CHAPTER SIX

TURNING TURK, TURNING HERETIC: JOSEPH PITTS OF EXETER AND THE EARLY ENLIGHTENMENT, 1670-1740

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Exeter is the ideal setting for hosting a conference on Britain and the Muslim World for the reason that it marks the birthplace of one of the city's most noteworthy yet often forgotten sons: Joseph Pitts (1663-1739?), a young sailor who, onboard a fishing vessel, was captured and enslaved by Algerian pirates off the coast of Spain in 1678, converted to Islam involuntarily, and performed (as the first Englishmen ever to do so) the Hajj to Mecca and Medina in 1684/5, only to escape to England about 1693, reaffirm his Christian faith, and publish a first-hand account of his travels in 1704. Pitts' fifteen-year journey from slavery to freedom, apostasy to atonement, ignominy to authorship, represents not only the remarkable life of one man, but also the political and religious contentions that plagued eighteenth-century Exeter externally and internally: besides being a hotspot for Algerian piracy raids and forced Muslim conversions along the Devonshire coast, Exeter was the site of the split between Presbyterians and Unitarians during the Trinitarian controversy of 1716-19. This essay argues that Exeter's local problems—a microcosm of religious difference within and without Britain's porous borders—casts a long shadow over Pitts' A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans (1704), a pioneering study of comparative religion that exalts Muslim devotional practices as a model for inculcating Protestant civic virtue.

As a practicing Muslim who remained a believing Christian, Pitts offers an insider's scoop on the Muslim world that can "do some good." This "good" comes in the form of vital information that can be used strategically for military, diplomatic, and commercial purposes as well as in the form of a lesson about the nature of true religion:
That all professing Christianity may both entirely believe the doctrine of our blessed Savior and sincerely conform their practice to their belief. And though the former in some instances may seem difficult to reason and the latter to corrupt nature, yet both, duly and humbly considered, will be found to be our rational service. And according to the best of my capacity, I see not much difference between a man’s refusing to embrace and believe the mysterious doctrines of our religion because they exceed his reach and comprehension, so long as they are clearly revealed, and his denying to obey the practical and moral precepts of Christianity because some of them are not suited to his humor and complexion and adapted to his own scheme. We must have a new religion to please all, but the old must and will stand in spite of the gates of hell.3

The words Pitts deploys—"rational," "sincerely," "mysterious doctrines," "revealed," and "practical and moral precepts"—are saturated in the theological idiom of Protestant moral piety, representing an ambivalent response (Anglican or Nonconformist?) to national debates about the scope of the Church’s "rational service": the balanced relationship between belief and practice, grace and good works.

According to Isabel Rivers, the language used to express these conflicting terms became culturally pervasive with the rise of Anglican moral religion during the late seventeenth century. Although Anglicans and Nonconformists disagreed on the proper relationship between belief and practice, they agreed that the expressive language and gesture of devotional practice and the intuition of grace as the inaugural moment of belief “were indissolubly linked.” In order to avoid the Pelagian heresy, moral virtue needed to be justified—at the level of affect and sentiment—by grace; otherwise, a good Christian cannot be distinguished from a good heathen, Jew, and Mahometan.4 Pitts partly succumbs to Pelagianism when noting that Muslims “sincerely” believe in their faith and strictly practice what they preach: “It is a shame indeed to Christians to take a view of the zeal of those poor blind Mahometans, which in the following account will be found to be in many things very strict.”5 Because of his ambivalent response to the belief-practice nexus, Pitts acquires two fluctuating voices: a High Anglican voice that polices English “Mahometans”—anti-Trinitarians who threaten Church and State—and a Nonconformist-Pelagian voice that valorises Islam as a living faith worthy of Christian respect and toleration.

According to Linda Colley, Pitts’ anti-clerical form of Protestantism allowed him (and many Britons) to identify with Islam over Catholicism, rendering “the crescent ... far less alien and dangerous than the cross on a Catholic’s rosary.”6 Building on Colley’s observation, this essay contextualizes Pitts’ approach to Islam within the debates of the early Enlightenment, 1670-1740, focusing on his use of comparative religion: an emerging field of study in which freethinkers appealed to non-Christian religions in order to posit the universal essence of (Christian) religion. Taking my cue from the influential scholarship of Talal Asad and Peter Harrison, I argue that Pitts’ sympathetic description of Muslim pious devotion reflects an Enlightenment tendency to define religion in two complimentary senses: (1) as a depersonalized system of propositional beliefs and textual-based knowledge that requires the believer’s “sincere” assent and (2) as a bodily habitus composed of dispositions, speech acts, and behaviours that are transposable across history and cultures.7 To “sincerely conform their practices to their belief” entails both of these definitions, which do not preclude the performative role of affect in uniting belief and practice within the text itself and between the 1704 and later 1731 and 1738 editions of Pitts’ account.

