

Translating to Refute: Peter the Venerable, the *Qur'an*, and the Shaping of Christian Anti-Islamic Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This paper aims to analyze the project of Abbot Peter the Venerable to translate the *Qur'an* into Latin (*Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete*) with the help of his associates in Toledo in the beginning of 12th century. The paper focuses on Abbot Peter's approach of direct and scholarly translation and rationalized blasphemy as an alternative to the accepted medieval militaristic crusades and superficial invectives attempting to contrast Islamic scriptures with a rationalized rebuttal.

Methodology: The paper uses thematic and historical discourse analysis applied to the primary literary sources of *Toledan Collection* (*Collectio Toletana*). It classifies the most relevant texts, including *Summa Totius Haeresis Saracenorum* and *Contra Sectam Saracenorum*, explores translation practices, marginal annotations, and heresiological frameworks.

Findings: All of this is realized within the context of defense of the orthodox Christian faith, conceptualized Islam as a form of an earlier Christian heresy interpreted through the "false prophet", and constructed an image of Islam as antithetical to the true Christian faith. Peter's heretical interpretation of Islam as Christianity "in reverse" was presented with the help of numerous metaphorical descriptions and annotating comments filled with violent and vivid imagery. It was intended to help provide a certain degree of rational understanding of Islam while simultaneously keeping the doctrinal purity of the Christian religion.

Conclusion: Peter's project provided a scholarly and methodological basis for the later developments in critiques of Islam that would echo throughout Europe for centuries to come. The paper concludes that this medieval approach provides structural and conceptual foundation for contemporary "neo-Islamophobia"; a complex of systematically ingrained hostilities towards Islam encoded in the social, civic, and political frameworks of modern society.

Keywords: Peter the Venerable, *Qur'an*, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Polemics, Christian-Islamic Relations, Neo-Islamophobia.

Article History

Received:
July 12, 2026

Revised:
September 22, 2026

Accepted:
September 25, 2026

Online:
September 30, 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

The Christian polemics against Islam during the medieval times set an epoch in the 12th century through the works of Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny (c. 1092-1156). He produced polemics of the highest order on three dimensions of Islam, viz., Islam as an opposing religion to Christianity, the *Qur'an*, and the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). This paper primarily analyzes Peter's approach and strategies for refuting the *Qur'an*, which we assume is the distinctive methodological shift in interfaith discourse that warrants closer examination. Unlike many of his contemporaries who relied primarily on rhetorical invective, Peter developed a more sophisticated dual strategy that employed rational argumentation and scriptural exegesis to delegitimize Islamic scriptures by characterizing them as diabolical in origin and nature.

In terms of literature, one major initiative by Peter the Venerable was his translation of the *Qur'an* into Latin; he did so with assistance from Robert of Ketton. He finished the task in 1143. With the help of Robert of Ketton, the Latin translation of the *Qur'an*, which Robert designated as *Lex Mahumet* or *Lex Sarracenorum*, represented a milestone moment in Christian-Muslim scholarly interactions. This would be the first time that Latin-speaking scholars in Europe could read portions of the scriptures of Islam. Robert of Ketton did not merely translate the *Qur'an*, rather his work was polemic in both intent and scope. One example of this can be seen in his decision to alter the total number of chapters (Surahs) of the *Qur'an* from 114 to 123. The action of altering the chapter structure, among other things, appears to indicate an interpretive alteration of the text. In all likelihood, such an alteration was intended to portray the *Qur'an* in a way that furthered Christian theological views (Tolan et al., 2012).

As indicated previously, this effort was part of what became the *Toledan Collection*; a collection of Islamic scriptures and refutations possibly compiled by Peter of Poitiers, another assistant to Peter the Venerable. The *Toledan Collection* represents a historically important body of works. Although the manuscripts are housed at the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*, they represent the oldest known illuminated depiction of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). The illustrations contained in these manuscripts demonstrate how medieval Christian scholars used images (as well as texts) to present their portrayal of Islam; namely that Islam is a deviant theology and not a genuine belief system (Daniel, 1993).

For reasons discussed above, we will focus on the anti-Islamic literary efforts of Peter the Venerable, the ninth Abbots of Cluny, whose activities were crucial in shaping how Christians perceived Islam and its foundational principles during the Middle Ages. At the heart of our research lies Peter's pioneering work in producing a Latin version of the *Qur'an* dated back to 1143. This initiative is considered to be the first occasion the *Qur'an* was translated into any European language, an act that aimed to debunk Islam through literary and theological studies rather than mere verbal or physical confrontations.

Crucially, the present study will also uncover how curiosity and hostility mingled throughout the history of interfaith encounters between Christians and Muslims in Europe during the medieval period. Through meticulous translation of Islamic scriptures (most notably the *Qur'an*) and interpreting this linguistic phenomenon through the lens of Christian heresiologies, Peter managed to author a new breed of polemics that informed Europe's perception of Islam for centuries to come free of any intellectual or academic critique.

The main body of this investigation aims to explore how Peter the Venerable's polemical strategies departed from and complemented the tradition of the Christendom's anti-Islamic historiography. In particular, we have attempted to discover how the polemic used Islamic sources, specially the *Qur'an* and other literary works, to advance a more sophisticated and rhetorical critique of Islam and the *Qur'an* in particular.

This paper employs thematic and historical discourse analysis methods to categorize the primary literary sources used by Peter the Venerable in his polemical works. Also, it has been attempted to examine the

relationship between Peter and his chosen area of work, i.e., polemics against the *Qur'an*, specifically for this paper, and Islam more broadly. Such an axiological framework has rarely prompted critical examination on ethical and moral grounds for Peter as being an elder of Christianity and his work against the *Qur'an* and Islam. While, Peter's primary responsibility as a leading religious figure of his time was to propagate his religion and protect it against any forces aiming at undermining it.

2. PETER THE VENERABLE AND HIS ASSOCIATES: A HISTORICAL AND INTELLECTUAL PORTRAIT

Peter the Venerable (Pierre Maurice de Montboissier, c.1092-1156) was a prominent figure among 12th-century Christian monasticism. He became the ninth Abbot of the most prestigious monastery of Western Europe in Cluny in 1122, when he was just around 28 years old (Knowles, 1956). Hailing from a noble Auvergnat family with close ties to the founding fathers of the Cluny Monastery, Peter was introduced to monastic life at a young age. His mother, Raingarde, had even convinced the renowned Abbot of Cluny, St. Hugh, to bless her unborn child (Saurette, 2011). He was admitted to the monastic life when he was 17 and became a disciple of Abbot Hugh, which symbolically established a strong spiritual bond between Peter and the revered father figure. This illustrious heritage and early immersion in Benedictine life prepared Peter to lead the social and religious order at a critical juncture.

