

## From Conqueror to Symbol: Early Modern English Representations of Umar ibn Al-Khattab رضي الله عنه

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### ABSTRACT

While scholarly attention on the representation of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in early modern English writings has received considerable attention since Nabil Matar's ground-breaking 1998 study, the companions of the Prophet, particularly Umar ibn Al-Khattab رضي الله عنه, remain under examined. This paper traces the representations of Umar رضي الله عنه across early modern English texts from 1481 to the mid-seventeenth century, demonstrating that English writers engaged with three distinct representations of Umar رضي الله عنه: as the conqueror of Jerusalem, as the administrator of Islamic territories, and as the symbolic counterpart to Ali رضي الله عنه in sectarian divisions. Through archival analysis using of travel narratives, historical texts, and religious polemics, this paper argues that the emergence of Umar رضي الله عنه in early modern English discourse was inextricably linked to European encounters with the Ottoman and Safavid empires, and that representations of the Prophet's companions serve as crucial indices for understanding early modern English knowledge production about Islamic civilization. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining digital corpus analysis of EEBO resources with close reading of early modern English texts to examine the discursive formation and multi-layered representations of Umar رضي الله عنه.

**Keywords:** Early Modern English Literature, Umar ibn al-Khattab (رضي الله عنه), Islamic-European Encounters, Ottoman and Safavid Empires, Representation of Islam in the West

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## Introduction:

Early modern England's experience of Islam was massive and diverse. In the second half of the sixteenth century, English travellers were traversing the three important Muslim empires: Ottoman, Mughal, and Safavid. English traders, merchants, and diplomats had reached the capitals of these empires and constantly transmitted reports back to London, thereby enhancing knowledge about the early modern Muslim Orient in elite circles of Britain. These reports were later compiled by Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas, and these compilations inspired a new spirit of travel and discovery among the English masses, leading many others to travel to oriental destinations not merely as merchants and diplomats but as tourists. The knowledge gained through observations of Muslim lands also played an important role in the origin and development of a new genre of plays now known as 'Turk Plays'. The last decades have witnessed a steady flow of studies dealing with this phenomenon under the rubric of representation of Turks in early modern writings, a trend given impetus by Nabil Matar's influential 1998 study, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685*.

However, the majority of works that deal with images of Islam produced in the last two and a half decades (by Samuel C. Chew, Matthew Dimmock, Nabil Matar, John V. Tolan and Daniel J Vitkus) cover mainly the interaction of England with the Ottoman Empire, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the Moors, with limited attention to the companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who appear frequently yet remain less analyzed in these texts. This scholarly lacuna is particularly notable given that the companions—especially Umar ibn Al-Khattab رضي الله عنه—occupied crucial positions in early modern English understanding of Islamic governance, sectarian differences, and historical narrative. Where these figures appear, they are typically mentioned in passing or subsumed within broader discussions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ or Ottoman political structures.

This paper examines the representation of Umar رضي الله عنه across three primary contexts: his portrayal as the conqueror of Jerusalem and expander of Islamic territories; his function as an administrative and legislative figure in early Islamic history; and his role as a symbolic representative of Sunni orthodoxy in opposition to Ali's رضي الله عنه representation of Shi'a tradition. Through close analysis of texts spanning from William Caxton's *Here Begynneth the Boke Intytlued Eracles* (1481) to mid-seventeenth-century works, I demonstrate that English representations of Umar رضي الله عنه reveal the mechanisms through which early modern writers constructed knowledge about Islamic civilization, negotiated religious difference, and understood geopolitical rivalry between Christian and Islamic powers

## A Review of the Research on Early Modern English Writings

Seminal scholars including Samuel C. Chew,<sup>1</sup> Nabil Matar,<sup>2</sup> Daniel Vitkus,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Samuel C. Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel J. Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 5.

and Matthew Dimmock<sup>4</sup> have made substantial contributions to understanding representations of Islam and Muslims in Early Modern English literature, with particular focus on dramatic depictions, captivity narratives, and the phenomenon of “turning Turk.” While Chew’s foundational work provided summary sketches, his colleagues have replaced these with sustained close readings demonstrating that Islamic representations were far more nuanced, fluid, and ambivalent than previously understood.<sup>5</sup> John V. Tolan, working on medieval Christian-Muslim relations, has traced broader historical patterns of anti-Muslim polemics.<sup>6</sup> However, despite their comprehensive coverage of Qur’anic figures like the Prophet Muhammad and Ottoman rulers, these scholars have not prioritized detailed textual analysis of Umar رضي الله عنه, the second Caliph, in Early Modern English writings—a notable lacuna that warrants scholarly attention given Umar’s رضي الله عنه centrality to Islamic history and significance in Muslim world.

## Methodology

This research uses the digital resources of EEBO to study representations of Umar رضي الله عنه from 1481 onward. EEBO-TCP is a digital resource providing facsimiles of approximately 125,000 volumes of Early English books, offering access to books that are otherwise inaccessible due to spatial limitations or their physical condition.<sup>7</sup> EEBO is advantageous because it is searchable by author name, book title, and publisher, with files accessible in seconds and downloadable for user convenience. This research using EEBO’s resources employs a mixed-methods approach, combining digital corpus analysis with scholarship on early modern English literature to examine selected texts closely. The methodology treats the corpus as an archive in the contemporary sense of research in this field—a discursive formation whose internal regularities reveal the conditions of possibility for knowledge about the multilayered representations of Umar رضي الله عنه. These include his depiction as a conqueror and religious figure; as an administrator and legislator in the context of Ottoman–Safavid rivalry; and, in the later seventeenth century, as a figure of consolidation and refinement. The project also considers the encyclopedic impulse in writers such as Hakluyt and Purchas and their role in the systematization of knowledge.

## Umar رضي الله عنه as Conqueror and Religious Figure

The first ever reference to Umar رضي الله عنه in English writings can be located in William Caxton’s *Here Begynneth the Boke Intytlyued Eracles* (1481). This first reference remembers him as the conqueror of Jerusalem. Umar رضي الله عنه is spelled as “homar the son of captap” and is said to be a “prynce of Arabe the thirde after machomet.” The name of Umar رضي الله عنه is to a great extent accurate, and it seems that Caxton had access to a source that carried his name in the Arabic style—that is, Umar ibn Al-

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in the Early Modern English Play* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Chew, *Crescent and the Rose*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> John V. Tolan, *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book History Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Text Creation Partnership, “Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership (EEBO-TCP,” <https://textcreationpartnership.org/tcp-texts/eebo-tcp-early-english-books-online/>. accessed November 17, 2025

Khattab رضي الله عنه. Caxton also employs an alternative spelling of Umar's رضي الله عنه name as Omar, a popular transcription of the name in English that continues to this day. Again, he is mentioned in connection with the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and Caxton states that the present form of the mosque owes itself to Umar رضي الله عنه. When narrating the story of the temple in Jerusalem and David's role in it, he writes: "And Salomon his sone made there the temple by the commaundement of God / At the begynnynge of this booke we sayde to you· that Omar the sone of Captap dyde make the forme in this manere..."<sup>8</sup>. This representation of Umar رضي الله عنه as the architect of Jerusalem's sacred space became one of the dominant ways Umar رضي الله عنه was remembered in early modern writings, and it is possible to suggest that this narrative had its origin in crusade narratives, as medieval historians focused on Jerusalem and necessarily wrote about Umar's رضي الله عنه role in the conquest. However, as the present study deals mainly with early modern works, the medieval period lies beyond its reach.

