

The *Corpus Islamolatinum* as *Auctoritas* in the Polemical Discourse of Symon Semeonis

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Abstract

This chapter presents the *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis*—an account of the journey to the Holy Land made by the Irish Franciscan Symon Semeonis in the fourteenth century—through an analysis of various passages in the text where Symon Semeonis constructs his anti-Islamic discourse using the polemical sources that Peter the Venerable commissioned for translation in the twelfth century.

1. The Text

The account of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem undertaken between 1323 and 1324 by the Irish Franciscan Symon Semeonis has been preserved in a single manuscript located at the library of Corpus Christi College, University of Cambridge, catalogue number 407.² This manuscript, first mentioned in 1748 by Thomas Tanner,³ has been divided into two parts by previous scholars:⁴ the first part contains three *Itineraria*, copied by a single hand, beginning with *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis* (ff. 1r–36v), followed by *Itinerarium Willelmi de Rubruck* (ff. 37r–67r) and *Itinerarium Odorici* (ff. 69r–91r). The second part contains three texts of different sorts copied by multiple hands.⁵ Although the entire manuscript has been dated to the fourteenth century, two factors have made it possible to date the first 92 folios with greater precision: the signature on the first folio of Symon Bozoun—prior of Norwich between 1344 and 1352—and the inclusion of the *Itinerarium Odorici*, which was written in 1330.

1. This study was undertaken as part of FFI2015-63659-C2-1-P, MINECO-FEDER, EU, and 2017 SGR 1787 at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, whose principal investigator is Cándida Ferrero Hernández; and AGAUR PhD Scholarship 2018.
2. A digital copy of the manuscript can be accessed online through the following link: [<https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/mj309qh4224>]. Operational as of December 16, 2018.
3. Tanner, Thomas (1748), *Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica*, London, p. 702.
4. Golubovich, Girolamo (1919), *Biblioteca Bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente francescano*, v.3, Florence, p. 245; Esposito, Mario (1960), *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis ab Hybernia ad Terram Sanctam*, Dublin, pp. 1-2.
5. Golubovich, Girolamo (1919), *Biblioteca*, p. 245; Esposito, Mario (1960), *Itinerarium*, p. 2. It has recently been argued that the three *Itineraria* were written by different hands, cf. Krasnodebska-D'Aughton, Malgorzata (2014), «Inflamed with Seraphic Ardor: Franciscan Learning and Spirituality in the Fourteenth-Century Irish Pilgrimage Account», in *Franciscan Studies*, 70, pp. 283-312. On the issue of the manuscript, cf. pp. 284-292.

These two details have led Mario Esposito to propose a date between 1335 (allowing a lapse of five years for Odoric's text to make it to Norwich, where this first part of the manuscript would have been copied) and 1352.⁶

Following Thomas Tanner's brief mention of the manuscript, Jacobus Nasmith cited it again in 1777 in his catalogue of the manuscripts in the library of Corpus Christi College,⁷ and a year later Nasmith produced the first edition of the *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis*.⁸ This first edition was criticized by the last two editors of the text in the twentieth century: Girolamo Golubovich⁹ in 1919 and Mario Esposito¹⁰ in 1960. The latter divided the text into one hundred passages and numbered them. There have also been three translations of the text: two into English by Eugene Hoade¹¹ and Mario Esposito,¹² and one into French by Christiane Deluz.¹³ All three translations are partial and stray from the original Latin. In the particular case of Mario Esposito's translation, the passages in which Symon Semeonis cites the Latin translation of the Qur'an are omitted, because "Versions of these books are readily procurable."¹⁴

2. The Journey

In the brief prologue at the beginning of the text, Symon Semeonis announces the pious motives that induce him to "refuse the highest honor"¹⁵—referring, perhaps, as has been suggested elsewhere,¹⁶ to his rejection of a prestigious position in the provincial chapter of the Franciscan order in Ireland—in order to set out for the Holy Land with another Franciscan, Hugo Illuminator. Following the celebration of the provincial chapter in Clonmel, the two men depart on March 16, 1323, crossing the "*mare Hybernicum ferocissimum atque periculosissimum*"¹⁷ and arriving at Caer Gybi.

6. Esposito, Mario (1960), *Itinerarium*, pp. 1-3.

7. Nasmith, Jacobus (1777), *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum quos Collegio corporis Christi et B. Mariae Virginis in Academia Cantabrigensi legavit reverendissimus in Christo Pater Matheus Parker*, Cambridge, pp. 384-385.

8. Nasmith, Jacobus (1778), *Itineraria Symonis Simeonis et Willemi de Worcestre. Quibus accedit Tractatus de Metro ... e codicibus MSS*. Edidit Jacobus Nasmith, Cambridge. For an analysis of this edition, cf. «The Itinerary of Fitz-Simeon, 1322», in Southern, Henry; Harris, Nicholas (1828), *The Retrospective Review and Historical and Antiquarian Magazine*, t.II, London, pp. 232-253.