Upon becoming the Abbot of Cluny, Peter was faced with a massive monastic enterprise with approximately 300-400 monks at the Abbey and a network of some 2,000 dependent priories across Europe (Knight, 2017). Cluny Abbey was a central religious institution of on the broader European landscape. The Abbey's church was then the largest in Europe, and its library was second only to that of the Cathedral of Cologne, representing the culmination of two centuries of the Cluniac's legacy. However, at the time of Peter, the Abbey was in dire need of reforms, facing financial and disciplinary challenges. True to his nature, Peter took on the responsibility of restoring the Abbey by reforming the financial setup, restoring discipline, and promoting literacy levels within the Cluniac system. Notably, he defended the traditional Cluniac model of ornate liturgy and scholarship against the austere ideals of new orders like the Cistercians led by his friend and rival, Bernard of Clairvaux. Hardly had the new Abbot of Cluny assumed office when he ran into challenges from supporters of the new Cistercian way of life. Despite the opposition, Bernard of Clairvaux was the first to confer Peter with the honorific "Venerable". Even the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa would use this epithet in his lifetime to commend Peter (Crispin, 2003). Secular rulers and church leaders sought Peter's counsel, reflecting Cluny's continued prestige. The fact that the Emperor himself showed a deep admiration for Peter the Venerable was yet another proof of his exceptional standing among contemporaries. Overall, the Abbot of Cluny Peter the Venerable was a central religious figure of his generation who reformed and revitalized the famed Cluny Abbey and defended its autonomy against the rising Cistercian reform movement.

Cluny was in a disarrayed state when Peter assumed his role. Shortly after settling the Cluny's internal affairs, he turned to one of his time's most pressing intellectual and theological concerns, i.e., the growing presence and perceived doctrinal threat of Judaism and Islam. His first target in this regard was Judaism, which he did with great cogitation and strong dedication to Christian orthodoxy by fiercely challenging the authority of the *Talmud* and fundamental Judaic teachings. In this regard, his intellectual and scholastic contributions were significant theological opposition and defence.

While turning towards Islam, Peter's approach was much broader and more systematic than his previously polemical efforts against Judaism. Recognizing Islam's rapid expansion and intellectual depth, Peter took a strategic and collaborative approach. This inspired him to create a pool of highly acclaimed scholars of his time to translate the *Qur'an* and critically analyze key Islamic scriptures instead of tackling it alone. Such collective intellectual endeavor gave way to the creation of comprehensive Christian polemics with the aim of refuting Islam and its core doctrines. In this way, Peter contributed to a formative episode in developing medieval Christian-Muslim intellectual relations. This stupendous scholarly team, unparalleled in medieval Christian encounters with Islam, significantly differed from the earlier polemical

traditions that mulled over unauthentic and proxy sources (Tolan, 2002a). Peter the Venerable meticulously structured his critique, which Kritzeck (1964) calls "the first systematic attempt in medieval Christendom to study Islam through its own sources" (p. 56). His translation team consisted of five scholars with diverse expertise, who altogether had the linguistic and intellectual competence to tackle this ambitious, somewhat religious task.

Among the scholars, Peter of Toledo probably had played a leading role in the translation team assembled by Peter the Venerable in 1142. In addition to supervising the group's endeavors, he also added some insightful annotations to the translated texts; interpretative remarks that would subsequently serve as crucial scaffolding for Peter's polemical arguments against Islam (Lamb, 1993).

Others include Peter's confidant and able secretary, Peter of Poitiers, who collaborated closely with Peter of Toledo on the most significant tasks concerning revision and organization of what was later known as the *Toledan Collection*. His work extended far beyond mere compilation; instead, he occupied a pivotal position in shaping the theological structure of the *Summa Totius Haeresis Saracenorum* (Gázquez & Gray, 2007). Profound clarity and understanding of Peter the Venerable's theological views against Islam and the *Qur'an* enabled his ability to align the translation project with the broader polemic goals.

The group of translators included Robert of Ketton and Herman of Dalmatia; they were both regarded as two of the foremost thinkers of their time and the most influential intellectuals of the 12th century. The work of Robert of Ketton who translated the *Qur'an* into Latin is noted as being "paraphrastically" or "interpretively" rather than a direct literal translation of the original Arabic. However, his interactions with Islam's holy scriptures shaped the way in which European academia interacted with Islam's holy scripture, an activity that had a lasting impact upon both theological and academic discussions throughout history. In addition to translating the *Qur'an*, Robert also authored *Fabulae Saracenorum* or *Stories of the Muslims*. These stories provided a historical frame for his translations from the *Qur'an*. Therefore, he allowed Peter the Venerable to create a much more targeted critique (Burman, 2007).

Herman of Dalmatia, whom Peter described as a man of exceptional intellect and scholarship, translated the *Liber Generationis Mahumeth* and the *Doctrina Muhammad*. Both works provide details about the genealogy and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Thus, Herman's translations greatly aided Peter in creating his critical biographies of the Prophet (PBUH), providing a critical component to Peter's broader polemic against Islam (Kedar, 1984).

The fifth of the cohort was Muhammad, an Arab scholar about whom less is known; representing another interesting aspect of this translation venture. His participation demonstrates Peter's recognition of the need for native linguistic and cultural expertise, even if the project's ultimate goal was firmly polemical. According to Burman (2007), the inclusion of a Muslim scholar, though less is known about his religious identity, in a project fundamentally opposed to Islam highlights the complex intellectual exchanges that defined medieval interreligious dialogue.

This carefully formed group reflected Peter the Venerable's deep understanding that effective polemics required efficient engagement with primary sources of Islam. In organizing these translations, he demonstrated what Southern (1962) termed "a new intellectual seriousness" (p. 28) in Christian approaches to Islam as being more effective weapons of refutation of Islam than what crusaders had in the past.

