In this article I shall sketch some common features and differences between medieval and Renaissance approaches to Islam, which will be done by analyzing the various perceptions of Christian authors on Islam from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. This is part of an extensive project on the formation of Western identity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, tracing the ways in which Latin and Byzantine thinkers defined their own civilization over and against Islam. In the line of scholars such as Nancy Bisaha, Thomas E. Burman, and Cary J. Nederman, who have illuminated the changing perceptions of Islam, I shall explore how both Western and Byzantine thinkers sought to deepen their approach to the foreign religion. Central to this story are the Renaissance humanists, whose views on the Turks acted as a bridge between medieval and modern attitudes regarding the West and Islam. Indeed, the exchange between Byzantium and the Latin West intensified as they formed strategic alliances against the Turkish enemy, and the consequent humanist

1 My extensive research project will also consider works of authors such as Bessarion, Plethon, Ciriaco d’Ancona, Guarino Veronese, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Francesco Filelfo, Manuele Crysolora, and Nicetas Choniates.

2 Thomas E. Burman, Reading the Qur’an in Latin Christendom (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Cary J. Nederman, Worlds of Difference: European Discourses of Toleration, c. 100–c. 1500 (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). Extremely relevant is the work Nancy Bisaha, Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). See also Alain De Libera, La philosophie médiévale (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993).

3 Bisaha, Creating East and West, 9. See also William R. Jones, “The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 13 (1971): 376–407; Michele Angelo Piemontese, “Il Corano latino di Ficino e i Corani arabi di Pico e Monchates,” Rinascimento 36 (1996): 227–73; and Margaret Meserve, Empires of Islam in Renaissance Thought (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

4 James Hankins, “Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Muhammad II,” Dumbarton Oaks Papers 49, Symposium on Byzantium and the Italians, 13th–15th Centuries (1995): 111–207.
responses to the Ottoman advance greatly influenced Western perceptions of the Turks and Islam, continuing to do so to this very day. However, to form their opinions, these humanists relied on earlier accounts of Islam, especially the *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, which was written by the thirteenth-century Dominican friar Riccoldo da Montecroce, and was one of the most widely circulated and influential works about Islam until the eighteenth century.

Due to its significance, I shall first briefly examine Riccoldo's *Contra legem Sarracenorum* [*CLS*], and then trace its rich legacy as it was translated and used in the works of five representative authors from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. From these five, Fazio degli Uberti's *Dittamondo* shows that the *CLS* was so widely known that it was even echoed in fourteenth-century vernacular poetry. Riccoldo's work also informs the Byzantine responses to Islam in Demetrius Kydones' *Pro subsidio Latinorum* and *De non reddenda Callipoli*, and in the treatise *On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat* by George of Trebizond, written to Mehmed II. Finally, Nicholas of Cusa's *Cribratio Alkorani* and Marsilio Ficino's *De Christiana religione* both adapt *CLS* to argue that Islam presupposes Christian truth—a truth that Muslims nevertheless fail to acknowledge.

As we shall see, Riccoldo's legacy vividly demonstrates both the shift in rhetoric concerning Islam and Muslims, and the slowly changing perception of Islam from ‘enemy’ to ‘other.’ The circulation of texts on the interpretation of the Qur’an, especially Riccoldo’s *CLS*, created a slow but growing knowledge about the affinities and the differences between Islam and Christianity, which consequently shaped the formation of a Christian and Western identity in opposition to the ‘uncivilized’ Turk. A pattern thus emerges: until the thirteenth century Islam was considered a terrifying enemy, however starting in the fourteenth century, apologetic and polemical works turned towards emphasizing the barbarism and ignorance of the Muslims more than the dangers that they posed.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) The transformation of the perception of another social or religious group is a slow process in cultural history, and it is possible to trace it through the analysis of metaphors, sentences, and the use of sources in the texts. By analyzing the repetitions, the differences or affinities with the previous tradition (in this case with *CLS*), or the insistence on one theme (the theme of ‘ignorance’) against another (the theme of ‘enemy’), I demonstrate how during Humanism the perception of Islam begins to change. See Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C. H. Beck, 1992).
The Source on Islam from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance: Riccoldo da Montecroce

To begin, let us first ask a fundamental question: What was the goal of Western humanists writing about Islam? Were they trying to increase general knowledge about Islam, or were they trying to erase all traces of Islamic influence on the West? An approach to answering this question can be provided by an analysis—for example, as undertaken by Thomas Burman and Norman Daniel⁶—of the work of Riccoldo da Montecroce, whose influential *Contra legem Sarracenorum* argues against the Qurʾan, and in the process addresses wider issues of Christian-Muslim relations. This text is of major historical importance because of its vast influence, and remains strikingly relevant as it deals with relations between Christian and Muslims—a topic powerfully linked to political and social tensions today.

Riccoldo da Montecroce (1243–1320) was a Dominican friar at the priory of Santa Maria Novella in Florence.⁷ For many years he was a missionary in Mesopotamia (today’s Iraq) and lived in Baghdad. We can reconstruct his biography through his works, some of which are kept at the National Library of Florence. In particular, his *Liber peregrinationis* (also known as the *Itinerarium*) describes his journeys in the Holy Land, Lebanon, Greece, Armenia, Turkey, Persia, and Mesopotamia, the land of the Chaldean Christians, where Riccoldo became acquainted with Jacobitism and Nestorianism.⁸

Nevertheless, his fundamental work is the *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, a work structured in the medieval form of *quaestio*.⁹ Its tone is aggressive throughout, as Riccoldo seeks to demonstrate the irrationality and

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⁶ Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960).

⁷ About Riccoldo da Montecroce, see Jean Marie Mérioux, “L’ouvrage d’un frère prêcheur florentin en Orient à la fin du XIIIe siècle: Le *Contra legem Sarracenorum* de Riccoldo da Monte di Croce,” in *Memorie Domenicane* 17 (Rome: Centro Riviste della Provincia Romana, 1986), 1–142; Mérioux publishes the critical edition of *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, which will be cited as *CLS*, followed by Prologue or chapter and page number; translations are my own. Emilio Panella, “Ricerche su Riccoldo da Montecroce,” *Archivum Fratrum Praeclerorum* 58 (1988): 5–85; Thomas E. Burman, “How an Italian Friar Read His Arabic Qur’an,” *Dante Studies* 125 (2007): 93–109; Rita George-Tvrtkovic, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq: Riccoldo da Montecroce’s Encounter with Islam* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

⁸ Mérioux, “L’ouvrage d’un frère prêcheur florentin,” 22.