For Pitts, Muslim humility, zeal, remorse, and charity mediate the balanced relationship between belief and practice, serving as a model for aligning Protestants with disciplinary regimes of truth made possible within existing networks of institutional and state power (the ecumenical church). This theological-political dimension of affect and sentiment confounds a triumphant Whig historiography in which “the representation of ‘Europe’ takes the form of a narrative” about the relocation of religion—as-belief and passion from public to private, “whose effect is to exclude Islam.”8 Resisting this secularist narrative, Pitts describes Islam as an embodied form of civic virtue, even as his 1731 edition suppressed the transnational significance of Muslim piety in the service of subordinating practice to belief.

Pitts’ approach to Islam is a by-product of radical histories of “Mahometanism” (a commonplace Christian nomenclature for Islam), which read the successful propagation of the Prophet’s teachings as the recuperation of a pristine Unitarian monotheism (the unity of God) rather than marking a retrograde hybrid of Christianity and Judaism. In the early eighteenth century, sympathetic accounts of Islam written by Henri Comte de Boullainvilliers, John Toland, and George Sale retold the history of monotheism from the perspective of Prophet Muhammad, hailed as a wise republican legislator.9 This approach was first promulgated in Henry Stubbe’s The Rise and Progress of Mahometanism (c. 1671), an anti-Trinitarian manuscript that circulated privately among radical Unitarian circles well into the nineteenth century.10 Relying on Edward Pococke Sr.’s Specimen Historiae Arabum (1650), Stubbe deplores the myths found in Christian polemics against Islam: Mahomet’s revelation as a symptom of the “falling sickness” (epileptic seizures), the holy pigeon who eats out
of Mahomet's ear, the suspended coffin of Mahomet between two lode stones, and the Nestorian monk (Sergius) and Jew (Abdalla) who allegedly wrote the Qur'an, and other such "fabulous, ridiculous trash."\textsuperscript{11} Instead, he proposes three heretical claims: (1) Islam revived Arianism, the original faith of messianic Judaism that upheld Christ as a human prophet rather than the Son of God; (2) the rapid growth of Islam is a reaction to the corrupting influences of Trinitarian idolatry and clerical tyranny; (3) Mahomet, a wise legislator, replaced Christian dogmas about original sin with popular myths about constitutional law. For Stubbe, Muslims are prime candidates (in a Pelagian sense) for justification through virtue rather than grace alone.

Like Stubbe, Pitts relies on Pococke's work to verify his first-hand observations, dispelling anti-Islamic myths about the Prophet's suspended coffin and his holy pigeon as disseminated in "many books ... stuffed with very great mistakes."\textsuperscript{12} Pitts' family background and personal experience partly explains his critical stance toward these "mistakes." Although Pitts claims to have been abused and tortured by his first two masters—Mustapha, a shopkeeper who beat him as a Christian, and Ibrahim, a "Turkish" captain who forced him to convert after undergoing an agonizing bastinado—he notes that this harsh treatment is atypical of the Muslim world; he resists commonplace stereotypes about Turkish cruelty and forced Muslim conversion.\textsuperscript{13} Under his last master and paternal patron, Eumer, Pitts was freed after their return trip from Mecca, as customary under Muslim practice; he now had the opportunity to secure an inheritance by marrying Eumer's daughter, learn how to read and write, and obtain a possible advancement to a government post.