3. SUMMARY OF TRANSLATIONAL WORK

Peter the Venerable commissioned the team in the 12th century that translated Islamic literature into Latin, albeit in its own way, to make Islamic doctrine and its Prophet (PBUH) appear demeaning to Westerners. Under Peter the Venerable's patronage, the five-member team produced a massive bundle of polemics, which is commonly known as *Collectio Toletana*, or the *Toledan Collection*. The *Toledan Collection* is a translated and interpreted work of the most influential Islamic literature, which appeared in five texts. It included, firstly, *Fabulae Saracenorum*, a tale explaining how the world was created, stories

of earlier prophets, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the first four caliphs (Burman, 2007). Secondly, *Liber Generationis Mahumeth* was a translation of *Kitāb Nasab Rasul-Allāh*, which recounts the story of a light (nūr Muḥammadī) being passed between generations of ancestors until its corporeal realization in the person of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Lamoreaux, 2013). Thirdly, *Doctrina Muhammad* was a translation of *Masā'il 'Abd-Allah b. Salām*, which was an apocryphal tale of four Jews posing questions to the Prophet (PBUH) and the latter's alleged responses, many of which are, at best, problematic theologically (Di Cesare, 2012). Fourthly, Ketton's translations of the *Qur'an*, which he titled *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete* (*The Law of the Pseudo-Prophet Muhammad*), provocatively. Fifthly, *Risālat al-Kindī*, an early Christian polemic against Islam, translated into Latin as the *Epistola Saraceni et Rescriptum Christiani* - fictional correspondence between a Muslim Abd-Allāh b. Ismā'il al-Hāshimī, and a Christian al-Kindī (Kritzeck, 1964).

Most poisonous literary and intellectual attacks on Islam and the Prophet (PBUH) by Peter the Venerable were titled *Summa Totius Haeresis Saracenorum* (*A Summary of Entire Heresy of the Saracens*, hereinafter written as *Summa*) and *Contra Sectam Saracenorum* (*Against the Sect of the Saracens*, hereinafter would be written as *Contra*) (Tolan, 2002a; Kritzeck, 1964). In *Summa*, Peter produced extreme polemics against Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by proving him to be a pseudo-prophet and Islam as a summation of Christian (and Judaic) heresies. At the same time, in *Contra*, which he completed in 1155-56 just before he died in 1156, he contrived to establish the supremacy of *Bible* and Christianity over *Qur'an* and Islam. He declared his work as a bulwark to the Church against the heretic views of Islam and believed that the pagans must be opposed through (written) polemics. It is important to note that Peter was methodical to the extent most in his approach to fighting against Islam. His attempts focused on his audience; hence, he wrote separately for the Christians to prevent them from embracing Islam (like *Summa*) and for Muslims and others to join Christianity (like *Contra*), wherein he tried to make Muslims read his arguments impartially as *Qur'an* itself testifies and authenticates Christian scripture.

Peter the Venerable ushered and introduced a turning point in Christian-Islam relations. Though polemical in nature, he was ambitious, methodic, and intellectual in his engagement with Islam. Unlike most of his predecessors, whose works were more often superficial encounters and based on hearsay, Peter's initiative laid a solid textual groundwork for a polemical campaign grounded in direct, though biased, readings of Islamic sources. For the five translations, as mentioned above, he prudently constituted a team with a carefully structured intellectual framework designed to contextualize and subsequently refute Islamic doctrine on multiple fronts (Kritzeck, 1964).

As noted by Peter, all five texts described different aspects of an Islamic tradition. Specifically: (1) doctrinal exposition; (2) genealogical information about prophets; (3) biographical narratives; and (4) scriptural revelation. The fourfold strategy used here exemplifies the sophistication of understanding in relation to interlocking textual authorities that comprised Islamic religious identity that Tolan (2002a) has referred to. In *Contrast* to a focus on a singular source, Peter examined a wide variety of central Islamic texts and was aware of the complexity of Islamic theology and self-identity. His objective was to provide a complete criticism of the fundamental beliefs of Islam, while simultaneously demonstrating his awareness of the internal consistency and complexity of Islamic intellectual traditions.

4. STRATEGIES EMPLOYED

At the heart of Peter the Venerable's translation initiative was a pursuit of scholarly understanding; the same impulses that drove his desire to destroy Islam. Peter's metaphorical comparison of Arabic to a "lethal virus" that has infected "half the world" indicates how aggressively anti-Islamic his stance was, yet still he reached out to Islamic texts with unparalleled intellectual openness (Resnick, 2016, p. 72). This rhetorical characterization of Islam as a force capable of spreading itself across vast territories and yet simultaneously rendering those territories ill through a medical metaphor of contagion/infestation

(Burman, 2007), demonstrates a deep level of animosity towards Islam in addition to recognizing the tremendous success it had achieved in its own right.

While many of the themes in Peter's writing about Islam are characterized by intense anti-Islamic sentiment, Peter understood that any successful polemical project could be accomplished through means beyond the scope of simply misrepresenting and/or simplistically characterizing the objects. Therefore, he decided to construct an organized collection of translations and as Kedar (1984) points out demonstrate his recognition that any effective polemical project will have to take seriously the substance of Islamic thought instead of relying on fanciful hearsay. In raising the cohort of translators, including scholars such as Herman of Dalmatia and Robert of Ketton, both of whom possess considerable linguistic and philosophical training, Peter made clear his commitment to developing a substantial body of texts as part of his polemical project.

Peter employed antagonistic and rational techniques. He paired severe vitriol with meticulous research. When denouncing the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), as "the damned soul", he constructed a detailed account of the Prophet's birth, teachings, and law (Jenkins, 2007, p. 406). Thus, we see a fundamental inconsistency in Peter's polemical endeavor. As noted by Tolan (2002a), Peter's initiative represented a watershed moment when Christian polemical goals prompted previously unheralded scholarly examination of Islamic texts to create an intellectually informed and systemically hostile environment toward Islam. The juxtaposition of vituperative speech and careful funding, along with careful scholarship illustrate the numerous motives behind medieval Christians' attempts to engage Islam.

As observed by Burman (2007), Peter's strategic integration of virulent language and carefully developed methodology, exemplifies the dynamics between the intellectual and ideologically-based components of interfaith discourse during the Middle Ages. Therefore, Peter produced a textual anthology that used Islamic scriptures not to understand them on their own terms but to reimagine them within a polemical Christian context. The use of Islamic textual resources as a polemical tool is a radical paradigmatic shift in the manner in which Christians interacted with Muslim thought during the Medieval period, as it created a teleology where scholarship existed to facilitate religious domination. It was with the Latin translation of the *Qur'an* in 1143 that Christian interaction with Islamic scripture transitioned to a new level of engagement based on a simultaneous desire to reject and understand Islam's most sacred divinely revealed source. This dual goal has gone on to redefine the intellectual and methodological process by which Christian scholars interact with Islam.

It was Peter's conviction that any criticism must begin with understanding of the subject/target that distinguished his approach from previous polemicists. Consequently, Peter took direct action against Islamic scriptures and introduced a new kind of methodological thinking by combining rational analytical procedures with scripture-based authority. Peter's novelty has had an impact on Christian apologetics and interfaith discourse up to the early modern period. Despite Peter's conclusion that non-Christian texts were diabolical in origin, Peter's process offered an essential turning point in the intellectual history of Christian-Muslim relations (Burman, 2007).

