

# Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

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# Lope Obregón

Lope de Obregón, López Obregón,  
Lupus de Obregón

DATE OF BIRTH Probably between the last decade of the  
15<sup>th</sup> century and first third of the 16<sup>th</sup> century  
PLACE OF BIRTH Unknown, but possibly Cantabria  
DATE OF DEATH Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century  
PLACE OF DEATH Unknown, but possibly Ávila

## BIOGRAPHY

Little is known of the life of Lope Obregón beyond the fact that he was a priest at the Basilica of San Vicente in Ávila around the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He worked under Bishop Diego de Álava y Esquivel, who, after returning from the first years of the Council of Trent in 1545-49, urged his clergy to preach to Moriscos and give them instruction (*Confutación*, p. 2r; El Kollí, 'Polémique', p. 122). We know from his work, which is directed to the bishop, that he was well versed in biblical and patristic sources in Latin, may have had a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic, and had a reasonable though distorted familiarity with the basic beliefs and history of Islam.

While the surname Obregón suggests a family hailing from the Cantabria region, nothing is known of his origins or youth. The general facts of his life must be gleaned from his attack on Islam, the *Confutación del alcorán y secta mahometana*.

## MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

### Primary

*Confutación del alcorán y secta mahometana, sacado de sus propios libros, y de la vida del mesmo Mahoma*, Granada, 1555, pp. 1v-3r

### Secondary

M.J. Framiñán de Miguel, 'Manuales para el adoctrinamiento de neoconvertidos en el siglo XVI', *Criticón* 93 (2005) 25-37, pp. 32-33 (also published as 'Catequesis "tras" la frontera. Manuales para el adoctrinamiento de neoconvertidos en el siglo XVI', in J. San José Lera [ed.], *Praestans labore victor. Homenaje al profesor Víctor García de la Concha*, Salamanca, 2005, 129-40, pp. 135-36)

- J. El Kolli, 'La polémique islamo-chrétienne en Espagne (1492-1640) à travers les réfutations de l'islam de Juan Andrés et Lope Obregón', Montpellier, 1983 (Diss. Paul-Valéry University – Montpellier III), pp. 122-31
- E. Llamas Martínez, 'Orientaciones sobre la historia de la teología española en la primera mitad del siglo XVI (1500-1550)', in *Repertorio de historia de las ciencias eclesiásticas en España*, vol. 1, Salamanca, 1967, 94-174, p. 110
- A. Hernández Sánchez, 'Catecismos para la instrucción de los moriscos', Salamanca, 1955 (Diss. Pontifical University of Salamanca), pp. 114-15

#### WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

*Confutación del alcorán y secta mahometana, sacado de sus propios libros, y de la vida del mesmo Mahoma; Confutación del alcorán y secta mahometana*, 'Refutation of the Qur'an and the Muḥammadan sect'

DATE 1555

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Spanish

#### DESCRIPTION

*Confutación del alcorán y secta mahometana* (1555) is one of a number of anti-Islamic treatises written by various authors in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spain that also include *Confusión o confutación de la secta mahomética y del Alcorán* of Juan Andrés (1515), the *Sermones* of Martín García (1517), *Lumbre de la fé contra la secta mahometana* of Juan Martín de Figuerola, (1518-21), Cristóbol de San Antonio's *Triumphus crucis contra infideles* (1521), Bernardo Pérez de Chinchón's *Libro llamado antialcorano* (1532), and Juan Luis Vives's *De veritate fidei Christianae*, Book 4 (1543). Such works were directed at or discussed the Morisco population of Spain (those Muslims who remained in the Iberian Peninsula after the fall of Granada in 1492), most of whom were forcibly converted to Christianity in the early years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century under the direction of Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros and other Spanish clergymen, but who, for the most part, continued to preserve their Muslim beliefs and customs in private. Along with a handful of catechetical guides written in the period, most of these works aimed to preach to the Morisco population in order more successfully to convert them to Christian belief and better integrate them into Spanish Catholic society.

Obregón's work follows in the tradition of these works but also stands apart from them in a number of ways. The work covers 143 pages (72 printed folios, including introductory material), and is made up of 15 chapters, the first ten of which are devoted to a critical biography of Muḥammad. It then deals with the history of the compilation of the Qur'an, followed by an overview of certain pro-Christian ideas in the Sunna and four chapters on the 'contradictions' (*contradiciones*), 'lies' (*mentiras*) and 'fables' (*fabulas, fabulosos dichos, fabulosas revelaciones*) found in the Qur'an. Obregón asserts that Muḥammad was possessed by the Devil, who used him to spread heresy in the world (pp. 20r, 47v).

Such arguments were typical in anti-Muslim writing in the Latin West, and Obregón seems to have been influenced in particular by Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, whose *Improbatio Alcorani* was published in Spain in Latin and in Castilian translation in the early years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Obregón specifically names a number of other Christian Latin authors and sources, including Gregory the Great (p. 6v), the 15<sup>th</sup>-century history *Fasciculus temporum* (p. 6v), the 'Archbishop of Florence' (Francesco Zabarella), Isidore of Seville and, most significantly, Denis (Dionysius) the Carthusian (in particular, Obregón seems to have used Denis's *Contra perfidiam Mahometi*, from c. 1462). He blends such references with content from the anti-Muslim works mentioned earlier, and he specifically mentions Juan Andrés, Pérez de Chinchón, and Martín García as his sources.

