

WESTERN IMAGE OF MUHAMMAD (PBUH) AS A PROPHET

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Abstract. The Western academic awareness of Muhammad's Prophethood helped the West to understand Islam. Since the spread of Islam in the seventh century, the Western church had perceived Islam as a great threat. It tried to check its spread by projecting Islam in the role of a dreadful and unpleasant enemy. The church represented Prophet Muhammad on biased studies. Christian writers distorted the image of the Prophet. They dubbed him with a derogatory title of an imposter, heretic or infidel, idol of Muslims, devil and anti-Christ. In fact, in his call to Islam, the Prophet informed early Christians and Jews in Madinah that he had come to testify Jesus and Moses. Although he proves that Prophet Jesus was neither a god nor part of God the Almighty; he was an elect Messenger of God (the Qur'an, 5:115-118). Western prejudice against Prophet Muhammad is anchored in misapprehension and misrepresentation.

Keywords: Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an, Christians, Jews, academic awareness

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1. Introduction

Western prejudice against Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) is anchored in misapprehension and misrepresentation. In the West, it is possible to believe a lie more readily than a hard fact. The church perceived Islam as a great threat and Muhammad as an enemy. Western institutions represented Prophet Muhammad on the basis of partial understanding. In European writings, Prophet Muhammad was portrayed as a man of profound moral faults. English writers, poets, churchmen, statesmen, historians, biographers, philosophers, and Orientalists similarly had sought to attribute to Islam, and especially to its Prophet, fanatical and disgraceful, even demonic personality.

2. Christian tradition in understanding Muhammad

Over the course of time, an obstinately unfair and consistently negative Christian outlook had persisted regarding the European perception of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). He was considered to be an anti-Christ sorcerer with a giant devil power which gave him a fabulous capacity to invent miraculous wonders. Consequently, the image of the Messenger Muhammad has fully been distorted in the English culture. He has been portrayed as an imposter, a false prophet and a malicious person. Muhammad (Pbuh) is represented in the West as an alien. For instance, the Prophet's personal life has been referred to as a Roman priest. *Piers Plowman* was a work of great popularity during the English Medieval period written by the fanatic churchman, William Langland (1330–1386) (Matar 1988: 226). He recalled an old false Christian story about the Prophet (Pbuh). It is claimed that the Prophet (peace be on him) had been a Christian priest before he became a heretic. The image of Muhammad (Pbuh) in *Piers Plowman* is of a cardinal fled from Rome after he had failed to become a pope; in Arabia, he revolted against Christianity in order to become the Prophet of a new dogma. The Westerners' lack of accurate knowledge about Islam appears in their literary attempts to represent some forms of Muslim religious rituals.

Most European writings of the Middle Ages attack Islam and Muhammad (Pbuh). They explained hostile attitudes claiming that Islam is opposed to the course taken by the West against an alternative system based on three principles, namely egalitarianism, peaceful coexistence and justice. For instance, Thomas Warton maintains that "Muhammad is grouped with such figures as Herod, Judas and Pilate, all of whom Skelton consigns to Hell" (Aljubouri 1972: 182). R. W. Southern says: 'It had come simultaneously of Medieval ones to allure a pure invention, which has no written sources' (1978: 30). Samuel C. Chew holds that wrong information in England contained palpable errors and misrepresentation (1937: 387 and 396).

The growing evangelical image of the Prophet was well-established in the Medieval attitude. R. W. Southern (1978) reports that among the widely spread legends in Medieval Europe about the Prophet was that he was a great sorcerer with a devil power which gave him capacity for inventing wonders obtained through sorcery and deception to destroy the Church (Southern 1978: 12). As a result of misunderstanding the Western Church sent crusades to the East. Three crusades were launched for restoring Jerusalem and the wooden cross from the hands of Muslims. The English were enrolled in the Christian armies. King Richard I (1157–1199) led the Third Crusade from England to Acre, Palestine (Aljubouri 1972: 120). The Crusades (1095–1270) left an enduring and poisonous legacy. Many myths about Prophet Muhammad had been established owing to this historical conflict between Europe and Islamic world.

Western misrepresentation of Prophet Muhammad's relations with Christian and Jewish tribes in Arabia is unfair. For many Westerners, Prophet Muhammad designed Islam, which is for them a stock of false accounts and deliberate distortion of truths, a religion of coercion, moral decadence, and violence with hostility and debauchery.

The change of the representation of the Islam is a construction of consciousness and research. Western scholarly attitude towards the Prophet focuses on the Prophet as a person without any minor reference to the purpose, aim and time of revelation. Simon Ockley, a Westerner, in his book, *The history of the Saracens; comprising the lives of Mohammed and his successors, to the death of Abdalmelik, the Eleventh Caliph* (vol I: 1708 and vol II: 1718), represents Prophet Muhammad on the basis of biased studies. The distortions about Prophet Muhammad's relation with Christian and Jewish tribes were widespread.

Some Christians believe that Islam is the enemy. One of the common allegations against Prophet Muhammad is that he was an impostor, who was to satisfy his ambition and lust propagated religious teachings which he himself knew to be false. Such insincerity makes the development of Islam incomprehensible. This point was first vigorously made over a hundred years ago by Thomas Carlyle in his lectures, 'On Heroes', and it has since been increasingly accepted by scholars. There is, thus, a strong case to hold that Muhammad was sincere. If, in some respects, he was mistaken, his mistakes were not due to deliberate lying or imposture (Watt 1961: 229).

Many Orientalists, such as Sir William Muir in his *The life of Mahomet* (1859), allege that Islam is based on Christian tradition. They understood monotheistic influence on Islam was due to the presence of Christians and Jews in Makkah. They also suggested that there was a monotheist informant from one of those religions. However, at a different stage, they also suggested that what the Prophet received from his informant 'would be factual knowledge' but the 'meaning and interpretation of the facts' came to him 'by the usual process of revelation'. They suggested that the gradual growth in accuracy of the Qur'an's narration, pertinent to biblical stories, is evidence that Prophet Muhammad got these stories from an informant. They alleged that the Qur'an replicated contemporary errors that were originally found in the Judeo-Christian scriptures.

The inaccurate approach of the Christian Orientalists was refuted by modern writers. The Prophet was only 12 years old when he met Baheera (a Christian monk) for a very short period of time on the way to Syria. Such a brief meeting would not have been sufficient to discuss religious doctrines. It is illogical to assume that a young boy could discuss religious doctrines and scriptural prophecy about the coming of the Messenger, at this tender age. The Orientalists acknowledged a part of this meeting, but they fail to acknowledge the other aspects, which speak about:

- Baheera's knowledge concerning the prophecy in the Scriptures regarding the coming of the new prophet,
- Baheera's recognition of the sign of Prophethood in Muhammad,
- Baheera's advice to Abu Talib to take the boy home.