At the heart of Peter's theological assaults on Islam was the doctrine of the Trinity; what he believed was the central issue separating Christianity and Islam. Despite the fact that this matter had been addressed by Christian-Muslim disputants previously (such as Al-Kindi's 9th-century apologetic works), Peter elevated this division to become a singularly definitive polemical focus. Essentially, Peter's arguments revolved primarily around Islam's unwillingness to accept the Triune nature of God, thereby rendering its theology as incomplete. Because Muslims claimed to be monotheistic but lacked complete knowledge of God's essence, they were mired in theological ignorance. For Peter, the Trinity (the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit) was not only the article of faith but also a ground for everything that was created and every single truth that came from the heart of God. By rejecting the Trinity, Muslims are lost in the dark (Tolan et al., 2012; Burman, 1994).

5. THEOLOGICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PETER'S POLEMICS

Peter the Venerable's commitment to the reasoned debate about the use of violent suppression is seen in his *Contra Sectam Saracenorum* (Against the Sect of Saracens), in which he painstakingly tries to debunk Islam as a divinely revealed religion. Although maintaining a polemical tone, Peter's work veered from direct attacks to engaging and ultimately undermining Islam through its texts. In following this objective with his team, Peter pioneered a new text-based strategy to critiquing Islam. This was, indeed, a new trend in 12th-century Europe to use scholarship to fight off non-Christian faiths, not merely blanket denunciation (Burnett, 2011).

However, it could be considered as being tolerant of Islam, but, all of Peter's efforts were deeply embedded in Christian supremacy. To him, Islam was a sister faith but a theological aberration in dire need of correction. His prime objective was to supplant Islamic doctrine with that of Christianity. Like earlier Christian heresiologists, he employed well-structured arguments to unveil perceived theological flaws. Paradoxically, in advocating the study of the *Qur'an*, Peter unintentionally facilitated a more profound and sustained European engagement with Islamic thought, an outcome with long-term repercussions for Christian intellectual history (Luscombe, 1997).

Peter based his critique on an in-depth examination of the *Qur'an*. He compared and contrasted a number of selected passages from the *Qur'an* and the *Bible*, seeking to identify contradictions that would expose the *Qur'an*'s errors. However, in the Christian interpretation of scripture, which views the *Bible* as the only true word of God, contradictions cannot exist or, if they do, they must be attributed to some form of deviation or deception. According to Burman (2018), Peter's approach created a context within which discrepancies between the Islamic and the Christian *Bibles* were interpreted as an active attempt by Satan to mislead the readers. Therefore, Peter's reasoning was that Islam was not an intrinsically false religion but rather a corrupted version of the true faith.

Peter's theological debates against the Muslim beliefs are most evident in his *Contra Sectam Saracenorum* where he used both philosophical argumentation and scripture analysis to dispute many of the Islamic beliefs. He concluded that Gabriel did not inspire Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), but rather was the instrument for a demonic spirit to deceive this prophet (Kritzeck, 1964). Medieval Christians were very aggressive in their attacks on other religions, including Islam. To be sure, the attack on Judaism was no less severe. In his *Adversus Iudaeorum inveteratam duritiem* (Against Jewish stubbornness), Peter made the same type of argument when he claimed the *Talmud* was a distorted version of the original biblical writings (Abulafia & Abulafia, 2013). Peter viewed error in religion as needing to be systematically attacked through reason and methodical *Contradiction* (Kedar, 2019).

It is precisely this structure, the rigorous systematization of polemics that marks Peter's innovation. According to Kritzeck (2015), Peter's endeavours are the first systematic attempt of Latin Christianity to understand Islamic texts before attacking them. To do so, he started *Cluniac Corpus* which included the *Qur'an* and a series of explanatory texts to help the Christian readers understand the unfamiliar Islamic theological landscape.

Peter was deeply inimical to the Islamic accusation of previous religious scriptures as being distorted and corrupted (the Islamic word for this concept is *Tahrif*). *Talmud* and the *Bible* were under this jurisdiction and were considered by Islam to be *Tahrif*-ed scriptures. Islamic scholars like Al-Tabari and Ibn Hazm have argued that Jews and Christians have tampered with their holy books to hide the prophecies of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Peter answered it with polemic spin that it was actually the *Qur'an* which was corrupted. Rather than being a divinely safeguarded revelation, Peter depicted the *Qur'an* as a patchwork of distortions from Christian and Jewish sources. His account established the *Bible* as a scriptural purity and an ultimate criterion of divine truth (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1992).

In *Contra*, Peter attempted to polemically outwit the discussion in order to establish the theological and textual supremacy of the *Bible* over the *Qur'an*, the main theme of his polemic vision. On the one hand, it reasserted the *Bible* as God's pure and unchangeable word. On the other, it was intended to discredit Islam's foundational text as an unreliable and fake scripture. Burman (2007) proclaims this to be the most effective strategy by Peter aimed at enhancing the Christian religious identity in a post-Crusade world, which was increasingly characterized by cross-cultural encounters.

a. Framing Islam as a Heretical and Cultural Threat

Simultaneously, Peter the Venerable's translation initiative performed an internal function in addition to an external polemical one. Although the target audience for these works was Islam, they were specifically created to promote and affirm Christian identity. Thus, as noted by Tolan (2002a), the presentation of Islamic texts was structured in such a way that it both demarcated and reinforced Christian identity (and therefore Christian orthodoxy) by contrasting it with a demonized "other" religion.

Therefore, while the *Qur'an* itself and its accompanying literature were utilized as sources of study, they were ultimately transformed into homiletic tools - tools designed to inoculate Christian communities against what was viewed as theologically "contagious" elements of Islam. The strategic manner in which this work was presented is indicative of how pedagogy and polemic can be employed together. His Latin translation of the *Qur'an* and composition of the *Summa Totius Haeresis Saracenorum* (Summary of the Entire Heresy of the Saracens), the first systematic Latin refutation of Islamic theology, signaled an unprecedented theological intervention. Labeling Islam a monstrous 'hybrid' by Peter the Venerable was not just an intriguing rhetoric (Jenkins, 2007). Instead, it fits a medieval Christian tradition of seeing Islam as Frankenstein's monster of Jewish and Christian beliefs and not a genuine revelation (Daniel, 1993). This let Peter 'debunk' Islam by treating it as Christianity's distorted shadow, which was much easier to attack than an exclusively separate faith.

In fact, the core of Peter's polemical approach was that Islam was the last, and the most dangerous Christian heresy. In portraying Islam as the ultimate source of theological wrong, he established a religious hierarchy, with Christianity being the complete religion, and Islam being the ultimate embodiment of doctrinal failure. It is a part of an older medieval heresiological tradition, which involved drawing theological opponents into a larger system of already condemned groups (Southern 1962).