9. Golubovich, Girolamo (1919), *Biblioteca*, pp. 237-282.

10. Esposito, Mario (1960), *Itinerarium*.

11. Hoade, Eugene (1952), *Western pilgrims. The Itineraries of Simon Fitzsimons, O.F.M. 1322-1323, a Certain Englishman 1344-1345. Thomas Brygge 1392 and Notes on Others Autors and Pilgrims*, Jerusalem.

12. Esposito, Mario (1960), *Itinerarium*.

13. Regnier-Bohler, Danielle (Ed.) (1997), *Croisades et pèlerinages: recits, chroniques et voyages en Terre Sainte. XIIIè-XVIè siècle*, Paris, pp. 964-995.

14. Esposito, Mario (1960), *Itinerarium*, p. ix.

15. *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis ab Hybernia ad Terram Sanctam*, 1. Hereafter cited as *It. Sym.*

16. Golubovich, Girolamo (1919), *Biblioteca*, p. 238; Esposito, Mario (1960), *Itinerarium*, p. 4.

17. *It. Sym.*, 1.

In the first part of the journey, as they travel across Western Europe, there are numerous brief references to the *castra* and *civitates* that they see in Ireland, Great Britain, France and Italy—with an emphasis on their defensive structures—and to the *monasteria* that they visit and the relics that are kept there. Symon Semeonis lingers over the description only in the case of great cities like London, Paris, and Venice, where he highlights important buildings (Westminster Abbey and the Tower of London,¹⁸ the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris,¹⁹ and the *Piazza* of Venice with its palace and the church of San Marcos²⁰) or the distinctive features of the city (Paris’s workshops²¹ and Venice’s canals²²).

From Venice, Symon Semeonis and Hugo Illuminator depart by ship for Pula on August 18, 1323. Their arrival on the eastern shore of the Adriatic is marked by a change in how the journey is recounted: while in the first part we find descriptions only of churches and cities, in the journey through Eastern Europe attention is also paid to the inhabitants and their customs. Symon Semeonis thus incorporates his interest in ethnography into the *Itinerarium*, describing, for example, the hats worn by the women in Zadar,²³ the money used in Dubrovnik,²⁴ the differences in dress between *Albanienses*, *Greci* and *Sclavy*,²⁵ among others. In fact, his attention to the kinds of people living in these lands will make Symon Semeonis the first author to mention the presence of Gypsies in Europe, in Crete, to be exact:

Ibidem etiam vidimus gentem extra civitatem ritu Grecorum utentem, et de genere Chaym se esse asserentem, que raro vel nunquam in loco aliquo moratur ultra XXX dies, sed semper, velut a Deo maledicta, vaga et profuga post XXXm diem de campo in campum cum tentoriis parvis, oblongis, nigris et humilibus, ad modum Arabum, et de caverna in cavernam discurrit, quia locus ab eis inhabitatus post dictum terminum efficitur plenus vermibus ac aliis immunditiis cum quibus impossibile est cohabitare.²⁶

Crete is the last stop before the travelers’ arrival in Alexandria, where Symon Semeonis has his first encounter with Islam: the Franciscan recounts how his ship is boarded by port guards (“*Saraceni portus custodes*”²⁷) who take down the passengers’ names and inspect their belongings. Afterward, they are taken to the city and left at the gates to await an interview with the admiral. Symon Semeonis states how they are mistreated by passers-by as they are waiting: “*Inter prefatas vero portas*

18. *It. Sym.*, 4.

19. *It. Sym.*, 7.

20. *It. Sym.*, 14.

21. *It. Sym.*, 7.

22. *It. Sym.*, 14.

23. *It. Sym.*, 15.

24. *It. Sym.*, 16.

25. *It. Sym.*, 17.

26. *It. Sym.*, 22. Cf. Esposito, Mario (1960), *Itinerarium*, p. 7.

27. *It. Sym.*, 24.

*fui*mus a transeuntibus pro nomine Jesu consputi, lapidibus percussi et alii contumeliis et obprobriis a mane usque ad horam sextam saturati.”²⁸ During the interview with the admiral, there is a moment of tension when the guards discover the religious images that the Franciscans have brought with them from Ireland:

Inter quos cum scrutantes vidissent ymagines Crucifixi, beate Marie virginis, [et] Johannis ewangeliste, quas de Hybernia reverenter et devote nobiscum portavimus, statim blasphemantes et super ipsas spuentes, clamorosis vocibus insultabant dicentes: “Wach! hii sunt canes et porci vilissimi, qui non credunt Machometum esse prophetam Dei et nuntium, sed ipsum in suis predicationibus superstitiosis continue blasfemant, et ad hec alios inducunt affirmantes vanitates et insanas fabulas, dicentes Deum filium habere et ipsum esse Jesum, filium Marie.” Alii vero dicebant, videlicet renegati, Saracenorum ferocitatem formidantes: “Vere scimus quoniam exploratores sunt isti, et non est in bonum eorum adventus ad nos. Eiciantur de civitate cum confusione et revertantur ad partes Christianorum, sive Refuytanorum, unde egressi sunt.”²⁹

