

THE LEGACY OF HENRY MARTYN TO THE STUDY OF INDIA'S MUSLIMS AND ISLAM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Avril A. Powell

University of Lincoln (SOAS)

INTRODUCTION:

A biography of Henry Martyn, published in 1892, by George Smith, a retired Bengal civil servant, carried two sub-titles: the first, 'saint and scholar', the second, the 'first modern missionary to the Mohammedans. [1] In an earlier lecture we have heard about the forming, initially in Cambridge, of a reputation for spirituality that partly explains the attribution of 'saintliness' to Martyn: my brief, on the other hand, is to explore the background to Smith's second attribution: the late Victorian perception of him as the 'first modern missionary' to Muslims. I intend to concentrate on the first hundred years since his ordination, dividing my paper between, first, Martyn's relations with Muslims in India and Persia, especially his efforts both to understand Islam and to prepare for the conversion of Muslims, and, second, the scholarship of those evangelicals who continued his efforts to turn Indian Muslims towards Christianity. Among the latter I shall be concerned especially with an important, but neglected figure, Sir William Muir, author of *The Life of Mahomet, and The Caliphate: its Rise, Decline and Fall*, and of several other histories of Islam, and of evangelical tracts directed to Muslim readers. I will

finish with a brief discussion of conversion from Islam to Christianity among the Muslim circles influenced by Martyn and Muir.

But before beginning I would like to mention the work of those responsible for the Henry Martyn Centre at Westminster College in recently collecting together and listing some widely scattered correspondence concerning Henry Martyn. It is unlikely now that the original correspondence, on which his nineteenth century biographers and editors based their publications of his journals and letters, will ever re-emerge. However, a great deal has now been recovered from other archives and from the correspondence of his colleagues and friends. I say this feelingly for most of my own work on Martyn was done some thirty years ago while attempting to establish a pre-history for a study of Muslim relations with missionaries later in the nineteenth century. Returning only recently to this subject, I certainly find that it is now possible to probe some hitherto unanswerable questions about Martyn with much more hope of finding answers as a result of the Centre's activities.

I would also wish to mention two previous lectures in this series (unfortunately I was not able to attend the third). Brian Stanley's deconstruction of a popular image of Martyn that had been somewhat uncritically revered in evangelical tradition has helped to distinguish the mercilessly self-reproachful lonely 'sinner' of his own journals, from the rather companionable, often 'cheerful' priest frequently encountered in the diaries of others. I owe much too to Sebastian Kim's examination in his own lecture of some later Bible translation programmes in Asia, for I agree with those who consider that Martyn's most lasting legacy was his multi-lingual translations of the Bible for Muslim readers, though with effects that I hope my lecture will show, that were not always what he had intended. Because I come last in this series of lectures I am going to assume that the details of the life of Henry Martyn are already well known to you.

PART I: MARTYN IN INDIA AND PERSIA:

Considering his subsequent reputation as a 'missionary to Mohammedans', Henry Martyn's opportunities for contact with Muslims were extremely short-

lived and restricted in nature. His entire residence in north India and Persia before his death in 1812, aged 31, occupied less than six years, the period of apprenticeship for most scholars before embarking on any serious translation or original publication. For most of that short time the East India Company's requirements that its employees, including chaplains, should avoid public preaching, prevented him from seeking the kind of close contact with Indians that he had originally envisaged. However, I agree with Brian Stanley, that he was anyway temperamentally unsuited to press his case with Hindus and Muslims as vigorously as some contemporary and later missionaries would choose to do. Before examining the legacy of his publishing and other activities I want to consider, first, the religious preconceptions and scholarly credentials he brought to religious debate with Muslims.

Martyn shared the views of most of his generation about non-Christian religious systems. After a few months in India he contrasted, 'the holiness of the word of God...to the mock majesty of the Koran, and the trifling, indecent stuff of the Ramayuna'. [2]His own evangelical upbringing, followed by a conversion experience at Cambridge, and a calling to evangelise in India, precluded any consideration of the bases of a Muslim's faith from the 'other's' perspective. His private thoughts were sometimes harsh indeed:

Mahomedanism he wrote off, when particularly exasperated, as the 'damnable delusion of the devil', and Muhammad as a 'filthy debauchee'. [3]The reading he had done, mainly from seventeenth and eighteenth century writers, was, with one important exception, entirely controversial in respect to Islam. The exception, Martyn's main source of reference, once he reached India, was George Sale's English translation of the *Al-Koran of Mohammed*, first published in 1734. [4]As his journal tells us, he read Sale's Qur'an during his first slow journey up the Ganges from Calcutta to Patna, and then again when preparing for discussion with learned Muslims in Persia. As significant as the text itself, was the 'preliminary discourse' prefixed by Sale to his translation. This consists of a remarkable examination of the beliefs and practices Sale considered Muhammad had promulgated: erudite and soundly based, its author expressly intended to approve in Islam 'such particulars as seemed to me to deserve approbation',

and to avoid 'all reproachful language'. [5] So much was this so that some of Sale's critics later charged that he had converted to Islam himself, a claim with no foundation. But if Martyn learned much from Sale, he remained uninfluenced, it seems, by the latter's remarkable capacity to stand aside from the legacy of medieval European invective against Islam.

Martyn recorded after a year in Upper India that 'I read everything I can pick up about the Mahomedans', but he made no mention of ever studying, or even being aware of, the other important sources of Islamic knowledge, that in addition to the Qur'an, guide Muslims to religious understanding. [6] Study and reassessment of the collections of the *hadith* (the traditions or sayings of the Prophet, reported by those who had witnessed his mission), was being undertaken in some of the *madrassas* of northern India at precisely the time Martyn was resident there. The first English translation of the *hadith* was published in Calcutta while he was in India, but he made no mention of it. [7] Simultaneously, Orientalist scholarship in continental Europe, particularly in Paris and Vienna, was beginning to engage with a wide spectrum of Islamic scholarly disciplines as well as with philology by the time Martyn decided for India. The English universities had little contact with continental orientalism, and the embryonic Protestant missionary societies, under whose wing Martyn had first intended to go to India, had not yet established their training colleges, though several would do so almost immediately afterwards. Martyn thus remained unaware of current Islamic scholarship both in India and Europe, and consequently somewhat naively confident that the mere reading of the Qur'an was sufficient to understand the shortcomings in Islam that his evangelical conscience suggested to him. In contrast, his legatees in India, the evangelical European Islamists of the mid-nineteenth century would be very aware of the need to study the Islamic sciences in depth if they were to engage effectively in discussion of religion with Muslim *'ulama* and sufis. In this perspective Martyn was a pioneer who, retrospectively, can be seen to have lacked the necessary scholarly support for his chosen role.