Although he refused Eumer's offer and little is known about Pitts' life after his return to England, this socio-economic prospect would have been impossible for an Englishman who had not conformed to the Church of England. Born into a Nonconformist family in which his father, John Pitts, is known to have signed a petition of an Exeter church dedicated to King Charles II, Joseph Pitts had a better possibility of finding preferment in Algiers than in Exeter.\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, the enactment of the Corporation (1662) and Test Acts (1673) disenfranchised Catholics and Protestant dissenters (including anti-Trinitarians such as Quakers, Unitarians, and Arians) by preventing them from assuming public office, earning university degrees, or obtaining legal preferment. Hence, Pitts' self-proclaimed "full and punctual" account foregrounds the exercise of independent and clergy-free worship among Muslims, within and without mosques. He is very self-conscious about mislabelling mosques "Churches" and imams "priests" and parenthetically notes the existence of a Presbyterian, if not Erastian,

form of governance among the ulama (Muslim legal scholars) in which civil magistrates rather than established clergymen appoint imams: "there is no such thing as ordination of the imam as I think or ever heard, but the dey appoints him."\textsuperscript{15} For Pitts and Stubbe, the Muslim world offers the kind of socio-economic advancements that were not available to Nonconformists in England.

And yet Pitts defends the Trinity. Whereas Stubbe and most Unitarians employed the Islamic concept of tawhid or unity of God to discredit the scriptural basis of (Anglican) Trinitarianism, Pitts does not use Islam as a polemical weapon against any particular doctrine or sect. He writes in the preface that:

My principal end in [this] publication is giving glory to God, by whose gracious providence I am released from slavery and reduced into my own native country where there are no means of salvation wanting and where the blessed doctrine of Jesus in established and the Holy Trinity adored.\textsuperscript{16}

Of course, not everyone adored the "Holy Trinity." The Corporation and Test Acts remained in effect after the 1689 Toleration Act—despite granting dissenters freedom of religious worship—fueling public resentment against the Trinity as codified in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Anglican faith. In an effort to mitigate this resentment and dispel any lingering doubts about his past apostasy, Pitts warns his readers about the imminent danger posed by "Mahometanism":

... the many heresies and divisions and blasphemous errors broached in that age ... provoked God to deliver the eastern churches over to cursed Mohammet and to remove the candlestick out of its place. God grant that the same cause may not have the same direful influence on us but that all professing Christianity may both entirely believe the doctrine of our blessed Savior and sincerely conform their practice to their belief.\textsuperscript{17}

Drawing on an older conceit that interprets Islam as a providential tool for punishing heretical Christians, Pitts posits an analogy between the church disputes of the early seventh century and the English sectarian conflicts of the early eighteenth century as a warning to those who refuse "to embrace and believe the mysterious doctrines of our religion because they exceed his reach and comprehension."\textsuperscript{18} He implores heretics to seek integration within the Church; otherwise, they risk repeating history by inciting another Mahometan invasion similar, in scope, to the conquest of the schismatic churches of Asia Minor. At the level of tone and affect, Pitts' mode of comparative religion serves to bolster orthodox, if not Anglican,
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zeal. Indeed, the story of Islam’s rise out of the ruins of the Greek Orthodox Church derives from Bishop Humphrey Prideaux’s anti-Islamic biography of the Prophet: The True Nature of Imposture Fully display’d in the Life of Mahomet. With a discourse Annex’d for the Vindication of Christianity from this Charge. Offered to the Consideration of the Deists of the Present Age (1697), a popular high Anglican polemic that went through nine editions and Pitts admires. As suggested in the subtitle, it is a coded response to the deist defence of Islam found in Stubbe and other critics of the Trinity. Prideaux’s dedication “to the reader” proposes that Mahomet’s conquest over an Eastern Church embroiled in “endless schisms and contentions” offers a dire warning about the heresies of “the Socinian, the Quaker, and the Deist,” which, in Prideaux’s paranoid imagination, will provoke God to “raise up some Mahomet against us”—an opportunistic Muslim enemy who will exploit anti-Trinitarian disputes so as to invade a weakened and self-divided England. He posits a historical analogy between Islamic tyranny and anti-Trinitarianism in order to terrify dissenters into returning to the orthodox Anglican fold. In this regard, he recasts Anglican attacks on Islam in terms of early Enlightenment debates about the lives of legislators versus impostors, debates that were used to formulate Christian conceptions of revealed versus natural religion. As such, Prideaux’s popular biography provides a reinstated apostate such as Pitts with a ready-made idiom for reasserting his national loyalty to Church and State: the rational integration of Trinitarian belief with Church practice. Accordingly, Pitts obliquely concludes his account on a high Anglican note by praying for “all Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics” to enter the “one fold” of a Trinitarian godhead, even though he (being a Nonconformist) refrains from praising the Church of England by name.