Another early reference to Umar رضي الله عنه appears in Polydore Vergil's historical compilation. In one of his books, he devotes a chapter to a highly biased history of Islam titled "The Originall of Mahomet's Sect." After briefly describing the beginning of Islam under Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, he sheds light on the successors of the prophet. Interestingly enough, the only immediate successor he names is Umar رضي الله عنه. He states:

*"Homar was the third that reigned; and he, after the conquest of the Persians, wan Hierusalem, and all Syria, the year of our Lord 680, in the time of Agathon Bishop of Rome, and Constantine the 4th, Emperour."*<sup>9</sup>

This conflation of dates and historical figures is characteristic of early modern European attempts to synchronize Islamic history with Christian chronology, a methodology that frequently produced considerable distortion.

The same spelling for Umar رضي الله عنه, as used by Caxton, also appears in a book published in 1577. This work, titled *A Notable Historie of the Saracens*, is probably the first book in English that provides a detailed discussion of Islamic history to the English reader. It also presents details of the first four caliphs and the story of their succession after Prophet Muhammad. The author informs readers that Prophet Muhammad had four main supporters commonly called by the Prophet as "the sharpe Swordes of God."<sup>10</sup> The four supporters were "Ebubezer, Omar, Ozmen and Ali the Sonne of his

<sup>8</sup> William Caxton, *Here Begynneth the Boke Intituled Eracles, and Also of Godefrey of Boloyne the Whiche Speketh of the Conquest of the Holy Londe of Iherusalem* (Printed by William Caxton, 1481), sig. G5v.

<sup>9</sup> Polydore Vergil, *The Works of the Famous Antiquary, Polidore Virgil Containing the Original of All Arts, Sciences, Mysteries, Orders, Rites, and Ceremonies, Both Ecclesiastical and Civil: a Work Useful for All Divines, Historians, Lawyers, and All Artificers* (Printed for Simon Miller, 1663), 277–78.

<sup>10</sup> Celio Augustino Curione, *A Notable Historie of the Saracens Briefly and Faithfully Descrybing the Originall Beginning, Continuaunce and Successes Aswell of the Saracens, as Also of Turkes, Souldan, Mamalukes, Assassines, Tartarians and Sophians. With a Discourse of Their Affaires and Actes from the Byrthe of Mahomet Their First Péeuish Prophet and Founder for 700 Yéeres Space. Drawn out of*

vnclē Salutelib, vnto whom he also ioyned in mariage Fatema, hys daughter in Lawe by hys first wife.”<sup>11</sup> Here we find the first ever mention of the first four successors of Prophet Muhammad in the correct order. “Ebubezer” is, of course, Abu Bakr, the first Caliph after the Prophet, and the writer is aware of the trouble with his name, explaining in the following lines: “Of these foure, Ebubezer, called of some Vbequar and of some other Buback or Eubocar, father in Law to Mahomet tooke hys voyage to Palestina...”<sup>12</sup> Here the author gives three variant spellings of Abu Bakr’s name, apart from his original Ebubezer, yet numerous other forms of the name were used by early modern authors throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The author tells the story of succession which clearly deviates from mainstream accounts of succession in Sunni histories. According to him, Prophet Muhammad appointed his son-in-law and cousin Ali رضي الله عنه as his successor and “Caliph (that is to say the chiefe Prelate) of hys Secte.”<sup>13</sup> Abu Bakr stopped this arrangement, alleging that

*“for as much as Mahomet deceased in his house, and by his only meanes had stepped vp to such credite, welth, estimation and gouernment, as being bolstered, mainteyned and preferred by his countenance and fréndship, none other by good reason was fitter to succéede then he that had béene his chiefe supporter.”<sup>14</sup>*

Like William Caxton above, the translator of *A Notable Historie* also uses Homar and Omar alternatively. It is worth noting that tones of volumes have been written on early Islamic history and the problems of succession in early Islam—a contentious issue over the last 1,400 years—yet the argument presented here to favor the succession of Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه against Ali رضي الله عنه seems remarkably superficial, suggesting that Curione relied upon secondary or heavily distorted sources.

The other reason given for the preference of Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه over Ali رضي الله عنه was that the former was supported by the two other companions of the prophet—Umar رضي الله عنه and Usman رضي الله عنه—and the age factor. Ali رضي الله عنه, being younger than Abu Bakr, had a chance of ruling for a longer period compared to Abu Bakr, who was an old man at that time. In the description of the successors of the prophet, the author makes it a point to enumerate the military campaigns of each caliph and the lands conquered by his armies. For example, regarding the era of the first Caliph, it is said that his armies “discomfited the Roman Garrisons.”<sup>15</sup> After Abu Bakr, “succeeded Homar...who was his Kinsman. He subdued Bosra the chief citie of all Arabie with many more, and conquered all the country as farre as Gabata.”<sup>16</sup> This focus on territorial conquest would become a defining feature of how Umar رضي الله عنه was remembered in

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*Augustine Curio and sundry other good authours by Thomas Newton* (By William How, for Abraham Veale, 1575), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

early modern English discourse.