No such criticism can be made of his linguistic preparations, for Martyn followed the same procedures as all British officers preparing for service in India, at a time when Persian was still the language of communication

between the Indian states and of polite discourse between scholars, but when the appropriate vernaculars were also required. All who met him commented on his proficiency in Arabic, Persian and especially in 'Hindustani' (more usually now called 'Urdu'), the vernacular of north India. Apart from these three so-called 'Muslim' languages, he also studied Bengali and Sanskrit, though the latter he soon abandoned not only as very difficult, but also as unnecessary for his agreed task of producing scriptures mainly for Muslim readers. As his main literary legacy is rightly considered to be his Hindustani translation of the New Testament, it is worth noting that before leaving England, he took lessons in Hindustani from the most sought after scholar in this field. John Gilchrist had previously taught Hindustani at the Company's training college in Calcutta. His reputation was built in India on his dictionaries, grammars and reading books, but after resigning from Company employment, he took on the private tutoring of pupils such as Martyn. Gilchrist seems to have exerted influence beyond the narrowly linguistic: for he warned Martyn, already eager to leap into print, to beware of embarking too early on a translation of the Bible, when such translations have already proved, he said, 'the rock on which missions had split' [8] This is a somewhat strange comment at a time when missionary translation programmes had scarcely begun, but its relevance will become apparent later in the lecture. Having learned the basics with Gilchrist, Martyn then worked from his grammars and dictionaries during a year-long voyage that took him to Calcutta via South America. His daily journals reveal the effort he continued to make with these languages once he knew he was to be posted to upcountry stations with considerable Muslim populations. His singlemindedness is summed up in the words of a recent biographer: 'for relaxation Henry Martyn read grammar books'. [9]

Martyn, like most other Europeans in India who aspired to a literary influence, continued to employ paid assistance for translation. His new employees deserve detailed attention because some of his *munshis*, or 'native translators', took on an agency of their own in subsequent stages of encounter between Christianity and Islam. The role played by native informants and translators in works ascribed only to European authors has received insufficient attention. Frustratingly, such scribes usually remain anonymous in

the record, referred to very possessively by their European employers as 'my munshi', or 'my pandit' but scarcely ever appearing by name on the frontispiece of subsequent publications. Even in private records the munshis usually remain nameless. Yet, Martyn, very unusually, supplied a great deal of information about those he employed. Their backgrounds, temperaments and their contributions to the translation programme feature frequently in his journals, as do records of his conversations with them on religious matters. Two of the employees who assisted him with translation or bookbinding would later have important impacts on Muslim-Christian relations, the first, Abdul Masih, for his conversion, ordination and individual style of Christian evangelism; the second, Jawad bin Sabat, an Arab who was already a Christian convert, for conveying the insider knowledge gained during his employment with Martyn to the Muslim scholars of north India after he resumed his original Muslim identity. Both of these interesting converts from Islam I will return to in assessing Martyn's legacy. A third munshi, Mirza Fitrat, a Shia Muslim from Benares, was probably much more typical of the general run of missionary employees in being prepared to carry out the Bible translations required of him with neither any apparent qualms of conscience (he remained a Muslim), nor with the displays of temper Martyn had to endure from the convert, Jawad Sabat. However, all three, and a fourth who assisted Martyn in Persia, were certainly much more than the 'bit players' in the drama that the anonymity of *munshis* in colonial and missionary records usually suggests. Without their aid, Martyn's Bible translations would not have been possible.

Vivienne Stacey, a present-day missionary in the Punjab, whose short biography of Martyn concentrated mainly on his translation work, writes, 'Undoubtedly the Urdu New Testament was Martyn's greatest single work'.^[10] All other commentators seem to agree. He had been so eager to commence, that he had already translated the first four chapters of Acts during his initial journey up the Ganges, thus forgetting in his enthusiasm, the words of warning of John Gilchrist, his Urdu teacher, on the foolhardiness of too rapid a translation. However, he continued to work on the rest of the New Testament throughout his four year stay in upper India: his daily journals abound with

references to the progress and problems involved in attempting translations, simultaneously, into three different languages. Difficulties included misunderstandings with his *munshis*, especially the notoriously irascible Jawad Sabat, and, briefly too, with the Serampore Baptists who, until Martyn's arrival, had considered Bible translation their monopoly. Early in 1809 he was delighted to report that he had managed to get a revision committee of Muslim literati and nawabs to inspect his translation, on which he commented somewhat over optimistically: 'It is a delightful consideration, to have set these Indians at work without hire at the word of God, for their own eternal salvation. Already kings are becoming nursing fathers to the church'. [11] He was delighted to report that he had managed to get a revision committee of Muslim literati and nawabs to inspect his translation, on which he commented somewhat over optimistically: 'It is a delightful consideration, to have set these Indians at work without hire at the word of God, for their own eternal salvation. Already kings are becoming nursing fathers to the church'. [12] Meanwhile he had been equally heavily occupied with the Persian and Arabic translations. For a number of reasons Martyn failed to set up the kind of face-to-face encounters he had anticipated would occur in India, though such relationships flowed easily, rather to his own surprise, in Persia. Apart from the Company's injunctions against proselytism, Martyn's self-doubting temperament, shown already during his Cambridge curacy and on board ship, caused him to shrink from deliberately seeking out Muslim scholars in the famed mosques, *madrassas* and sufi shrines of north India, as his successors would later do with little of his reserve. Hence his journals in India show constant brinkmanship: some proposed meetings with *ulama* and sufi pirs arranged for him by *munshi* go-betweens, failed to materialize in the end, often to Martyn's evident relief. For example, several efforts made by his Arab *munshi*, Jawad Sabat, for him to visit the important sufi shrine of Phulwari sharif came to nothing, and Martyn did not press the issue. His presence at a ceremony at the court of Muslim-ruled Lucknow, a city renowned for its receptivity to Europeans, was completely ignored, Martyn recording rather pathetically that, the nawab 'said not a word to me'. [13] He made no visits to the *madrassas* and mosques of Delhi, nor did he ever mention Indian Muslim scholars whose