Like earlier anti-Muslim works, Obregón's attacks on Muslim belief and custom rest heavily on a specific attack on Muḥammad, including proofs that he performed no miracles, was a false prophet, and had an excessively carnal nature. He claims that Muḥammad faked his prophecy out of a desire for fame and power, basing his teaching on what he had learned of Christian tradition from two Christian sword makers, Jabr and Yasar (a claim based on *tafsīr* of Q 16:103-5). He also shows familiarity with the Baḥīrā legend, which alleges that Muḥammad was influenced by a schismatic Christian monk. Similarly, he mentions the legend of Muḥammad's debate with the Jew Abū l-Ḥārith 'Abdallāh ben Salām (called Abdias) (p. 50v *et passim*) and the legend of Muḥammad's alleged contact with and letter to Heraclius (pp. 42v-45r). Originally, the Western Christian legend of Abdias the Jew was based on the *Liber de doctrina Mahumet*, translated by Hermann of Carinthia as part of the *Collectio Toletana*, the cluster of translations ordered by Peter the Venerable of Cluny in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century (Ferrero Hernández and De la Cruz,

'Hermann of Carinthia', pp. 501, 505). Although this work, along with the *Liber de generatione Mahumet* (another work in the *Collectio Toletana*), was published by Theodore Bibliander as part of his 1543 edition of Robert of Ketton's translation of the Qur'an, Bibliander's edition was probably not Obregón's source, since he does not follow Ketton's numbering of Qur'anic books. Rather, Obregón very possibly drew his version of this material from Denis the Carthusian, whom he mentions as one of his sources (in particular, see Denis's *Contra perfidiam Mahometi* Book 3, articles XIII-XIV, for discussion of Abdias).

Obregón does not rely only on Christian sources, however, but quotes widely from Qur'an, the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq, various books of Sunna (al-Bukhārī and Muslim), the *Kitāb al-shifā' bi-ta'rif ḥuqūq al-muṣṭafā* of Qāḍī 'Iyād of Ceuta (p. 9r), and a few works of *tafsīr* (al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn 'Aṭīyya), all drawn from Juan Andrés (for one example, see Szpiech, 'Preaching Paul', p. 337). He also names a few philosophers (Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, p. 53r) but does not quote from them or show any knowledge of their work. He displays a patchy and idiosyncratic understanding of the *ḥajj* and other Muslim customs and traditions, and his knowledge seems to be drawn from earlier 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish authors.

Obregón's work is significant in following Juan Andrés in particular, because it makes reference to the division of the Qur'an into four books, a Maghribī practice first mentioned and used by Juan Andrés (and imitated by Martín García but not by Pérez de Chinchón). Obregón follows the same divisions used by Juan as well, starting the second group at Book 7, the third at Book 19, and the fourth at Book 38, although he takes some *sūras* out of order and claims the fourth book contains 170 chapters (five fewer than Juan Andrés, who claims 175) (p. 47v). Also like Juan Andrés, Obregón regularly provides the Arabic of his citations in phonetic transliteration into Latin characters, a practice not found in any of the other 16<sup>th</sup>-century anti-Muslim sources named above except Juan Martín de Figuerola, who transliterates his Qur'anic citations after providing them in Arabic characters. As no manuscripts of Juan Andrés's work or Lope Obregón's work survive, it is not known whether they too included Arabic characters in their texts, which were then left out in printing. It is worth noting in this context that Pérez de Chinchón's text refers to original citations and leaves space for them in the text, but does not include them in any form in the printed editions, thus suggesting that some kind of original-language citation was included in the manuscript. While Obregón's transliterations often match Juan's (for example,

Q 33:37 in Juan Andrés, *Confusión*, p. 48v, and Obregón, p. 21r), they also sometimes differ (for example, Q 3:3 in Andrés, p. 76r, and Obregón, p. 17r). Based on Obregón's many references to Christian sources, El Kolli believes that he did not know Arabic and could not read the sources he cites in the original ('La polémique', p. 125), and the presence of some garbled, shortened or mixed Qur'anic citations (which are not as garbled in Juan Andrés's text) would seem to support this (for example, see Obregón's citations of Q 2:87 on p. 2v, or Q 5:44 on p. 11r). Then again, some changes to the text (for example, in this latter verse on fol. 11r, the transposition of *hudan wa-nūrun* as 'nuron guahunde', i.e. *nūrun wa-hudan*, a phrase found elsewhere in the Qur'an) suggest that either he or an Arabic-speaking collaborator produced some of his citations from memory rather than copying them from a written version.