### **Umar رضي الله عنه in the Context of Ottoman-Safavid Rivalry**

Safavid Persia was one of the important conduits through which knowledge about the early history of Islam and especially the succession after Prophet Muhammad reached Europe. The issue of succession inevitably mentions Umar رضي الله عنه, apart from the other three caliphs after Prophet Muhammad. One of the first instances of this type is found in a travel narrative included in *The History of Trauayle in the VWest and East Indies* (1577). An Italian traveller who visited the modern-day Middle East in the early years of the sixteenth century also traveled to Persia. At almost the same time, Shah Ismael, the first of the Safavids, had taken over Persia and laid the foundation of a dynasty that would rule Persia until 1722. Shah Ismael declared Persia a Shi'a state and converted the Sunni population of Persia to Shi'ism. When Ludovico di Varthema, whose travel accounts are included in the book mentioned above, traveled through Persia, he learnt about the sectarian differences in Islam. Varthema refers to the wars between the Turks and the Persians, with the Turks defined as those "Mahumetans, which are of the sect and religion of Bubachar, Othomar, & Omar."<sup>17</sup> He provides further details about the first three successors of Prophet Muhammad in the subsequent lines:

*"These were the felowes of Mahumet, as we haue written before of Mahumet and his felowes. The Persians abhorre these as heretikes and false doctours, although they them selues also be Mahumetans of another secte, whiche is of Mahumet and Hali, whose doctrine they embrace and esteeme for most perfect and true religion."*<sup>18</sup>

The sermon preached at the occasion of the baptism of "Chinano, a Turk" by Meredith Hanmer refers to Muslim practices of invoking pious figures as mediators with God. The figures that he mentions are Abraham and Isaac. Moreover, "They honor Nabi, Bubacar, Othomar, Aumar, Fatoma, the followers of Mahomet with others."<sup>19</sup> Aumar refers to Umar رضي الله عنه, and notably, there is no mention of Ali رضي الله عنه here, though we find Fatima, his wife and Prophet Muhammad's daughter, enumerated along with the first three successors of the Prophet. This omission is significant, as it suggests that English writers had not fully developed the awareness of sectarian distinctions that would become more prominent in later seventeenth-century works.

An important work that disseminated information about the differences between the

<sup>17</sup> Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, *The History of Trauayle in the VWest and East Indies, and Other Countreys Lying Eyther Way, Towardes the Fruitfull and Ryche Moluccaes As Moscouia Persia, Arabia, Syria, Ægypte, Ethiopia, Guinea, China in Cathayo, and Giapan: Vvith a Discourse of the Northwest Passage. Gathered in part, and done into Englyshe by Richarde Eden, newly set in order, augmented, and finished by Richarde VVilles* (Printed by Richarde Iugge, 1577), n.p.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Meredith Hanmer, *The Baptizing of a Turke A Sermon Preached at the Hospitall of Saint Katherin, Adioyning Vnto Her Maiesties Towre the 2. of October 1586. at the Baptizing of One Chinano a Turke, Borne at Nigropontus* (Robert Walde-graue, 1586), n.p.

Turks and the Persians in early modern England was John Thomas Minadoi's *The History of the Vvarres Betvveene the Turkes and the Persians* (1595), translated into English by Abraham Hartwell. The first reference in the work provides information about the marriage of Prophet Muhammad to Umar رضي الله عنه's daughter Hafsa, and this is the first time her name is mentioned in an English text. While writing about the wives of the Prophet Muhammad, he says the greatest of his wives were "Aisse the daughter of Abubacher, Ofesa the daughter of Omar."<sup>20</sup> This is probably the first ever mention of Ummul Muminin Ayesha رضي الله عنها and Hafsa رضي الله عنها in early modern England, representing an expansion of English knowledge about the Prophet's household.

In the same chapter, Minadoi refers to the first three caliphs of Islam in the context of Persian hatred for them. After narrating the process of succession following the passing away of Prophet Muhammad, wherein he points out the difference of opinion in the early Muslim community regarding who should be the leader of Muslims after Prophet Muhammad, Minadoi has included details found in polemical histories of early Islam showing how the first three successors of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ deprived Ali رضي الله عنه of his right to be the first caliph. Since Ali رضي الله عنه lived a long life, "he saw the death of his predecessors Abubacher, Omar, and Ottoman, and after their decease he himself also succeeded in the Dignity, which till then they had vsurped vpon him."<sup>21</sup> The first three caliphs are declared "usurpers" by Minadoi, in line with the sources through which he acquired knowledge about early Islamic history. This language of usurpation would echo through subsequent early modern English texts dealing with Islamic succession.

After shedding light on the differences regarding succession in early Islam, Minadoi jumps to the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry in the early modern period and contextualizes contemporary differences with the classical period. The early difference of opinion regarding the priority of succession after Prophet Muhammad re-emerged in Persia in the form of anti-Ottoman feelings, a trend set by one named "Siec Giunet." The hatred for the first three Caliphs after the Prophet among the Safavid Persians is reported by many other English travellers. John Cartwright, in his travel narrative *The Preacher's Travels*, discusses the conversion of Persia to a religion different from that of the Ottoman Turks. A "new Prophet" named Guini convinced the people of Persia, among whom he had become popular, that "the three first successours of Mahomet, were vniust and vnlawfull vsurpers of that dignitie, and that iust Aly, Mahomets sonne in law, onely ought to be named the lawfull successour: that he alone ought to be called vpon in their prayers for helpe, and that all honours should be given to him, and taken from

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<sup>20</sup> Giovanni Tommaso Minadoi, *The History of the Vvarres Betvveene the Turkes and the Persians*. Written in Italian by Iohn-Thomas Minadoi, and Translated into English by Abraham Hartvvell. Containing the Description of All Such Matters, as Pertaine to the Religion, to the Forces to the Gouvernement, and to the Countries of the Kingdome of the Persians. Together with the Argument of Euery Booke, & a New Geographical Mappe of All Those Territories (John Windet, 1595), 41–42.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 43.

Abubacher, Omar, and Ottaman, as from persons that were undoubtedly damned.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Guini taught his followers “onely to receiue the writings of Aly as of others most authentically, to reiect Abuchacher, Omar, and Ottaman, with their writings as most wicked & accursed; whō the Turks had euer, and yet do honour & worship as the true successors of their Prophet Mahomet, and his sincere interpreters, together with the aforesaid Aly, whom the Persians do only acknowledge: and therefore in their prayers doe commonly say, Cursed be Abubachar, Omar, and Ottaman, and God be fauorable to Aly, and well pleased with him.”<sup>23</sup>

The quotation by Cartwright demonstrates the rising awareness of sectarian differences between the Ottomans and Safavids and the role that the first three successors—particularly Umar رضي الله عنه—played in these distinctions. These religious figures became proxies for political and dynastic rivalries, and Umar’s رضي الله عنه positioning as a representative of Sunni orthodoxy against Shi’a preferences for Ali رضي الله عنه took on geopolitical significance. We find similar information in Anthony Sherley’s travel narrative printed in London in 1613. He informs his readers of the Persian King’s strict suppression of “the Religion of Mahomet, which followeth the interpretation of Vssen and Omar and to make his people cleaue to that of Aly.”<sup>24</sup> In his judgment, the Persian king adopted this policy not out of sincere belief in his interpretation of religion but as a strategy to defend his country against the Turks, ensuring that commonality of religion would not create a soft corner for the enemy. To further consolidate this strategy, once a year, the images of “Vssen and Omar” were burnt publicly by the Persians to prove that they were “maine Heretiques.”<sup>25</sup> This public destruction of symbolic representations demonstrates the degree to which Umar رضي الله عنه had become entangled with Ottoman identity and Ottoman-Safavid antagonism.