Symon Semeonis and Hugo Illuminator respond to both accusations in accordance with the precept of the Franciscan *Regula non bullata*,³⁰ which stated that Franciscans in Saracen lands had two options: to proselytize or to avoid all disputes by declaring themselves to be Christians. Symon Semeonis and Hugo Illuminator choose the second option:

Si verus propheta est Machometus et dominus, pacem habetote cum illo, et ejus laudibus insistite; nobis autem alius dominus non est nisi dominus Jesus Christus, qui est unigenitus Dei filius eternaliter genitus et filius Marie in tempore natus. Cujus filii per adoptionem sumus et non exploratores, ipsius sepulcrum gloriosum devote visitare volentes, tundere genibus, osculari labiis, et lacrimis rigare.³¹

The account of their journey through the lands of Egypt, which takes them through Fow and Cairo, combines polemical attacks—some examples of which we will look at below—and a fascination with the East: Symon Semeonis describes the beauty of the Nile River, the large number of fruits that can be found there, such as the *poma paradisi*, and the native animals of Egypt, which he considers to be

28. *It. Sym.*, 26.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Regula non bullata*, XVI: «Fratres vero, qui vadunt, duobus modis inter eos possunt spiritualiter conversari. Unus modus est, quod non faciant lites neque contentiones, sed sint subditi omni humanae creaturae propter Deum et confiteantur se esse christianos». Cf. Heullant-Donat, Isabelle (2005), «Des missionnaires martyrs aux martyrs missionnaires: La Mémoire des martyrs franciscains au sein de leur Ordre aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles», in *Écrire son histoire: Les communautés régulières face à leur passé. Actes du 5e Colloque International du C.E.R.C.O.R.*, Saint-Etienne, pp. 171-184.

31. *It. Sym.*, 26.

the most beautiful land in the world.³² The people who inhabit this land, however, are not so highly regarded by the Franciscan, who does not hesitate to characterize them as “*turpes, viles et impersonati, moribus et gestu bestiis totaliter conformes.*”³³ In Cairo, Hugo Illuminator succumbs to disease, and after eulogizing him in what are the most beautifully written paragraphs of the *Itinerarium*,³⁴ Symon Semeonis presents himself to the sultan and his *druchemanni* to obtain permission to travel freely to the Holy Land.³⁵

Permission granted, Symon Semeonis hires a driver and two camels and, in the company of two youths and another pilgrim,³⁶ he makes the arduous journey across the desert,³⁷ where he encounters the Bedouins,³⁸ before arriving in Jerusalem. His description of Jerusalem is limited to references to the holy sites and to the distances, expressed in *passus*, between them.³⁹ The unfinished account ends with a final lament over the replacement of David’s fortification of the holy city by a mosque: «*Ubi nunc est ecclesia Saracenorum, que est spherice figure, ad quam nullum Christianum permittunt accedere.*»⁴⁰

3. Symon Semeonis’s Polemical Discourse

3.1. *The Corpus Islamolatinum*

In 1142, Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, visited Spain as part of his tour of the Cluniac monasteries on the Iberian Peninsula.⁴¹ During his stay, he commissioned the translation of Islam’s religious texts as part of a new strategy for combatting the rival religion. Until then, Islam had been dealt with either militarily or on the basis of the fantastical claims of the Eastern Fathers, who disparaged Muḥammad without knowing anything about the teachings or beliefs of Islam.⁴² To carry out this commission, Peter the Venerable hired as translators Robert of Ketton, Hermann of Carinthia, Peter of Toledo and a Muslim named Mohammed.⁴³

32. *It. Sym.*, 40-46.

33. *It. Sym.*, 47.

34. *It. Sym.*, 73-77

35. *It. Sym.*, 77-79.

36. *It. Sym.*, 77.

37. *It. Sym.*, 85.

38. *It. Sym.*, 81-84.

39. *It. Sym.*, 93-100.

40. *It. Sym.*, 100.

41. Kritzcek, James (1964), *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, Princeton, pp. 10-11.

42. Martínez Gázquez, José, Petrus, Nàdia (2008), «Las motivaciones generales de las traducciones medievales latinas del Corán», in *The Journal of Medieval Latin*, 18, pp. 230-246.