When confronted with the above information, William Muir (a Scottish Orientalist, 1819–1905) even tried to explain it as a mistake or as a forgery of the monk. In order to downplay the importance of Baheera's recognition of the sign of Prophethood,

Muir wrote a footnote saying that the report is full of absurdities. But, later, realizing his recklessness, he omitted the footnote in subsequent editions without altering the main text. It is common knowledge that a trade caravan travelling in the harsh desert would concentrate their trade in populated areas only and avoid wandering into deserted habitations and ruined townships or empty church assemblies, just for the sightseeing pleasure of a young boy. Yet Muir suggests that the caravan passed near Petra, Jerash, Ammon and other ruined cities and that these sights influenced the young Muhammad. In Makkah, there were only a few Christians of humble social and intellectual status, being either slaves or petty retailers, mostly immigrants. Only one or two original residents of Makkah such as `Uthmaan bin Al-Huwayrith and Waraqah bin Nawfal had become Christians, the former out of personal or political considerations, and the latter as a result of his search for better faith. The Makkan community had some second-hand knowledge of these two religions of Judaism and Christianity.

The question is, would a person of the stature, knowledge and intelligence of Prophet Muhammad, proceed to propound a new religion and challenge the credibility of both the prevailing systems of Judaism and Christianity only on the basis of hearsay and superficial knowledge of them, as suggested by Orientalists?

The Orientalists are not consistent in their allegation that:

- The Prophet was ambitious and therefore careful enough to avoid the political implications of embracing either Judaism or Christianity.
- He was careless enough to institute a new religion based on information picked up from bazaar gossips and Jewish storytellers at wine shops.
- Monotheistic Judeo-Christian Influence.
- It is naïve to say that Islam is a blend of second-hand information about Judaism and Christianity with an inkling of Arab elements in it. It is absurd to suggest that the Prophet was cognizant of the two religious systems.
- The concept of Prophethood, the memory of Ibraaheem (Abraham) as a prophet and founder of the Ka'bah, which the Arabs universally cherished, as well as the rites of Hajj (pilgrimage to the Ka'bah) instituted by Ibraaheem were unquestionably from before the time of Jews and Christians. Pre-Islamic Arabs, independent of any Jewish or Christian influence, knew the concept of Allaah as the supreme God. The teachings of Ibraaheem found haven in Arabia long before the arrival of Judaism or Christianity and the Arabs were already acquainted with the word '*Haneef*' as the worshipper of One God.
- The Prophet accused the contemporary Arabs, Jews and Christians of having deviated from the original teachings of their prophets and of having degenerated into polytheism. He also rejected what they claimed to be the teachings of their scriptures. He cannot thus be misconstrued as having conceived the idea of monotheism from the Judeo-Christian influence.
- The Qur'an does not maintain that it is teaching a new religion. Instead it upholds and revives the original teachings God has given through all Prophets of all nations. It claims that its teachings are the same as that of 'Ibrahim'

(Abraham), 'Moosaa' (Moses) and 'Eesaa' (Jesus), may Allah exalt their mention, and speaks about all of them in glowing terms. Since every Orientalist agrees on the fact that Prophet Muhammad has not read any of the scriptures, therefore, his source of knowledge must be something else.

- The rejection of Biblical teachings about the son or father of god was rejected even in the Makkan Soorahs (chapters of the Qur'an) long before the Prophet's migration to Al-Madeenah. Hence, it is not correct to say that these renunciations came about in the wake of the separation from the Jews and Christians in Al-Madeenah.
- It was impossible to get even a glimpse of monotheism by observing Judaism and Christianity in those days. The practices of these two religious groups were steeped in the most debasing corruption and superstitions, which are vastly removed from monotheism.
- The various reform movements in Christianity, particularly the Cluniac Movement, the Iconoclastic Movement and the Reformation started by Martin Luther bear testimony to the depth of degradation into which the Christians and Christianity of the day had descended. In a way, all these reform movements and the subsequent emphasis on monotheism, despite an adherence to the doctrines of Trinity and divinity of Christ are largely the results of the uncompromising monotheism enunciated and propagated by Islam. In other words, it was Islam that influenced the revival movements in Christianity and not the other way around.

Prophet Muhammad was nothing more or less than a human being. But he was a man with a noble mission: teaching the oneness of God and upright living based on the commands of God. He always described himself as "A Servant and Messenger of God", and so indeed every action of his proclaimed to be. Sir Thomas Walker Arnold, in his book *The Preaching Islam* (1896) has changed the prejudiced attitude of Christians towards Islam to a more objective and sympathetic one. As Orientalist, he has a better understanding of the Prophethood of Muhammad (Pbuh) and Islamic theology.

3. Prophet Muhammad in the Oriental schools

There are many Oriental schools and institutions in the West, such as School of Oriental and African Studies in University of London, the Islamic Institute of Indiana University, Cambridge and Oxford centres of Islamic Studies, etc. They made many attempts to understand Islam and Prophet Muhammad, but they seem to be an honest Christian response to the question of Muhammad's position. In other words, they do not contribute to the understanding of Islam and spiritual vision. In his book *Mohammad and Mohammadanism* (1874), Bosworth Smith fully admits that Mohammedanism or Islam, if indeed it had succeeded in conquering the most civilized races of the world and the Christianity of the West, as it succeeded

in conquering the Eastern nations and their various forms of belief, would have conquered something that was potentially better than itself, and then it would have been what Christian writers are so fond of calling a curse to the world rather than a blessing (Smith 1874: 202-203).

The early Christian tradition launched the campaign of denigration against Prophet Muhammad was by John of Damascus (d. 750 AD), an Eastern Christian priest. In his book, *De Haeresibus*, John discusses Prophet Muhammad and sees him just like those Orientalists who followed him throughout the entire Middle Ages did, as a 'heretic' or a 'fake prophet' who deceived the people around him, by using Christian sources with the help of an Arian priest, rather than the prophet of a new religion. Moreover, Prophet Muhammad's marriages and the wars he fought are discussed in this book in a biased way; these baseless criticisms later became the sole basis of other Orientalists who for the most part simply repeated what John had said before them. In fact, it still continues today.

The biography of the Prophet of Islam also concerned the priests and others who lived in the Byzantine Empire. Some of the important Byzantine sources from this era include *Refutatio Mohammedis* (which is also mentioned in some sources as *Refutation du Coran Confutatio Alcorani*), written by Nicetas Byzantium in the 9th century, and the *Chronographia*, which was written by Theophanes the Confessor (758 – around 816) and discovered and compiled by *Anastasius Bibliothecarius*. Moreover, the Christians and Jews in Spain also played an important role in the dissemination of negative views and misunderstandings about Islam and Prophet Muhammad in the West. Despite the fact that these groups had access to correct information about the Prophet and the truth about Islam, as they had lived under the administration of Muslims, they created a literature full of lies and false stories, possibly due to their enmity against their Muslim administrators. For example, *the Eulogius of Cordova's Liber Apologeticus Martyrum*, written in the 9th century, basically drawing on Latin manuscript, is one such work.