### **Umar رضي الله عنه as Administrator and Legislator**

The famous English martyrologist John Foxe also discusses the sequence of succession after the death of Prophet Muhammad. He transliterates the name of Abubakr as “Ebocara, or Ebubecer” and Umar رضي الله عنه as “Omar or Ahumar.” About the latter, he says that he “conquered a great part of Syria, and got Egypt.”<sup>26</sup> This reference is

<sup>22</sup> John Cartwright, *The Preachers Trauels Wherein Is Set Downe a True Iournall to the Confines of the East Indies, Through the Great Countreyes of Syria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Media, Hircania and Parthia. With the Authors Returne by the Way of Persia, Susiana, Assiria, Chaldæa, and Arabia* (Printed by William Stansby, for Thomas Thorppe, and sold by Walter Burre, 1611), 52–53.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony Sherley, "A Discourse of the Turks," in *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, vol. 1, compiled by Samuel Purchas (1625), 74.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of Matters Most Speciall and Memorable, Happenyng in the Church* [vol. 1] with an Vniuersall History of the Same, Wherein Is Set Forth at Large the Whole Race and Course of the Church, from the Primitiue Age to These Latter Tymes of Ours, with the Bloudy Times, Horrible Troubles, and Great Persecutions Agaynst the True Martyrs of Christ, Sought and Wrought as Well by Heathen Emperours, as Nowe Lately Practised by Romish Prelates, Especially in This Realme of England and Scotland. Newly revised and recognised, partly also augmented, and now the fourth time agayne published and recommended to the

important as Foxe's work was one of the most widely read works in Elizabethan England, specifically among staunch Protestants. Foxe's inclusion of Umar رضي الله عنه among the figures worthy of historical attention gave the caliph a certain legitimacy within Protestant intellectual circles, even as the broader text maintained hostile attitudes toward Islam.

The reference to the successors of Prophet Muhammad is also found in a French text authored by Louis Leroy and translated into English by Robert Ashley towards the end of the sixteenth century. Interestingly, in the chapter dealing with Islam, we find a notably neutral description of Prophet Muhammad devoid of the slurs and abuses that characterized the signature tone of early modern representation of the Prophet of Islam. According to the author, "Mahomet, the authour of the Alcoran, and founder of the Sarazen Empire; who being borne of an obscure, & poore parentage, came to great riches, power, & authority, making himselfe the law-giuer of mankind; & making the people beleue, that he was the prophet and messenger of God."<sup>27</sup> This is a remarkable passage; despite a misconception, the author had not divulged the deep-seated hatred for the founder of Islam typical of the early modern age. The author next provides more information, and this is also remarkable as we find mention not only of the four "rightly-guided" caliphs after Prophet Muhammad but also of a few later rulers.

*"His successors were Eubocara, Homar, Odmen, Hali, Alharen, Moaui, Iesid, & the Caliphes, who prospered merueilously in a little time with those beginnings which Mahomet had giuen them; spreading far & wide together with their dominion, the Arabian language, & religion: abolishing those countries which they conquered, the Greek, Latin, Punick, & Persian: which was a wonderfull strange mutation."*<sup>28</sup>

Not only the passage informs the reader that the Muslim empire "prospered merueilously" and the Caliphs brought about "a wonderful strange mutation" in the territories that they conquered but also it is distinguished by the inclusion of names such as Alharen, Moaui, and Iesid, which respectively signify Hassan ibn Ali, Muawia ibn Abu Sufyan, and Yazeed ibn Muawia, who ruled the early Islamic state in the same order.

The successors of Prophet Muhammad are mentioned in a book containing Christian polemics against all other religions and sects of the time. In order to demonstrate the

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*studious reader, by the author (through the helpe of Christ our Lord) Iohn Foxe (Imprinted by Iohn Daye, 1583), 737.*

<sup>27</sup> Louis Leroy, *Of the Interchangeable Course, or Variety of Things in the Whole World and the Concurrence of Armes and Learning, Thorough the First and Famousest Nations: From the Beginning of Ciuility, and Memory of Man, to This Present. Moreouer, Whether It Be True or No, That There Can Be Nothing Sayd, Which Hath Not Bin Said Heretofore: and That We Ought by Our Owne Inuentions to Augment the Doctrine of the Auncients; Not Contenting Our Selues with Translations, Expositions, Corrections, and Abridgments of Their Writings. Written in French by Loys le Roy called Regius, and translated into English by R.A. Charles, Yetsweirt Esq,* 1594), 97.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

superiority of Catholic faith, the writer argues that the deaths of all the successors were unnatural and therefore Christianity is superior to Islam. His narration is full of fallacies and myths popular in early modern Europe generally and in England specifically. His narrative begins with the Prophet, about whom he says that he was

*“first ordayned of Mahumet himselfe, violently oppressed & deposed, Eubocora poysoned to death, Homar Murthered of his seruant, Osmenus killed himselfe, Mahumetes violently and vnnaturally slaine, Alys trayterouslye murthered, Muauias so afflicted with scis/mes and sects in that profession, that hundreds of Camelles were not able to carry the writings of such as rebelled against him.”*<sup>29</sup>

An identical history of early Islam is found in an Italian author whose work was translated into English and later published in London. *A Geographical Historie of Africa* by Africanus Leo, translated into English by John Pory and printed in 1600, also contains references to “Homar the second Califa or Mahumetan patriarke of that name”<sup>30</sup> as the person under whose rule Egypt was conquered by Muslims. About the beginnings of Cairo, it is said that “This citie being the first that was built in Egypt in the time of the Mahumetans, was founded by Hamre captaine generall ouer the forces of Homar the second Mahumetan patriarke vpon the banke of Nilus...”<sup>31</sup> This administrative narrative of Umar رضي الله عنه established him as not merely a military conqueror but as a builder and organizer of territorial administration.