Following Prideaux’s rhetorical lead, Pitts equates superstitious Islamic doctrines with Catholic absurdities. For instance, he compares Islamic reverence for marabouts or Sufi leaders to the “Papist” belief in the efficacy of saints. As confirmation for this analogy, he references Prideaux’s work in a parenthetical note: “Here’s true Sergius: this is exactly ora pro nobis, and indeed their whole religion is a miscellany of popery, Judaism, and the gentilism of the Arabs, as may by seen in D. Prideaux’s excellently written life of Mohammet.” The back-to-back mocking allusion to “true Sergius”—the Nestorian monk who allegedly aided Muhammad in fabricating Islam—and “ora pro nobis” (pray for us)—a congregation’s response to the Latin litany on Saint’s intercession—conflates, metaphorically, the falselhoods of Catholicism with Islam. Pitts’ mocking description of the marabout offerings of money, candles, oil, linen cloth, and animal sacrifice—along with the “heavy sighs and groans” of the supplicants—renders these “blind infidels” proto-Catholic. Pitts frequently compares Mahometans to Papists: halal sacrifice of animals is equated with the doctrine of transubstantiation; Muslim forgiveness of sin with purgatory; dervishes with Roman monks and friars; and the holy water of the Zem Zem well with Catholic baptismal rites. By contrast, true Protestant religion is implicitly defined as a self-consistent, rational, and sincere belief system that is untainted by idolatrous and superstitious worship and is acquired only through a direct relationship with God in the form of grace alone. Pitts rehashes the Mahometan-Papist analogies that were debunked by Stubbe. In doing so, he aligns himself with an anti-Islamic mode of comparative religion that, by the eighteenth century, was indistinguishable from Prideaux’s high Anglican polemic.

However, chapters six through eight of Pitts’ account depart from Prideaux’s mode of comparative religion. Providing accurate and sympathetic descriptions of Muslim rites, ablutions, prayers, and the Five Pillars of Islam, these intermediate chapters do not reflect the Anglican anti-Islamic tone of the opening and closing chapters. On the verge of the Pelagian heresy, Pitts equates superstitious religious piety: they say “grace” before taking their meals; diligently study the Qur’an, thoroughly educate their children in reading and memorizing it; punctually perform their “nomas” or prayers; carefully obey all the required rites as “hagges” in Mecca and Medina; and are always charitable to the poor. Pitts notes that Muslims commit various vices that go unpunished— sodomy in particular—and yet, in a Pelagian-like fashion, he portrays their state of moral perfection (without grace) as worthy of emulation: “I wish to God that Christians were as diligent in studying the holy scriptures, the Law, and the Gospel ... as those infidels are in poring upon ... falsities and abominable follies and absurdities.” In chapter seven, he is emotionally overpowered by the humility, remorse, and charity of tearful hajjis circling the Ka’aba, the cube-shaped House of God at the centre of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. He condemns this rite as superstitious, yet (as a hajji) participates in their pious worship physically and psychologically:

And I profess I could not choose but admire to see those poor creatures so extraordinary devout and affectionate when they were about these superstitious and with what awe and trembling they were possessed. Insomuch that I could scarce forbear shedding tears to see their zeal, though blind and idolatrous.

Insofar as Pitts’ tears partake in the hajjis’ tears upon first beholding the
Ka'aba, he deprecates Islamic doctrinal belief *but only* to elevate—at the level of affect—Muslim devotional practice as an embodied transcultural form of salvation; religion defined not as a symbolic system of abstract beliefs held by a particular civilization and within a certain geographical locale but as disciplinary, bodily practices conducive for producing virtuous subjects across history, nations, and cultures. Hence, the zeal, humility, remorse, and charity that Pitts evokes in his chapters on Mecca and Medina serve to inculcate similar virtues in an English readership that witnessed a decline in parish charity, Anglican piety, and biblical study—especially in Exeter—and widespread religious apathy and church non-attendance after the 1688 Revolution.