43. Kritzcek, James (1964), *Peter the Venerable*, pp. 56-69; Tolan, John (2002), *Saracens*, New York, pp. 155-157.

Robert of Ketton was commissioned to translate the Qur'ān (*Alcoranus*), which was accompanied by other texts that together make up the *Corpus Islamlatinum* and deal with various aspects of the Islamic world: a chronicle (*Chronica mendosa et ridicula sarracenorum*, also translated by Robert of Ketton), a life of Muḥammad (*Liber de generatione Machumeti*), a catechism-like dialogue between Muḥammad and the Jew Abdias b. Shalom (*De doctrina Machumeti*⁴⁴)—both translated by Hermann of Carinthia—and a polemical dialogue between a Muslim and a Christian (*Risālat al-Kindī*), translated by Peter of Toledo.⁴⁵ With these works, Peter the Venerable undertook to refute Islam. This refutation took form as his *Liber contra sectam sive haeresim Saracenorum*. His method met with success, and some two centuries later Symon Semeonis was still drawing on the *Corpus* established by Peter the Venerable in his portrayal of the Islamic religion and the life of Muslims. However, the Franciscan pilgrim to the Holy Land makes use of only two of the works: the *Alcoranus* and the *Liber de doctrina Machumeti*.

Throughout the polemical discourse that we find in the *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis*, the discussions where the Irish Franciscan has need of the authority of the *Corpus Islamlatinum* can be divided into two groups. In the first group we find his descriptions of different aspects of everyday life, which are based on his own observations but which he attempts to explain by reference to the polemical translations. This is the case with the clothing worn by men and by women,⁴⁶ the number of wives that a Muslim man can have,⁴⁷ and the treatment of slaves.⁴⁸ Symon Semeonis claims to have had direct experience of these customs, whether because he saw them (“*cujus rei testes sumus*”⁴⁹) or because he heard about them from a reliable source (“*ut relatu fide digno audivimus*”⁵⁰). In the second group we find Islamic concepts and precepts such as Paradise⁵¹ or Ramadan.⁵² Here, as we will see below, Symon Semeonis only cites the text—selecting the parts that support his argument—and is unable to add anything of his own.

44. Ferrero Hernández, Cándida (2011), «Difusión de las ideas islámicas a partir del *Liber de doctrina Machumeti*», in Pietro Entrialgo, Clara Elena (Ed.), *Asturiensis Regni Territorium. Documentos y estudios sobre el período tardorromano y medieval en el noroeste hispano. Arabes in patria Asturiensum*, Oviedo, pp. 191-204.

45. Burman, Thomas (2007), *Reading the Qur'ān in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560*, Philadelphia, pp. 76-77.

46. *It. Sym.*, 35-36

47. *It. Sym.*, 51.

48. *It. Sym.*, 71.

49. *It. Sym.*, 37.

50. *It. Sym.*, 51.

51. *It. Sym.*, 30.

52. *It. Sym.*, 28.

3.2. *Aspects of Everyday Life*

In order to illustrate the kind of passages in which Symon Semeonis combines his own observations with the *auctoritas* of the *Corpus Islamolatinum* to polemicize against Islam, I have chosen two extracts where he describes the clothing worn by Muslim men and women. Upon arriving in Eastern Europe, Symon Semeonis shows—as was noted above—an interest in describing the dress of the inhabitants of the different places he passes through. However, he has no need of a religious authority to explain the use of this clothing in Croatia, Albania, or Greece. In Egypt, however, he will require the authority of the Qur’ān to make sense of the way Muslim men dress:

Saraceni autem raro vel nunquam cinguntur nisi tualia, quam cum oratum vadunt coram se extendunt, exceptis nobilibus et equitibus, qui cingulis cinguntur ad dominarum modum latis, et de serico totaliter factis, auro et argento nobilissime ornatis, in quibus summe gloriantur. Nec caligas portant, sed femoralia rugosa circa tybias largissima et ampla, a minori usque ad majorem, a parvo unius anni usque ad canum et annosum, et hoc quia sibi totiens lavant tybias et posteriora. Nam quinque orationes in die naturali ex legis precepto diabolice dicere tenentur, non clamorose sed voce mediocriter, prout scribitur in Alchorano, azoara cap. xxvii. Quas eorum multi cum genuflexionibus super memoratas tualias et inclinationibus, iudicio nostro salvo meliori, satis devote modo suo dicunt, versus templum Dei secundum eos, videlicet Mecham, se vertentes. Quod est situm in oriente, ubi Abraham primo templum fundavit in honorem Dei, et ibidem jussu divino filium suum Ysaac voluit in sacrificium immolare, prout dicitur in Alchorano, secundo azoara. Ante quarum horarum quamlibet lavant sibi manus, brachia, et pedes, et posteriora, firmiter credentes quod in aquarum ablu-tione percipiunt remissionem omnium peccatorum. Et quando sunt in deserto vel loco inaquoso, ubi aque copia non habetur, antequam ad orandum accedere presumant, sibi super capud terram mundam spargunt, credentes etiam sic a peccatorum sordibus se expiare. Unde scriptum est in Alchorano, azoara cap. xi: “Viri boni, cum oratum surrexeritis, facies vestras ac manus et brachia usque ad cubitum, et pedes usque ad tybias abluere et capillos revolvendo capud abstergere, et post coytum mulierum balneari vos oportet. Infirmi quidem et in itinere ab egestionem vel mulierum coytu venientes et aquam minime reperientes, facies suas atque manus terre munde pulvere tergant. Deus namque vestram diligit munditiam, officiique divini perfectionem, cum gratiarum sibi retributione et divinitatis invocatione.”⁵³