During the early modern period, as a result of European travellers’ visits to the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia, a steady flow of information regarding the differences between the Turks and Persians emerged, and an understanding of sectarian differences in Islam began developing. One of the ways to understand the sectarian difference was to juxtapose Umar رضي الله عنه against Ali رضي الله عنه as the heads of two sects. For example, William Reynolde, a priest from the sixteenth century, considers comparing new forms of Christianity with the old Christian faith just as one might compare “an ape with a man, silver with gold or ‘Mahomets prophets Homar and Halis, vvith S. Peter and S. Paule the Apostles of our Saviour!”<sup>32</sup> The above quotation shows that

<sup>29</sup> Richard Broughton, *The First Part of the Resolution of Religion Devided into Two Bookes, Contayning a Demonstration of the Necessity of a Diuine and Supernaturall Worshipp In the First, Against All Atheists, and Epicures: In the Second, That Christian Catholic Religion Is the Same in Particular, and More Certaine in Euery Article Thereof, Than Any Humane or Experimented Knowledge, Against Iewes, Mahumetans, Pagans, and Other External Enemies of Christ* (English Secret Press, 1603), 137.

<sup>30</sup> Leo Africanus, *A Geographical Historie of Africa, Written in Arabicke and Italian by Iohn Leo a More, Borne in Granada, and Brought Vp in Barbarie. Wherein He Hath at Large Described, Not Onely the Qualities, Situations, and True Distances of the Regions, Cities, Townes, Mountaines, Riuers, and Other Places Throughout All the North and Principall Partes of Africa; but Also the Descents and Families of Their Kings. Translated and collected by Iohn Pory, lately of Gouernour and Caius College in Cambridge* (Impensis Georg. Bishop, 1600), 298.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 310.

<sup>32</sup> William Reynolde, *A Treatise Conteyning the True Catholike and Apostolike Faith of the Holy Sacrifice and Sacrament Ordeyned by Christ at His Last Supper Vvith a*

sixteenth-century English writers considered Umar رضي الله عنه and Ali رضي الله عنه to have diametrically opposed positions on matters of religion.

Jean Bodin, in his *The Six Books of Common-Weale* (1603), has devoted a chapter to the significance of slaves in the development of ancient empires and nations. In this regard, he says that the power of the Arabians also originated from the same source. According to him, “And in truth the power of the Arabians grew by no other meanes.” He attributes the massive attraction for slaves in Islam to a strategy adopted by Umar رضي الله عنه.

“For as soone as Homar one of Mahomets licutenants [sic], had begun to raise warre in Arabia, and promised libertie vnto the slaues that should follow him, he drew such a number after him, that in few yeares they made themselues lords of all the East.”<sup>33</sup>

Bodin contends that it was because of this large-scale abolition of slavery initiated by Umar رضي الله عنه that slaves in other parts of the world also started fighting for their freedom.

“The fame of which libertie, and the conquests made by those slaues, so encouraged the slaues of Europe, that they began to take vp armes, first in Spaine in the yeare 781, and afterward in Fraunce in the time of Charlemaigne, and of Lewes the godly; as is to bee seene by their Edicts then made against the conspiracie of slaues.”<sup>34</sup>

This interpretation, while historically questionable, demonstrates how early modern writers attempted to fit Islamic history into their own frameworks of historical causation and social change.

## The Encyclopedic Project: Hakluyt, Purchas, and the Systematization of Knowledge

The amassing of knowledge from all over the world during the Renaissance produced polymaths with encyclopedic range in the early modern period. Two important figures in this regard were Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas, who dedicated their efforts to compiling and aggregating travel narratives about the various parts of the world visited by English merchants and navigators. They also set a trend which led others to translate similar texts from other European languages into English. The major contribution of Purchas was to continue the legacy of Hakluyt in his *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625), a collection of early modern travel narratives in four volumes. Apart from this, he was a keen reader of new knowledge being produced in English regarding other religions. He published a volume on this topic under the self-explanatory title

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*Declaration of the Berengarian Heresie Renewed in Our Age: and an Answere to Certain Sermons Made by M. Robert Bruce Minister of Edinburgh Concerning This Matter* (Imprinted by Ioachim Trognesium, 1593), 436.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Bodin, *The Six Bookes of a Common-Weale. Vvritten by I. Bodin a Famous Lawyer, and a Man of Great Experience in Matters of State. Out of the French and Latine Copies, done into English by Richard Knolles* (Impensis G. Bishop, 1606), 39.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

*Purchas his pilgrimage. Or Relations of the vworld and the religions obserued in all ages and places discovered, from the Creation vnto this present In foure partes. This first containeth a theologicall and geographycall historie of Asia, Africa, and America, with the ilands adiacent. Declaring the ancient religions before the Floud...With briefe descriptions of the countries, nations, states, discoveries, priuate and publike customes, and the most remarkable rarities of nature, or humane industrie, in the same* (1613). Until 1626, four expanded editions of the work were printed—1613, 1614, 1617, and 1626 respectively. Each edition incorporated new information that became available to the author in the meanwhile. Matthew Dimmock has analyzed the work in his essay titled “Faith, Form and Faction: Samuel Purchas’s *Purchas His Pilgrimage*” and shows that “The project was clearly ambitious and encyclopaedic, incorporating all the religions of the known world, with the exclusion of Europe, but it was also necessarily innovative.”<sup>35</sup>

The copiousness of Purchas’s work is emphasized by Dimmock in his essay mentioned above. This can be demonstrated from the story of succession after Prophet Muhammad. He copies from *A Notable Historie of the Saracens* the story quoted above but with additions here and there. One of the references to Umar رضي الله عنه in *Purchas his Pilgrimage* remembers him as a great conqueror like many other early modern works:

*“Homar... wanne Bosra the chiefe Citie of Arabia, and all the country as far as Gabata, and put Theodorus, the Emperors brother, to flight. He besieged Damascus, and hauing broken the forces that came to rescue it, obtained it: subduing also all Phoenicia. After that, turning his forces into Aegypt, Cyrus the Bishop of Alexandria stayed him with promise of 200000. peeces of golde, for yeerely Tribute. This vvas disannulled by Heraclius, and Emanuel the deputy denied the paiment: wherevpon enltring the second time vnder conduct of Hamrus, Aegypt was conquered.”*<sup>36</sup>

Immediately after this, the writer mentions Muawia as the governor of the regions between Nile and Euphrates and says that once Muawia consolidated his position in

<sup>35</sup> Matthew Dimmock, "Faith, Form and Faction: Samuel Purchas's *Purchas His Pilgrimage*," *Renaissance Studies* 28, no. 2 (2014): 262.