Pitts' Pelagian-like evaluation of Muslims comes across in a morally edifying tale, a dialogue between himself and a Turkish hajji set inside the Grand Mosque:

Ere I leave Mecca, I shall acquaint you with one passage of a Turk to me in temple cloister (for, as I said, the temple is much of the figure of the Royal Exchange, with cloisters or piazzas, and the beat [Ka'aba] stands in the midst of the court) in the nighttime, between *aashmon nomas* and *gegee nomas*, i.e., between the evening and the night services. The hagges do usually spend that time or good part of it (which is about an hour and half) at towof and then sit down on the mats and rest themselves. This I did and, after I had sat a while and for my more ease, at last was lying on my back with my feet towards the beat, but at a distance, as many others did, a Turk which sat by me asked me what countryman I was.

"A Maghebi," said I (i.e., one of the west).

"Pray," quoth he, "how far west did you come?"

I told him, "From Gaza," i.e., Algier.

"Ah!" replied he, "Have you taken so much pains, and been at so much cost, and now be guilty of this irreverent posture before the beat-olloh, or House of God?"

The Grand Mosque sets the stage for what Mary Louise Pratt describes as reciprocal vision, a contact zone experience in which Pitts subjects himself to the critical gaze of a Turk who shames him for disrespectfully positioning his feet in the direction of the Ka'aba. And yet this anti-conquest story does not bolster a universalist Protestant ethos. Obliquely identifying himself as "one of the west," Pitts engages in a mode of religious self-questioning that interrupts his metanarrative of national Protestant redemption. On a literal level, he cannot answer the Turk's question truthfully, since to do so would expose his cover as a Christian infidel in disguise and result in his death for illegally trespassing into the Muslim holy land. But on a symbolic level, his silence testifies to an inability to answer a pressing question that reveals the shameful and inferior state of western Christendom in relationship to the Muslim world: the intimation that the English do not practice what they preach. In subjecting himself (and the reader) to the scrutiny of the Muslim gaze, Pitts treats religion as a zone of transcultural coexistence in which European (Protestant) knowledge is rendered non-universal and, if anything, fundamentally flawed for failing to put belief into practice.

Pitts' dialogical exchange is framed by an elaborate conceit comparing "the temple of Mecca" to the London Royal Exchange, a national icon of England's financial revolution in the late seventeenth century. After its reconstruction following the great fire of 1666, the second Exchange became emblematic of God's material grace on Protestant England, testifying to London's emerging financial pre-eminence. And yet it was also symbolic of the vices of trading in foreign "luxuries." Twice in chapter seven, Pitts compares the Exchange as a quadrangle courtyard with "cloisters" and "piazzas" to the architectural design of the Grand Mosque, another icon of international cosmopolitanism. Through this conceit, London's financial centre is transposed onto the Ka'aba, which earlier he calls "the idol" that is adored by proto-Catholic Muslims who worship God in relics (the kissing of the black stone).

Once a sailor onboard a commercial fishing vessel returning from the West Indies and Newfoundland, Pitts, not surprisingly, casts moneyed interest as England's national idol and devout practices as belonging exclusively to Muslims despite their "Papists" beliefs. Indeed, a few paragraphs after the passage on the devout Turk, Pitts refuses to equate Muslims with "poor Romanists" for the first time:

I was lately perusing an English Alcoran, where I find in the preface that the translator saith that the vulgar are not permitted to read the Alcoran but (as the poor Romanists) to live and die in an implicit faith of what they are taught by their priests. This I utterly deny, for it is not only permitted and allowed of, but it is (as I intimated before) looked on as very commendable in any person to be diligent in the reading of it.

Pitts disproves the Mahometan-Papist analogy as popularized in the preface to the 1649 translation of the Qur'an. By reading their holy text without clerical mediation, Muslims, for Pitts, cannot be compared to Catholics, contrary to what he has repeatedly asserted. Elevating autonomous reading practices above church-sanctioned belief, Pitts suggests a transcultural affinity between Muslims and Protestants. In this regard, chapter seven registers a switch in tone from Prideaux's high Anglican polemic to Stubbe's deist-Pelagian rhetoric.
Oscillating between Anglicanism and deism, Pitts’ multivalent voice is occluded—though not erased—in the third edition of his account. Unlike the pirated 1717 edition, the 1731 edition suppresses the self-questioning implicit in his transcultural encounter with the Turkish Hajji. It deletes the parenthetical note comparing the Grand Mosque to the Exchange and rewrites the Pitts-Turk conversation in a non-dialogical form. As a result, the analogy between Muslim-Catholic idolatry and London’s irreligious financial order is censored. The conceit of religious exchange as a corrupt form of commercial transaction is instead ascribed to Muslims. The 1731 edition states that Muslims “give eight or ten Dollars for a Copy of the Alcoran. Their Dollar is about two Shillings and three Pence.” As the last sentence of chapter seven, this supplementary note displaces an image of English monetary exchange (shillings and pence) onto a symbol of Muslim devotion (the Qur’an), implying that Muslims rather than Englishmen sell their faith for commercial gain. The main difference between the 1704 and 1731 editions is that the former allows for a transcultural mode of critique that holds Pitts accountable to the standards of Muslim virtue whereas the latter retains the didactic lesson (that Englishmen should be as pious as Muslims) while downplaying any potentially radical portrayals of proto-Protestant Muslims. In other words, the third edition forecloses the possibility that the Muslim world represents a viable alternative to an English commercial society that no longer practices what it believes.