Symon Semeonis describes the clothing worn by Muslim men, differentiating between the upper and lower classes (“*exceptis nobilibus et equitibus*”). Their clothing and particularly their pants (“*femoralia*”) are explained by the ablutions that precede the prayers that they must perform throughout the day (“*et hoc quia sibi totiens*

53. *It. Sym.*, 35.

lavant sibi tybias et posteriora”). This fact allows Symon Semeonis to explain how many prayers Muslims are obliged to say according to their Law, which he attacks using his customary assertion, “*ex legis precepto diabolice.*” His mention of sura XXVII in the Qur’ān does not refer to the number of prayers but rather to vocal intonation, which he criticizes (“*non clamorose sed voce mediocriter*”).⁵⁴ Further along, he explains how prayers are performed—which apparently made a positive impression on him since he says “*satis devote modo suo dicunt*”—and he looks to the Qur’ān for an explanation of the practice of facing toward Mecca, paraphrasing the second *sura* but also providing further information, since the sacrifice of Isaac does not appear in Robert of Ketton’s translation of the cited *sura*.⁵⁵ He accompanies the description of the ritual of ablution with a verbatim quote from the Qur’ān, giving the reasons for it (“*firmiter credentes quod in aquarum ablutione percipiunt remissionem omnium peccatorum*”) and explaining what Muslims do when they find themselves in a place without access to water.

We have just seen how Symon Semeonis constructs his discourse by combining a description of the clothing worn by Muslim men with quotations from the Qur’ān, explaining that the reason why they dress in such a manner is the continual prayers that they must perform each day. The case of the women’s dress is different:

Quorum mulieres nunquam oratorium sive ecclesiam ingrediuntur, nec ad locum orationis admittuntur, sed semper quasi in domibus includuntur, et a discursu omni superfluo artantur. Et signanter nobilium mulieres que nunquam nisi urgente causa magna de domibus suis egredi permittuntur. Que omnes in ornatu modum habent singularem et valde mirabilem. Sunt enim mantellate omnes indifferenter mantellis lineis vel bumbacinis nive candidioribus, et velate et cooperte in tantum, quod cum difficultate earum oculi ab aspicientibus per retia subtilissima de serico nigro facta videntur et percipiuntur. Tunicas etiam portant omnes brevissimas, que minime usque ad genua se extendunt. Quarum quedam sunt de serico tantum, et quedam de lineo panno vel bumbacino, satis etiam vario modo contexto, prout earum status exigunt et conditiones. Et femoralibus sericis pretiosissimis auro contextis utuntur communiter omnes et potissime nobiles, que usque ad talos se ad instar equitum prescriptorum se extendunt, in quibus summe et principaliter relucet earum gloria, conditionis dignitas et status magnificentia. Earum quedam portant scalpas superius descriptas, quedam stivaldos rubeos, et quedam albos ad modum equitum, quibus cum predictis femoralibus et earum ceteris ornamentis similes totaliter fictitiis demonibus, qui in ludis clericorum solent haberi, totaliter efficiuntur. Unde in Alchorano scriptum est, azoara cap. xxiii : “Bone femine suos visus quamlibet tegant, membraque genitalia similiter. Hoc enim est optimum apud Deum, omnes suos actus dinoscentem. Mulieres itaque

54. Bibliander, Theodor (1550), *Machumeti Saracenorum principia eiusque successorum vitæ ac doctrina ipseque Alcoran [...]*. Basel: Johannes Opporin, pp. 7-188. (2nd revised edition). Bibliander’s text has recently been republished by Lamarque, Henri – Vigliano, Tristan (eds.) *Theodor Bibliander: Le Coran en latin*. Université de Lyon: GRAC, 2010 (online resource), pp. 94, ll. 24-27.

55. *Le Coran en latin*, p. 13, ll. 43-46; p. 14, ll. 5-6.

bene se curent ut linealiter aspiciant suos, peplo tegentes collum et pectus ; omnem pulcritudinem suam, nisi quando apparere necessitas cogit, celent omnibus, speciemque pedum etiam eundo, nisi maritis suis, eorumque suisque parentibus, et filiis atque fratribus, et nepotibus et ancillis, omnibusque non suspectis sive subjectis manui, vel impollutis ; [et] ad Deum omnes convertimini, quod est vobis optimum.” Hec porcus Machometus mulierum amator. Portant etiam in tybiis inferius circa pedes et in brachiis circa manus anulos grossos et concavos ad instar compedum, qui sunt communiter de auro vel argento, in quibus ponuntur aliqua verba legis maledicte, que apud eos tantum appetantur, quantum apud nos appetiatur Ewangelium Sancti Johannis ewangeliste.⁵⁶

Here, the description begins by indicating the limited access that women have to places of worship and the lives they lead in general, making clear that class differences do not entail any variation in this regard. While in the case of Muslim men, dress was explained with reference to the ritual of ablution, in the case of women, Symon Semeonis points to Muḥammad as the ultimate source for these customs.