<sup>36</sup> Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage. Or Relations of the Vworld and the Religions Obserued in All Ages and Places Discovered, from the Creation Vnto This Present In Foure Partes. This First Containeth a Theologicall and Geographycall Historie of Asia, Africa, and America, with the Ilands Adiacent* (William Stansby, 1613); *Purchas His Pilgrimage. Or Relations of the Vworld and the Religions Obserued in All Ages and Places Discovered, from the Creation Vnto This Present Contayning a Theologicall and Geographycall Historie of Asia, Africa, and America, with the Ilands Adiacent. The fourth edition, much enlarged with additions, and illustrated with mappes through the whole worke; and three whole treatises annexed, one of Russia and other northeasterne regions by Sr. Ierome Horsey; the second of the Gulfe of Bengala by Master William Methold; the third of the Saracenicall empire, translated out of Arabike by T. Erpenius* (William Stansby, 1626); *Purchas His Pilgrimes. Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others*, vol. 1 (William Stansby, 1625), 194.

these areas, Umar رضي الله عنه turned towards Persia and conquered it. In the battle that ensued, "...the Persians lost both their King Hormisda, their state, religion, & name: of Persians being conuerted into Saracens."<sup>37</sup> It was also under Umar's رضي الله عنه rule that Muslims conquered Jerusalem, and Umar رضي الله عنه declared this city as his "royall seate, where he built a Temple to Mahumet."<sup>38</sup>

Another reference to Umar رضي الله عنه in Purchas (1613) is found in a chapter of the work detailing the successors of the Prophet Muhammad. Here Purchas uses "Aomar" as the spelling of his name, though he knows the variant spelling "Homar" which was used by Leo Africanus. He does not, however, remember that he uses "Homar" when he copies material from *A Notable Historie of Saracens*. He attributes the prayers in Ramazan to Umar رضي الله عنه as well as the compilation of the Quran into a single volume so as to make it easy for the posterity of Muslims to read through the Holy Book.<sup>39</sup> This contribution of Umar رضي الله عنه, it seems, is not mentioned by any other early modern writing available in English. Again here, Umar رضي الله عنه is mentioned as the ruler under whom Muslims expanded their territories, the areas mentioned being Jerusalem, Gaza, Damascus, and Egypt.<sup>40</sup> He omits Persia here, and this might be because of the source he was using.

In the descriptions of sects in Islam, there is an interesting reference to the first four Caliphs which shows a garbled early modern understanding of sectarian differences in Islam. In the early centuries of Islam, due to variant understanding of the traditions of the Prophet, Muslims developed four major schools of thought named after four jurists. The followers of Imam Abu Hanifa were known as Hanafis, of Imam Malik ibn Anas as Malikis, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal's as Hanbalis, and those of Imam Shafi'i as Shafi'is. Now what Purchas has done is confused these four schools of thought, which were a later development, with the first four caliphs who lived, in some cases, a century or two earlier. He writes:

*"Those foure Doctors aforesaid... intending their owne priuate endes, sowed the seedes then, which fructifie in their venemous multiplication till this day. Hali or Alli was author of the sect Imemia, which was embraced of the Persians, Indians, and of many Arabians, and the Gelbines of Africa. Ozimen or Odmen began the Sect Baanesia or Xefaia, and hath in diuers countries his followers. Homar, founded the Anefia, followed of the Turkes, Syrians, and in Zahara in Afrike. Eubocar (otherwise called Ebuber, or Abubequer) taught the Sect Melchia, generally posses/sing Arabia and Africa."*<sup>41</sup>

Purchas has connected Abu Bakr, the first caliph, with the Malikis; Umar رضي الله عنه with the Hanafis; Usman رضي الله عنه probably with the Shafi'is (Xefaia); and Ali with the Imamia. The only attribution that can be given credence is the last one, and the use of "Imemia" by Purchas also reveals his source: *A Geographical Historie of Africa* by

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid. 227.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid. 228.

Africanus Leo, published in 1600. According to Leo, Muslims are divided into two major sects—Leshari and Imamia. The former is “dispersed ouer all Africa, Egypt, Syria, Aralbia, and Turkie” while the latter “is authorized throughout the whole kingdome of Persia, and in certaine townes of Corasan; and this sect the great Sophi of Persia maintaineth...”<sup>42</sup>

Umar رضي الله عنه is written as Aumar at another place in the same work. Here he is mentioned in connection with the conquest of Egypt and Muslim administrative division of the newly conquered country.

*“These Saracens diuided Egypt into three parts; Errif, from Cairo to Rosetto; Satrid, from Cairo to Bugia; Matemma, as Nilus runneth to Damiata. It was subdued vnder the conduct of Hamrus the sonne of Hasi, Generall of the Arabian forces to Homar or Aumar the second Caliph.”*<sup>43</sup>

*“Hamrus the sonne of Hasi” refers to Amr ibn Al-Aas, who commanded the army that conquered Egypt.*

An important contribution to the understanding of early Islamic history in early modern England is Pierre d’Avity’s *The Estates, Empires, & Principallities of the World* (1615). Avity included a translation of Persian history by Central Asian historian Mir-Khvand (1433-34/1498). In his chapter dealing with the Persian kings, he enumerates “Homar” as the second Caliph and the first king of Persia after the Arabians had conquered it. The author here gives somewhat more detail about the conquest of Persia than other early modern works and does not mention any other territories as has been the case with other authors who describe Umar رضي الله عنه. The author states:

*“After the death of Abubakar, the Mahometans scepter fell into the hands of Homar, who hauing hold it ten yeares and a halfe, seeing his enterprises to succeed in all things, and being aduertised how much Persia was infested by the Turkes, he thought he should giue a great increase to his commaund, if he should inuade it, as he did in the time of Iazdgerd, as hath beene said, the which succeeded so happily by the sodain death of the king of Persia, as he made himselfe absolute lord of that realme, with more speed and facilitate than he could imagine, settling for himselfe, and his successours, Califes, his royall seat at Bagaded. He died a yeare after, about the yeare of Grace 655, and of the Egyra, or yeares of Mahomet, 33.”*<sup>44</sup>

William Lithgow was a Scottish traveller who visited the east in the early years of the seventeenth century. A section of his travel narrative deals with the description of Jerusalem. He gives a history of successive conquests of Jerusalem over the course of history and places the conquest by Umar رضي الله عنه at number six. He writes: “Sixthly,

<sup>42</sup> Leo, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, 154.

<sup>43</sup> Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 485.

<sup>44</sup> Pierre d’Avity, sieur de Montmartin, *The Estates, Empires, & Principallities of the World Represented by Ye Description of Countries, Maners of Inhabitants, Riches of Prouinces, Forces, Gouvernement, Religion; and the Princes That Hauue Governed in Euery Estate With the Begin[n]ing of All Militarie and Religious Orders. Translated out of French by Edw: Grimstone, sargeant at armes* (Adam Islip, 1615), 873.

it was overcome by Homar Califf the successour of Mahomet.”<sup>45</sup>

### Umar رضي الله عنه in the Later Seventeenth Century: Consolidation and Refinement

Samuel Purchas, in his *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625), has included portions of a book of geography originally written in Arabic and later translated into Latin by Gabriel Sionita and Johannes Hisonita. In this book, discussing the history of Prophet Muhammad, he mentions his successors. His description of companions of the prophet is to a great extent accurate. First, he starts with “Abu-Bacr” who was

“...his sincerest and most in ward friend, a man very rich and releuer of Mohameds necessities, his successor after his death. He dyed the thirteenth yeere of the Hegira, and sixtie three of his age, and was buried in the same graue with Mohamed.”<sup>46</sup>

The above description is true with the caveat that Abu Bakr was buried in a grave beside Prophet Muhammad in the same premises rather than, as the writer suggests, in the same grave. Next, he describes the second caliph and he adds significantly to our knowledge about the second caliph.

