, like Massignon, Basetti-Sani, and Kung, was committed to ecumenical dialogue and struggled to find ways to eliminate (or at least reduce) doctrinal barriers to that dialogue. For all of them, Christian recognition of the prophetic role of Muhammad [pbuh] was central" (p. 258).

This is followed by 5-page 'Conclusion' (pp. 259-264), which summarizes the overall import and impressions of the book, and puts forth the following arguments, assertions, and contentions:

1. "The shifting perceptions of the prophet of Islam in European discourse and culture," clearly reveal both the "emerging trends in the portrayal of Muhammad [pbuh]," as well as the "great variety of conflicting images [that] coexists" (p. 259)
2. A "plethora of books [have been] written about Muhammad [pbuh] in the last two centuries in English" only, ranging from "the pious to scholarly to the polemical" (p. 259)
3. It was (de)colonization, immigration, and globalization that has "brought negative European perceptions of Islam and its prophet to the attention of Muslims" (p. 259)
4. Readers may be "surprised" and at times "confused" by the "sheer multiplicity and diversity of European perceptions of the prophet of Islam" encountered in the different chapters of this book, which range from the Prophet's (pbuh) portrayal "as idol, [and] heresiarch" to "reformer, statesman, mystic, or poet," and one sees that "the lines between these portrayals are blurred," which have been "crossed" frequently and, at times, deliberately (p. 260)
5. "Polemical portraits," which form a significant portion of this book, cast the Prophet (pbuh) as a "golden idol to be toppled by righteous

crusades; a scheming heresiarch; a lustful, power-hungry impostor”—images which “live on in European and American cultures” even today (p. 260). But there are, as different chapters reveal it, many portraits showing the Prophet (pbuh) as “reformer, charismatic leader, wise law giver,” “visionary,” and “a model and an inspiration” (p. 261)

6. “What emerge from this survey,” author recalls with confidence, “is that Muhammad [pbuh] and Islam are integral elements of European culture,” and what also emerges is that “Europeans have been talking about him [the Prophet (pbuh)], and arguing about him, for centuries”; therefore, a rethinking is needed by those who “think that Islam and Muhammad [pbuh] are somehow marginal to Western culture” (p. 261)
7. Muslim readers will “realize” instead of thinking that “European perceptions of the Muslim prophet were invariably hostile,” the “richness, variety, and ambiguity of European perceptions of the prophet [pbuh]” (pp. 261-62).

Tolan concludes his book with these remarks, “Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others have, for almost fourteen centuries, portrayed the prophet in a great variety of ways. ... The sheer variety and diversity of portraits of Muhammad [pbuh] have become both major fields of research and important elements in the dialogue of religions and cultures. ... [The] prophet of Islam [pbuh] appears as a mirror for European writers, expressing their fears, hopes and ambitions. He is an integral part of ‘Western’ culture, an object of fascination and speculation for writers and artists for centuries: a European Muhammad [pbuh]” (p. 263).

Being primarily a historian, Tolan evaluates and analyses the Western perceptions of the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) in the academic (mostly polemical in nature) works of European and American authors (Latin, French, German, English, etc.), published in between 12th to 20th centuries (including Laurent de Premierfat, Boccaccio, Nogent, Lydgate, Alfonsi, Montecroce, Rada, Sabio, Pascual, German, Nicolas of Cusa, Toruemedea, Andres, Luther, Calvin, Poster, Rainolds, Stubbe, Ross, Bibliander, Prideaux, Henri, Sale, Renald, Voltaire, Gibbon, Bonaparte, Goethe, Hugo, Lamartine, Carlyle, Geiger, Weil, Graetz, Goldziher, Massignon, Kung and Watt). Thus, Tolan’s book (over 320 pages) is broad in coverage, contents, analysis, and evaluation, and focuses mostly on the prose works—many being those which have been evaluated, analysed, and critiqued less.

Thus, to conclude, it may be fairly argued that Tolan’s *Faces of Muhammad* is a welcome addition to literature on this subject and will be received with great interest and zeal by the students and scholars of Literary Orientalism,

Cross-cultural studies, Islamic/ Religious Studies and allied subjects. It helps in understanding, fairly, the tenors, tendencies, and trends in this sub-field of literary Orientalism—aptly termed by Mathew Dimmock as ‘the misrepresentation of a biography’ or ‘the biography of a misrepresentation’. In sum, Tolan’s *Faces of Muhammad* is a perceptive, meticulous, and unbiased critical assessment of the ‘changing, complex, and contradictory visions’ of the prophet of Islam in European and American/ ‘Western’ literary and academic works by a European non-Muslim historian.

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