⁹ Giuseppe Rizzardi, “Introduzione,” in *I saraceni*, Italian translation of the *Contra legem Sarracenorum* (Firenze: Nardini, 1992), especially 25–47.
Insubstantiality of Islam. He describes Muhammad as a persecutor of the divine—that is, Christian—law,\(^{10}\) and Muslims, moreover, as persecutors of Christians.

In the first chapter, Riccoldo writes that Muhammad’s principal intention is to convince readers that Christ is neither a god nor the Son of God, but only a wise man.\(^{11}\) Accordingly, Riccoldo outlines the affinities between Islam and heresies such as Arianism and Manichaeism. Furthermore, he underlines the lecherous reputation of Muhammad, as the Prophet affirms, according to Riccoldo, that beatitude consists in carnal pleasures and in food, in marvelous clothes, and in living in gardens rich in water. To support this, Riccoldo notes that in the Qur’an Muhammad aims to eliminate everything that is difficult to believe or to do, and instead permits believers to indulge the sensual pleasures. In chapter two of his work, Riccoldo writes that because Muslims cannot grasp the mystery of the Trinity, it is easier to prove to them that their own law is false than to prove the truth of the Christian religion.\(^{12}\)

Later in the second chapter, Riccoldo continues to relate that the Saracens deny the miracles and words of the Apostles, since they contradict the Qur’an. He insists that the Qur’an is not a divine law but is in fact perfidious, and that the Saracens must therefore accept the authority of the Gospel. To demonstrate these arguments he turns to his analysis of the Qur’an, pointing out several times the theme of violence. Thus, he concludes that the Qur’an does not fit with the divine law, since God’s law does not permit murder, robbery, and concupiscence, while the Qur’an, on the contrary, does. Throughout the work, Riccoldo describes Muhammad as being wicked, a thief, adulterous, incestuous, and as a man who committed homicide.\(^{13}\) Then, in chapter ten, Riccoldo repeats that the Qur’an promotes violence. By insisting on the violence inherent in Islam and Muhammad’s cruel nature, Riccoldo aims to demonstrate the dangerous threat that Islam poses to Christianity.

Another tactic Riccoldo employs for this purpose is to point out contradictions in the Qur’an.\(^{14}\) Furthermore, he argues that the Saracen law contains not only many contradictions, but also many lies and fabrications. He also points out the lack of logic or order in the Qur’an, and therefore states in chapter eleven: “I do not remember finding in all of that book [the Qur’an] an adequate

\(^{10}\) \textit{CLS}, Prologus, 62.

\(^{11}\) \textit{CLS}, ch. 1, 64.

\(^{12}\) \textit{CLS}, ch. 2, 69.

\(^{13}\) \textit{CLS}, ch. 8, 91–93.

\(^{14}\) \textit{CLS}, ch. 6, 83.
argument. This law cannot derive from God, since it does not follow any order.\textsuperscript{15}

Defensive arguments are also found throughout the treatise, as Riccoldo felt the need to defend Christianity against a powerful enemy. He does this in three ways. Following the Dominican rhetorical tradition, he first presents some sentences from the Qur’an in order to prove their falsity. In contrast to these, he then exalts the coherence of the Christian texts and the rationality of Christian doctrine. Finally, he turns the Islamic denial of miracles against the ‘Muslim law’ itself, since—unlike Christian faith—Islam cannot be verified by miracles.\textsuperscript{16}

In sum, in the work of Riccoldo we can note the following elements: there is a patent fear of Islam as the enemy of Christianity and its persecutor, and accordingly, there is a rhetorical use of many defensive arguments, as well as a stress on the irrationality of the Qur’an. As we shall see, Riccoldo’s later readers used and modified these elements from the \textit{CLS} in their own writings.

The Stereotypes about Islam in a Vernacular Work: Fazio degli Uberti

One of the many genres influenced by Riccoldo’s \textit{Contra Legem Sarracenorum} is the vernacular literature from fourteenth-century Italy.\textsuperscript{17} For example, the poet Fazio degli Uberti (1301–1367) makes extensive use of the \textit{CLS} in his \textit{Dittamondo} (c. 1345),\textsuperscript{18} an encyclopedic poem in six books with a meter of chained

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{CLS}, ch. 11, 113.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{CLS}, ch. 7, 90.

\textsuperscript{17} For example, Cod. 205, University of Bologna, cited in Fazio degli Uberti, \textit{Il Dittamondo e le rime}, ed. Giuseppe Corsi (Rome: Laterza, 1952), 333.

\textsuperscript{18} About the work of Fazio degli Uberti, see Corsi’s introduction to his edition of \textit{Dittamondo}, and Charles Edward Whitmore, \textit{The Lyrics of Fazio degli Uberti in their relation to Dante} (Boston: Ginn & Co, 1917). For a biography of Fazio, see Filippo Villani, \textit{De civitatis Florentiae et eiusdem famosis civibus}, ed. Giovanni Calò (Rocca San Casciano: L. Cappelli, 1904). For additional information on Fazio, see Eleanor F. Jordain, “Holyday’s ‘Survey of the World’ and the \textit{Dittamondo}” \textit{The Modern Language Review} 2/1 (1906): 44–55. Also intriguing is the relationship between Fazio and Dante, in order to trace the possible influence of Riccoldo in the work of Dante; see, for example, Leonardo Olschki, “Mohammedan Eschatology and Dante’s Other World,” \textit{Comparative Literature} 3/1 (1951): 1–17; John Tolan, “Mendicants and Muslims in Dante’s Florence,” \textit{Dante Studies} 125 (2007): 227–48; and Karla Mallette, “Muhammad in Hell Author(s),” \textit{Dante Studies} 125 (2007): 207–24. See also
triplets. The theme of the poem is a journey through Europe, North Africa, and Palestine. Many legends and much of its geographical and historical information are drawn from the works of Solino, Pliny the Elder, Martin Polonio, and Riccoldo. Of the latter, Fazio writes, “Here I came and I heard about Riccoldo / Po di qua venni e di Ricoldo m’è deto,” and Dittamondo does indeed contain many details about the Islamic tradition from CLS. Furthermore, Riccoldo had travelled along the same route that Fazio intended to take, namely, the route in the eastern lands, although Fazio died before completing his poem and travels.

In Book Five, chapters ten–twelve and fourteen are dedicated to explaining the Islamic religion and the figure of Muhammad. Among the claims about the Prophet that Fazio includes is Riccoldo’s assertion that Muhammad was lascivious and inclined to drink. Fazio repeats this assertion in chapter Twelve, where he describes Muhammad as attracted to the vices of gluttony and lust. Another theme likely drawn from the CLS is the absence of miracles in the Islamic tradition. According to Fazio, Muhammad raised no one from the dead, nor did he heal the blind or disabled, but instead, he often received his support through weapons. Fazio thus recalls the argument of the sword that is found in the CLS: Muhammad proclaims that he was not sent to perform miracles but to fight with weapons, to which the priests of the Qur’an then wave the sword. The themes of the sword and violence are also repeated to support the argument of the inconsistency of Qur’anic law: in the Qur’an, Fazio recounts, we read many indecent things, but it also commands believers to obey Muhammad or to die.