reputations and writings drew students to Delhi from all over the Muslim world. His indifference to Islamic scholarship and seeming reluctance to engage with Muslim scholars appear to conflict with his many journal references both to preaching and distributing portions of the Bible during his journeys, and to the need to fully understand non-Christian religions before judging them.

Seemingly it was the prospect of facing men of deep Islamic learning that caused him to doubt himself. He frequently expressed the view that 'the work of God is seldom wrought this way', that is, by disputation.

Yet, from the moment he landed on Persian soil, he seemed to experience a transformation, eagerly abandoning the sober clerical dress of the portraits for a quite extraordinary assortment of clothes he considered to be appropriately 'indigenous' (including baggy blue trousers, red boots, a conical Astrakhan cap), to then sit cross legged on the ground discussing religion with his Persian hosts, and eating rice with his hands. His much less inhibited demeanour in Persia was surely one of several reasons why the kind of close encounter with scholars and sufis that had eluded him in India was able to take place, for the result was prolonged discussions and the writing and circulation of religious tracts, neither of which he had managed to achieve in India. There were of course some important political and diplomatic differences that set the stage for his new sense of optimism. Britain was currently making diplomatic and trading overtures to the recently established Qajar regime which, fearing annexations from Russia rather than from Britain, seemed favourably disposed to the new ally's nationals. A wandering missionary such as Martyn excited no hostility at that particular juncture. Early nineteenth century Shiraz, famed city of poets and mystics, where Martyn was to stay for nearly a year, provided a forum for religious interchange akin to the courts of Mughal Agra, or to contemporary nawabi-ruled Lucknow, that contrasted strongly with directly ruled British India where his freedom to engage with Indians had been so restricted.

He arrived in Persia with letters of introduction from several highly placed British officials who had previously served there. Through one such introduction he was hosted in Shiraz by one Jaffir Ali Khan, a wealthy and respected merchant. Significantly, Jaffir's brother-in-law, Mirza Syed Ali Khan,

much higher in social standing than his Indian *munshis*, was appointed Martyn's assistant for a final revision of the Persian New Testament he had completed in India. The local Shirazi view, Martyn reported, was that 'our attempts at Persian translation in India were good for nothing'.^[14] Meanwhile, the high social status of his hosts in Shiraz ensured a stream of visitors to the house: Europeans were still rare in Persia, hence he was certainly the object of mere curiosity, but many came in order to engage in religious discussion. Thus followed a rich period of harmonious and fairly open-ended debate with various Shia and Armenian scholars, but also with some sufi mystics, and *madrassa 'ulama*, all detailed in Martyn's journals. They make very interesting reading, especially as he had no immediate Protestant successors in Persia. But I have time to mention only the religious tracts, generated by his discussions which, though his biographers barely mentioned them, provide the main intellectual link between Martyn and his successors in India.

Martyn had not engaged in tract writing in India, nor did he intend to do so in Persia: he was propelled into activity by the submission to him by one of his visitors, Mirza Muhammad Ibrahim, of a tract arguing that the 'excellence of the Qur'an' (ie, the perfection of the Arabic in which the Qur'an was composed), irrespective of all other claims, provides the crucial proof of Muhammad's true prophethood. Martyn felt obliged to answer, even though his own chosen ground of discussion was neither medieval arguments based on miracles, nor the rational evidential style of argument favoured in Enlightenment period debate on religion. Apart from the two tracts he wrote in Persian on such 'evidences', he added a third, on 'The vanity of the Soofi system', based on his many encounters in Shiraz with mystics. After his departure and death, a leading Persian Shia scholar took up the same questions, producing a 300 page tract in refutation of all Martyn's arguments. Forgotten in Persia, and not known about in Britain until the mid-1820s, this collection of 'controversial' exchanges between Islam and Christianity, the first since those recorded by the Jesuits at the sixteenth century Mughal court in India, was to become an important part of his legacy when eventually rediscovered in India.^[15]

The translations of the Bible, on the other hand, which were far more important to Martyn than his tracts, did have some more immediate effects. As the well known account, legendary in British missionary journals, attests, the revised manuscripts of the Persian New Testament, finished in Shiraz, were printed after Martyn's death, in St Petersburg in 1815, and in Calcutta in 1816. The Hindustani New Testament, completed with Mirza Fitrat's help, had finally been published in Arabic script under the auspices of the British and Foreign Bible Society at the Serampore Mission Press in Bengal in 1814. A nagri script version, intended for Hindu readers, appeared three years later, and Fitrat meanwhile completed the translations of the separate books and sections of the Old Testament that he had been working on with Martyn, which were then published in stages throughout the 1820s. Many further editions of the New Testament followed, and even when missionaries newer to the field began to embark on their own translations, they continued to pay homage to the Martyn/Fitrat version. William Yates, a Baptist missionary, for example, published a new translation in 1838, but made 'free use', he said, of Martyn's version. Copies of all the nineteenth century editions, as well as his Persian and Arabic versions, and his equally important translations of the Book of Common Prayer, are deposited in the Bible Society's collection in the Cambridge University Library.[16] Many other libraries in India and Britain also hold copies, indicating just how widely Martyn's efforts were disseminated and used among Indian and Middle Eastern Christians. Muslim awareness and usage of Martyn's Bibles and prayerbooks form part of his Indian legacy to which I now turn.