“The second was Homar the sonne of Chattab, surnamed Faruque} who succeeded Abi-Bacr, and ruled ten yeeres and six moneths. He was the first which was called King of the faithfull, and writ the Annals of the Moslemans, and brought the Alcoran into a Volume, and caused the Ramadam fast to be obserued. He was slaine the three and twentieth of the Hegira, and buried by Abi-Bacr.”<sup>47</sup>

Umar رضي الله عنه father’s name, Khattab, was first mentioned in Caxton’s *Here Begynneth the Boke Intituled Eracles* (1481), which in my view is the first time that Umar رضي الله عنه was discussed in an English book. What our present author has added is his surname Faruque, and it is the first occurrence of this name in early modern writings. The fact that he is the first to be called “King of the Faithfull,” by which the author means “Ameer-ul-Muminin,” and that he “wrote the annals of Moslemans,” which probably means that he paid attention to the codification of the Prophet’s tradition as that constituted the history of early Islam, demonstrates a more sophisticated understanding of Umar رضي الله عنه administrative and literary contributions than previous English sources.

The view that Umar رضي الله عنه had a role in compiling the Qur’an into a volume is also expressed by William Bedwell in his book published in London in 1615. Bedwell, who

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<sup>45</sup> William Lithgow, *A Most Delectable and True Discourse, of an Admired and Painefull Peregrination from Scotland, to the Most Famous Kingdomes in Europe, Asia and Affricke With the Particular Descriptions (More Exactly Set Downe Then Hath Beene Heeretofore in English) of Italy Sycilia, Dalmatia, Ilyria, Epire, Peloponnesus, Macedonia, Thessalia, and the Whole Continent of Greece, Creta, Rhodes, the Iles Cyclades...and the Chiefest Countries of Asia Minor. From Thence, to Cyprus, Phania, Syria...and the Sacred Citie Ierusalem* (Nicholas Okes, 1616), 91.

<sup>46</sup> Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 1502.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

displays deeply entrenched hatred against Islam and the Prophet Muhammad—as is evident from his work’s title—has annexed some Arabic terms and their meanings towards the end of the book. Under the term “Alfvrkan,” after explaining that it is the same as “Alkoran,” he states: “These lawes written by Mohammed, as they say, in schedules & litle scroles, were afterward by Omar digested into one volume.”<sup>48</sup> Like the sources above, Bedwell rightly attributes the beginning of prayer in the month of Ramazan to a decree by Caliph Umar رضي الله عنه. According to him, Umar رضي الله عنه issued a decree that “...that in all their synagogues (Mesgids, they call them) prayers should bee read euery day throughout the moneth of September. This moneth they call Ramadhan, which also is their Lent.”<sup>49</sup> Assigning the month of September to Ramadhan is a curious error on Bedwell’s part, as he apparently did not know that the Hijri calendar follows the moon unlike the Gregorian calendar.

Purchas’s *His Pilgriamge*’s fourth edition, printed in 1626, is largely a reproduction of earlier editions as far as the references to Umar رضي الله عنه are concerned. Umar رضي الله عنه is mentioned as a great conqueror who added larger territories to the Muslim empire, with Egypt and Persia discussed in particular. He is also credited with building a temple in Jerusalem. “Anno Dom. 641. Did Homar build his Temple at Ierusalem with incredible costs in matter and workmanship, enriching the same with many and large possessions and reuenues; in the Musaike worke of the inner and outward part thereof expressing in Arabike letters, the Author, time, and charges of the building.”<sup>50</sup> This temple, according to Purchas, was known as Solomon’s temple, as he points out while narrating the story of the first crusade. The crusaders entered Jerusalem in July 1099 AD on a Friday and “...after much bloud and slaughter in the Citie, they set vpon those which had betaken themselues to Salomons Temple (so was that called which Homar built)...”<sup>51</sup> Another author, in the second half of the seventeenth century, mentions the conquest and demolition of Jerusalem at the hands of “Homar the Third King of Saracens.”<sup>52</sup> The same author also points out the connection between Solomon’s temple and the Muslim mosque in Jerusalem. In the section titled “Of the Mount Moria and the Glorious Temple of Solomon,” we are told that

*“Now a days the Turks have taken possession of this Mount, and all the Ground whereon Solomon’s Temple did stand, and have built a Mahumetan Mosche on it; which Homar the Third after... Mahomet built when he had taken the holy Land and the City of Jerusalem.”*<sup>53</sup>

Purchas also mentions Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه, Umar رضي الله عنه, and Usman رضي الله عنه as the unlawful successors of Prophet Muhammad in the eyes of Persians. He bases his narrative on Mirkond, whom he calls a “Persian Authour,” and believes that the native historian’s account should be considered more reliable than “the more vncertayne

<sup>48</sup> William Bedwell, *A Briefe and Easie Introduction to the Practise of the Heavenly Discipline. Published with Arabic terms and translations* (1615), n.p.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 215–16.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 217.

<sup>52</sup> John Ray, *A Collection of Curious Travels & Voyages in Two Tomes* (Printed for S. Smith and B. Walford, 1693), 271.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 295.

relations of Christian Authors.”<sup>54</sup> The summary of schism in Islam that the writer produces at the end of his section on schism in Persia runs as follows: “By all which hath beene said, appeareth a continuall difference betwixt the Persians and other Saracens about their Religion; either (as some affirme) for that the Persians preferred Ali before Mahumet, or for that (which is more likely) they accounted Ali, and not any of the other three (Eubocar, Osmen, or Homar) to be the true successor of Mahumet.”<sup>55</sup>

Some early modern authors juxtapose Umar رضي الله عنه and Ali رضي الله عنه whenever they are discussing the differences between Turks and Persians or dilating upon the sectarian differences in Islam. For example, in the following excerpt, the author portrays Umar رضي الله عنه and Ali رضي الله عنه as the champions of Turks and Persians respectively:

*“All Religions, Sects, and sorts of People are ready to get their Doctors and Teachers into too high Chairs of estimation and praises, even to Homar and Hali among the Turks and Persians...”*<sup>56</sup>