Although he attributes all information about Islam to Riccoldo, it is unclear whether Dittamondo in reality relies solely on this text as a source about Islam. For example, Fazio quotes the Qur’an to illustrate a legend that is
found in the *CLS*, while Riccoldo correctly locates the legend’s source not in the Qur’an, but in the *Doctrina Machumeti*. This misattribution reflects Fazio’s broader confusion about his sources, and we are aware now that he also drew from the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacopo da Voragine.

Nevertheless, in the work of Fazio we can observe the use of *CLS* as the main source of information about Islam in a vernacular work, and there is a clear repetition of Riccoldo’s stereotypes about the Islamic tradition and the figure of Muhammad. And yet, Fazio takes a noticeably less aggressive tone towards Muhammad and the Islamic tradition than Riccoldo does.

**Different Rhetoric on Islam: Demetrius Kydones and George of Trebizond**

Alongside its usage by fourteenth-century Italian writers, as discussed above, the *CLS* was also utilized by Byzantine scholars. By analyzing works of two such scholars, Demetrius Kydones and George of Trebizond, we can see how they use Riccoldo’s work, and repeat his stereotypes of Islam, as well. Yet their rhetoric also displays a shift from perceiving Islam as an ‘enemy’ to viewing the Turks as merely ‘uncivilized’.28

**A Demetrius Kydones**

Demetrius Kydones (1324–1398) was a Byzantine humanist at the Court of John Kantakouzenos, a *mesazon* or minister for government affairs. He was the teacher of George Gemistos Plethon, and had also travelled to Italy, where he intensively studied Latin culture.29 His work is important for two main reasons:

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28 The works of Kydones and Trebizond show also that “one last variable that encouraged classical treatment of the Turks was the influence of contemporary Byzantine attitudes. The result was not only an increase in classically inspired rhetoric on the Turks but also the development of a more unified discourse of European civility versus Asian barbarism,” as Bisaha rightly states (*Creating East and West*, 44).

29 On Kydones, see Giovanni Mercati, *Notizie di Procoro e Demetrio Cydone, Manuele Caleca e Teodoro Meliteniota* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1931). Cf. Frances Kianka, *Demetrius Cydones* (c. 1324—c.1397): *Intellectual and Diplomatic Relations between Byzantium and the West in the Fourteenth Century* (Ph.D. diss.: Fordham University, 1981); and Raymond-Joseph Loenertz, ed., *Démétrius Cydonés: Correspondance*, 2 vols. (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1956, 1960). Cf. George T. Dennis, “Demetrios Cydones and Venice,” in *Bisanzio, Venezia e il mondo franco-greco (XIII–XV secolo): Atti del Convegno Internazionale Organizzato nel Centenario della nascita di Raimond-Joseph Loenerts O.P.*, *Venezia, 1–2 dicembre 2000* (Venice: Istituto ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di
he translated many works from Latin into Greek, among them the *Summa contra gentiles* of Thomas Aquinas, and he was dedicated to fighting the Ottomans. Furthermore, his works provide valuable insight into the Byzantine scholar’s attitude towards both Ottomans and Latins.

He is also responsible for translating Riccoldo’s *Contra legem Sarracenorum* from Latin into Greek,\(^{30}\) and sent the work to Emperor Manuel II in 1358. Nor is this the end of the story—in the late fifteenth century, Bartolomeo Picerno di Montearduo retranslated *CLS* back into Latin from Kydones’s Greek,\(^{31}\) and dedicated it to Ferdinand II, king of Aragon and Sicily. In the prologue, Bartolomeo asserts that Kydones’ Greek translation admirably enriches Riccoldo’s original text. Hence, rather than sending Riccoldo’s Latin text directly, Bartolomeo was motivated to retranslate the *CLS* into more elegant Latin, as a gift to the king who was fighting the Muslims in Spain. These different versions of the *CLS* show how Riccoldo’s treatise against Islam circulated from the Byzantine territories to Spain, and highlight the relation between Byzantine scholars and the Latin heritage. Moreover, they also exemplify how a common image of Muslims was building between the Western and Eastern Empires.

Kydones’s approach towards the Turks can be seen in his works about relations with the Ottomans, namely, the *Pro subsidio Latinorum* (1366) and the *De non reddenda Callipoli* (1369).\(^{32}\) Both works concern the site of Gallipoli (Turkey), a strategic point in the Hellespont, and both are important sources about the political strategies of the Byzantines towards the Ottomans and Latins. Following the surrender of Gallipoli to the Turks, Kydones calls for

\[^{30}\] Ryder, *The Career and Writings of Demetrius Kydones*, 156. The translation, dated 1350, is found in PG 154. See Mérigoux, “L‘ouvrage d’un frère prêcheur florentin,” 58, as well as works by Kianka, Ryder, and Mercati.

\[^{31}\] The Latin version of *CLS*, translated by Picerno, is in PG 154.

\[^{32}\] Demetrius Kydones, *Oratio pro subsidio Latinorum*, PG 154, cols. 961–1008; and *De non reddenda Callipoli*, PG 154, cols. 1012D–1013B.
Latin assistance, considering the Latins as allies of Byzantium in the fight against the Ottomans, the enemies of freedom.\textsuperscript{33} The \textit{De non reddenda} points to the fall of Gallipoli in 1354 as immediately “provoking great panic, while his work on the \textit{Contra legem Sarracenorum} shows him already concerned with a theological confrontation with Islam.”\textsuperscript{34} Also, in the \textit{Oratio pro subsidio Latinorum}, Kydones affirms that western Europe and the papacy were not Byzantium’s enemies, but rather, its most natural political and military allies against the aggression of the Turks.\textsuperscript{35}

How does Kydones describe the Ottomans in these works? He uses term ‘\textit{barbaroi}’ to describe the Turks, which he uses to refer to other social groups as well. As in the \textit{CLS}, the Turks are represented as fundamentally uncivilized and cruel, with “all characteristics directly in contrast with the Christians of the \textit{oikumene},”\textsuperscript{36} where ‘Christianity’ means the unity of the Latin and Greek Churches. Here we see at play the process of building Western identity as a phenomenon in contrast with the Islamic tradition.\textsuperscript{37}