Western writers were drawing attention to the Eastern world – already offered to the European imagination as lands of mystery and exoticism. St. Willibald (700–786) was the first English traveler to Arabia, particularly Palestine (Aljubouri 1972: 36). Although he spoke about the Islamic World positively, the flood of misrepresentation was at its height in the Middle Ages. In the early ninth century, Charlemagne, the king of the last Byzantine Empire, instructed specialists to translate principal Arabic books into Latin for the use of the people in the various provinces of his empire (Crichton 1852: 436). Charles Haskins claimed the Islamic world had tremendous stream of knowledge in the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century (Haskins 00:62; Kidwai 1997:3). Many English students graduated from schools and universities of Muslim Spain and Sicily. Among them were these famous scholars: Roger Bacon, William of Malmesburg, John of Salisbury, Thomas of Erceldoune, Mathew Paris and Ranulf Higden.¹ The journey of the first known Arabist, Briton, known as John

¹ Watt 1961: 58 and 60–70. The date of these famous scholars as Roger Bacon (1214–92), William of Malmesburg (1090–1143), John of Salisbury (1115–1180), Thomas of Erceldoune (1220–1297), Mathew Paris (1195–1259) and Ranulf Higden (1300–1364) as well as John Erigena (810–877).

Erigena, from Spain to Avicenna's birthplace in Bukhara of Central Asia, is full of admiration for the work of the multi-faceted scholar, Avicenna who taught the world the philosophy of Aristotle (Al-Balabki, 1992:9). The scientific contribution of these Oriental scholars went on to fuel awareness of science in all fields which brought better understanding of Islamic World. This positive information stimulated peace and defused the anti-Islamic impulse in the West towards Islam and Muslims.

A considerable number of Oriental Christians, converts, and Spanish Arabists contributed to the translation from Arabic into Latin. Translation was the first major step in the scholarly transmission of Islamic studies to Europe. Under the supervision of the Abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable, the English scholar, Robert of Ketton translated *The Holy Quran* into Latin in 1143 (Daniel 1966: 58). Another important factor that led to the further dissemination of the misconceptions about Prophet Muhammad and Islam in the West is, of course, the Crusades. Within this framework, the studies of the Bishop of Cluny, Petrus Venerabilis (d. 1156, also known as Peter the Venerable or Peter of Montboissier) aimed to provide a foundation for many previously written refutations against Islam; these are now known as the Toledo-Cluny collection. One of the earliest examples of its kind, this collection includes such 'studies' as *Liber generationis Mahumet*, *Doctrina Mahumet* and *Summa totius haeresis Saracenorum* as well as a Latin translation of the Qur'an, and a Latin translation of an apologetical pamphlet (*Epistola Saraceni or Rescriptum Christiani*) written in the 9th century by Abulmasih ibn Ishaq al Kindi, in order to defend Christianity. Vincent de Beauvais (d. 1264), too, drew on this pamphlet in composing his compilation, *Speculum Historiale*, where he brought together different stories regarding Prophet Muhammad that were found in various monastic chronicles and transmitted across generations – a compilation which had great influence on later generations in the West. This important pamphlet was later published in English as *The Apology of al Kindi* by a leading Orientalist, Sir William Muir (London 1882).

With this very late intellectual move to understand Islam, Europe had for the first time a scholarly translation to study Islam at large. Although it was a great stride, Abbot of Cluny and Matthew Paris tried to point out the weakness of Islam, as it does not allow the humanitarian voice (Southern 1978: 37-38). Other researches were like Roger Bacon's. He provided some account of Islamic theology in the Holy Qur'an. For example, one of his descriptions is about the journey of Prophet Muhammad through heavens. The narrative was more explained in *Hadiths* – the Prophet's speech. For Europeans, it was full of myths and legends as in their own romances. This story had great influence on the plot of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (Southern 1978: 38). However, the translation was a right stand to understand Islam and Muslims; it did not improve the image of the Prophet (Pbuh). Professor Watt indicates that the Christian writers created an image of Islam that was in many respects derogatory (1992: 1).

The very long poem (consisting of thousands of lines), written by the priest Konrad in the middle of the 12th century, known in Europe as *Chanson de Roland*, *Rolandslied*, or *the Song of Roland*, is a very important work in terms of the cultural

history of Europe. It describes how a close companion of Roland betrayed and killed Charlemagne during the war he conducted against Muslims in Andalusia in 778. This long poem contains a lot of negative and untrue stories about Muslims, among which is the particularly interesting claim that Muslims worshipped three major idols by the names of Muhammad, Apollin and Targant. Similarly, the famous Italian writer Dante Alighieri, in his work, *The Divine Comedy (La divina commedia)*, which he wrote in 1306–1321, depicts Prophet Muhammad on the 9th floor of the hell, along with Ali.

In the European Renaissance literature, Islam is defined as the religion of the Turks, and Prophet Muhammad is also discussed in this context. Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism, wrote many books, and he delivered a number of sermons about the Turks and ‘their’ beliefs. In his work entitled *Eine Heerespredigt wider den Turken*, he sees the Turks as the worshippers of Satan and as a curse sent by God to punish the Pope. Moreover, in many other works written in this period, Prophet Muhammad is described as the prophet of the Turks and the author of the Qur’an.

The European Middle Ages, a period that covers many centuries, was a time that was not unfamiliar with paganism; a large portion of Europe did not encounter Christianity until the 12th century. With the process of the re-Christianization of Spain as a result of the collapse of the Umayyad Empire in Andalusia, a process called *Reconquista*; there occurred an increase in the publications in Europe against Islam and Prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, with the Crusades, the literature that accused Prophet Muhammad of being the anti-Christ and depicting Muslims as pagans also expanded considerably. The enmity against Muslims went so far as to blame them for the killing of Christians, when they had actually died at the hands of pagans or other Christian groups in Europe. In the 12th century Europe, it was the church officials in particular who were responsible for inventing and disseminating the (false) idea that Muslims were pagans in their verbal and written culture. Furthermore, the characterization of Muslims as pagans in the Christian and Western literature of the Middle Ages had some social and political consequences as well. For instance, killing Muslims and the confiscation of their property were actions justified in religious terms, and Muslims had to undergo an intense process of religious, social and political oppression, which included being sent to exile or being executed, as in the case of the Moriskos (the Muslims in Spain) during the Reconquista. In addition, Christians used the image of the Muslim ‘pagans’ as the external common enemy to unite and solve the conflicts among themselves. In the entire literature of the Middle Ages, Prophet Muhammad was depicted mostly either as an “idol of Muslims” or as a heretic.

Another reason why members of the Christian Church invented so many untrue allegations about Prophet Muhammad and Islam is because most Christians often perceived Islam as a rival religion. The fact is that the geography of Islam expanded in a very short period of time on several continents, as a result of the large numbers of people choosing Islam as their religion. Even the Mongols who invaded and destroyed the Islamic world in the 13th century converted to Islam shortly after their invasion. So, in order to maintain their congregations, many leading Christians

started denigration campaigns against Islam and Prophet Muhammad, claiming that Islam was an extremist religion that had nothing to do with God's word.

The strength of Islam, however, was not only military: it was also commercial. The Ottoman dominions provided ample opportunity for Christian Europeans of low social or financial rank to gain power and wealth; and multitudes willingly renounced their faith in pursuit of such goals. Converts to Islam grew in number that made Europeans not so strange in the Islamic World. Ward was widely known in England to have attained power and wealth as a Muslim, and the rumours of Ward's riches were so attractive that they captured the imagination of adventurers. In fact, reports from the Barbary Coast included the name of Sir Francis Verney, a member of the English nobility joined Ward and became Turk (Daniel 1966: 213). Therefore, it was by travel that the West learnt more about Islam and Muslims. European travellers, such as Zen, John Cabot, Pero de Covilha, Von Harff, Da Silveira, Da Quadra and later Francisco Alvarez travelled to Arabia and the Islamic world (Beckingham 1983: ix-xii). They described Islamic cities, people, costume and customs such as Sir John Mandeville with his travel tales (circa 1366) who described the Islamic World. Yet a few errors of geographical description came from Barros, Couto, Castanheda and Correa. They claimed seeing 'Mohammed's tomb at Mecca' (Beckingham 1983: ix-xii). For example, Mandeville explains that the Prophet Mohammed prohibited the drinking of wine after he had slaughtered a Christian hermit while being drunk (Oueijan 1996: 11-12).