The same idea is repeated in a later work by John Ogilby. While describing the various religions that are believed and practiced in Asia, he also writes about Islam and the sects that emerged in Islam. “Of the Mahumetans” according to him, “there have been reckon’d sixty two Sects, which nevertheless are reduc’d to two Principal ones; that of the Turks, which follows the Doctrine of Homar; and that of the Persians, following the Doctrine of Ali. The Persians have their Patriarch at Ispahan, the Turks theirs at Bagdat.”<sup>57</sup>

The first three Caliphs are assigned to Ottoman Turks and the fourth is assigned to Safavid Persians. While the Turks nevertheless respect the fourth successor as well, the perception that is built in early modern English writings is that the first three occupy the Turkish side and the fourth occupies the Persian side. For example, George Sandys, the famous English traveller who wrote his account of travels in the Ottoman empire, writes about the value of a Mufti in the Ottoman Empire as the inheritor of the dignity of “Chaliphs.” According to Sandys, “...the Mufties (which name doth signifie An Oracle, or Answerer of doubts) as Successors to Ebbubecher, Omar and Ozman;...”<sup>58</sup> What is of interest for us is whether Sandys has deliberately removed the name of the fourth Caliph from his list. Was he aware of the sectarian difference between the Ottomans and Persians? Most probably this should be taken as an innocent omission, as there is no other evidence which proves that Sandys was aware of the 3:1 division of

<sup>54</sup> Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 379.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 151.

<sup>57</sup> John Ogilby, *Asia. The First Part Being an Accurate Description of Persia, and the Several Provinces Thereof: the Vast Empire of the Great Mogol, and Other Parts of India, and Their Several Kingdoms and Regions: with the Denominations and Descriptions of the Cities, Towns, and Places of Remark Therein Contain'd: the Various Customs, Habits, Religion, and Languages of the Inhabitants: Their Political Governments, and Way of Commerce: Also the Plants and Animals Peculiar to Each Country* (Printed by the author at his house in White-friers, 1673), n.p.

<sup>58</sup> Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 1293.

Caliphs between the Ottomans and the Safavids.

The first mention of Umar's رضي الله عنه murderer as a "Persian" is found in Alexander Ross's *The History of the World* (1652). The juxtaposition of Umar رضي الله عنه and Ali رضي الله عنه is again found in this work. According to him, the major cause of the wars between the Turks and the Persians was their quarrel about Umar رضي الله عنه and Ali رضي الله عنه. "The occasion of the quarrel," he says, "were Hali and Homar the two Interpreters of Mahumets Alcoran; The Ottomans followed Hali, the rest Homar."<sup>59</sup> In his later work, *Pansebeia*, Ross once again explains the differences between the Turks and the Persians. The chief doctrinal difference, according to the writer, is about "the true Alcoran," and Persians

*"hold Eubocar, Ofmen, and Homar, whom the Turks worship, to have been usurpers, and Hali the onely true successor of Mahomet, whose Sepulchre they visit with as great devotion as the Turks do the other three."*<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

The representations of Umar ibn Al-Khattab رضي الله عنه across early modern English texts reveal a significant gap in scholarly attention to the companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. While extensive scholarship exists on early modern English representations of the Prophet himself, the figures who occupied essential roles in Islamic governance and religious authority—such as Umar رضي الله عنه—remain marginalized in academic discourse. This paper has traced three overlapping representations of Umar رضي الله عنه across nearly two centuries of English writing: first, as the military conqueror and architect of Jerusalem's sacred spaces; second, as the administrator and legislator who organized Islamic territories and codified Islamic practices; and third, as the symbolic embodiment of Sunni orthodoxy in opposition to Shi'a claims centered on Ali رضي الله عنه.

The emergence of Umar رضي الله عنه in early modern English texts was directly correlated with European encounters with the Ottoman and Safavid empires. As English merchants, diplomats, and travellers navigated these Islamic political entities, they acquired knowledge of sectarian divisions within Islam. The divisions between Turks and Persians—between Ottoman and Safavid—became comprehensible through recourse to early Islamic history and, particularly, to the question of succession after Prophet Muhammad. In this historical narrative, Umar رضي الله عنه occupied a crucial position: as the representative figure of Sunni tradition against Ali's رضي الله عنه representation of Shi'a claims. English writers thus learned about Umar رضي الله عنه not primarily from Islamic sources directly, but through the lens of Ottoman-Safavid rivalry and through European intermediaries who had themselves acquired this knowledge during their travels.

This pattern of knowledge acquisition demonstrates the situated and mediated nature of

<sup>59</sup> Alexander Ross, *Pansebeia, or, A View of All Religions in the World with the Severall Church-Governments from the Creation, to These Times: Also, a Discovery of All Known Heresies in All Ages and Places, and Choice Observations and Reflections throughout the Whole* (1655), 263.

<sup>60</sup> Ross, *Pansebeia, or, A View of All Religions in the World*, 167.

early modern English understanding of Islam. The knowledge about Umar رضي الله عنه that appears in English texts is not representative of how Islamic scholarship understood the second caliph; rather, it is shaped by the geopolitical interests and religious polemics of early modern Europe. Umar رضي الله عنه appears primarily as a conqueror and as a focal point of sectarian division rather than as the legal and administrative reformer celebrated in Islamic historiography. This selective representation reveals how early modern English writers constructed Islamic history in accordance with their own preoccupations—territorial expansion, sectarian conflict, and the nature of religious authority.

The attention to companions of the Prophet, and specifically to Umar رضي الله عنه, furthermore opens new avenues for understanding the construction of religious knowledge in the early modern period more broadly. Early modern English writers did not engage with Islam as a monolithic entity but negotiated its complexity through attention to internal divisions and historical personalities. The repetition across nearly two centuries of references to Umar رضي الله عنه, the debates about his spelling and his attributes, and the attempts to connect him to contemporary political figures and religious doctrines all suggest that Umar رضي الله عنه functioned as a figure through which early modern writers could organize and make sense of the Islamic world. His representation in English texts thus offers a valuable index of how European knowledge of the Islamic world was produced, transmitted, and transformed.

Future scholarship on early modern representations of Islam would benefit from sustained attention to the companions of the Prophet. Such attention would illuminate not only what early modern Europeans knew about Islamic history but also how they knew it—through what networks of exchange, through what intermediaries, and in service of what rhetorical and political ends. By examining the representations of figures like Umar رضي الله عنه alongside those of Prophet Muhammad himself, we gain a more nuanced understanding of early modern European engagement with Islamic civilization and a clearer sense of how religious difference was negotiated, understood, and deployed in the service of political and polemical purposes during the Renaissance and early modern period.

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