



THE OTHER HALF OF HISTORY



Obama, Jefferson, and the “Holy” Koran

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In his much-ballyhooed speech of June 4, President Obama spoke in soothing terms of all the areas where Islam and the rest of the world could find common ground. His speech was praised by many in the media and the political class, but criticized by some students of the history of the United States and the Islamic world. Most shocking to students of American history is the way the President implied that Thomas Jefferson had been on comfortable terms with Islam.

In his speech President Obama said “when the first Muslim American was recently elected to Congress, he took the oath to defend our Constitution using the same Holy Qur’an that one of our founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, kept in his personal library.” (The congressman the President is referring to is Representative Keith Ellison of Minnesota, who first took the oath of office in January of 2007.)

The Koran (aka Quran, aka Qur’an) is the central document of Islam, written by the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century. It consists of 114 “Suras,” or chapters. Muslims believe that the Koran is the literal word of God, dictated to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel.

President Obama makes it sound as if the author of the Declaration of Independence kept a Koran in his library so he could learn about tolerance and peace. In actual fact, Thomas Jefferson had no such illusions about the contents of the “holy” Koran.

Jefferson's introduction to Koranic theology came in 1786, when he and John Adams participated in negotiations with Tripoli's ambassador to London, Sidi Haji Abdul Rahman Adja.

Pirates from North Africa's Islamic states had been attacking merchant ships, and even small towns, all across the Mediterranean. Any "infidel," or non-Muslim, unfortunate enough to be caught in one of these raids would be carried off to a life of slavery. Female captives were especially prized.

In their report to the American Congress, Adams and Jefferson wrote that when they asked the Ambassador how he justified these attacks he cited the Koran. "The Ambassador answered us," they wrote, "that it was founded on the Laws of the Prophet, that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have acknowledged their authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as prisoners."

There is a brief description of this meeting on Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Barbary_War

Ambassador Rahman Adja was representing the Koran much more accurately than President Obama did in his recent speech. Sura 2 of [The Koran](#) declares "God is an enemy to the infidels."¹ The another verse instructs good Muslims that "When ye encounter the infidels, strike off their heads until ye have made a great slaughter among them, and of the rest make fast the fetters." (Sura 47)²

Sura 9 declares "Believers! Wage war against such of the infidels as are your neighbors, and let them find you rigorous; and know that God is with those who fear him."³

Sura 8 further tells Muslims "No prophet hath been able to take captives until he had made a great slaughter in the earth... Eat therefore of the spoils you have taken what is lawful and good."⁴

Sura 8 also makes it clear that Muslims are to be in a state of war with the rest of the world until they succeed in forcing all the nations to accept Islam: "Fight then against them till strife be at an end, and the religion be all of it God's."⁵

In Sura 3 the Prophet warns of dire consequences for any Muslim who makes friends with an infidel: "Let not believers take infidels for their friends rather than believers; whoso shall do this hath nothing to hope from God."⁶ Suras 4 and 5 repeat this warning.

The Koran is chock full of endorsements of slavery, giving Ambassador Rahman Adja plenty of grounds for justifying what the Barbary pirates were doing. Sura 16, for example, tells us "God maketh comparison between a slave, the property of his lord, who hath no power over anything, and a free man whom we have ourselves supplied with goodly supplies, and who giveth alms therefrom both in secret and openly. Shall they be held equal? No: praise be to God!"⁷

One reason the Middle Eastern pirates of the late eighteenth century were so eager to take female prisoners is that the Koran explicitly and repeatedly gives Islamic men the right to have sex with their female slaves. Sura 4 tells the Muslim man "Forbidden to you also are married women, except those who are in your hands as slaves."⁸

Sura 23 offers blessings for those men "who restrain their appetites (save with their wives, or the slaves whom their right hands possess; for in that case they shall be free from blame. But they whose desires reach further than this are transgressors)."⁹

In Sura 33 Muhammad declares his own rights: "O Prophet! We allow thee thy wives whom thou hast dowered, and the slaves whom thy right hand possesseth out of the booty which God hath granted thee."¹⁰

Sura 70 again urges Muslims to practice sexual restraint “save with their wives or the slaves whom their right hands have won, for there they shall be blameless.”¹¹

History does not tell us exactly when Jefferson picked up that copy of the Koran that Keith Ellison would later hold while being sworn in as a United States Congressman, but the shock he expressed at the words of Ambassador Rahman Adja would seem to imply Jefferson had not yet read the book when he had that 1786 meeting.