The Islamic classics in Sirah, Hadith, Tafsir (the interpretation of the Qur'an) and others were interpreted freely and in a manner that was not accurate or consistent with reality. A leading example of this attitude is the fact that they assumed that it was the Prophet who had written the Qur'an; as a result, they often reduced the divine revelation to an autobiographical account of Prophet Muhammad. Similarly, those Orientalists assumed and even explicitly argued that the hadiths did not belong to Prophet Muhammad but were fabricated later on by different groups and individuals. Instead of listing every opinion put forward by the Orientalists, some of which went so far as to be nonsensical allegations, we will try to summarize them in terms of their general characteristics.

One of the main characteristics in Orientalist studies, it was assumed (and argued) that what Prophet Muhammad had brought was not original; rather he composed this religion as a collage of Judaism, Christianity, and even Mandaeism, receiving different ideas from each of these older religions. In his book, *What has Muhammad received from Judaism?* (1833), Abraham Geiger claims that Prophet Muhammad copied many things from Judaism, including different concepts, beliefs and stories, and tries to prove this by comparing the Qur'an with different Judaic texts. On the other hand, Alois Sprenger (1851), polemically, discusses the Prophet's name, claiming that the name Muhammad had not been given to him when he was born, but that he later adopted it after the migration. He also speculates about the early years of the Prophethood and claims that Prophet Muhammad learnt many things about God and religions which he later synthesized into the Qur'an. He explains the moments of trembling that the Prophet sometimes experienced when receiving revelation, like

many other Orientalists, as a symptom of epilepsy, and even goes so far as to claim that they were an indication of his religious madness. Finally, Sprenger interpreted the account of Archangel Gabriel, who disguised himself as a man and brought the revelation to the Prophet, as a person who was deceiving and exploiting Muhammad.

The seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries rapidly increased in the number of books on Prophet Muhammad and Islam in Europe. There was mostly a repetition of earlier works written by previous generations, which were full of calumnies and lies about Islam and its prophet. Karen Armstrong remarks in her book *Muhammad: a biography of the Prophet*, “The whole amalgam of myths that had been conjured up in Europe from the Middle Ages by bellicose crusaders by generations of churchmen fearful of a threatening and all-powerful Islam, by reforming men of the Christian Church, by flamboyant writers of the Renaissance, by champions of Reason in the Enlightenment, by writers, poets and painters intoxicated by the imagined charms of the exotic Orient, by serious biographers unable to shake off their own Christian view of the world, all flash by, all are echoed in this provocative work: the Venerable Bede, John of Damascus, Paul Alvarus, William Langland, William Dunbar, Higden, Mandeville, Dante, Lydgate, Rabelais, Marlowe, Luther, Prideaux, Pitts, Abbe de Vertot, Voltaire, Hugo, Diderot, Gibbon, Muir, Byron, Shelley, Southey, Delacroix, Thackeray”. She says: “But there is another tradition that lives on, the tradition of Roger Bacon, of John of Segovia, of Lessing, of young Goethe, of Boulainvilliers, of Bolingbroke, of Carlyle, of Dawson, of Reland, of Rilke, of Paret, of Sprenger, of Tor Andrae, of Bodley, of Montgomery Watt, of Rodinson, of Schimmel. They have sought to understand Muhammad’s cause, Muhammad’s message, Muhammad’s social and political reforms, Muhammad’s personality and character in the context of his times and with an open mind. They have sought to dispel the myths and the stereotypes and to show how Islam embraces values dear to religions that have regarded it as their sworn enemy, while Muhammad himself saw his Faith as the continuation and enhancement of those very religions” (Armstrong 1992: 42).

It is thus difficult to understand and explain the Christian assertions and denigrations of Prophet Muhammad in Western sources and books which insulted Muslims and presented them as pagans that were prevalent during the Middle Ages without understanding the history of the Church in particular, as well as the political and social history of the West in general. For instance, the Christian scholar, Sprenger, also claimed that when Muhammad was in his forties, he emulated the Christian priests by withdrawing into solitude. When he ‘wrote the 35th verse of the Surat Al-Nur (the Light)’, he was inspired by the lights of the churches he had seen during his travels in southern Arabia. Moreover, Sprenger asserted that in his later years Prophet Muhammad ‘inserted’ the stories of Prophet Moses and the Pharaoh into the Qur’an after he learnt the details; however, according to Sprenger, he did not completely understand this story. In contrast, with the emergence of Orientalism as a ‘scientific field’ in the 19th century and its development as such in the 20th century, many of the classical works on the history of Islam, including books in the *Sirah* (traditional Muslim biographies of Prophet Muhammad) and *maghazi* (a genre of prophetic biography in Islamic literature), which were written by such leading

figures as Ibn Hisham, Waqidi, Ibn Sa'd, and al Taberi, were translated into Western languages. Despite the fact that the early Orientalists had access to these classics, they used them extensively in early studies; they did not hesitate to twist the truth by distorting many important topics and facts about Islam and Prophet Muhammad.

There are some unbiased studies and academic research about Prophet Muhammad in the West as well. The first work that contained a positive interpretation and positive arguments about Prophet Muhammad is Henry Stubbe's *An account of the rise and progress of Mahometanism with the life of Mahomet and a vindication of him and his religion from the calumnies of the Christians* (1671). Henry Stubbe (1632–1676) was an English physician, writer and scholar. The book that was written to defend Islam and Prophet Muhammad against the false accusations of the Christians was not available to the reader for many years. In the first two chapters of the book, Stubbe gives general information about the first centuries of Christianity and Judaism; then in the third chapter, he presents a description of the history and geography of the Arabian Peninsula, giving some information about the Saracens (Muslims). In the rest of the book other chapters (4–10) include the following titles: "Developments after the Birth of Muhammad", "Migration to Medina", "The Wars", "Muhammad's Farewell Pilgrimage and his Death", "Muhammad's Character and the Accusations of the Christians", "The Qur'an and Muhammad's Miracles", and "The Justice of the Wars of Muslims". In the book, Stubbe says that Prophet Muhammad was an extraordinary individual; he also presents a description of the physical features of the Prophet based on the classical, authentic sources of Islam (1911: 149).

Professor Stubbe also admits that the Prophet had a superior talent and capacity in the art of both war and peace, not in line with descriptions found in Christian accounts. Furthermore, he gives information about the genealogy of the Prophet and indicates to some misunderstandings that arose from the misreading of his name by some Orientalists (1911: 151). Stubbe also argues that the teachings of Prophet Muhammad are entirely consistent with the laws of nature, just like the original Christian and Jewish teachings in their earlier phases (183). Moreover, he says that the claim that Prophet Muhammad disseminated his teachings by the sword is a calumny; the wars he fought were aimed at restoring the old, original religion, rather than instituting a new one (192). According to Stubbe, Prophet Muhammad's teachings were centred on the idea that paganism should be eliminated all over the world, that God is one and has no partners. According to Stubbe, when Muhammad sought to end paganism, he never forced anyone to enter Islam; in fact, Muhammad himself wrote some letters that sanctioned the protection of Christians and Jews in the Arabian Peninsula (193).