The self-censoring of the third edition reflects a cautious response to an anti-Trinitarian controversy that peaked between 1716 and 1719 in Exeter. This controversy centred on Joseph Hallet II, the principal of an Exeter Nonconformist Academy that was caught in a nationwide scandal regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. Hallet’s son, Joseph Hallet III, introduced Arian views in an Academy designed to prepare students for the ministry. His son held secret correspondence with two notorious heretics: William Whiston, who was ejected from his Cambridge professorship in 1710 for defending Arianism, and Samuel Clark, rector of St. James, who argued for the non-scriptural basis of the Trinity.

In 1716, this secret correspondence was publicly exposed, prompting orthodox Presbyterians to demand a declaration of belief in the Trinity at the Exeter Assembly of dissening ministers in 1718. When Hallet II, his son, and other ministers refused to subscribe, the orthodox ministry barred them from meeting houses, resulting in the ejection of at least 300 members from an estimated population of 2,250 Exeter Presbyterians and the closing of the Academy in 1719. Unable to agree on the proper criterion under which to perform belief (subscription), Presbyterian Trinitarians split from Arian Unitarians, as evident in the ensuing pamphlet warfare that engulfed Exeter (as well as England, Ireland, and Scotland) during the same period in which Pitts’ account was pirated in 1717. In this context, his account acquired polemical implications: inserted in his narrative, his father wrote a letter of forgiveness to his apostate son based on the advice of Exeter’s Nonconformist ministers, “who unanimously concurred in their opinion that [Pitts] had not sinned the unpardonable sin,” as if the practice (without belief) of Muslim devotion is not inherently sinful. In order to avoid casting these would-be Unitarians as secret Muslim sympathizers, the third edition steers away from controversy; it supersedes transcultural moments in which the devout Muslim world is exalted above an irreligious Christian world.

Pitts’ position on the Exeter controversy remains a mystery, but given his aversion to schismatic Christians he would have wanted to see an end to internal disputes that were endangering the prospect for the toleration of dissenters. In fact, this controversy served as a testing ground for national debates in London about the Occasional Conformity Act, which prevented dissenters from circumventing the Test Acts by occasionally taking Anglican Communion, and the Schism Act, which required dissenting academies to be licensed by an Anglican bishop. Passed during the reign of Queen Anne but repealed in 1719 under the Whig administration of King George I, these strictures were defended by Tories who exploited Presbyterian in-fighting in Exeter as a pretext for exaggerating the threat of Arianism and sounding the alarm of “the Church in danger.” Nonconformist Whigs who were interested in repealing the Test and Corporation Acts actively sought to put an end to the Exeter controversy, which was playing into the hands of their Tory opponents. In an effort to steer away from controversy, Pitts’ third edition mimics the tactics of Presbyterian Whigs. The main clue lies in Pitts’ new dedicatory addressee. Whereas the 1704 edition honours William Ray, the consul of Smyrna who facilitated Pitts’ escape, the 1731 edition is dedicated to Peter King (1669-1734): Lord Chancellor of England, a Whig constitutional lawyer, and an Exeter Presbyterian. He advocated for the toleration of dissenters in his published histories on the non-clerical worship practiced by the primitive Christian church.