Another description of the Turks emphasizes the “\textit{cupiditas Barbarorum},”\textsuperscript{38} which is a way of underlining the evil nature of the Ottomans; this also seems to recall the argument of \textit{CLS} about the depraved attitude of Muslims. Nevertheless, in \textit{CLS} the mistakes of Muslims are connected to the errors of Muhammad as a false prophet, while in Kydones’s works, the negative attributes describe the entire community of Muslims, in contrast with the virtuous Christians. Kydones also recalls the violent character of the Islamic people, and affirms that they conquered the Greek territories though the use of enslavement and violence.\textsuperscript{39} Again, this theme of violence echoes Riccoldo’s \textit{CLS}.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} See Ryder, \textit{Career and Writings of Kydones}, 79.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ryder, \textit{Career and Writings of Kydones}, 156.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Kianka, “Kydones and Italy,” 103.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ryder, \textit{Career and Writings of Kydones}, 59. About the relationship between Byzantium and Islam, see Adel-Théodor Khoury, \textit{Les théologiens byzantins et l’Islam: textes et auteurs (VIII–XIII s.)} (Paris-Louvain: Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1969).
\item \textsuperscript{37} See Kianka, “Demetrios Kydones and Italy,” 102: “Kydones attempted solutions [through] anti-Turkish, pro-Latin policy and an intellectual appreciation for and defence of the philosophy and theology of the Latin West, seen primarily in his attraction to the work of Thomas Aquinas.”
\item \textsuperscript{38} Demetrios Kydones, \textit{De non reddenda Callipoli}, PG 154, 1027.
\item \textsuperscript{39} See Kianka, “Demetrios Kydones and Italy,” 103: “Faced with the continuing conquests and settlements of the Ottoman Turks in Byzantine territory, especially in Thrace, [Kydones] pursued the forging of alliances with the Catholic powers of the West—a new crusade, directed not at the recovery of the Holy Land but at rescuing what remained of Byzantine lands from the aggression of their Muslim enemy.”
\end{itemize}
In summary, we can identify three distinguishing features in Kydones’s writings: his scorn towards the Ottomans, called ‘barbaroi;’ an attempt to unify the Latin and Greek Churches against the Ottomans; and the influence of the CLS on his approach to Islam.

B  George of Trebizond
In his response to the Turks, George of Trebizond uses a very different rhetoric. Rather than employing Kydones’s approach of scorning the Turks to build an alliance with the Latin West, Trebizond aims instead to convert the sultan Mehmed II, and hence his tone is more subdued and even laudatory.

George of Trebizond (1395–1472/73) was born in Crete, then converted to Roman Catholicism and began a new life in Italy, all the while remaining devoted to the Greek cause. For most of his career he was attached to the papal court as a secretary and Greek translator, but he also lectured and taught in Florence, Rome, and Venice on topics such as rhetoric, poetry, and the Greek language.

Here we shall focus on Trebizond’s treatise On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat and His World Empire, written to the Emir, Mehmed II, when he stormed Constantinople, as an attempt to convert him to Christianity. We also find this attempt in other works of Trebizond, addressed to Mehmed as well.

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40 The translation and comments on Trebizond works are in John Monfasani, ed., Collectanea Trapezuntiana: Texts, Documents and Bibliographies of George Trebizond (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies in conjunction with the Renaissance Society of America, 1984). George Trebizond, “Preface of His Translation of Plato’s Laws,” trans. John Monfasani, in Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts, vol. 2: Political Philosophy, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 128–34. See Thomas Berns, “Construire un idéal vénitien de la constitution mixte à la Renaissance: L’enseignement de Platon par Trébizonde,” in Le Gouvernement mixte (Saint-Etienne: Université de Saint-Etienne, 2005), 25–38; Franco Gaeta, “Giorgio da Trebisonda, le Leggi di Platone e la costituzione di Venezia,” Bullettino dell’Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo e Archivio Muratoriano 82 (1970): 479–501; John Monfasani, George of Trebizond: A Biography and a Study of His Rhetoric and Logic (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 171–74; Giorgio Ravegnani, “Nota sul pensiero politico di Giorgio da Trebisonda,” Aevum 49 (1975): 319–329; and Carl Joachim Classen, “The Rhetorical Works of George of Trebizond and Their Debt to Cicero,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 56 (1993): 75–84. See Bisaha, Creating East and West, 116: “George of Trebizond, by focusing on Greece’s position in antiquity as defender of all Europe, and therefore as a crucial part of Europe, . . . firmly brings Byzantium within the Western cultural identity.”

41 See Monfasani, George of Trebizond, 131–136.
As John Monfasani notes about one of these treatises, *On the Truth of Faith of Christians to the Emir*, written in 1453:

> Nor was he alone in attempting to convert Muhammad II. We have the famous letter of Pope Pius II to the Conqueror. Scholars have never fathomed what George meant by this letter. He was not motivated by an extraordinary irenic spirit, as some have suggested, nor by eccentric political ideas, as others have supposed.\(^\text{42}\)

According to Monfasani, the answer to what motivated Trebizond lies in his treatise *On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat* and in another letter to Mehmed II, *On Divine Manuel, Shortly to be King of the Whole World*.\(^\text{43}\) These writings are inspired by the apocalyptic text of Pseudo-Methodius, who predicted that the sons of Ishmael would conquer the Latin Empire.\(^\text{44}\) Thus,

> By converting Mehmed II, Trebizond hoped to avert the dreadful reign of the Ishmaelites: he would remake the Moslem conqueror of Constantinople into the universal Christian Emperor. Trebizond considers Greece and Latin West as a unity.\(^\text{45}\)

How, then, does George of Trebizond try to convert Mehmed II? Which rhetorical strategies does he use? In *On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat*, he calls Mehmed II ‘King of kings’ and ‘Mightiness’,\(^\text{46}\) and his words in general are extremely positive towards Mehmed II: “Now I do not think it escapes you, O wondrous autocrat, that God has selected you and yours to rule the whole world.”\(^\text{47}\)

\(^{42}\) Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 131.

\(^{43}\) George of Trebizond, “On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat,” and “On the Divinity of Manuel,” in *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, 492–527, 564–574.

\(^{44}\) Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 132: “According to the script of Pseudo-Methodius, the all conquering Ishmaelites would usher in a reign of terror which would only end when the last true Christian emperor arose to disperse them and bring about the reign of peace which must precede the coming of Gog, Magog, and the Antichrist.”

\(^{45}\) Ibid.

\(^{46}\) George of Trebizond, “On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat,” in *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*. See Bisaha, *Creating East and West*, 136: “By combining aspects of medieval conversion treatises with humanist rhetoric, they hoped to persuade the Turks to accept the enlightened path of Christianity.”