The second important Oriental figure who examined the biography of Prophet Muhammad in an impartial manner is the great German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Author of the *West – East Diwan (West – Ostliche Diwan)*, Goethe expressed his positive feelings and interpretation of Islam and its prophet in poetic form. In his poem entitled Muhammad's Song (*Muhammeds Gesang*), which he wrote in 1773, he praises the Prophet; he also uses the phrase "Muhammad, the best of the mankind" (*Oberhaupt der Geschöpfe – Mohammed*). Goethe also started to write a book on

Prophet Muhammad, but he could not finish it in his life. Some have argued that Goethe had converted to Islam. Another figure who was able to stay away from the denigration campaign and calumnies against the Prophet Muhammad in his studies was the British historian and author Thomas Carlyle, who, though much younger than Goethe, corresponded with the latter and translated his work into English. In his book, entitled *On heroes and hero worship and the heroic in history*, which he wrote in the 1840s, he analyses Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) within the category of the great leaders who changed the history of the world. Carlyle argues that none of the allegations put forward against the Prophet of Islam until that time were true, for his incredible achievements in creating a great civilization. The fact that many wise men with great characters were followers of Prophet Muhammad is enough to disprove the negative allegations against him. He also notes that accusing the Prophet of being a ‘fake prophet’ creates more problems than it solves (1841: 198).

Professor William Muir, the author of a four-volume biography of Prophet Muhammad, which has been influential within Orientalist literature since the middle of the 19th century, is one of those Orientalists who practised Orientalism as ‘Rivalry Studies’ (Gegnerforschung). A diplomat and missionary working as an officer in the British colonial administration in India, Muir’s primary purpose was to convert Muslims to Christianity. He even founded a city called ‘Muirabad’, inspired by the city ‘Allahabad’ in India. In his book on Prophet Muhammad, *The Life of Mahomet* (1858–1861),² which he wrote drawing on classical Islamic biographies of the Prophet, he simply repeated the lies and allegations that had been attributed to the Prophet by earlier Orientalists. Despite the fact that he does mention in the book some positive aspects of the Prophet, which were unavoidable, such as his trustworthiness, his sense of justice, and his struggle against pagan values in the Arabian Peninsula, he directs serious accusations against the Prophet during the post-Prophethood period since his essential aim is to ‘prove’ that Prophet Muhammad was not a real prophet but a liar. For example, he repeats insults about Prophet Muhammad, claiming that he used to talk to himself and that he often experienced epileptic seizures etc. Towards the end of the second volume, he discusses, entirely, on the basis of speculation, the possible sources of the information that Prophet Muhammad gathered the Qur’an from Christianity.

Margoliouth remarks that modern Western scholars still think that the Jewish and Christian systems and scriptures were wholly unknown to Muhammad’s fellow citizens; indeed, this is expressly stated: if Western scholars do not accept its assertion that these were communicated to Muhammad by special revelation, they can only suppose that he became acquainted with them on his travels. And the forms assumed by Biblical names and Jewish and Christian technicalities in the Qur’an indicate numerous sources (1905, 100). Thus the forms Yunus for Jonah and Elias for Elijah clearly get theirs from some Greek source or version made from the Greek. The name for the Apostles is certainly Ethiopic. Other names or technicalities are Hebrew or Syriac. The tradition gives the name of a monk Bahira with whom he at

² Muir’s four-volume biography of Prophet Muhammad was published in London between 1858–1861.

one time came in contact, and the Meccans pointed to some foreign resident from whom they asserted that he derived information; the Qur'an which repudiates the charge fails to mention this person's name. Both Judaism and Christianity had by the time of his birth (about A.D. 570) been making considerable progress in Arabia, but there is no evidence that any parts of the Christian Bible had been translated into the dialect of the Quraish or those Arabic dialects of which we have monuments in pre-Islamic inscriptions (Margoliouth 1905: 100).

The lack of academic awareness of the Christian scholars was the main reason of misunderstanding of Prophet Muhammad and Islam. For instance, when it comes to the Medinan period in particular, Professor Muir intensifies his speculations and allegations about Prophet Muhammad in order to insult his prophetic personality further. However, it should also be noted that the ideas that Sprenger and Muir put forward about Islam and its prophet are not entirely negative. In the beginning of his work, Sprenger emphasizes the significance of studying Islam in terms of the fact that Islam is the only universal religion whose emergence phase is known by historians. For this reason, he says, the emergence of Islam as a universal religion should concern all those who would like to know how a religion first emerges. He also notes that Muslims have made great contributions to the universal culture of mankind via their valuable studies and the cultural products of their civilization. Likewise, Muir acknowledges the fact that there is no doubt about the authenticity of the transmission of the Qur'an (i.e. it has never been changed since the beginning); he even disproves, through a discussion of several examples, those who express doubts about the authenticity of the Qur'an.

To sum up, Western images of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) are never ending. However, some deceptive views and news about the Islamic world, its people and its culture, have not disappeared completely from the Western mass media even in the dawn of the twenty-first century. The image, negative and positive, was explicit and implicit in the religious, historical and literary works of Western writers especially in those of the British ones. Western representations of Islamic power are not always derogatory or negative. The European image of Islam is contradictory and contains both positive and negative features. The demonization is a form in modern fiction which in many ways is a typical example of how Islamic powers were associated with evil and represented by European writers in both literary and non-literary forms. For example, Milton's depiction of Satan is based upon mainly negative and hostile attitude towards Islamic culture, a deeply imbedded way of thinking about Islam that was, and is, prevalent in the West (Vitkus 1999: 211).

4. Prophet Muhammad and the West

There seems to be a contrast between the West and Islam in terms of fear. Apparently, especially in the West, there was an open conflict between religion and science, and many religious assumptions were found to be untenable. Of course, religions differed in their degrees of authenticity, and these which lacked authenticity

and adaptability suffered most. In the present trend of modernism, mainly Western development, it seems that among the so-called monotheistic religions, Islam has stood the test, and secularism cannot affect it, because it is secular, and its genuine monotheism, together with its doctrine of unity in nature and in human society, is a guarantee that it will weather the anti-religious movement of modernism, even without the need for fundamentalism which is used by Judaism and Christianity against the new tide of secularism in the West in particular.