PART TWO: THE SCHOLARLY LEGACY:

My treatment of Martyn's legacy must of necessity be selective, with an emphasis on aspects that have not had much attention in earlier studies. I am omitting (except for a brief reference to the transmission of the so-called 'Persian tracts' to north India) any further reference to Persia where, in spite, of Martyn's strikingly greater success in arousing interest, there was no resumption of evangelical activity until the middle nineteenth century. In India,

in contrast, the terms of encounter were radically altered, shortly after Martyn's death, both by changes in British relations with India, and by movements within Indian Muslim scholarly circles which were stimulated, initially at least, completely independently of European expansion in Asia. Significant among these, on the British side, was the opening of India to missionary activity in 1813, and the final removal of restrictions on establishing schools and orphanages in the 1830s. Officially the British Indian government continued to profess itself religiously 'neutral', but in practice evangelical agendas were greatly assisted, especially in the north-west, by the increase in likeminded recruits to the service of the East India Company from the 1830s onwards.

On the other hand, the escalation in the 1820s of a movement of Islamic purification, the Tariqah-i Muhammadiyyah, or the 'Way of Muhammad', among north Indian Muslims, began to direct attention to the need for some re-evaluation of textual sources, notably of the hadith, and for the compilation of suitable tract literature. These developments, internal to Islam, prepared the ground for a more assertive response from hitherto quiescent Muslim scholars to evangelical attempts to draw their interest to Christianity. Significantly, Hindustani, the language of Martyn's New Testament, was also now preferred over Persian as the medium for inter-Muslim religious discourse. Translations of the Qur'an into Urdu, began to appear simultaneously with the dissemination of Martyn's Hindustani New Testament in the 1820s.[17] Informal encounters between spokesmen for Islam and Christianity, avoided in Martyn's time, became a common occurrence throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, generating a voluminous tract literature from both sides, and marked by the occasional holding of formal public debates on the comparative merits of Islam and Christianity. [18]

I choose to assess the legacy of Martyn to this complex phase of Muslim-Christian relations through the scholarly role of an influential government servant who spans this entire era. William Muir, born shortly after Martyn's death, arrived in north India in 1837, aged 18, to serve the Company and the Raj for almost forty years. He continued a career-long scholarly input into evangelical causes, especially through the publication of historical works and

evangelical tracts, until shortly before his death in 1905. The various facets of the Muslim scholarly responses to Christian evangelism can be traced through his publications, speeches and correspondence: for throughout this period he was in touch with, and sometimes closely involved with, the key Muslim participants during several highly interactive decades.[19]

Like Martyn, Muir was a natural linguist, who also chose to steep himself in the three 'Muslim' languages, having a particular preference for Arabic and Urdu, rather than Persian. But Muir was much the better prepared of the two for engagement with Islamic scholarship. The foundations had been laid during his two years at the Company's training college at Haileybury, which he entered as a seventeen-year-old after a university education at both Edinburgh and Glasgow. Like Martyn, he continued his language studies throughout his time in India, but unlike Martyn he directed his attention also to the Arabic sources of Islam: he too used Sale's Qur'an, but chose to re-translate to his own satisfaction many of the ayats he quoted. His main contribution as an Orientalist followed his procuring in Delhi of some thirteenth and fourteenth century manuscript copies of some of the earliest Arabic biographies of the Prophet. These, together with the hadith collections, critically evaluated, formed the basis of his own *Life of Mahomet*, started in the early 1850s, and completed in the early 1860s. [20]This was probably the single most influential British work on the Prophet to be published, going into several re-editions in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It did not go unchallenged either in Britain or in India. Yet, even those Muslim scholars in India who disagreed with his interpretations, as most did, respected Muir's command of Islamic scholarship.

From what kind of evangelical perspective did William Muir approach Islam? His certainties as a Christian were very similar to Martyn's. Brought up in a Scottish Presbyterian evangelical family, he identified with the Church Missionary Society and with German Pietist missionary groups while in India. Throughout his long life he maintained an unbending faith in the literal 'word' of scripture, rejecting without discussion the views of the Biblical critics, including his own brother, John Muir's, Broad Church reconsiderations.

[21]Like Martyn he believed that, if presented to Muslims in their own

language, the simple message of Christian salvation was its own best advocate. So, like Martyn, Muir doubted the efficacy of disputation as a means to win souls. In spite of this, his reputation, sometimes notoriety, as a controversialist rests on the fact that as a young civil servant he was closely associated in Agra with a Pietist group using combative methods to draw out the Muslim scholarly class. In an important comparative study of *Victorian Images of Islam*, Clinton Bennett has categorised six major British scholars as either 'conciliatory' or 'confrontational' in their approach to Muslims and Islamic society: Muir figures prominently in Bennett's discussion of the latter group. While I do not entirely agree with the grounds for this division, it is nonetheless significant to my own study that Bennett represents Muir as Martyn's successor in the employment of what he calls 'confrontation tactics', even though both scholars frequently claimed to recognise the futility of such methods. [22]

Muir's consciousness of Martyn was established very early in his career. For in 1845, while still on the lower rungs of the Company's service, he published his first scholarly contribution on the relations between Islam and Christianity. This *Calcutta Review* article, entitled 'The Mohammadan Controversy', surveyed the present state of Protestant interaction with the Islamic world, deplored past failures to engage with Muslims, and provided detailed critiques of some Urdu tracts recently published by both Muslims and missionaries in India. Muir was forthright in making some suggestions of his own as to how evangelism of Muslims should now proceed, under the steam of several missionary societies newly arrived in north India.