As with Juan Andrés, this use of original Arabic sources is part of Obregón's missionising strategy towards the Moriscos. He specifically states his intention to speak directly to Muslims in order to convert them, and laments their stubborn resistance, saying, 'since it is prohibited to them to dispute [their law], most of the Muḥammadans do not take care to know or say more than "my father died a Muslim, so must I die a Muslim"' (*porque como les está vedado disputarla, todos los más de los mahometanos no se curan de saber ni dezir más sino moro murió mi padre, moro tengo de morir yo*, p. 5r). Thus he stresses that his work makes use of 'very authentic books of the Moors' (*libros muy autenticos entre los moros*, p. 9r) and argues only 'according to the very sayings of the Qur'an' (*por los propios dichos de su alcoran*, p. 2r). In this, he follows Juan Andrés, who similarly stresses the persuasive power of using the Qur'an itself as a source of proofs of Christian truth.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

Like its predecessors, this work draws heavily upon the work of Juan Andrés, combining this material with earlier sources. Unlike Juan's work, Obregón does not claim that his work is from the perspective of a convert from Islam, but instead inserts its missionising arguments into the historical context of the Council of Trent and the call to evangelise the Moriscos more effectively through better preaching. While the work is not particularly noteworthy for the originality of its arguments, it is significant for two reasons: first, because it represents one of the ways that older anti-Islamic ideas from the *Collectio Toletana* and Riccolodo da Monte di Croce were transmitted in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spain in Spanish rather than Latin, and second, because it represents the last major missionary

work of its kind before the second Alpujarras revolt (1568-71), when the Moriscos around Granada staged a failed rebellion against decrees of King Philip II that had enforced a ban on Morisco customs and prohibited the Arabic language and alphabet. In the disastrous wake of the rebellion, Spanish writing about Islam and the Moriscos began to take a more pessimistic tone, and the Moriscos were definitively expelled from Spain in 1609. As Bunes Ibarra has observed, Obregón's work already shows a more polemical tone than earlier missionising works ('El enfrentamiento', p. 52), perhaps hinting at the ensuing embitterment in Christian-Morisco relations in Spain in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Obregón's work was cited by various authors in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, including Antonio de Torquemada, *Jardín de flores curiosas* (1570), Juan de Pineda, *Tercera parte de la monarchia ecclesiástica o historia universal del mundo* (1606), and most significantly the Jesuit Tirso González de Santalla in his *Selectarum disputationum ex vniuersa theologia scholastica* (1680) and *Manuductio ad conversionem Mahumetanorum* (1687). Outside Spain, his work had only a moderate impact, being far overshadowed by the work of Juan Andrés, which was translated into numerous languages and very widely disseminated. It is known that a copy of Obregón's work was held in the library of Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland (and brother of William Percy, author of the early-modern English play 'Mahomet and his heaven' from 1601). His work was mentioned in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by philologist Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Freytag (*Analecta litteraria de libris rarioribus*, 1750) and was known to form part of the large library of the Dutch lawyer Samuel van Hulst, sold at auction (*Bibliotheca Hulsiana*, 1730).

#### EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

*Confutación del alcorán y secta mahometana, sacado de sus propios libros, y de la vida del mesmo Mahoma*, Granada, 1555

(references to a second 1560 printing begin to appear sporadically in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century but no such copy is now known to exist, suggesting this is simply a cataloguing error)

#### STUDIES

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Ó. de la Cruz Palma and C. Ferrero Hernández, 'Hermann of Carinthia', in *Christian-Muslim relations. A bibliographical history. Volume 3 (1050-1200)*, ed. D. Thomas and A. Mallett, Leiden, 2011, 497-507

- Y. El Alaoui, 'L'évangélisation des morisques ou comment effacer les frontières religieuses', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 79 (2009) 51-72, pp. 67-69
- J.P.A. Torres, 'Bibliografía sobre las traducciones del Alcorán en el ámbito hispano', *TRANS. Revista de Traductología* 11 (2007) 261-72
- Framiñán de Miguel, 'Manuales para el adoctrinamiento', pp. 32-33 ('Catequesis', pp. 135-36)
- M.A. Bunes Ibarra, *La imagen de los musulmanes y del norte de África en la España de los siglos XVI y XVII. Los caracteres de una hostilidad*, Madrid, 1989, pp. 104, 203-16, 236, 260
- M.A. Bunes Ibarra, 'El enfrentamiento con el islam en el Siglo de Oro. los antialcoranes', *Edad de Oro* 8 (1989) 41-58, pp. 52-53
- G.W. Drost, 'Die Moriscos in de publicaties van Staat en Kerk (1492-1609)', Katwijk aan den Rijn, 1984 (Diss. University of Leiden), pp. 129-33, 377, 379
- El Kolli, 'La polémique islamo-chrétienne', pp. 122-31, 146-59, 167-94, 202-367
- B. Jiménez Duque, *La escuela sacerdotal de Ávila del siglo XVI*, Salamanca, 1981, pp. 74, 125-26
- M. Andrés, *La teología española en el siglo XVI*, Madrid, 1976, i, pp. 345-46
- Hernández Sánchez, 'Catecismos para la instrucción de los moriscos', pp. 114-42, 240-42

Ryan Szpiech