Norman Daniel, an eminent British historian at Edinburgh University, reacted to the Europeans' response to the Islamic danger is obviously reflected in the English culture (1960; 499). He remarks that 'the use of false evidence to attack Islam was all but universal' (1966: 267). The Elizabethans thought of Turks as the people of Islam and Prophet Muhammad. The English dealt with them harshly as aliens to English life. The response was on the whole conservative and defensive. Islam was seen to be a fraudulent and new version of some previous faith. The travellers were less reliable sources than Marlowe supposed. For instance, the lack of authentic information made Marlowe believe in Lithgow's report that the Islamic burial practices involve coffins, and that the dead body of Prophet Muhammad lies suspended in a coffin from the ceiling of Makkah's mosque; Marlowe reproduces this report in *Tamburlaine* (Part II, 4.1.133-142) (see Daniel 1966: 24). Norman Daniel comments on the English Elizabethan travellers:

They easily confused what they saw, what they were told and what they had long ago read in books. Most travellers of the seventeenth century added practical observations of their own, they based their accounts of Islam as religion, not their own direct experience, but on the tradition inherited from the Medieval West (Daniel 1966: 282).

Sir William Muir compares Islam and Christianity on the issue of religiously motivated violence. The intellectual attitudes in the historical eras and tendencies towards the Prophethood of Muhammad (Pbuh) have crystallized into patterns of thought such as *Sharia*, *Jihad* and *Terrorism*. These issues have been echoed for millennia and worn smooth by generations of Western scholars. As a result of this, the Messenger Muhammad (Pbuh) remains the most misunderstood person in the West. The Messenger is obviously innocent. He took up the sword only in self-defence and only when oppression became unbearable. Muir established their argument of the spread of Islam as a product of violence and force strategy with diffusion to the divine reality that a very poor and illiterate Arab messenger of God became successful in his mission of Prophethood. The statement of Sir Valentine Chirol is argumentative. He believes that "Islam alone of all the great religions of the human race was born with sword in hand. Islam has always relied on the sword, and for thirteen hundred years the mullah who reads the Friday prayers in the mosque wears a sword, even if only made of wood, as a symbol of his creed." 'Mahomet' became a bogey to the people of Europe, used by mothers to frighten disobedient children. The reason behind this offensive presentation and the mentality of the Western men of letters make so many untrue allegations about Prophet Muhammad and Islam, is because most Westerners often perceived Islam as a rival religion. So, in order to

maintain Islamophobia, many leading writers started denigration campaigns against Islam and Prophet Muhammad, claiming that Islam was an extremist religion that had nothing to do with Allah's word.

William Montgomery Watt (1909–2006) was a Scottish historian, an Emeritus Professor in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Watt, one of the foremost non-Muslim interpreters of Islam in the West, was an enormously influential scholar in the field of Islamic studies and a much-revered name for many Muslims all over the world. Montgomery Watt, as a historian of Islamic history and prolific modern biographer of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), has been regarded as one of the most accredited Orientalists of the twentieth century by both Christians and Muslims. Daniel³ indicates that Watt's views on Muhammad, although they "do not revolutionize the Christian assessment of the prophet, do change the emphasis, so that the reader, through the historico-anthropological approach is drawn into and allowed to some extent to share the Muslim awareness of the prophet" (Daniel 1966: 330-331).

Watt believed that the Qur'an was divinely inspired, though not infallibly true. Martin Forward, a 21st century non-Muslim Islamic scholar states: Watt's books have done much to emphasize the Prophet's commitment to social justice; Watt has described him as being like an Old Testament prophet, who came to restore fair dealing and belief in one God to the Arabs, for whom these were or had become irrelevant concepts. This would not be a sufficiently high estimate of his worth for most Muslims, but it's a start. Frankly, it's hard for Christians to say affirmative things about a religion like Islam that post-dates their own, which they are brought up to believe contains all things necessary for salvation. And it is difficult for Muslims to face the fact that Christians are not persuaded by the view that Christianity is only a stop on the way to Islam, the final religion (Forward 2003: 178). Charlotte Alfred, a reporter for the journal founded in Watt's Department at Edinburgh, the Edinburgh Middle East Report, pointed out:

His views on Islam and Christianity have at times been controversial. He rejects the infallibility of both the Bible and the Qur'an but regards each as divinely inspired. He has argued that the Muslim and Judeo-Christian traditions have much to teach each other, personally commenting that his study of Islam deepened his understanding of the oneness of God.⁴

Without tendentious theorizing, Islam is rarely studied, rarely researched, rarely known in the West. To some writers of the history, Islam is a politics and a religion; to others it is a style of being; to others it is distinguishable from Muslim society; to still others, it is a mysteriously known essence; Islam is a remote, tensionless thing, without much to know about the complexities of Muslim issues. Hanging over the whole disjointed enterprise which is *The Cambridge history of Islam* (1970) is the old Orientalist truism that Islam is about texts, not about people. As such, some Westerners represented the Prophet Muhammad on the basis of biased studies. These distortions and outright lies about Islam and Prophet Muhammad were widespread.

³ Sir Valentine Chirol, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. I, No. 3

⁴ Obituary by Charlotte Alfred. *Edinburgh Middle East Report Online*. Winter 2006

From John of Damascus to the modern age Robert Morey, so far the content is concerned; their outlook on Islam has scarcely changed. Western prejudice against the Prophet Muhammad is anchored in misapprehension and misrepresentation.

Different points of Western views are studied in this research. First, the continuous preponderance of negative biases, though some rightly argue, it needs to be overcome in order for Westerners to study the character of the Prophethood of Muhammad (Pbuh) dispassionately. Second, some English writers such as Thomas Carlyle and William M. Watt appreciated the role of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). The acknowledgments of Western opinions on Prophet Muhammad are endemic, by claiming that the need to re-examine the image of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) in the medieval ages has become vital. The research's attempt is worthwhile undertaking. It is a critical evaluation of the perception of image of Islam in Western discourse. It is a humble attempt to bring into light the mass of the image of Islam with an examination to the sources of the information through the accounts of travellers. It is an investigation in the causes of continuous misunderstanding of English writers in their depiction of the image of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). These free secular authors try to liberate themselves from the traditional belief and the predominant prejudice against Islam. They sought genuine understanding of the Islamic culture of that ancient part of the world. Their work is objective and accurate but unrelated to the Prophet's message of God, to his people worldwide. They purport to change the attitude of the British public towards the Prophet by providing the Englishmen with legitimate information.

Many Western educated personages come close to understanding Muslims recognition of Muhammad as *Rasul Allah*, the Messenger of *Allah* (God, the Creator). Following the belief, Muhammad is not just a prophet for the Arabs, but a prophet with a universal Message for all human beings. The job of Prophethood is a political and religious mission. The principle of Islam that there is no compulsion in religion was well known to them. The emergence of the new religion was not easily acceptable to Arab pagans. New Muslims were oppressed and deprived of their prosperity. The use of force for the new Islamic community was a must in the conventional laws of the Middle Ages. When Prophet Muhammad was compelled to go to battlefields, Muslims used to win and sometimes, lose battles in Arabia. According to the Arab chronicles, the battle of Badr was one of the most decisive battles of history. Some traditions represent the Prophet as moving along the ranks with a drawn sword to convert people to Islam (Margoliouth 1905: 269). The great success of Muhammad's life had been through sheer moral force, without a stroke of the sword. The theory that Prophet Muhammad and the sword, for instance, is not heard now frequently anywhere without the reference to the event of September 11th. This charge based on ignorance and bigotry, is refuted by Qur'an; and by the history of Muslim conquerors, and by their public and legal toleration of Christian worship.