By way of introduction, Muir drew attention to a neglected publication by Samuel Lee, Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, whose collection of what he called Martyn's *Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mohammedanism* had been published by the Cambridge University Press in 1824. [23] Samuel Lee's compendium included, in addition to extracts and comments on the Jesuit encounters with the Mughals, a translation of the 'miracle' tract that had first provoked Martyn's own tracts, together with some rejoinders from Persian scholars after Martyn's departure. Finally, Lee provided his own advice to missionaries on how to engage Muslims in religious interchange. William Muir

had his own ideas on the matter, so his review article was a critique rather than an appreciation: the point I am really making is that his decision to highlight the only available collection of Martyn's Persian tracts in English brought Martyn to missionary attention in India at a time when new approaches to Muslims were being urgently considered. Several leading missionaries subsequently recorded their debt to Martyn as received through Muir's advertising of Samuel Lee's volume of 'controversial tracts'.

As for Muir himself, he actually conceived his own role very differently: no more than Martyn did he conceive himself as advocating 'controversy', though controversy was often what his publications caused. On the invitation of his missionary friends, he gave scholarly assistance to their efforts to draw some respected *'ulama*, Muslim civil servants and lawyers into religious discussion. His first substantial Urdu publication, *Masihi kalisiya ki tarikh*, was a history of the Christian Church, from the birth of Christ until the early fourth century, the accession of Emperor Constantine. [24]A main objective was to show that Christianity had spread by peaceful means, establishing a direct contrast for one of his own frequent criticisms of Islam, that the latter's expansion was to be explained mainly by the use of force.

There was little original about this Church History, except its Urdu format, but the four-volume biography of the Prophet Muhammad that he published ten years later was a highly original undertaking that caused considerable stir among north Indian Muslims. Although an Urdu translation was intended, the only version that actually appeared was in English: even so, it gained notoriety even among many Muslims who had not actually read it. In a long introduction that took up most of the first volume, Muir subjected to scrutiny both the Arabic manuscripts he had collected, the basis of his new interpretation, and also the alternative sources preferred by Muslim scholars. He was already well known to many local *'ulama*, some of whom were already citing his Urdu Church History to the detriment of Christianity, finding information there to be used in subsequent tracts, on, for instance, some heresies in the early Church. Furthermore, he had recently attended, unofficially, but with an aura of governmental authority about him, some well advertised public debates in Agra. A highly respected *madrassa 'alim*, one

Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairanawi, had challenged Muir's Pietist missionary friends in Agra to a three day discussion on the comparative merits of Islam and Christianity. This same *'alim* had already published and would continue to publish, a stream of Urdu books in criticism of Christianity, in all of which he used Muir's historical works, among other European works of Biblical Criticism, to support his own arguments. [25]

Sidelined now were the arguments based on miracles and the alleged irrationality of Christian doctrines, previously favoured in India by Muslims: Rahmat Allah Kairanawi, and the handful of lawyers, medical doctors and *madrassa 'ulama* who assisted him, now concluded that a critique of the reliability of the Christian scriptures, on which depended, they felt, most of the other areas of disagreement between them, would silence the missionaries once and for all. Without going into details of the *fatwas*, newspaper articles and further tracts that followed this 'great debate', the only point I would stress in this particular context is that the many editions of Henry Martyn's Hindustani, Persian and Arabic Bibles that had been circulating in north India since the early 1820s, provided the Muslim *'ulama* with a new argument, based on differences between the translations and editions, that they considered unanswerable. Adherence to this argument, on the so-called 'corruption of the scriptures', served to stultify inter-religious debates between Muslims and Christians for the rest of the nineteenth century. Recent decades have seen the same claims rehearsed by Muslim controversialists, still citing Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairanawi's 1850s arguments in north India, in the context of controversy in the Middle East as well as in Pakistan.[26]Muir, in the 1860s, particularly resistant as he was to Biblical Criticism, refused to respond to attacks on the integrity of the scriptures, choosing instead to continue to place the emphasis, on comparisons first, between the doctrinal teachings of the two religions and second, the historical record of those societies that have subsequently claimed either Christian or Muslim identity. Indian Muslim scholars obviously drew on many other sources besides the Hindustani Bible, notably on recent publications in English of works of European Biblical Criticism, discovered mainly in college libraries in north India. One source much utilised was an Arabic publication by Martyn's

munshi, Jawad Sabat, who had reconverted to Islam even before he had completed the Arabic translation of the New Testament. According to Muslim sources, his conversion to Christianity had taken place only in order to find out how best to refute Christian doctrines: it seems that Henry Martyn, along with a number of other chaplains, had been completely taken in by Sabat. His Arabic work, wordily entitled *Sabatian Proofs which support the pillars of the Muhammadan religion and subvert the columns of the abrogated Christian faith*, published in Calcutta in 1814, is an incoherent, rambling work, concerned less with the religious questions at issue than with establishing his own aristocratic pedigree, his reputation as a poet, and his mistreatment, not only by his Christian employers but also, allegedly, by fellow Muslims. [27] I suspect that later Muslim controversialists used it only as a last resort, but use it they did, as it was invaluable to them for particular purposes such as comparing the various Christian creeds on the basis of Sabat's recorded discussions with Henry Martyn. Martyn, of course, was never to know the outcome of Sabat's double game.

The distastefulness of the Sabat incident seems to suggest that most Muslim literati responded to both Martyn and Muir only negatively. Most did. There were some important exceptions, however, in addition to the few who were actually converted under their influence. For some more nuanced responses came from scholars who were by then seeking means to re-evaluate Islamic teaching in the light of changing historical circumstances, the realization of such a need being brought home to them only after the failure of the north Indian rebellion of 1857. Most influential among such scholars was Syed Ahmed Khan, a member of the colonial judiciary, whose volume of essays on the Prophet, published first in English in the 1870s, and later in Urdu, was a direct response to Muir's life of the Prophet. [28] Syed Ahmed's efforts to boost the morale of India's Muslims through lecture tours, a privately founded newspaper, publications on all aspects of religion and society, and the provision of higher education for Muslim boys, seemed to presage the kind of awakening to progressive change within Muslim societies that Muir had always deemed impossible. Yet, I would argue, it was partly Muir's own provocative critique of Islamic religion and society that had stimulated what

came to be called 'Islamic modernism', which far from being the result he had intended, was perceived variously and controversially as either progressive or heretical within contesting Indian Muslim circles.