The study of Peter's interaction with Islam is important because of the intellectual nature of his approach to Islam. It is important to note that though Peter's scholarly work is relevant to his understanding of Islam as an intellectual challenge, it is only one aspect of his engagement with Islam. At its core, Peter's battle plan represented a sense of Christian responsibility based upon a Scriptural mandate. Peter calls on the Apostle Paul, (2 Cor. 10:5), in almost all of his writing, to quote Paul, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (Lee, 2024). Peter's conception of his polemical work is that of being a Theological Mandate, not just a scholarly task. In confronting Islam, Tolan (2002a) suggests that Peter's strategy fits into the general pattern of Christian apologetics, which was to attack doctrine-based errors aggressively and with intellectual rigor (Kritzeck, 1964, p. 43). As such, Peter's linguistic and intellectual critiques can be seen as expressions of Spiritual Warfare.

Peter's intense rhetoric makes it clear that he was engaged in a verbal crusade. Peter urges his readers to "combat, destroy, and crush... every knowledge that exalts itself against the height of God" (Kritzeck, 1964, p. 43). Such language leaves no doubt that there will be no compromise or reconciliation with what Peter perceives to be wrongheaded theological ideas. Such language aligns perfectly with the militant spirit of Christianity during the time of the Crusades and the Reconquista (Daniel, 1993; Burman, 1994). Peter's polemics were therefore, a larger call to arms, not just to fight on battlefields, but in the libraries, scriptoria, and universities throughout Christian Europe.

Peter knew that Muslim scholarship had been coming into the European Christian intellectual environment through translations and other routes in places like Spain. He knew that it was creating an

internal threat to Christianity. His continued demands for further polemics against Islamic thought show that he knew that Muslims could not be left in their lands anymore; it had become part of the common pool of intellectual and theological space among Christians. Thus, the translation programme initiated by Peter the Venerable was a master plan for Christians to refute and vanquish Islam. He wanted to wage a protracted battle against Islamic thought within Christian Europe; one that will be carried out by the scholars of the future generations (Griffith, 2013). The burden of refuting was not just for Peter but for the future generations of Christian scholars.

b. Christological Divergence and the Limits of Heresiological Categorization

One of the important points of theological divergence that Peter the Venerable tackled was the Islamic doctrine of *shirk*, the unforgivable sin of associating partners with God. In Islamic theology, *shirk* starkly contrasts the absolute oneness of God (*tawhid*), and it is repeatedly emphasized in the *Qur'an* that it is an unpardonable offense unless repented before death (*Qur'an* 4:116 says, "Indeed, Allah does not forgive associating partners with Him, but He forgives anything less than that for whom He wills. And whoever associates partners with Allah has certainly strayed far away"). Peter exploited what he saw to be ambiguities in the *Qur'anic* portrayal of God, such as the use of plurals in divine speech. Christian theologians had always taken these plurals as indicators of the Trinity, but Islamic exegetes understood them as expressions of divine majesty, not essence. Nevertheless, Peter polemically utilized this feature to argue that Muslims, in denying the Trinity, were inadvertently bearing witness to its truth (Reynolds, 2020).

Peter had focused so much on Islam denying the Trinity that Peter began an attempt to create a divide between Christianity and Islam through translations. He then claimed Islam to be a defective religion because of the superiority of Christianity. Peter did not lazily dismiss Islam, but he invested a systematic approach in translating Scripture in order to disprove Islam. Peter's views created concepts that would guide and direct the criticisms of Christians towards Islam for many generations to come. For the scholars of the next few hundred years, the Trinity ceased to be just another doctrine; it became the line that separated salvation and heresy.

But, Peter, who was so sure of the rightness of Christian Orthodoxy, demonstrated a very peculiar case of uncertainty about where to place Islam. In his *Contra Sectam Saracenorum* (Against the Sect of the Saracens), Peter was given a conceptual obstacle in the form of a classification of Islam as a Christian heresy or as a totally new kind of paganism? Here, the question of classification was not just a semantic one. Instead, it was a reflection of larger methodological and theological issues relating to the definition of heresy during the Middle Ages. Heresy in the past meant holding to beliefs contrary to those of Christianity. It was said that those who had been members of the faith had "strayed" away from the right teaching. Islam, however, had come out of the confines of the church, making its assimilation to the traditional understanding difficult (Tolan, 2002b).

While tackling this challenge, Peter came up with a unique and broad, but not very convincing definition of heresy. According to him, anyone who stubbornly rejects any part of orthodox belief, whosoever they are, whether Christians or Muslims, could be branded as a heretic. By this logic, Islam that denies some core Christian beliefs deserves to be labeled as heresy and its followers as heretics. Nonetheless, he seemed less convinced and hesitated to follow his designed approach. His admission that he could not clearly decide whether the Mohammedan error must be called a heresy and its followers heretics or whether they are to be called pagans is a clear indication of the conceptual strain of forcing Islamic theology into Christian categories. Nonetheless, outright rejection of the Trinity and Incarnation by Islam made it absolutely impossible for it to find any space in the Christian orthodoxy (Daniel, 1993).

As mentioned earlier, Peter saw Islam as a dangerous mimic that praised Jesus and his miracles but denied his divinity, borrowing numerous Christian concepts while stripping their meaning. He saw it as a disagreement and a deception, a counterfeit faith designed to hollow out Christianity's core truths (Kritzeck, 1964; Daniel, 1993). By highlighting this selective agreement of Islam with Christianity, like

Jesus as the "Spirit of God" and "Word" but denying his divinity, Peter fortified his argument by saying that Islam was a warped imitation, but a spiritual knockoff designed to trick believers by mimicking truth while gutting its core. He spotlighted this paradox by arguing that Islam was not an honest rival. It was a wolf in theological sheep's clothing (Daniel, 1993).

c. Enduring Legacy of the Cluniac Translation Project

It is ironic that Robert of Ketton's *Lex Mahumet*; a book designed primarily to disprove Islam, eventually provided Western Europeans with one of their first and most significant introduction to Islamic thought and led many Christians from disdain to begrudging curiosity about Muslim beliefs. Moreover, it created the foundation for subsequent, albeit hostile, theological and legal understandings of Islam among Western Christians. The double-edged nature of distortion (as well as access) would continue to shape how Western Christians interacted with Muslims over the next several centuries.