5. Academic awareness of Muhammad's Prophethood

The Academic Enlightenment of Muhammad's Prophethood has come in the modern age with basic grounds for more understanding between the West and the Islamic World. The development of Islamic Studies in the West grew with the appearance of the Holy Quran in different languages. Muhammad Ali Hachicho points out that the Englishman deemed Robert of Ketton, Robertus Retenensis's knowledge of Arabic, the translation of the Quran into Latin in 1143, to be inaccurate and insincere. Nevertheless, his Latin translation of the Quran played an important role for the next four centuries, and was used for an Italian translation in 1557, which in its turn led to a German one in 1616, and from the latter ensued the Dutch translation in 1641 (Hachicho 1964: 131-2). In the seventeenth century, several translations of the Holy Quran came into light, as well as biographies of the Prophet Muhammad and histories of the Turks. This was more exotic than an interest in comparative religion, but it was remarkable that the corrupting influence of Islamic material was estimated to be weaker than in the Medieval and Elizabethan ages. Alexander Ross states in the introduction to his translation of the Quran (1649), that reading it is dangerous because there is nothing in 'so manifest a forgery' as the Quran that could be probably attractive to a Christian. Thomas Fuller says in *The historie of the holy warre* (1639): '...to give the Mohammadans their due, they are generally good fellows in this point [the virtue of tolerance] and Christians among them may keep their consciousness if their tongues be fettered, not to oppose the doctrine of Mohammad' (Fuller 1639: 5-6).

A very important contribution to the Arabic studies in England in the eighteenth century was the edition of Sale's translation of the Qur'an. George Sale was a lawyer who devoted his free time to the study of Arabic. This led him to make the most celebrated translation of the Qur'an, from the original Arabic text, with occasional reference to Marraccis's Latin Version (Hachicho 1964: 132). To the latter's commentary he owed most of his Arabic quotations. Sale's translation is characterized by its sober clearness, which aimed mainly at displaying the contents of the text in the clearest manner possible. Throughout he has made full use of native commentators, as regards both the interpretation of the text and its illustration in the notes. Despite a few errors, his version was the best in any language (Hachicho 1964: 132). Sale's preliminary discourse and notes display a remarkable acquaintance not only with the works of European writers upon Islam and its history, but also with native Arab literature. The preface and notes are still reckoned among the best sources of information with regard to the faith of Islam and the Moslem peoples.⁵

The truth of the Prophethood of Muhammad (Pbuh) appears in the lectures of Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), a Scottish satirical writer, essayist, historian and teacher during the Victorian era. He called economics 'the dismal science', wrote articles for the Edinburgh Encyclopaedia, and became a controversial social commentator.

⁵ See Hachicho (1964:132). The Qur'an was commonly called *Koran* or *Alcoran of Mohammed*. It was translated into English immediately from the original Arabic, with explanatory notes taken from the most approved commentators to which was prefixed a preliminary discourse by George Sale, London, 1734.

Carlyle was one of the very few philosophers who witnessed the industrial revolution, but still kept a transcendental non-materialistic view of the world. The book included people ranging from the field of religion through literature and politics. He included people as coordinates and accorded Muhammad a special place in the book under the chapter title *Hero as a Prophet*. In his work, Carlyle declared his admiration with a passionate championship of Muhammad as a Hegelian agent of reform, insisting on his sincerity and commenting “how one man, single-handedly, could weld warring tribes and wandering Bedouins into a most powerful and civilized nation in less than two decades” (Carlyle 1841: 156). Muhammad was to kindle the world; the world’s Maker had ordered so. Thomas Carlyle says the following about Muhammad (Pbuh):

Muhammad is no longer an imposter, but a great reformer. He is no longer a neurotic patient suffering from epilepsy, but a man of tremendous character and unbending will. He is no longer a self-seeking despot, ministering to his own selfish ends but a beneficent ruler shedding light and love around him. He is no longer an opportunist, but a Prophet with a fixed purpose, a man of strong will, undeviating in his consistency... “Muhammad was the man of truth and fidelity, true in what he did, in what he spoke, in what he thought; always meant something, a man rather taciturn in speech, silent when there was nothing to be said, but pertinent, wise, sincere, when he did speak, always throwing light on the matter” ... A poor shepherd people roaming unnoticed in the deserts since the creation of the world; a hero Prophet was sent down to them with a word they could believe; see the unnoticed became world noticeable, within one century afterwards Arabia is at Granada on this end; at Delhi on that; glancing with valour and splendour and the light of genius, Arabia shines through long ages over a great section of the world. (Carlyle 1841: 158).

The works of the most influential British writers such as Sir Thomas Walker Arnold, William Muir and W. M. Watt, etc., have contributed to the modern Western academic awareness. These English thinkers have justified the historical background and roots of the Prophethood of Muhammad in the West. They have created a new environment in representing Muhammad as a Prophet for mankind. For example, Sir Thomas Walker Arnold, *Preaching Islam* (1896), introduces impressionist points of views about Islam and Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). Sir Arnold appreciates the Islamic teachings as they are universal in the principle and reason. Like Arnold, Sir William Muir’s *The Life of Mahomet* (1859), represents a thorough investigation of Muhammad (Pbuh). Professor Muir contributes to establish the academic awareness and enlightenment in the West. He uses in his book about Sirah literature the title of Prophet for Muhammad (Pbuh). Another example is the contribution of W. M. Watt. His books became the prescribed book in the Western universities to study Islam. His main views about the status and Prophethood of Muhammad can be found in his later writings such as *Islam and Christianity today* (1983); “Muhammad as the Founder of Islam” (1984); “The Nature of Prophethood of Muhammad” (1987); *Muhammad’s Mecca* (1953) and *Muhammad’s Medina* (1964), are all considered to be classics in

the field. The last two books, *Muhammad's Mecca* and *Muhammad's Medina*, are the basic grounds to understand the biography of the Prophet. They approved, after verifying, the Islamic historical references of Sirah Literature.

The gradual change of the depiction of the Islam and Muhammad (Pbuh) as a Prophet, is a production of awareness and investigation. For instance, Clinton Bennett praises it as “a detailed life of Muhammad more complete than almost any other previous book, at least in English,” noting however that besides placing the facts of Muhammad’s life before both Muslim and Christian readers (1998:189). For the sake of authentic knowledge in the world, Robert Burton’s *Personal narrative pilgrimage to Meccah and Madina* (1893) provides authentic information for English readers which made non-Muslims and Muslims to work together against all forms of misinformation and to oppose all manifestations of misunderstanding as well as to admit a new methodology as an important step to a real understanding of the Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad. As a result, the representation of the Prophet has been taken another shape. As well, the Western readers, who acknowledge their own scholars, can find the truth of the prophetic message of Prophet Muhammad.

The media presentation of the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) is enlightening the public. For instance, the American writer John Austin wrote in “*Muhammad the Prophet of Allah*,” in T. P.’s and Cassel’s Weekly for 24th September 1927 that in little more than a year he was actually the spiritual, nominal and temporal rule of Medina, with his hands on the lever that was to shake the world.