\(^{47}\) George of Trebizond, “On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat,” in *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, 524.
At the beginning of On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat, Trebizond proposes to use the Aristotelian rule “by which in the comparison of conflicting propositions, men would find the truth and cast falsity aside,”\(^{48}\) since he had heard that “every day you [Mehmed] philosophize as much as possible.”\(^ {49}\) Although this text exalts Mehmed, we also note some topics drawn from the medieval tradition. Was Trebizond then familiar with the work of Riccoldo? The answer to this question is ‘probably,’ since he quotes Demetrius Kydones, the translator of the \textit{CLS}, in a letter from 1452 (Exhortation to Pope Nicholas V \textit{Ad defendenda pro Europa Hellesponti claustra}),\(^ {50}\) and because in \textit{On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat} we find many topics about Islam that are also present in \textit{CLS}, such as: how it is difficult for Muslims to comprehend the Trinity (from chapter six to chapter sixteen), as well as the crucifixion and death of Christ (fifteen–sixteen) and his resurrection (chapter seventeen).\(^ {51}\) But unlike Riccoldo, George of Trebizond believes that for Mehmed, and indeed for all Muslim people, it is necessary to convert to Christianity, however difficult it may be. Furthermore, for Trebizond, the only real hope to save the Christian empire is by converting Mehmed II.

In this work, Trebizond perceives Westerners and Byzantines as a unity against the Turks.\(^ {52}\) This perception changed, however, after being warned of the capture of Constantinople,\(^ {53}\) as becomes clear in another work, the above-mentioned Exhortation to Pope Nicholas V. Here, the author requested the

\begin{flushright}
\textit{CLS} was the most popular treatise on the Qur’an. Furthermore, in Trebizond’s elite circle of humanists, Riccoldo’s treatise was read and used. About the relations between Byzantine and Italian scholars, see Kenneth M. Setton, “The Byzantine Background to the Italian Renaissance,” \textit{Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society} 100/1 (1956): 1–76. See also Mérigoux, “L’ouvrage d’un frère precheur florentin,” 53: “George of Trebizond, humanist and theologian was affected by the influence of the work of Riccoldo.”
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\textbf{48} George of Trebizond “On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat,” in \textit{Collectanea Trapenzuntiana}, 496. \\
\textbf{49} Ibid. \\
\textbf{50} George of Trebizond, “Exhortation to Pope Nicholas V ad defendenda pro Europa Hellesponti claustra,” in \textit{Collectanea Trapenzuntiana}, 434–444. \\
\textbf{51} George of Trebizond, “On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat,” in \textit{Collectanea Trapenzuntiana}. Although these themes are common in the medieval tradition on Islam, \textit{CLS} was the most popular treatise on the Qur’an. Furthermore, in Trebizond’s elite circle of humanists, Riccoldo’s treatise was read and used. About the relations between Byzantine and Italian scholars, see Kenneth M. Setton, “The Byzantine Background to the Italian Renaissance,” \textit{Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society} 100/1 (1956): 1–76. See also Mérigoux, “L’ouvrage d’un frère precheur florentin,” 53: “George of Trebizond, humanist and theologian was affected by the influence of the work of Riccoldo.”

\textbf{52} See Bisaha, \textit{Creating East and West}, 132: “Despite the hostility Europeans once felt toward Byzantines, and which some individuals continued to express, the year 1453 marked the beginning of a change in Western perceptions of the Greeks. Greeks had been settling in Italy before this date, and thousands more came to settle afterward.”

\textbf{53} About this point, see Carlo Maria Mazzucchi and Agostino Pertusi, \textit{Bisanzio e i Turchi nella cultura del Rinascimento e del Barocco} (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2004); Roberto Weiss,
Pope’s help in order to protect Constantinople from the Turks. Undoubtedly, it was after the fall of Constantinople that Trebizond’s approach to Islam changed. Whereas he previously considered the Pope as the only one who could save the Empire, in his letter of 1466 to Mehmed, Trebizond requests the help of the Autocrat himself. I suggest that this change was caused by multiple factors. First, it was due to geopolitical strategy: after the fall of Constantinople, Christians inevitably acknowledged Mehmed to be both a great conqueror and a great political figure, as the famous letter of Pius II shows. Second, there were traditional theological and eschatological beliefs involved (like the prediction of Pseudo-Methodius), as Monfasani stresses. Third, there began a slow evolution in the perception of Muslims, who were no longer viewed so much as ‘enemies,’ but rather as Christians who did not know that they are Christians.

Although Trebizond uses many topics from medieval tradition—for example, the insistence on the incapacity of Muslims to grasp the truth of Trinity—he nevertheless attempts to convert Mehmed by using an elaborate rhetoric of praise, rather than a fierce diatribe like Riccoldo’s. Thus, in the works of Trebizond, the perception of Islam seems to change yet again: Mehmed is no longer considered an ‘enemy,’ but instead becomes a possible ally.

Nicholas of Cusa and Marsilio Ficino: ‘Presupposition’ and the Changing Face of Islam

The following section will highlight the use of *CLS* in Nicholas of Cusa’s *Cribratio Alkorani* and Marsilio Ficino’s *De Christiana religione*. Specifically, I shall discuss Cusanus and Ficino’s rhetorical strategy of *praesuppositio*, namely, their claim that whatever is true in the Qur’an reflects its borrowings from the Christian Scripture, which it 'presupposes.' We shall also see how this strategy fits within the larger scheme of perceptions shifting from Islam as ‘enemy’ to ‘other.’

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La scoperta dell’antichità classica nel Rinascimento, Italian translation (Padua: Antenore, 1989).

54 Enea Silvio Piccolomini, “Letter to Mehmed II”; see Luca d’Ascia, *Il Corano e la tiara* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2001).

55 Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, in particular 131–135.
Nicholas of Cusa

Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) knew Riccoldo’s CLS well. Cusanus himself informs us: “In Rome I saw the book of Brother Riccoldo, of the Order of Preachers, who studied Arabic in Baghdad; this [book] was more gratifying than the others.” Nicholas’s manuscript of CLS, with marginal notes in his own hand, survives in his library at St. Nicholas Hospital in Bernkastel-Kues, and his Cribratio Alkorani makes extensive use of it. However, according to Jean Marie Mérigoux, Cusanus distorts the original intention of CLS, because instead of considering it a missionary theological work, he sees it as a source of information on Islamic culture and religion.