Muir, by then promoted to Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, chose not to respond when challenged either by the 'modernist' or the 'conservative' Muslim presses; nor did he modify the later editions of his own histories to take any account of Muslim objections. But this by no means marked the end of his involvement in evangelical causes. He remained at the hub of missionary publishing enterprises until he retired. Maintaining his own interest in the Qur'an, his other publications included an anthology of Quranic passages entitled, *The Testimony borne by the Coran to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures*, published in English, Arabic and Urdu editions.

[29]Continuing his life-long interest in the Arabs, he produced further volumes on Caliphal and Mamluk history, as well as articles on specific episodes in Arab history, such as the Crusades. In retirement from Indian service after 1876, but principal of Edinburgh University until shortly before his death in 1905, Muir returned to his youthful interest in composing or translating evangelical tracts for Muslims as an aid to conversion. These were no longer 'controversial', but designed rather to exemplify pious lives or dramatic moments of spiritual realization which he believed had led to the conversion to Christianity of some former Muslims. [30]

Another less confrontational aspect of this scholar's personality that juxtaposes rather unexpectedly with his major historical publications, was shown in Muir's capacity for, and valuing of, some very close relationships with individual Muslim scholars during his Raj service. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, the leading scholar whose 'modernist' stance I have already briefly mentioned, described Muir's biography of the Prophet as having 'burnt my heart', yet he remained in correspondence with Muir on a basis of personal friendship that was reciprocated until the latter left India. Among the reasons why such Indian Muslim scholars respected Muir in spite of his trenchant criticism of both their faith and their social arrangements, was his strong support for the education of Muslims, especially his efforts to retain the teaching of Arabic and Persian against the dominant trend in British India of instituting English medium higher

education. It was during Muir's governorship that Syed Ahmed Khan was able to plan an Anglo-Muhammadan college teaching Islamic sciences and languages side by side with a Western curriculum and English language. A government college, to which many Muslim families would also send their sons, opened in Allahabad as the 'Muir College'. These two colleges later formed the bases of the first fully fledged universities in the province, at Aligarh and Allahabad. Many more examples could be assembled to show why the relationship between Muir and the Muslims of this province was by the 1870s symbiotic, rather than simply confrontational.

PART THREE: CONVERSION

I intend to draw together the various facets of the Martyn legacy in India by considering the roles of two Christian converts from Islam who had particularly close associations with Martyn and Muir. For Muir was as dedicated in the last years of the nineteenth century to encouraging the conversion of Muslims as Martyn had been at the beginning. Yet conversion from Islam to Christianity remained, in spite of the 'mass movements' elsewhere, almost as unusual an occurrence in late nineteenth century north India, as it had been in Martyn's time.

My two examples from this admittedly rather small pool are the Reverend 'Abdul Masih, who always attributed his conversion to Martyn's influence, but was not baptized until after his death, and the Reverend Maulvi Imad ud-din, who, as a maulvi had assisted the *'ulama* against the missionaries in the religious debates in Agra in the 1850s, yet sought Anglican Christian baptism in the 1860s, during Muir's period of influence among north Indian Christian communities. [31] Both were ordained after baptism, and through their own adaptations of evangelistic methods, involvement in Bible translation and the writing of Urdu liturgies, hymns or tracts might be said to provide the creative link between Martyn, Muir and the twentieth century churches of North India. Both left detailed accounts of their conversions and their ministries, on which I base my comments.

Abdul Masih, I have mentioned earlier as an employee, as bookbinder, of Henry Martyn at Cawnpore. Born Shaikh Salih in a well placed Sunni Muslim family, whose members had served earlier Muslim rulers, he was first drawn to Christianity by listening to Martyn's Sunday morning sermons to a crowd of beggars that assembled in his garden in the hope of *bakshish*. He then consolidated his knowledge, he said, by secret study of Martyn's translation of the New Testament while employed by him as a binder of draft copies of the Urdu and Persian scriptures. Interestingly, Martyn refused Salih's request for baptism, deeming him as yet unready. Persevering, Salih obtained the Calcutta chaplains' agreement to his baptism, shortly after Martyn's departure for Persia, taking the name, 'Abd al-Masih ('servant of Christ'). He then returned to the north-west, with the chaplain Daniel Corrie, where his evangelistic efforts resulted over the next few years in the establishment of one of the first Protestant Christian settlements in the region.

'Abdul Masih remained the pastor of this community from 1813 until his death in 1827, counting among his achievements the building of a church, the establishment of several schools and the medical care of all who came to him whatever their religion. Although fairly learned in Arabic, Persian and the Islamic sciences, he did not consider himself a scholar, and made no attempt at original writing, apart from the composition of some Hindustani hymns which are still sung today. That Martyn's Hindustani New Testament was disseminated very widely in this region, especially among those *'ulama* who would later debate with the next generation of missionaries, was largely through 'Abdul Masih's efforts. He praised Martyn's translations as 'intelligible to all', but there is plenty of evidence that 'Abdul had the common touch in face-to-face encounter which Martyn had seemed to lack during his own short sojourn in India. He was evidently a popular figure in the vicinity of Agra. His ability to gain access also to royal and aristocratic circles where Martyn had failed, was shown on visits to the Muslim-ruled city of Lucknow where his own family then lived. There he engaged in debates on religious matters with the court *'ulama*, thus probably contributing to the receptiveness with which Christian preachers would later be received at that particular court.