The development of Peter the Venerable's work has to be viewed within the larger context of this duality. Peter recognized that the confrontation of ideas between Christian and Muslim theologians was not adequately addressed merely by force. Therefore, Peter's intellectual endeavors were a precursor to later scholastic dialogues between Muslim philosophers and lawmakers and Christian thinkers. In fact, Peter positioned the use of reason-based argumentation as a complementary tool to military struggle (Hames, 2000). Ultimately, Peter established a dual-strategy for dealing with Islam; namely, to provide Christians with the authoritative knowledge of Islamic teaching in order to dismantle those teachings through argument and persuasion instead of solely relying on conquest. Thus, Peter encouraged Christians to focus their efforts toward the conversion of Muslims through both understanding and structured criticism. A central component of this strategy was the Latin translation of the *Qur'an*, *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete*. The *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete* was used as the framework for Peter's larger polemical project, *Contra Sectam Saracenorum*, aimed at establishing Christianity as superior to Islam and demonstrating the latter to be based on defective doctrine (Tolan et al., 2012).

One of the main themes that ran throughout Peter's critiques of Islam concerned the issue of the crucifixion, a foundational element of Christian soteriology and the single most important area of difference between Islamic and Christian theology. According to the *Qur'anic* account of Surah 4:157 ("That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah"; but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not"); which denies that Jesus was crucified presented a direct contradiction to Christian views on salvation history. For Peter, the rejection of the cross by Muslims; therefore, rendered Islam not only wrong theologically but opposed to God (Daniel, 1993). In addition, by portraying Islam as a heretic deviant from orthodoxy rather than a parallel faith system, Peter allowed Christian theologians to employ traditional heresiological techniques to deal with what they perceived as a dangerous and fundamentally flawed religious doctrine (d'Avray, 2010).

Moreover, ironically enough, the very same mechanisms put forward by Peter to refute Islam would open up new, unexplored avenues for debate. In particular, Peter's translation initiative was a departure from prevailing medieval trends concerning rumour and/or misrepresentations of foreign religions, specifically Islam. With the Peter's translation initiative, Christendom finally had access to fundamental Islamic scriptures although through the lens of polemical interpretation. Ultimately, it is this combative approach which resulted in an unforeseen consequence: transformation in serious scholarly debates regarding Islamic thought. In essence, what began as polemics evolved into a richer and more complex exchange of views regarding Islamic thought.

Peter's initiative has had lasting effects. As Iqbal (2009) points out, the *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete* not only converted Arabic into Latin; however, it also embedded Christian bias in the texts thereby limiting all future European perspectives on Islam in terms of a polemical paradigm for hundreds of years. The *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete* reinterpreted *Qur'anic* language as a means of reinforcing Christian

theological issues while simultaneously providing scholars with exposure to Islamic cosmology, ethics and scripture in a sustained textual manner. This critically mediated understanding characterized by critique became a defining lens through which Islam would be understood in Europe for generations.

Moreover, Peter used other sophisticated rhetorical tactics that helped to broaden the range of influence of Peter's polemic. Unlike the previous polemics against Islam, which were based on common-place tropes, Peter used what Kedar (1984) calls the rhetorical strength of seemingly insider criticism, i.e., he cited the criticism of the tradition itself, giving his own criticism a kind of inside justification or authority. This intensified the impact of Peter's criticisms, and proved to be a stroke of genius in his long game plan using scholarship as a weapon.

It was not only a turning point for polemics, but also for Christian scholarship itself, the translation project. Peter's willingness to confront Islamic texts was revolutionary, as opposed to any Christian writing on Islam prior to his, which was based on misinformation caricatures. Another layer of scholarship was added when Robert of Ketton joined in. Also known for his works in astronomy and mathematics, Ketton's engagement in the translation of the *Qur'an* was an indication of a desire to understand Islam's intellectual tradition. Though Ketton is credited for being the first to use "sinus" in its trigonometric sense (Hogendijk & Sabra, 2003), his legacy is the area of theological translation.

In a nutshell, Peter the Venerable's initiative to translate Islamic scriptures was an attempt, primarily, to attack Islam, which in turn, opened up new ways in which to study, question, and engage with ideas beyond their theological traditions. By providing access to Islamic texts, albeit through a critical lens, he paved the way for more meaningful understandings of Islam in the medieval and early modern periods. The very attempt to dismantle Islamic theology would ironically ensure that it could no longer be ignored or misrepresented.

6. THE LATIN-TRANSLATED *QUR'AN*: ANNOTATION AND MARGINALIA

Peter translated the *Qur'an* to provide Christian scholars with a means to attack Islam and to enable them to dissect Islam's core text. By providing access to the *Qur'an* in Latin, he transformed polemics into a scholarly arena in which Islam could be 'proven' wrong line by line. Unlike the Crusaders who aimed to combat Islam through military conquests, Peter advocated an intellectual confrontation, arguing that knowledge of the *Qur'an* would provide a more effective way to refute its doctrines (d'Avray, 2010). This was innovative since medieval Christian writings on Islam were largely based upon secondary sources or polemical distortions rather than any direct engagement with Islamic texts (Goddard, 2000).

What was Robert of Ketton's role in Peter the Venerable's crusade against Islam? Robert of Ketton's work on translation of the *Qur'an*, *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete* (Law of the Pseudo-Prophet Muhammad) provided Western Christianity with an understanding of Islamic scripture for nearly five hundred years (Bobzin, 1996). What distinguished Robert from other translators was his attempt to translate the *Qur'an* using clarity rather than literal accuracy. This is an indication of his desire to make the *Qur'an* accessible to the western world, as well as his willingness to adapt his translation in such a way that the ideas contained in the *Qur'an* could be understood in a manner that would aid the battle to preserve Christianity.

Not only did Robert alter the translations of parts of the *Qur'an*, Peter the Venerable also constructed marginal annotations that interpreted the passages from the *Qur'an* as being diabolically inspired and subversive to Christian beliefs. These marginal comments functioned as interpretative devices, which were designed to have an influence on how the reader viewed Islam. Marginal comments were utilized as a way in which to indicate how Judaism and Christianity had been corrupted. Therefore, *Lex Mahumet* was not only a translation of the *Qur'an*, but it was also a tool used by Peter and his fellow clergymen to demonstrate the supremacy of Christian doctrine. Furthermore, it provided clergy members and missionaries with material to use when refuting Islam (Burman, 2007).

The Latin translation of the *Qur'an* by Peter the Venerable, along with the work done by his associates, provides a clearer picture of not only what type of information about Islam was available during the twelfth century, but how the Christian community interpreted and presented this information. The marginalia found in many of the manuscripts from this time provide evidence of a sophisticated system of interpretation used by Christian scholars when evaluating non-Christian religions.