Nicholas of Cusa wrote the Cribratio Alkorani in 1461, three years before his death. This work is dedicated to Pope Pius II, who is urged to consider the ‘Mohammedan sect’ as originating from the Nestorian heresy and, consequently, erroneous but able to be refuted. Following CLS, Nicholas writes about Muslim violence against Christians, the overall violent nature of the Qur’anic law, and the ‘continuous persecutions’ put into effect by the Muslims against Christian populations. Cusanus insists over and over again on

56 On Nicholas of Cusa and Islam, see the essays in Part I this volume. See also James E. Biechler, “Interreligious Dialogue,” in Introducing Nicholas of Cusa: A Guide to a Renaissance Man, ed. Christopher M. Bellitto, Thomas M. Izbicki and Gerald Christianson (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004), 270–96; G. Christianson and T. M. Izbicki, eds., Nicholas of Cusa: In Search of God and Wisdom (Leiden: Brill, 1991); Walter A. Euler and Tom Kerger, eds., Cusanus und der Islam (Tier: Paulinus, 2010); Pim Valkenberg, “Sifting the Qur’an: Two Forms of Interreligious Hermeneutics in Nicholas of Cusa,” in Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe, ed. D. Cheetham, U. Winkler, O. Leirvik and J. Gruber (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 27–48; Rita George-Tvrtkovic, “After the Fall: Riccoldo da Montecroce and Nicholas of Cusa on Religious Diversity,” Theological Studies 73 (2012): 641–62; Marica Costigliolo, Islam e cristianesimo: mondi di differenze nel Medioevo. Il dialogo con l’Islam nell’opera di Nicola da Cusa (Genoa: Genova University Press, 2012).

57 The critical edition of Cribratio Alkorani is in Ludwig Hagemann, ed., Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia, vol. 8 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1986). I shall cite this edition by Prologue or Book, chapter, paragraph number (n.), and lines, as here: Prol., n. 4, lines. 3–5: “Vidi… Romae libellum fratris Ricoldi ordinis praedicatorum qui arabicis litteris in bal-dach operam dedit et plus caeteris placuit.” English translation by Jasper Hopkins in Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa, vol. II (Minneapolis: Banning, 2001), 963–1105, here, 966.

58 James E. Biechler, “Three Manuscripts on Islam from the Library of Nicholas of Cusa,” Manuscrita 27 (1983): 91–100. See also Marica Costigliolo, “Qur’anic Sources of Nicholas of Cusa,” Mediaevistik 24 (2011): 219–238.

59 Mérigoux, “L’ouvrage d’un frère precheur florentin,” 48.

60 Cribratio Alkorani, III, iii, n. 168.
Muhammad’s dominating actions. He also acknowledges that Christians might convert to Islam but will nonetheless remain Christian in their hearts; he therefore argues that persecution on religious grounds is senseless for both religions. In Cusanus’s opinion, Muhammad’s sole purpose was to pursue power through the sword, to extend his property on the pretext of religion and God. Muhammad’s work on the Qur’an would be completed later, thanks to a group of counselors, among whose number were some heretical Christians and ‘perverse’ Jews.

Nicholas describes the Cribratio’s project as follows:

Nonetheless, we intend to critically examine, presupposing the Gospel of Christ, Muhammad’s book, and prove that also that book includes some things, which would notably confirm the Gospel, should it need to be confirmed, and wherever it disagrees with the Gospel, it was caused by ignorance, and consequently, by perversity in Muhammad’s intentions. . . . For he did not pursue the glory of God and the salvation of man, but rather his own glory.

Nicholas’s comment—that ‘the Qur’an confirms the truth of the Gospel’—severely limits his textual hermeneutics because he declares that he already knows the outcome of his analysis, namely, the affirmation of the Gospel’s truth through an analysis of the Qur’an. To support this thought, Nicholas wants to thoroughly and critically examine (cribrare) the Qur’an. To do so, he makes use of ‘pia interpretatio’ (pious or faithful interpretation), a method he had already used in his dialogue De pace fidei (1453). He thus begins his argument from a conceptual principle that he had developed in his earlier dialogical work: there is only one truth, the truth of the Gospel, and no comparisons can be made without this presupposition. However, in the Cribratio, praesuppositio is no longer used to prove the uniqueness of truth appearing in a variety

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61 In particular, Cribratio Alkorani, III, viii n. 184.
62 Cribratio Alkorani, III, vi, n. 180, lines 10–15.
63 Cribratio Alkorani, III, vii, n. 184, lines 1–5.
64 Cribratio Alkorani, I, i, n. 23, lines 9–11.
65 Cribratio Alkorani, Prol., n. 10, lines 1–7, my translation.
66 See J. Biechler, “Interreligious Dialogue,” 289: “The Sifting utilizes a hermeneutic principle which like the foregoing elements, has an ameliorative effect on the Christian-Muslim confrontation. Cusanus uses what he terms an interpretatio pia, a kind of benign understanding by means of which certain Qur’anic passages are understood in a sense not contradictory to Christian belief.” See also P. Valkenberg, “Sifting the Qur’an,” 36–46; and Cribratio Alkorani, II, xii, nn. 119–120.
of rites, but instead, is meant to demonstrate the wicked intention of the Qur'an's author Muhammad, who, Nicholas claims, perversely subverted the truth of the Gospel.

The *Cribratio Alkorani* is grounded on the premise that if the Qur'an is correctly understood, it shall prove the truth of the Gospel, as Nicholas affirms in the work's prologue. The work is filled with polemical and apologetic intentions, and consistently uses the rhetorical strategy of *praesuppositio*. Cusanus does not deal with the specific traditions and rites of Islam, as he had done previously in *De pace fidei*. Here his gaze is not introspective and self-critical, and he does not attempt to investigate whether historical reasons or common affinities exist. Rather, Nicholas does not change his general theoretical approach and resorts to the same concepts expounded in his previous theological works, since here too he analyzes the differences between the two religions based on the presupposition that the truth is in the Gospel. Hence, he concludes that if anything beautiful or truthful can be found in the Qur'an, it necessarily originates from the Gospel.

In the *Cribratio*, Cusanus presents two different kinds of analyses of the Qur'anic text. First, Nicholas examines the Qur'an without criticizing its contents, since he wants to confront his opponent on equal terms and prove that the Qur'an actually bears witness to Christian truths. But at the same time, Nicholas also intends to prove that the Qur'anic text cannot be the fruit of a divine revelation. Thus, the *Cribratio* shows a strong textual consistency with both the tradition of the Bible and Nicholas's own thought. This consistency emerges in particular in his comparison between the holy books, especially in the chapter entitled “The Qur'an is not trustworthy in the points in which it contradicts the Holy Scriptures.” Nicholas maintains that in a comparison between the two holy books, the term ‘variation’ means not only the replacement of words, but also the different meaning of the Qur'an's words compared to the evangelical word. In that case, he adds, the Qur'an cannot be justified; therefore, we must admit that it was not God who transmitted the Qur'anic word to Muhammad.