As an ex-pupil of Hallet II, King imbibes in the freethinking spirit of the Exeter Academy and yet governs as a non-controversial politician. By evoking King, Pitts’ description of Muslim non-clerical worship lends itself to a moderate Whig defence of ecumenical toleration as originally practiced by primitive Christians. In this regard, the third and fourth editions (reprinted in 1738) joined an expanding chorus of scholarly works on Islam that were intent on broadening the scope of toleration. Indeed, sympathetic accounts of
Muslim worship were on the rise between 1720 and 1740. Among these accounts, Joseph Morgan, Adrian Reland, and Bernard Picart furnished Pitts' third and fourth editions with two vivid illustrations: "The most sacred and antient TEMPLE of the MAHOMETANS at MECCA" and "The various gestures of the Mahometans in their prayers to God" [Figs. 5-1 and 5-2].

Meticulously diagrammed, they were first printed (in a different version) in the 1721 French translation of Reland's De religione Mohammedica and subsequently in Muhammad Rabadan's Mahometanism Fully Explained (translated by Joseph Morgan in 1723-25) and in Picart's The Ceremonies and Religious Customs of the Various Nations of the known world (published between 1723 and 1737 and translated into English in 1733).

Depicting the act of worship as an abstract set of techniques, verbally and visually, these works interpret the performance of religious practices as symbolic of a fundamentally unified and disembodied belief system worthy of toleration. As Talal Asad points out, "where faith had once been a virtue [for instituting discipline and truth in medieval Christendom], it now acquired an epistemological sense. Faith became a way of knowing supernatural objects, parallel to the knowledge of nature (the real world) that reason and observation provided." Repackaged as a scholarly study of religion/s, Pitts' third and fourth editions assimilate to this rationalist mode of knowledge, in text and image, redefining Islam as an inverted version of Protestant supernaturalism. Hence, The Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mahometans—foregrounding the word "faithful" and deleting "true" from the original title—relocates the conditions of truth-production in other-worldly belief rather than in this-worldly virtue.

Overall, I have argued that the belief-practice nexus was reconfigured between Pitts' first and third/fourth editions in response to the Exeter controversy, which rendered the performance of belief (in the Trinity) the prime legalistic criterion for debating toleration. Seeking to remedy the widespread decline of Anglican piety, Pitts exalts Muslims as role models for how to instil, for example, "pious education" among Christians starting at a young age. Between 1704 and 1731, the emphasis of "sincerely conform[ing] their practice to their belief" shifted from religion-as-practice to religion-as-performed belief, even as these two definitions of religion remained in flux in Pitts' dual Anglican-deist voice (present in both editions) and throughout the eighteenth century. This shift is a side effect of the editorial decision to downplay transcultural identifications with Muslims. In an effort to avoid theological strife, the third edition
recasts Islam as, first and foremost, an abstract system of “sincere” beliefs belonging to a foreign geographical locale and civilization and, secondly and less prominently, as a bodily habitus composed of virtuous practices, dispositions, and emotions that persist across generations, cultures, and nations. And yet, as a practicing young Muslim who had an affectionate relationship with his third master and good socio-economic prospects if he remained with him, Pitts provides more details about Islam as a living civic discipline and faith than any other work of comparative religion well into the nineteenth century.

Pitts’ pioneering ethnography of Muslim “manners” deserves more sustained attention (in its multiple editions) than is possible in this short essay, not only for what it can teach critics about Western representations of Islam and the discourse of Orientalism, but also for what it reveals about secular definitions of religion as a normalizing concept when applied to the Muslim world. Anthropologists and religious studies scholars have shown that the concept of religion-as-belief is a unique by-product of the West’s political, theological, and colonial history that, in effect, homogenizes non-Western cultures. And yet most literary and postcolonial critics treat this concept as if it were a self-evident and universal category. Situating Pitts’ multivalent approach to Islam within the historical trajectory of comparative religion, then and now, might, I hope, make critics self-consciously aware of the provincial specificity of religion-as-belief, a western-generated concept that continues to act as a stumbling block in initiating a cross-cultural dialogue between Britain and the Muslim world.

Notes

1 On eighteenth-century Exeter’s theological and political contentions, see Robert Newton, Eighteenth Century Exeter (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1984), 1-17, 52, 77. The Devonshire coast was vulnerable to frequent Algerian piracy raids that resulted in captured Englishmen who, like Pitts, converted to Islam, forcefully and voluntarily. Linda Colley points out that many English captives originated from the maritime trading region of Devon: see Colley, Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1830 (London: Cape, 2002), 44, 49, 76, 85. 2 Joseph Pitts, A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohametans (Exeter, 1704), 221. All citations refer to this edition unless otherwise noted. For a lightly modernized text, see “A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mahometans, with an Account of the Author’s Being Taken Captive,” in Daniel J. Vitkus, ed., Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 218-340.