As mentioned above, Peter's *Cluniac Corpus* contains examples of what modern scholars call "guided" readings. In guided readings, paratexts (the surrounding text) influence readers toward certain interpretations. Many of the margins found in Peter's manuscripts contain commentary that describe the *Qur'anic* passages as "diabolical" based on Peter's classification of theological errors (Tolan, 2002a, p. 156). The annotation is systematic in labeling various passages from the *Qur'an* and encourages the monks to view them through a Christian lens. Additionally, these annotations guide the monk to view the *Qur'an* as a corrupt form of theology.

Additionally, some of the techniques employed in the annotations can be seen as an example of rhetoric. Through repeated references to "note", "remember" etc., the annotations present a cumulative impression of deviance from Christian orthodoxy. The metaphors used in these annotations do more than simply criticize a competing religion. Instead, they represent defense strategies developed to protect Christianity from exposing Islamic doctrine. These annotations allowed Christians to read about and study Islam and its central scriptures while maintaining a level of protection for their faith (Burman, 2007).

Furthermore, Peter's annotated *Qur'an* serves two purposes: a scholarly pursuit and a theological attack (Tolan, 2002a). While providing a novel opportunity for studying Islamic texts in their own context, the marginal commentaries illustrate the limits placed upon such an engagement. These marginal commentaries serve as an example of what Burman (2007) calls "hermeneutical containment" (Tolan, 2002b, p. 156; Burman, 2007). Hermeneutical containment is a technique used to contain potentially dangerous religious texts by framing them in ways that prevent them from challenging existing beliefs (Sharkey, 2017).

While limited in their ability to provide insight into their original intent, Peter's marginally annotated copies of the *Qur'an* demonstrate how medieval Christian scholars were able to manage the tension caused by exposure to foreign, highly developed theological systems. Burman (2021) states that Peter's extremely aggressive marginal polemics indicate that he recognized that the *Qur'an* itself possessed a unique power as a religious text and therefore needed to be explicitly diminished through marginal commentary.

Peter's marginalia and other forms of annotation he made to the *Qur'an* have formed a model for later Christians' engagement with Islamic literature. He has influenced all scholarly and polemic responses to Islamic literature throughout the early modern period. Peter's margins are, obviously, not a second-hand source for understanding Muslim literature; they were likely a first-hand source for many readers who needed to quickly or easily get an idea about what is being said in the scripture. Peter had devised an extraordinary intellectual approach to get Christian readers interested in Islam in a very highly managed environment.

7. METAPHORS AND DEMONOLOGICAL RHETORIC IN PETER'S POLEMICS

Peter the Venerable's labeling of the *Qur'an* as a regurgitation of old heresies, and nearly all the filth of the old heresies which the devil has delivered unto the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), is indicative of the intense vitriolic nature and graphic metaphorical expressions employed by medieval Christian polemicists. Peter's characterization of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), as someone who drank in the errors of earlier heresies and then repeated them, was used to place Islam within a theological pedigree of condemned Christian sects, i.e., Arians and Nestorians. These sects have long been criticized for their aberrations from orthodoxy regarding Christology. When Peter labeled the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as "diabolo imbuente", (inspired by the devil) he did not simply label him a heretic, but

transformed him into a symbol of Satan's deception (Burman, 1994). The motivation for such accusations was by no means exclusively theological; they offered a pretext for centuries of political antagonism towards Islam. Although these statements can be regarded as entirely polemical, Peter's accusations were to some extent based on facts.

Early Islam emerged in conversation with several Christian sects, including Monophysites and Nestorians. However, Peter's use of this context was meant to collapse Islam into the category of heresy rather than create greater historical awareness. According to Goddard (2000), by making this maneuver, Peter eliminated Islam's uniqueness and cast it as a perversion of divine revelation instead of another Abrahamic faith. If Islam was not new, but an ultimate degradation of past heresies, then it could be countered with traditional Christian arguments against prior heresies. The ferocity of Peter's characterization was intentional. His use of harsh and frequently scatological imagery was done deliberately so as to evoke revulsion and emphasize the difference between Christians and Muslims (Southern, 1962). This illustrated a common characteristic of medieval Christian discourse regarding physical degradation and derogatory depictions of religious enemies. Clichés employed to describe enemies of the faith fulfilled both theological and psychological functions to demonstrate the purity of Christian doctrine when compared to the perceived spiritual dirtiness of others (Daniel, 1993). Although Peter advocated for the study of Islam through translation, his characterization of the *Qur'an* as a demonic regurgitation illustrates that his polemics were motivated by existing theological animosity rather than objective investigation (Burman, 1994).

Even when dealing with non-biblical prophetic figures in the *Qur'an*, Peter's comments and explanations represented a form of theological censorship in which he labelled non-Biblical figures as demons and their teachings deceitful Satanic representations instead of true heavenly revelations (Griffith, 2007). As Kedar (2019) noted, the demonological framework that marked medieval Christian scholarly work enabled Christian scholars to note similar forms of formal argumentation between Christian and Islamic claims for revelation whilst categorically denying the legitimacy or authenticity of those Muslim claims.

When discussing stories that are shared between the *Qur'an* and the *Bible*, Peter consistently argued that the *Qur'anic* versions of figures like Abraham and Noah were corrupted imitations of their biblical counterparts. Peter's interpretations represent a continued pattern in Christian polemics literature in which the *Qur'an* is represented as a perverted version of sacred history, rather than a legitimate alternative theological account (Tolan, 2002a). He denied that the *Qur'an* was an original source of religious truth and claimed that the *Bible* was exclusively authoritative because Christianity alone had dominion over divine truth, a position based upon the polemical heritage of earlier writers such as John of Damascus (Griffith, 2013).

Peter attempted to encapsulate his loathing for Islam using symbolic language when he described it as "the cloacaal stream of dissent" (Uebel, 1996). This illustration framed Islam as a polluted mix of Christianity and positioned Islam as attacking the very essence of the Christian faith. As with other illustrations employed in anti-heretical polemic, Peter's metaphors were employed in order to cement Christian identity by presenting other religions as corrupt hybrids (Burman, 1994). In addition, Peter's metaphors served two purposes; expressing theological ideas and stirring Christian sentiment against Islamic thought (Griffith, 2013).

In *Contrast*, Riccoldo da Monte di Croce expanded on this tradition of venomous speech in stating that Islam was "the excrement of all ancient heresies"; a statement that echoed Peter's words but went beyond them. For Riccoldo, there was no original content offered by the Prophet (PBUH) of Islam; instead he collated past heresies into one final perversion. This argument, which traced back to John of Damascus' classification of Islam as a form of Arianism, served to totally erase the distinctiveness of Islam. Riccoldo's framing was even more aggressive than that of Peter's depicting Islam as heretical and a concentrated essence of all theological deviance (Hoyland, 1997). Besides, he lamented why Islam remained unchallenged by the Church for over five centuries. His metaphor of Islam as "the flower of that

perverse sectarian doctrine, covering up a scorpion" reveals the fear that Islam's intellectual sophistication was a covering for the deeper spiritual danger (Kritzeck, 1964, p. 64). Here, Islam is portrayed as being seductively attractive but ultimately poisonous and must be unmasked and opposed before it ensnares the faithful (Burman, 1994).