With the help of the Qur’ān—which for Symon Semeonis is the work of Muḥammad and not divine revelation, as we will see below—the Franciscan seeks to discredit the prophet of Islam, who is accused throughout the *Itinerarium* of offenses of a sexual nature. It is surprising that, despite the admiration that Symon Semeonis seems to profess for the women’s apparel (“*Que omnes in ornatu modum habent singularem et valde mirabilem*”), this does not prevent him from accusing Muḥammad of having made a law to benefit himself. This is indicated in the closing of the quotation from the Qur’ān (“*Hec porcus Machometus mulierum amator*”) and in the preceding passage, where Symon Semeonis seeks a utilitarian explanation for the men’s manner of dress. We should also not let pass without comment the last sentence of the paragraph, where Symon Semeonis makes clear that he opposes the idea of seeing Islam’s holy book as divine revelation. The Qur’ān, for Symon Semeonis, can never be comparable to the Bible.

3.3. *Islamic Precepts*

While with the previous passages we have established how Symon Semeonis constructs his polemical discourse based on evidence that he himself observes and witnesses, in this section we will find two of the most common themes in medieval anti-Islamic polemics: Islam’s Paradise and the number of wives men are allowed to marry:

De paradyso autem et vita eterna credunt secundum quod continetur in libello *De Doctrina* porci vilissimi Machometi, ubi continetur sic: “Paradyysi namque aureum

56. *It. Sym.*, 36.

solum smaragdīs et jacinthis crebro interpositis distinctum, omnique fructifera consitum arbore, decurrentibus per amena fluentis, quorum alia quidem lac, alia mel album, alia vinum purissimum fundunt. Dies enim mille annorum, annus xl milia annorum.” Et sequitur: «Incolis quidem ejus quicquid desiderare potest statim adheret. Omni siquidem colore vestietur, preter nigrum, qui color neminem illic attinget excepto preconone meo, qui ob insignem hujus vite meritum proprium colorem singulari privilegio retinebit. Perfecti omnes in statura quidem Ade, in facie vere Jesu Christi; nunquam incrementum aut decrementum patientes. Primum quidem ingressis vescendum proponitur jecur piscis allehbut, cibus ultra quam mirari possis delectabilis; succedunt fructus arborum potusque de fluentis paradisi; deinde quicquid affectaverint presto erit, ubi etiam panem et carnes comedent et fructus et cetera preter illicita que nec ipsis placebunt, cujusmodi sunt carnes suille.” Quod si voluptas illis deesset, beatitudo minime plena esset. Quod probat sic: “Si ullum oblectamenti genus deesset beatitudo minime plena esset; frustra igitur delicie adessent si voluptas deesset. Quinimo quicquid volunt presto est, et quascumque et quandocumque volunt habent, et qualiter et ubi et quando et quantum et quotiens volunt, omnia ad libitum sine mora et difficultate. Ita quidem quod quas hic habuerunt uxores fideles, habebunt et illic, cetera concubine erunt; ancillarum vero non erit numerus.” Hec Machometus porcus, mulierum amator.⁵⁷

This passage, as Cándida Ferrero has shown in her study,⁵⁸ includes a verbatim quote from the book *De doctrina Machumeti*. The quote is allowed to explain in its own terms the concept of Paradise in Islam, without any judgment being expressed by Symon Semeonis beyond the disparaging of Muḥammad in the opening and closing sentences of the passage (“*in libello De doctrina porci vilissimi Machumeti ... Hec Machometus porcus, mulierum amator*”). This seems to suggest that Symon Semeonis grants the same religious value to the *De doctrina Machumeti* as to the Qur’ān.

Like many other writers,⁵⁹ Symon Semeonis uses the Paradise argument to demonstrate the non-spirituality of Islam: a religion whose Paradise is utterly carnal cannot be likened to Christianity. Symon Semeonis underscores this fact by repeating, in the middle of the quote, the following sentence from the translation: “*Quod si voluptas illis deesset, beatitudo minime plena esset. Quod probat sic: ‘Si ullum oblectamenti genus deesset beatitudo minime plena esset.’*”

The selection of passages that he cites is not accidental: from Hermann of Carinthia’s translation, Symon Semeonis selects only those parts that make it possible to portray Islam’s Paradise as carnal and omits the questions posed by the Jew Abdullah and Muḥammad’s responses. The elided parts are numerous, and some of them

57. *It. Sym.*, 30.