Jefferson was a studious man, and it’s probably safe to assume that he had read that Koran he bought by the time he became President of the United States fifteen years later, in 1801. If he had, the knowledge of its contents must have stood him in good stead when the first crisis of his young presidency erupted. Just two months after Jefferson’s inauguration the Pasha of Tripoli, angry over America’s reluctance to pay protection money, declared war on the United States. Jefferson sent the US Navy and, eventually, the Marines. In letters to his friends the new President raged about the villainy of the pirates and their state sponsors.

If Thomas Jefferson had known that a politician would one day be sworn in as a member of the United States Congress holding a Koran, he would have been shocked and frightened.

¹ The Koran, 1909 J.M. Rodwell translation. 2001 Phoenix Publishing paperback edition, p. 11.

²ibid. p.342

³ibid. p.130

⁴ibid. p.117

⁵ibid. p.115

⁶ibid. p.34

⁷ibid. p.176

⁸ibid. p.52

⁹ibid. p.224

¹⁰ibid. p.281

¹¹ibid. p.393

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18 thoughts on “Obama, Jefferson, and the “Holy” Koran”

- **christian** says:

[October 13, 2014 at 2:08 pm](#)

Jesus forbid the stoning of a woman who committed adultery and forgave her of her sins when the Jews took up stones to kill her (stoning). A Muslim would abuse the women simply because she was a woman. Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies because even evil people love their friends. Muslims are taught to kill anyone not believing in Allah (their enemies) and to seek them out until they are all destroyed (“until only Allah is left”). God bless America !

- **Al Fuller** says:

[September 28, 2014 at 6:40 pm](#)

Aslamo-alaikum’s comment about the lack of verse-specific citations in my column deserve an answer. I’ve cited only the suras, and not the specific verses, because the English language Koran I read before I wrote this column is not divided into verses.

To make it easier for future readers to verify my citations, I have now added footnotes to the column citing specific pages from the version of The Koran I used.

Al Fuller

- **T. Jackson** says:

[September 27, 2014 at 4:56 pm](#)

In his comment, Aslamo-alaikum complains that the writer has not listed every verse quoted, only the relevant Surah. Apparently the implication is that either (a) the verse has been taken out of context, or (b) it has been misquoted, or (c) simply doesn't exist.

In this his comment is correct: It would have been more immediately useful to have the verse. However, by not providing the verse, the reader is lead to seek out the relevant verse in the text, and that process leads the reader into study of the full Surah, presumably in context.

As an example, the author's first quoted verse, from Surah 2, verse 98. ... "Then, lo! Allah (Himself) is an enemy to the disbelievers."

Are we to understand that this quote is incorrect? And out of context? The truth of this verse is shown in numerous other verses in this Surah:

88. ... Allah hath cursed them for their disbelief.

90. ... For disbelievers is a shameful doom.

104. ... For disbelievers is a painful doom.

126. ... As for him who disbelieveth ... I shall compel him to the doom of fire – a hapless journey's end!

254. ... The disbelievers, they are the wrong-doers.

258. ... And Allah guideth not wrong-doing folk.

264. ... Allah guideth not the disbelieving folk.

270. ... Wrong-doers have no helpers.

And yet, in this same Surah we read,

20. ... Lo! Allah is Able to do all things.

106. ... Knowest thou not that Allah is Able to do all things?

109. ... Lo! Allah is Able to do all things.

148. ... Lo! Allah is Able to do all things.

259. ... Allah is Able to do all things.

Apparently Muslims are pretty dense. Allah has to keep repeating himself to get his point across. Yet Allah seems to be rather incapable of helping the disbelievers. Indeed, he chooses to hurt them:

6. As for the disbelievers (infidels), whether thou warn them or thou warn them not ... 7. Allah hath sealed their hearing and their hearts.

257. ... As for those who disbelieve ... Such are the rightful owners of the Fire. They will abide therein.

204. ... Allah ... is the most rigid of opponents.

161. Lo! those who disbelieve, and die while they are disbelievers; on them is the curse of Allah ... (So therefore the objective appears to be to make sure you kill the infidels before they believe.)

This teaching leads to other related verses:

244. Fight in the way of Allah.

216. Warfare is ordained for you.

178. O ye who believe! Retaliation is prescribed for you in the matter of the murdered. ... 179. And there is life for you in retaliation ... (See Surah 8 – The Spoils of War – that defines the Quran's position on War Profiteering)

How are we missing the context?