Many visitors stopped at the Christian quarter he established in Agra city: some of them merely wanted to satisfy their curiosity about the new *kala padre* (black pastor); others, as the sudden spate of baptisms shows, really did want to engage in discussion of religion. He had the support of other Company chaplains, notably Henry Martyn's close friend, Daniel Corrie, whose translation of 'Abdul Masih's journals ensured wide publicity and interest in Britain, particularly through regular and detailed notices in journals such as the *Missionary Register*.^[32] This convert clergyman, whose name was always linked in missionary publicity of this kind to that of Henry Martyn, his first Christian mentor, was looked to in the early 1820s as the starting point of an anticipated mass movement, particularly of Muslims, towards Christianity. A series of penny tracts published in Edinburgh in the 1850s, set up *Abdool Messee, or the True Convert*, in direct contrast to *Sabat the Arabian, or the Apostate*, with warnings to readers to beware falling, like Martyn, into the traps of such as Sabat, and with plaudits for Abdul Masih's successful evangelism of both Muslims and Hindus in north India.^[33]

However, things did not turn out as anticipated in north India after Abul Masih's first spate of conversions, for some of the most prestigious of his converts from Islam, including a *hakim* (a Muslim doctor), soon returned to Islam. After Abdul Masih's death in 1827, the Christian community in Agra collapsed, not to revive until other Christian agencies, employing the kind of 'controversial' methods discussed earlier, returned to Agra in the late 1830s, with William Muir soon to become their scholarly patron and collaborator. In the longer term, the 'Abd al-Masih episode may seem very transitory. Yet his methods of evangelism, including his pioneer use of medicine and his avoidance of criticism of Hindu and Islamic practices, suggest the beginnings of an appropriately indigenous adaptation and implementation of Henry Martyn's agenda which would be taken up again much later, once the confrontational approach had been seen to be counter-productive.

In the meantime, very few of the Muslims who picked up tracts, listened to bazaar sermons, or attended debates on religion actually sought baptism. In the 1870s one of the few who did so, then published a list of more than one hundred 'Christian converts of some distinction from Mohammedanism in

India', together with notes on their present occupations. Clearly this was an exercise to counter statements that no respectable converts could be drawn from Islam to Christianity. The compiler of this list, the Reverend Maulvi Imad ud-din, had been closely connected with Sir William Muir during his school days in Agra when Muir was an examiner in the Agra Government College where Imad ud-din was a student in the Oriental Department. Imad ud-din, who chose to keep his '*maulvi*' title even when he adopted that of 'reverend', played as influential a part in the building of a Christian community in late 19th century Punjab as Abdul Masih had done earlier in Agra.

Imad ud-din had belonged to a well-known Sunni Muslim family from Panipat, near Delhi, with strong sufi associations and a reputation for learning. His conversion was extremely surprising both to Muir and to others who had known him earlier, for as a young man, he had supported those '*ulama* who had criticized the Bible in public debates, and had also preached in the royal mosque at Agra against Muir's missionary colleagues. He read at this time Muir's *History of the Christian Church*, as well as the local missionary publications on Islam and the Prophet. At some point he seems to have lost his religious moorings. According to his own retrospective account, he collapsed into spiritual despair, feeling that neither formal Islam nor sufism could answer his needs. A long period of experimentation with various sufi mystical paths provided no relief: in his own words, he found peace only after re-reading some missionary tracts he had earlier rejected, along with the Gospels. Missionaries in the Punjab, who helped him at this time, agreed to baptize, and almost immediately to ordain him, recognizing how useful the skills he had honed as a *maulvi* would be to their own efforts to gain hearers among Muslims.

After ordination Imad ud-din fulfilled the intermediary role anticipated of him, taking over from the European missionaries much of the responsibility for the evangelism of Muslims. He published numerous Urdu tracts, many of them in the 'controversial' mode, including notably, the first critical biography of the Prophet in Urdu, the task William Muir had intended to do himself, but had failed to accomplish even though he produced two more editions of his English *Life of Mahomet*. Imad ud-din was also instrumental in the setting up

of the first 'native church council' in north India as a step towards achieving some agency for Indian Christians in the affairs of their new communities. In spite of his revival of controversial methods, Thomas Valpy French, the first bishop of Lahore, who consciously donned Henry Martyn's mantle as a 'missionary to Muslims' in the Middle East as well as in late nineteenth century north India, valued Imad ud din highly, and encouraged his projects, allowing him scope to pursue his own vision of an Indian Christian community.

CONCLUSION

There were a number of other late nineteenth century evangelicals, both British and Indian, who were influential in north India in the late nineteenth century, and whose legacy from Henry Martyn in the encounter with Islam and with Muslims might be profitably traced. Thomas Valpy French, just mentioned as the first bishop of Lahore, was certainly one of these, whom Martyn's late nineteenth century biographer, George Smith, considered 'the missionary bishop who most resembled Martyn in character and service'. Though he started his missionary vocation in the fold of the Agra controversialists, French soon realised the futility of such methods, choosing to look for commonalities in religions rather than differences. Yet, despite their differences in approach, French worked with both William Muir and with Imad ud-din on common evangelical concerns, notably on some further fine-tuning of some of Martyn's Urdu scriptures, on developing an Urdu liturgy for use in worship, and on the training of an indigenous clergy from among the converts in north India. On his departure from India for the Middle East, French's final meeting with Abdul Masih, in a retreat on the banks of the river Ravi, was a deeply emotional occasion, the bishop calling the convert pastor his 'spiritual brother' in respect for their common endeavours for Muslim evangelism. Like Martyn, over seventy years earlier, French had felt called to leave India for the Islamic heartlands in order to study Islam among Arab speaking Muslims. I am unable today to bring Bishop French any closer into the picture, but I hope I have shown something of the genealogy linking evangelical interest in Islam and Muslims in the Indian environment from Henry Martyn,

through Abdul Masih and William Muir to Imad ud din and French's generation. I am aware that I have not even touched upon the twentieth century legacy. My survey of the nineteenth century has necessarily focused on controversy rather than dialogue to an extent that may seem irreconcilable with Kenneth Cragg's insightful chapter on Henry Martyn which, in exploring the 'dialogue with his own soul', made him for Cragg 'the first of modern missionaries to know the painful perplexity of registering the sheer otherness of faiths'.^[34] Others then must look to the work of the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies, its early work among Muslims in cities such as Aligarh, Lahore and Lucknow, and to its contemporary successor in the Hyderabad of today, in order to examine how far and in what ways, scholarship on Islam, and contacts with Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims in the twentieth century have managed to modify the nineteenth century patterns of encounter in the subcontinent.