3 Pitts, True and Faithful Account, 224.
5 Pitts, True and Faithful Account, 223.
6 Colley, Captives, 125.
7 According to Talal Asad and Peter Harrison, these two definitions of religion are a product of the early Enlightenment study of comparative religions, which, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, privileged belief over practice; see Talal Asad, Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993) and Peter Harrison, “Religion” and the Religions in the English Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). But as Isabel Rivers has thoroughly documented, this dual definition of religion—though present at the level of Enlightenment discourses—complement each other at the level of affect, or performed belief, among dissenters and Anglicans alike; see Rivers, Reason, Grace, and Sentiment.
10 On the private circulation of this manuscript, see James R. Jacob, Henry Stubbe: Radical Protestantism and the Early Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 139-60.
12 Pitts, True and Faithful Account, 223.
13 Ibid., 306.
15 Pitts, True and Faithful Account, 224, 249
16 Ibid., 223.
17 Ibid., 223-4.
18 Ibid., 224.
19 Ibid., 233.
21 Humphrey Prideaux, The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display’d in the Life of Mahomet. With a discourse Annex’d for the Vindication of Christianity from this Charge. Offered to the Consideration of the Deists of the Present Age (London, 1697), vii-viii.

23 Pitts, True and Faithful Account, 339.

24 Ibid., 233.

25 Ibid., 234.

26 Ibid., 235, 257, 276, 279, 283.

27 Ibid., 235, 244, 286, 289.

28 Ibid., 244.

29 Ibid., 276.

30 On the anxious nationalist rhetoric of Anglican piety, mainly in response to the post-1688 decline in ritual practice among the laity and dwindling church attendance, see John Spurr, The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 234-78, 376-401. Between 1700 and 1740, Anglican Church education in Exeter was limited to middle-class men, excluding most of the poor, and specialized in teaching practical and professional skills rather than religious piety and biblical study. Since 1698, the poor rate revenue of local Exeter parishes was extremely limited and inadequately distributed (only given to Anglican residents) despite an increasing number of beggars and homeless people in the streets of Exeter; see Newton, Eighteenth Century Exeter, 28-9, 30-2.

31 Pitts, True and Faithful Account, 288.

32 For a broader discussion on the critical self-questioning of European knowledge and ethics emerging during moments of reciprocal vision in travelogues, see Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturisation (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 82-3.


34 Pitts, True and Faithful Account, 279, 288, 277.

35 Ibid., 290.

36 Pitts, True and Faithful Account, 1731 ed., 147.


38 Brockett, Nonconformity, 96.

39 Pitts, True and Faithful Account, 316. Radford claims that Joseph Hallet II advised Pitts’ father to write a letter of forgiveness to his apostate son, though she offers no evidence for this claim; Radford, “Joseph Pitts,” 227.

40 Thomas, “Non-subscription Controversy,” 168.

41 Written as a response to ongoing parliamentary debates about comprehensive toleration, Peter King published popular defences of the non-clerical worship practiced among primitive Christians, mainly in terms of Presbyterian and Episcopalian church governance: An Enquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship of the Primitive Church (1691; rpt. London, 1712, 1713); and The History of the Apostles Creed: with Critical Observations on its Articles (London, 1702), which was reprinted in several editions, in England and Europe, for the next forty years: see ODNB.


44 Picart may have been involved in engraving these two illustrations for Reland’s work. On Picart’s adoption of these illustrations in volume one and seven of his work, see Hunt, et al., eds., The Book, 249, 358; and Brafman, “Picart,” 149-50. Reland’s De religione Mahammedi (1705) first appeared in English translation, without the illustrations, in Four Treatises Concerning the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of the Mahometan Religion (London, 1712). Morgan translated a seventeenth-century account of Islam written by Muhammad Rabdan, an exiled Morisco who castigates intolerant Christians for their violent persecution of pious Muslims and Jews.


46 Asad, Formations, 38-9.

47 Pitts, True and Faithful Account, 224.

48 According to Albert Hourani, the history of orientalist studies can be characterized by an opposition between Islam as a textual object of belief and as a living faith and practice, the latter gaining prominence by the first half of the nineteenth century; Hourani, Islam in European Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 7-60.