Hence, the use of *praesuppositio* can be seen as part of the slow transformation of the perception of Turks from 'enemy' into 'other.' Indeed, Cusanus considers Muslims 'different' from Christians because of their ignorance, and he

67 See Pim Valkenberg, "Una Religio in Rituum Varietate: Religious Pluralism, the Qur'an, and Nicholas of Cusa," in this volume.
68 *Cribratio Alkorani*, I, vi, n. 41, lines 1–5.
69 *Cribratio Alkorani*, III, vi, n. 179, lines 10–15.
70 *Cribratio Alkorani*, III, vii, n. 183, lines 12–16.
underlines the obliviousness of Muslims, who must be converted to Christianity. To summarize, Cusanus’s *Cribratio Alkorani* exhibits two key features: a reliance on *CLS* for many themes, including the violence of the Qur’anic law, and the use of *praesuppositio* to guide Nicholas’s reading of the Qur’an. Thus, by arguing that the Qur’an presupposes the Gospel’s truth, Nicholas simultaneously modifies his perception of Muslims by insisting on their ignorance.

### B Marsilio Ficino

In the *De Christiana religione* of Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) we can also clearly see the influence of the *CLS*, as Angelo Michele Piemontese asserts:

> The *Contra legem Sarracenorum* is the main source for Marsilio Ficino about Muhammad and the Qur’an in the *De Christiana religione* (1474), in particular chapters Twelve and Twenty-six. In chapter Two Ficino quotes his source.71

Furthermore, the *De Christiana religione* is not the only text where Ficino tackles the issue of Islamic culture. As Bisaha notes:

> In October 1480 Marsilio Ficino, the Florentine humanist and Neoplatonic scholar, wrote a letter to Matthias Corvinus of Hungary entitled “An exhortation to war against the barbarians.” Ficino implores Matthias to help and save Italy and all of Christendom from the ravages of the inhuman Turks. He chose to emphasize the damage the Turks had done to learning.72

This theme (of the Turks as ‘*barbaro,*’ or ‘uncivilized’) is repeated also in *De Christiana religione.* Though the premises of Ficino’s philosophy might seem
open to a religious exchange, as will be discussed below, this treatise clearly displays the opposite tendency.

According to Ficino, the soul is the fixed center of the world, and links everything in a concrete unity.\(^{73}\) From this, he moves to develop an original theory of natural religion, which is deeply rooted in man, and distinguishes men from animals.\(^{74}\) The philosophical doctrine is meant to show the truths of religion with theoretical arguments.\(^{75}\) Although Ficino bases these arguments on the concept of natural religion, which would seem to make all religions equal, he firmly asserts the superiority of the Christian religion. Indeed, he tries to defend Christian theology, a project that he undertakes in his major apologetic work, *De Christiana religione*. In the first part of the work, in addition to his famous remarks on the relationship between philosophy and religion, he explains how the authority of the Christian religion can be justified with good reasons against the Jews and Muslims.\(^{76}\)

In his library, Ficino had a Qurʾan translated into Latin as well as other texts from the Islamic tradition (e.g., Avicenna’s writings), and he had the *CLS* of Riccoldo. Indeed, Ficino’s works echo several arguments found in Riccoldo’s *CLS*, including the disorder and fabrications of the Qurʾan, and the violence of Muhammad. Furthermore, Ficino states that this fiction that is the Qurʾan is credible among foolish people such as the Muslims, and has spread through violence and deception (a theme from *CLS*), since it seems ridiculous to intelligent and wise men. Here we can note a difference between Ficino and Riccoldo: although Riccoldo also describes Muslims as unlearned people, Ficino considers ignorance to be their primary fault.

In chapter twelve of the *De Christiana religione*, Ficino writes that although Muslims may seem Christian, they are in fact heretics or Arians or Manicheans: “We conclude that Jews, Muslims, and pagans recognize the Christian religion as the most excellent above all.” He then adds: “Although these people prefer their doctrine, however, they put the Christian religion before all the others.”\(^{77}\) Therefore, if a Muslim were to judge with sincerity, he would prefer the Christian religion without doubt. In this case Ficino uses the same rhetorical strategy of Cusanus, namely, the *praesuppositio*: Muslims must recognize that

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\(^{73}\) Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino*, Italian translation (Florence: Sansoni, 1953). See also Paul Richard Blum, *Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 109–27.

\(^{74}\) Kristeller, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino*, 344.

\(^{75}\) Kristeller, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino*, 345. Bisaha, *Creating East and West*, 172.

\(^{76}\) Bisaha, *Creating East and West*, 265.

\(^{77}\) Marsilio Ficino, *De Christiana religione*, chapter twelve.
the Truth is the Christian truth, since rational thinking necessarily leads to this conclusion. Unlike the CLS, Ficino insists that Quranic statements confirm the truth of the Gospel, and he uses this argument to affirm that Muslims should then accept Christianity. He emphasizes that Muhammed himself recognized the affinities between Islam and Christianity, and that this is a sign of the Gospel’s superiority, since only ignorant people would disregard these similarities and believe instead that Muhammed was the last Prophet and not Jesus.

By using the rhetorical device of ‘praesuppositio,’ Ficino aims to prove that there is only one truth, the truth of the Gospel, and that it is impossible to make any other comparison without starting from this presupposition. Like Cusanus, he uses the praesuppositio to claim that the Qur’an’s author Muhammad perversely subverted the Gospel’s order of truth. For this reason, some parts of the Qur’an deviate from the points where it agrees with the Christian text.

We can therefore note Ficino’s insistence on the ignorance of Muslims, as well as his description of them as ‘barbarians.’ Moreover, like Cusanus, Ficino uses the praesuppositio to insist on the affinities between Muslims and Christians, and to highlight how Muslims are really Christians but simply refuse to recognize this. Although Ficino drew many themes from CLS, they are nevertheless modified in his work, since his perception of Islam is focused less on the dangers that it poses, and more on the ignorance of Muslims.