The West started to realize that Allah Almighty sent His Messenger, Muhammad (Pbuh), heralding Islam, the religion of monotheism and divine guidance, a message of brotherhood, mutual acquaintance and coexistence among the human beings, to build up civilization to make peace pervade the earth and let justice, equality, concord and charity triumph over injustice, discrimination, animosity and wicked alliances. For example, the greatest American historian, Michael H. Hart says that “my choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world’s most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and the secular level” (Hart 1978: 33). Bosworth Smith admits that “he was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without Pope’s pretensions, Caesar without the legions of Caesar: without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a palace, without a fixed revenue; if ever any man had the right to say that he ruled by the right divine, it was Mohammed, for he had all the power without its instruments and without its supports” (Smith 1874: 92). John William Draper adds that “Four years after the death of Justinian, A.D. 569, was born at Mecca, in Arabia the man who, of all men exercised the greatest influence upon the human race ... Muhammad” (1875: 330).

The West admires the principle of Islamic human brotherhood, the unity of origin and the equality of rights in the pursuit of decent life in dignity and freedom are the mainstay of the relationship established by Islam with the rest of non-Muslim communities, with the aim of achieving mutual benefits and rearing common interests, to make the world a better place to live in. Over its history, the Islamic civilization has been actively engaged in a cross-fertilization process,

interacting with the world civilizations and opening up onto peoples and nations indiscriminately. It contributed to the other nations in a variety of sciences, arts, literature, industries, administration and lifestyles. Even when it reached its peak, the Islamic civilization used to be a universal civilization offering a sublime model of coexistence, dialogue and cooperation for the general well-being of humanity. The Qur'an urges on rapprochement among peoples and nations: "*O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other*" (the Qur'an, 49: 13). The Islamic Orient and the West acquainted themselves with the rest of world civilizations and cultures and showed hardly emulated examples of integration and coexistence, all operated evenly and smoothly in a unique sense of friendship.

In recent years, the academic field of what used to be called Orientalism has been renamed 'Area Studies' or 'Regional Studies', or in many quarters studies in 'Inter-Faith Relations'. These politically correct terms have taken the place of the word 'Orientalism' in scholarly circles since the latter word is now tainted with a negative imperialist connotation, in a large measure due to the Orientalists themselves. However, even though the Western scholars' views of Prophet Muhammad have still not reached a level of satisfaction for Muslims, it does not allow dispassionate academic study. Moreover, the works of Western scholars who pursue these fields do not reach the public at large they do often fall into the hands of students and those who are personally interested in learning more about Islam. As such, any student of Islam especially those in the West need to be aware of the historical phenomenon of Orientalism, both as an academic pursuit and as a means of cultural exploitation. When used by Muslims, the word 'Orientalist' generally refers to any Western scholar who studies Islam regardless of his or her motives and thus, inevitably, distorts it. As we shall see, however, the phenomenon of Orientalism is much more than an academic pursuit.

6. Conclusion

The establishment of the Western academic consciousness about the Prophethood of Muhammad helped the West to understand Muhammad (Pbuh). Many British writers have contributed in creating the basic ground of this understanding. The works of the most prominent British writers such as Sir Thomas Walker Arnold, William Muir and William M. Watt, etc. have contributed to the modern Western academic consciousness. These efforts for better understanding and awareness of the truthful personality of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) are advantageous for all human knowledge. More investigation in the English Oriental library to the sources of information on Islam and the life and the mission of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) is needed by the English and Muslim writers for a proper understanding of the life and the mission of the Prophet (Pbuh) and to approach Muslims in the context of their truthful history, culture, religion, and customs. Making a truthful image of Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) is a part of knowledge, and it is necessary for proper

communication and a meaningful dialogue of civilizations between the Islamic and the Western worlds as well as for better Christian Muslim relations to pave the way for a peaceful global community enjoying truth, peace and justice at all levels and in all affairs. The western academy should play its significant role.

The Western awareness of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) has been in a process of transformation since the beginning of the sixteenth century, both economically and psychologically. There is a wide difference between Islam and the West. The West is centrifugal and Islam is centripetal. In Islam, diversity ends in unity but, in the West, unity develops into diversity. In Islam, the human species is one, and racism is not tolerated, and the West is divided into races, peoples, whites and coloured, each section is hostile to the other. This hostility has brought about wars, savageries, poverty, and has brought the idea of the super-race or people and the idea of hegemony.

The West is still unprepared to understand the term ‘prophet’ for Muhammad. Like Professor Martin Forward,⁶ many Christian writers prefer not to use this title ‘prophet’ for Muhammad. As Forward remarks, “Christians deceive themselves when they think that by calling Muhammad a prophet, they mean the same or even a comparable thing” (Forward 1998: 120). Therefore, Jomier and Forward, unlike the other contemporary writers such as Watt, Küng, Cragg, and Kerr, regard Prophet Muhammad as a political and religious genius without assigning him the term ‘prophet’. Although these attempts by Jomier and Forward seem to be an honest Christian response to the question of Muhammad’s status, they do not contribute to the understanding of Muhammad’s religious and spiritual vision (Armstrong 1992: 14). For many Western scholars, the concept of Prophethood should not include political and religious instruments in the reform of a nation which is in Islam. J. Lindblom elaborates the features of a prophet in his book, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*:

A prophet is a person who experiences the divine in an original way to himself. He entirely belongs to God and receives revelation from Him. His primary duty, first of all, is to listen to God and obey Him and then proclaim His message to others. He develops his personal communion with God by prayer, devotion, and moral submission to His will. In this sense, he differs from a politician, a social reformer, a thinker or even a poet although he often puts his words in a poetical form. (Lindblom 1962: 1-2)

The West’s effort to understand Prophet Muhammad fails since it is based on the Christian perception of Prophecy. The European accounts of Islam are contradictory, containing both positive and negative features. The demonization is a form in modern biographers which in many ways is a typical example of how Islamic powers were combined with evil and represented by Western writers in both historical and non-historical forms. For example, Milton’s depiction of Satan is based upon mainly negative and hostile attitude towards Islamic culture, a deeply imbedded way of

⁶ Professor Martin Forward is a British, Methodist Christian lecturer and author on religion and Professor of Religion at Aurora University, Illinois He has taught Islam at the Universities of Leicester, Bristol and Cambridge.

thinking about Islam; that was, and still is prevalent in the West (Vitkus 1999: 211). One of the strange stereotypes about Prophet Muhammad is to view him as a virtuous man who bestowed his life to save his community and the pagans of the Arabian Peninsula from their wretched lifestyle by claiming Prophethood. This view, while appearing innocent at first glance, critically overlooks his lifetime achievements and his impact on the history of humanity. Watt comments that none of the great figures of history is so poorly appreciated in the West as Muhammad (Watt 1953: 52).

The academic consciousness about Prophet Muhammad and Islam takes on several approaches such as communication – research articles, grant proposals, conference presentations, lectures and books. Muslims pulled out of some of the conquered countries as soon as the rulers of these countries accepted Islam as their religion and made a pledge to preserve Islam as their religious faith. For example, the Persian Bazan was approved to rule Yemen by the Caliph Abu Bakr and the Caliph Omer. When the latter was ousted by Qays bin Abd Yaghfith, an Arab, Abu Bakr intervened and reinstated him, helping thereby a Persian Muslim to win over an Arab Muslim. The tolerance of the conquering Muslims had a great effect in encouraging the non-Muslim populations of the conquered territories to embrace Islam; and many of them returned to Islam on account of the discipline and tolerance the newly arrived conquerors showed towards them.

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