Notes:

i[1] George Smith, *Henry Martyn, Saint and Scholar: First Modern Missionary to the Mohammedans, 1781-1812* (London, 1892).

i[2] Henry Martyn, Journal, 30 Oct. 1806, J. Sargent, *A Memoir of the Rev. Henry Martyn, B. D.*, 2nd ed. (London, 1819), p.206.

i[3] Martyn to Daniel Corrie, in Samuel Wilberforce (ed) *Journals and Letters of the Rev. Henry Martyn, B.D.*, 2 vols (London, 1837), II, p.74..

i[4] George Sale, *The Koran; Commonly called the Alcoran of Mohammed...to which is prefixed a Preliminary Discourse* (London, 1734).

i[5] Sale, 'new edition' of *The Koran*, 1801, I, preface, pp. vi-vii.

i[6] Martyn, Journal, 7 May, 1807; Martyn to Daniel Corrie, 29 Feb. 1808, *Journals and Letters*, II, pp.58;164.

i[7] Matthews, A.N., *Mishcat-ul-Masabih*, 2 vols (Calcutta, 1809).

i[8] Martyn, Journal, 21 March, 1805, *Journals and Letters*, I, pp.240-1.

i[9] V. Stacey, *Life of Henry Martyn* (Hyderabad, 1980), p.37.

i[10] Ibid.

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- i[11] Martyn to David Brown, Patna, 28 March, 1809, *Journals and Letters*, II, p.238.
- i[12] Martyn to Daniel Corrie, 10 Jan. 1810, *Journals and Letters*, II, p.281.
- i[13] Martyn to Lydia Grenfell, Shiraz, 23 June, 1811, *Journals and Letters*, II, p. 364.
- i[14] The tracts generated by Martyn's encounters in Persia were collected, translated and published by Samuel Lee, *Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mohammedanism by the late Rev. Henry Martyn, B.D....and some of the most eminent writers of Persia translated and explained* (Cambridge, 1824).
- i[15] For details on the Urdu, Arabic and Persian translations now held in Cambridge see, T.H. Darlow and H. F. Moule, *The Historical Catalogue of the Printed Editions of Holy Scripture in the Library of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 2 vols (London, 1903-1911).
- i[16] For background see, Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, 1972), chaps 2-3; Avril A. Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (London, 1993), chap. 2.
- i[17] Powell, *Muslims*, chaps. 4-8.
- i[18] For an overview of William Muir's scholarly interactions with the 'modernist' *'ulama* see, Avril A. Powell, 'Modernist Muslim Responses to Christian Critiques of Islamic Culture, Civilization, and History in Northern India', in Judith M. Brown and Robert Eric Frykenberg (eds), *Christians, Cultural Interactions and India's Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge and London, 2002), pp.61-91.
- i[19] William Muir, *Life of Mahomet from Original Sources*, 4 vols (London, 1858-61).
- i[20] For an insightful study of John Muir's theological evolution and relations with north Indian pandits see, Richard Fox Young, *Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit sources on anti-Christian apologetics in early Nineteenth-Century India* (Vienna, 1981).
- i[21] Clinton Bennett, *Victorian Images of Islam* (London, 1992), pp.13-18; chap. 5.

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- i[22] William Muir, 'The Mohammedan Controversy', *Calcutta Review*, IV (Dec.1845), pp.418-75.
- i[23] See above, footnote 14. On Samuel Lee see, A.M. Lee, *A Scholar of a Past Generation: a Brief Memoir of Samuel Lee, D.D.* (Cambridge, 1896).
- i[24] William Muir, *Masih kalisiya ki tarikh* (Agra, 1848)
- i[25] Powell, *Muslims*, chaps. 7-8.
- i[26] Eg, Rahmat Allah al-Hindi, *Izhar al-haqq* [Manifestation of the Truth](Cairo, 1978; 1986); *Izhar-ul-haq*, Part 1;2: Contradictions and Errors in the Biblical Text (London, 1989).
- i[27] For a synopsis of this Arabic work, which is very rare, see Maulvi Abdul Wali, *Life and Work of Jawad Sabat, an Arab Traveller, Writer and Apologist: Together with a review of his Romantic Career, as a Christian and Muslim* (Calcutta and Simla, 1925).
- i[28] Syed Ahmed Khan, *A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto* (London, 1870)
- i[33] Including English editions (Agra, 1856; London and Allahabad, 1860).
- i[30] Eg, *Sweet First Fruits*, subtitled, *A tale of the nineteenth century on the truth and virtue of the Christian Religion (1893); Moslems invited to read the Bible* (1899), written for the maulvies of Persia.
- i[31] For more detailed discussion of these two converts see, Avril A. Powell, 'Processes of Conversion to Christianity in Nineteenth-Century North-Western India', in Geoffrey A. Oddie (ed) *Religious Conversion Movements in South Asia: Continuities and Change, 1800-1900* (London, 1997), pp.15-55; "'Pillar of a New Faith": Christianity in Late-Nineteenth Century Punjab from the Perspective of a Convert from Islam' [Imad ud-din], in Robert Eric Frykenberg (ed) *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-cultural Communication since 1500* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge and London, 2003), pp. 223-55. On 'Abdul Masih see also, Graham Kings, 'Abdul Masih: Icon of Indian Indigeneity', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 23:2 (April, 1999), pp.66-9.
- i[32] See issues of the *Missionary Register*, 1813-27, for Abdul Masih's journals and letters, and also for the comments of others about him.

i[33] Rev. R.M. McCheyne, *Abdool Messee, or the True Convert* (Edinburgh, c. 1850); *Sabat the Arabian: or, the Apostate* (Edinburgh, c.1854). Another anonymous tract was entitled *Sabat; or, the Servant of Sin* (London and Birmingham, c.1855).

i[34] Kenneth Cragg, *Troubled by Truth* (Hutton Close, 1992), pp. 15-31.