**Conclusions**

In conclusion, by comparing the works of six authors, I have been able to highlight some themes in Christian apologetic treatises, in order to show how the perception of Muslim culture changed over time. The different ways of writing on Islam are quite clear: whereas Riccoldo considers Muslims as enemies, Ficino describes them less harshly as ‘those who do not know.’ Thus, the main point shifts to an insistence on the ignorance of Muslims—a modification that is also noticeable in the works of other authors, such as Piccolomini.78

78 A debate on the source of his Letter to Mehmed II is still open. I support the thesis of the use of Contra Legem in the work of Pius II; see Costigliolo, Islam e Cristianesimo, 120–21. For essays on Islam and Piccolomini, see Luca D’Ascia and E. Mecacci, eds., Conferenze su Pio II nel sesto centenario della nascita di Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405–2005) (Siena: Accademia senese degli intronati, 2006). See also Luigi Totaro, ed., Pio II nei suoi Commentarii, un contributo alla lettura della autobiografia di Enea Silvio de Piccolomini.
As demonstrated by the wide circulation of Riccoldo’s work, humanists inherited a medieval perception of Islam, which has since been carried forward into modern Western thought.\(^7^9\) Because \textit{CLS} was the main source about Islam for Christian authors throughout the centuries, it is essential to uncover how this work was used, as well as identify its translations and assess its influence on the course of history. Riccoldo wrote the \textit{CLS} in light of his long experience in an Arabic-speaking country: throughout the work he appears to be angry and continually fighting against Islam, with no hope that Muslims would accept Christianity.\(^8^0\) In the space of one century, however, the perception begins to change, and Christian authors, both Catholic and Orthodox, study Islam from a different perspective. Islam is no more the enemy but the ‘other’—something that can be controlled and must necessarily be converted to Christianity. Here the work of George of Trebizond is extremely important for two reasons: it shows the change from a medieval to a humanist perception, as well as the development of a more unified discourse of European civility, contrasted with an Islamic barbarism.\(^8^1\)

Regarding this last aspect, it is important to note that over the course of time fewer Italian scholars traveled to Byzantium, largely because Byzantine Greeks were coming to Italy in increasing numbers. “A combination of pressure from the Turks and growing opportunities in the West led many Greeks to leave their homelands in search of employment in Italy, while others relocated to different areas of Greece and Venetian Crete.”\(^8^2\) The work of Trebizond and others such as Bessarion, Plethon, and Kydones is an important indication of this tendency.

According to Edmund Reiss,\(^8^3\) the literary and philosophical production of the Middle Ages is consistently characterized by strong polemical intentions.

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\(^{79}\) Bisaha, \textit{Creating East and West}, 41.

\(^{80}\) About the emotions of Riccoldo about Islamic expansion, see René Kappler, trans., \textit{Epistolae ad ecclesiam triumphantem, Riccold de Monte Croce, Pérégrination en Terre Sainte et au Proche Orient, Lettres sur la chute de Saint-Jean d’Acre} (Paris: H. Champion, 1997); for the Italian translation, see Davide Cappi, ed., \textit{Libro della peregrinazione; Epistole alla Chiesa Trionfante} (Genova-Milano, 2005).

\(^{81}\) Bisaha, \textit{Creating East and West}, 44. See also Weiss, \textit{La scoperta dell’antichità classica nel Rinascimento}.

\(^{82}\) Bisaha, \textit{Creating East and West}, 140.

\(^{83}\) Edmund Reiss, “Conflict and its Resolution in Medieval Dialogues,” in \textit{Arts libéraux et philosophie au Moyen Age, Actes du quatrième Congrès international de philosophie médiévale} (Paris: Vrin, 1969), 863–872.
As a matter of fact, disputes, apologetic treatises, polemical libels, and similar texts converged in the literary genre of ‘dialogue.’ In fifteenth-century political and social life, religious problems were hardly separable from the political context; thus, they were particularly thorny everyday issues for both scholars and the mighty of that age. Dialogue between different religions was therefore an urgent and topical matter on which authors debated, putting forward a variety of philosophical, theological, and political arguments. Nevertheless, the medieval genre of ‘dialogue’ was constructed through paraphrases, quotations that were frequently unattributed, and a range of textual misinterpretations that often depended on unreliable sources and inaccurate translations of original texts.

According to Thomas Burman, the translations of the Qurʾan that circulated in Europe until the eighteenth century show evidence of a deep interest among Western scholars in the Islamic world, despite the translations’ many inaccuracies. Based on these translations and polemical works on the Qurʾan, it finally became possible to start weaving an intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Even a polemical and apologetic work can be considered a form of interreligious dialogue, since it is constructed with a continuous comparison of the essential texts and themes of two monotheistic religions, namely, Christianity and Islam.

As mentioned above, Bartolomeo Picerno re-translated the CLS from Greek back into Latin as a gift for Ferdinand II, who in 1492 conquered the kingdom of Granada; furthermore, Bartolomeo’s letter invites the king also to liberate Jerusalem and the African countries from Muslim control. In the sixteenth century, anti-Islamic propaganda continued to use the CLS as the source of ‘inspiration’ for fighting the Muslims (for example, through Luther’s widely known translation). However, if it is true that dialogue is a sort of mutual knowledge, then it is also true that we can detect a change in this respect during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. If on one hand the circulation of the texts on the interpretation of the Qur’an (like Riccoldo’s work) created a slow but growing knowledge about the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity, then on the other hand, this textual and theoretical comparison also contributed to the formation of a Christian and Western identity that saw itself as the center of Roman and Greek culture, in direct opposition to the ‘uncivilized’ Turks. This theme must be considered as part of the birth of two polar images: the Turk becomes not only the ‘wild beast’ but also the barbarian and adversary of learning, while the West finds its own identity through this very contrast with the totally strange ‘other.’

84 This is the thesis on which Burman’s Reading the Qurʾan is based.
In the Middle Ages, as Christian sources on the Islamic world show, Muslim culture was perceived as extremely threatening. Hence, there were many defenses for Christianity, such as the treatises on the ‘mistakes’ of the followers of Allah. However, as our analysis has illustrated, over the course of time this textual attitude was modified, and authors aimed to point out the Christian truth in comparison with the ‘falsity’ of Islamic theology, in order to reinforce Christian identity through the presupposition of its own absolute truth. Thus, the apologetic aim is gradually replaced by a systematic comparison based on partial translations of the Qur’an. The comparison with the ‘other,’ moreover, becomes the basis for reinforcing identity, in order to demonstrate the truth and consequently the supremacy of one’s own theoretical position. The ‘other,’ the Muslim, is no longer the enemy; instead, he takes on the role of the non-Western, the non-European, the ‘something’ different and alien. Alongside the forced conversion of Muslims and Jews conducted by the Spanish Inquisition, the works of the authors analyzed above show the Western European passage from a position of fear and open hostility towards Muslims, to a progressive position of supremacy, which finally turns into the disappearance of any notion of an ‘other’ and a respect for legitimate differences.85

85 I dedicate this article to my children, Antonio and Adele. I wish to thank Donald Duclow, who provided crucial support. I thank Ian Levy and Rita Tvrkovic for their questions and editing. Thanks also go to Thomas E. Burman, Gerald Christianson, and all who participated in the Gettysburg conference on “Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Late Middle Ages.”