The most infamous metaphoric phrase that Peter used to describe Islam was "the sludge of all heresies" (*hac fece universarum heresum*) (Moudarres, 2014). For Peter, Islam was not a rival religion but a toxic spew of old heresies that would sway Christianity away if not countered jingoistically from all possible fronts. This framing aligns closely with the overall medieval Christian strategy of heresiology, which sought to assimilate non-Christian traditions into a taxonomy of error. Burman (1994) stresses that these are descriptive and prescriptive arguments, which guide Christians on how they might approach Islam theologically.

8. CONCLUSION

Peter the Venerable's 12th-century scholarly translation endeavor of the *Qur'an* via his *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete*, carried out in collaboration with other translators/scholars, was not simply an effort of neutral scholarship. Rather, it was a strategic theological weapon used to strip Islam of all legitimacy by portraying it as a distorted version of Christian heresy.

He continued this effort with other written materials such as *Contra Sectam Saracenorum* (Against the Sect of the Saracens) and *Summa Totius Haeresis Saracenorum* (A Summary of All Heresy of the Saracens). He gave a multi-layered critique of Islam; not only was it wrong, Peter said Islam was heretical, deceptive and devilish.

The approach employed by Peter was neither arbitrary nor singular. Peter's writings played a significant role in the development of the polemical form of engagement with Islam that was to dominate for many centuries that followed. Peter framed Islamic beliefs not as a legitimate alternate theological system which deserved dialogue and exchange but rather it was an aberration that needed to be unmasked, contradicted, and destroyed. The intent behind Peter's methodology were scholarly in practice yet aggressive in design based upon the conviction that Christianity should both protect and cleanse itself through definition of Islam as its antithetical doctrine.

The long-term impact of Peter's project was not just a reflection of his beliefs on Islam during his lifetime, but of what he set as norms in the many years that followed. With the rigour of his logical formulation of polemics, it became institutionalized in many facets of theology and ecclesiastical practices, and even evolved into different forms of polemical writing. It was still kept in the monastery walls. It developed into an integral part of European consciousness.

The above mentioned legacy is not solely related to historical periods. The polemical efforts initially instituted by Peter in the twelfth century have grown into a broader societal phenomenon in novel and intensified ways today. As such, this paper provides a description of the present state using the term neo-Islamophobia: a climate of systematic distrust, aversion, and hostility towards Islam that is greater than simple individual bias but a fundamental aspect of the way Islam is understood within the frameworks of religious, civic, social, and political systems.

In contrast to classical Islamophobia which could be described as being based in ignorance or fear; neo-Islamophobia is significantly more organized and intellectually formulated. Neo-Islamophobia emerged as a result of texts similar to Peter's and their inclusion within Western theological and philosophical institutions. Therefore, the process of reproducing neo-Islamophobia can occur generationally. Neo-Islamophobia occurs in multiple domains, i.e., media, politics, education, law and daily civic existence. Thus, neo-Islamophobia represents a climate/an invisible structure through which Muslim identity is conceptualized, through which Qur'ānically based discourses are interpreted and through which Islam exists within Western consciousness (Tariq & Iqbal, 2023).

Although created for a particular era in history, Peter's polemical strategy served as one of the foundational elements in establishing this larger system. By translating the *Qur'an* not to understand it but to expose and denounce it; Peter permanently turned the Islamic text into an item of suspicion. Although Peter's metaphors (i.e., Islam as "the sludge of heresies", Muhammad as a vessel of demonic deception), although dating back to medieval times; these metaphors continued to resound, either directly or indirectly, in subsequent works, sermons and academic analyses. Furthermore, they assisted in establishing the epistemological bounds through which Islam will continue to be examined and controlled.

We are observing in modern times, not a new conflict but an expansion upon the initial endeavors of Peter. In today's digitally saturated and media-orientated world, Peter's polemical tropes have not only survived but increased in intensity. Debates that rage about whether Islam is a threat to western civilization or whether certain passages from the *Qur'an* should be read out-of-context frequently rely upon some kind of narrative created by Peter and his followers.

This is why neo-Islamophobia differs from previous manifestations of religious bigotedness or structures such as orientalism or racism. Unlike these concepts, neo-Islamophobia relies upon structured reasoning rooted in textual analysis. This is why neo-Islamophobia portrays itself as rational, researched, and historically informed. It relies upon authoritative references, not necessarily political but scholarly and theological authorities. Due to this reason, neo-Islamophobia insinuates itself deep within a community's moral consciousness.

Additionally, this type of neo-Islamophobia is no longer restricted to the elite class. It started as a polemical argument in the pulpit of Cluny, and has spread across society through television programmes, shows, social media, school textbooks, policy debates and more. It is no longer the suspicion of the monk, but the reflexive judgment of the ordinary citizen, no longer a theological judgment, but a judgment of everyday life. What started as a polemic has grown into a system or a prism for judging, interpreting and rejecting Muslims.

This is not only a judgment on the legacy of Peter the Venerable, but also a bridge from the textual politics of medieval Christianity to the structural conflicts of our world. Peter's theological precision and his scholasticism produced a theology which has influenced the thinking and relationship of Christians towards Muslims in the present day. The problem is that Peter didn't understand Islam and it became a dogma and handed down through generations as tradition and then believed as fact.

The challenge of prejudice must not only be made when it is blatant and obvious in the text, but when the structures that make it look normal or even necessary must also be challenged (translations, footnotes, syllabi, metaphors). It is important to recognise that neo-islamophobia is not only a fear or hatred of Islam. Neo-islamophobia is based upon an intellectual inheritance that has yet to come to full terms with itself.

By giving it a name and providing a history of where it comes from, this paper presents a critique of a historical figure and calls for a re-examination of the terms on which Islam has been approached within Christian thought. To "unmake" the long-term climate that we have created, it is first necessary to understand how these terms have been constructed in polemic, metaphor and system.

Acknowledgments

The author acknowledges the use of Grammarly for grammatical improvement. All content refined using this tool was critically evaluated and appropriately reviewed by the author. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the content presented in this article.

Authors Contribution

Prof. Dr. Zafar Iqbal contributed to the study design and data collection, drafted the manuscript, revised, proofread research work. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding Source

The author received NO funding to conduct this study.

Data Availability Statement

Not Applicable.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable.

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