58. Ferrero Hernández, Cándida (2014), «El *Liber de doctrina Machumeti* como auctoritas en el Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis», in D’Angelo, Edoardo, Ziolkowski, Jan (Eds.), *Auctor et Auctoritas in latinis mediæ aevi litteris*, Florence, pp. 353-367.

59. Daniel, Norman (1960), *Islam and the West. The Making of an Image*, Edinburgh, pp. 148-152.

coincide with Symon Semeonis's interjections in the quotation ("... *et sequitur ... Quod si voluptas illis deesset, beatitudo minime plena esset*"), but elsewhere, Symon Semeonis pastes together separate passages, suppressing the parts that are not necessary for his argument. In the case discussed below, Symon Semeonis introduces an adverb (*ubi*) to unite two sentences:

[...] deinde quicquid affectaverint presto erit, *Ait, Dic ergo, cum quicquid influit, et effluere necesse habet, nonne ut comedent, sic et iam egerere oportebit? Respondit, non sequitur. Nam et infans in utero dum uiuit, uescitur, nec tamen egerit. Et quam cito egerere incipit, mortalitatis legem subit. Quae et illos, si egererent, necessitas consequeretur. Si quid tamen superfluit, id per sudorem exit, odorem musti fragrantem. Ait, Bene quidem, et discrete huic obiectioni respondisti, dum subiungas, ubi etiam(ne) panem et carnes comedent et fructus et cetera ...*⁶⁰

As for the number of women whom a Muslim man can marry—a favorite topic among the polemical authors of the *Latinitas Christiana*⁶¹—Symon Semeonis deals with this issue specifically:

Est itaque sciendum quod in ea quasi ex omni tribu et lingua et natione, que sub celo est, viri vel mulieres reperiuntur, et quod ipsius cives et populares Alexandriae totaliter sunt conformes. Qui omnes, sicut ceteri legis dyabolice professores, a minore usque ad maximum, ab Admiraldo usque ad Soldanum inclusive, sunt sodomite pessimi et vilissimi, et eorum multi cum asinis et bestiis operantur iniquitatem. Et tamen Soldanus habet, ut relato fide digno audivimus, lx uxores, et pedissecas sive ancillas ipsis intendentes mille, que omnes secum in castro infrascripto continue morantur. Alii vero communiter habent iii vel iiiii^{or} et eorum multi vii, de quibus potest verificari illud Ysaie; "Et apprehenderunt vii mulieres virum unum in die illa, et cetera." Et in Alchorano, azoara id est capitulo vii: "Duas aut tres aut iv^{or} uxores ducite, nisi timueritis eas nullatenus pacificare posse; tunc enim [unam] vel quot sua manus castigare quieverit, qui rem determinatam donet, ducat, res autem suas illis permittentibus, voluntate vestra postulante, licite et commode potestis, nesciis et temerariis ante dies discretionis sue solum victui vestituique necessaria tribuite." Hec porcus Machometus, pudicitie et castitatis suffocator.⁶²

This passage begins with a description of the inhabitants of Cairo, who are characterized as being like those of Alexandria, but then moves on to attack them fiercely, accusing them of zoophilia ("*et eorum multi cum asinis et bestiis operantur iniquitatem*"). This introduction serves as a contextualization and to alert potential

60. The text of the *Doctrina Machumeti* is italicized following the edition by *Le Coran en latin*, p. 196, 11.33-45; p. 197, ll. 1-11.

61. Daniel, Norman (1960), *Islam and the West*, pp. 135-140.

62. *It. Sym.*, 51.

readers to the kind of commentary that follows: the number of wives a man can marry in Islam. The connection Symon Semeonis draws between the alleged practices of the people and their religion is clearly intended to discredit Islam by casting aspersions on Muslims. The Franciscan pilgrim argues that his account about the number of the sultan's wives must be believed because of the reliability of the source (“*ut relatu fide digno audivimus*”).

The line of argument in this passage is peculiar: he tells us that Muslim men can marry up to seven women (“*Alii vero habent iii vel iii^{or} et eorum multi vii*”) and, to prove it, cites a biblical verse (Is. 4:1), granting prophetic value to a Judeo-Christian *auctoritas* who apparently predicted the advent of Islam. Symon Semeonis takes this line of argument even further and, at the same time as claiming that the number of wives a Muslim man can marry is seven, includes the quotation from the Qur’ān, sura VII, which clearly limits the number of wives to four (“*Duas aut tres aut IV^{or} uxores ducite*”). Symon Semeonis’s argumentative method is surprising: it ignores the very text that it cites. In this passage, reality is established on the basis of the Judeo-Christian *auctoritas* and his conception of Islam; the quote from the Qur’ān does not seem to carry any weight for Symon Semeonis’s beliefs. Muḥammad is again insulted at the end of the quote: “*Hec porcus Machometus, pudicite et castitatis suffocator.*”

4. The Quotations

Throughout Symon Semeonis’s description of his journey across Egypt, where he first comes across Islam, he cites from the translations in the *Corpus Islamolatinum* fourteen times: twelve times from the Qur’ān, and twice from *De doctrina Machometi*. As we have seen in the previous three passages, he usually accompanied the quotes with insults in the form of epithets against Muḥammad (*It. Sym.*, 28: “*predictus porcus vilissimus et mulierum amator*”; 30: “*De doctrina porci vilissimi Machometi ... Hec Machometus porcus, mulierum amator*”; 36: “*Hec porcus Machometus mulierum amator*”; 37: “*Hec falsarius veritatis, primogenitus Sathane Machometus*”; 51: “*Hec porcus Machometus, pudicitie et castitatis suffocator*”; 70: “*Hec legifer filiorum Belial Machometus*”; 71: “*Hec primogenitus Sathane Machometus humani generis inimicus*”) or else against his holy book (*It. Sym.*, 29: “*in lege maledicta eorum scriptum est*”; 35: “*ex legis precepto diabolice*”).

Symon Semeonis deals with the quotations in one of three different ways. In five places, he appends the quotation to his own text without changing it. This is the case with the quotations about the rituals of ablution,⁶³ women’s dress,⁶⁴ wine,⁶⁵

63. *It. Sym.*, 35.

64. *It. Sym.*, 36.

65. *It. Sym.*, 37.

the number of wives a Muslim can take,⁶⁶ and Friday as a holy day.⁶⁷ Elsewhere, such as in the explanation of Ramadan⁶⁸ and the voice to be used and the direction to face when praying,⁶⁹ Symon Semeonis makes use of paraphrase, either inserting adverbs with a clearly pejorative intent (“*non clamorose sed voce mediocriter*”⁷⁰) or changing the text so much as to no longer resemble Robert of Ketton’s translation, as in the case of his discussion of Ramadan: “*Et tunc jejuntant tota die usque quo primam stellam noctis videant, et exinde comedunt et bibunt et cum mulieribus turpiter operantur usque tantum diei luceat quo discerni possit filum album a nigro.*”⁷¹ Lastly, there are places where Symon Semeonis intentionally modifies the quotes, selecting only the parts that are relevant to his argument about Islam, whether changing the word order in the text of the Qur’ān to further his point, as in the case of the figure of Jesus⁷² in Islam, jumping from one sura to another, as in the quotations he selects from the Qur’ān about war and slavery,⁷³ or omitting parts that are irrelevant to his argument, as in the passage that has already been mentioned about Paradise.

5. Conclusions

The text left to us by Symon Semeonis provides a portrait of conditions in Europe and Egypt between 1323 and 1324: he includes numerous ethnological descriptions regarding both dress and religious practices, as well as the first mention of the Gypsies in Europe. Yet once it reaches Egypt, the *Itinerarium* becomes a quasi-polemical text that combines Symon Semeonis’s knack for observation and description with a twelfth-century anti-Islamic polemical tool: the *Corpus Islamolatinum*. Despite this, Symon Semeonis is unable to detach himself from the fables about Islam that originated in the East and circulated in Europe (he refers to the story about Muḥammad and Zāynab bint Jahx when he explains the *miracula* that praise the Prophet from the minarets in the calls to prayer⁷⁴) or from crude vilification of Muslims on account of their faith (such as the accusation of zoophilia levelled against the inhabitants of Cairo⁷⁵).

66. *It. Sym.*, 51.

67. *It. Sym.*, 70.

68. *It. Sym.*, 28.

69. *It. Sym.*, 35.

70. *Ibid.* Here, Symon Semeonis alludes to sura XXVII of the Qur’ān, and the prayer translated by Robert of Ketton is the following one: *Le Coran en latin*, p. 94, l. 25: “*Orationes autem uoce mediocri funde.*”

71. *It. Sym.*, 28. The translation used by Symon Semeonis is *Le Coran en latin*, p. 15, ll. 31-33: “*Die tota ieiunantes, nocte ieiunum soluite, tunc comedentes et bibentes quantum libuerit, fere usque ad principium horae quae solis ortum antecedit.*”

72. *It. Sym.*, 29.

73. *It. Sym.*, 71.

74. *It. Sym.*, 28. Cf. Daniel, Norman (1960), *Islam and the West*, pp. 96-102.

75. *It. Sym.*, 51.

Symon Semeonis penned some passages whose objective was to discredit Islam through negative descriptions of Muslims and their prophet Muḥammad using as *auctoritas* quotations taken from the *Corpus Islamolatinum*. Thus, Symon Semeonis is connected to polemics in two different ways: as a Franciscan and as a pilgrim. His beliefs and his mentality render impossible any kind of conciliation with the religious Other that he spent so much time living among. Although the *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis* does not make use of elaborate theological arguments to combat Islam—since, as we have seen in the selected passages, no theological argument is made that defends his faith without attacking the other religion—it is representative of the image of the East that was projected by the West.