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Gerard Wiegers

# Ludovico Marracci's Use of *Tafsīr* and His Interpretation of Jesus' Demise in the Sacromonte Lead Books

Within the general theme of this book, I will offer a case study of how early-modern Christian scholars made use of *tafsīr* to interpret important passages in the Lead Books of the Sacromonte of Granada which deal with Jesus' demise. Jesus' demise and the crucifixion were important themes in the discussions between Muslim and Christians in general, and between Catholic missionaries and the Mudejars and Moriscos in the Iberian Peninsula in particular.<sup>1</sup> As is well known, the true nature of the Lead Books was highly contested from the moment they were discovered in caves on the slopes of Mount Valparaíso, later called Sacromonte (i.e., "Holy Mountain"), allegedly the place where James and his companions – including the first bishop Cecilius – had hidden sacred texts before they were martyred. Scholars questioned both their authenticity as early Christian texts and the authenticity of the relics (ashes, a veil belonging to Mary, a bone of Saint Stephen) which accompanied them. While archbishop Pedro Vaca de Castro y Quiñones (1534–1623), who oversaw the initial qualification process of the relics, and his circle defended both their early date and the interpretation of them as Christian, others, among them influential and authoritative scholars who were able to study the original texts in Granada such as Benito Arias Montano (1527–98)

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1 See for example Louis Cardaillac, *Morisques et Chrétiens. Un affrontement polémique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977), 279–88; Mikel de Epalza, *Jésus Otage. Juifs, chrétiens et musulmans en Espagne (VI–XVIIe s.)* (Paris: Cerf, 1987); Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009); Neal Robinson, "Jesus," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an Online* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), accessed February 2, 2025, [https://doi-org.proxy.uba.uva.nl/10.1163/1875-3922\\_q3\\_EQCOM\\_00099](https://doi-org.proxy.uba.uva.nl/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00099); Gabriel Said Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or alive?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies* 72 (2009): 237–58; Aman Daima Md. Zain et al., "Yahuza al-Iskhriyuti (Judas Iscariot) according to the views of Quranic mufasssirin scholars," *Research in Islamic Studies* 2/2 (2015): 18–25, accessed February 11, 2025, doi: 10.15364/ris15-0202-02.

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**Note:** I thank Ulisse Cecini for inviting me to the conference in Barcelona and the participants in the conference for their remarks on my presentation. I am indebted to Teresa Madrid Álvarez-Piñer for her work on the transcription of Muḥammad Alguazir's text, which she, Mercedes García-Arenal and myself are preparing for publication. In this contribution I build upon research carried out over the course of a long-term cooperation with Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, who sadly passed away in 2021, and upon our discussions.

and Marcos Dobelio (c. 1572–1654), argued that they were Muslim lore, or, in any case that they demonstrated a lot of Islamic influence. The recent study by Sjoerd van Koningsveld and myself, based for the first time since the seventeenth century on the original texts themselves, indicates that the seventeenth-century critics of the Christianizing interpretation had been right.<sup>2</sup> In developing this critical interpretation, however, these scholars, who were working in a European context, could not yet rely on many linguistic and philological tools. Arabic dictionaries, grammars, works on *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and lexicography were rare, and qur’anic manuscripts hard to come by. Since the forced conversions of the Muslims between 1499 and 1526, the possession of Arabic writings had been seen in Habsburg Spain as an indication that the owner might be a Muslim, something that was punishable by the Inquisition.

In their study on the evaluation process of the Lead Books and the role of Islamic and Oriental Studies in this, Mercedes García-Arenal and Fernando Rodríguez Mediano analyze the political, social and scholarly background of the process of evaluation.<sup>3</sup> In our aforesaid study on the Lead Books we focused on the role of those scholars who had access to the texts themselves in order to reconstruct the genealogy of the dominant and rejected interpretation traditions.<sup>4</sup>

My goal here is more limited: to analyze how the Christian interpreters, particularly the opponents of the interpretation of the Lead Books as Christian, made use of Muslim exegetical sources to understand the Lead Books. In exploring this theme, I will focus on a number of authors and on a particular case: the demise of Jesus. I will not be looking at the Muslim readers, including Moriscos, who, as I have shown elsewhere, invariably saw the Lead Books as Muslim texts.<sup>5</sup>

Below, I first briefly summarize the contents of the Lead Books on the basis of our recent study. I then look more closely at how the authors depict Jesus’ demise, and subsequently analyse how a select number of authors interpreted these passages and the study the place of Muslim exegetical sources in their works, focusing on Ludovico Marracci (1612–1700). Next, I compare the depiction of Jesus’ demise in the

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2 Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld and Gerard Albert Wiegers, *The Lead Books of the Sacromonte and the Parchment of the Torre Turpiana: Granada 1588–1606: General Introduction, Critical Edition, and Translation* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2024), *passim*.

3 Mercedes García-Arenal and Fernando Rodríguez Mediano, *The Orient in Spain. Converted Muslims, the Forged Lead Books of Granada, and the Rise of Orientalism*, trans. Consuelo López-Morillas (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), *passim*.

4 Van Koningsveld and Wiegers, *The Lead Books of the Sacromonte*, *passim*.

5 Gerard A. Wiegers, “Transmission, Interpretation, and Use of the Parchment of the Torre Turpiana and Sacromonte Lead Books by Moriscos in Exile,” in *The Morisco Diaspora and Morisco Networks across the Mediterranean*, ed. Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers (Leiden: Brill, 2025), 243–70.

Lead Books with the parallel interpretations and comments as we find it in a number of contemporary Morisco sources, and end with a discussion and some conclusions.

## 1 The Contents of the Lead Books

Between 1588 and 1606, a parchment and twenty-one Lead Books were found in Granada. Defended as authentic first-century CE Christian texts from the moment the first books appeared in 1595, they were soon suspected of being Morisco inventions.<sup>6</sup> Moriscos were associated with these discoveries from the outset: as persons involved in the search for and discoveries of Lead Books on the slopes of the Valparaíso hillock (later called the Sacromonte), and as translators of the Parchment and Lead Books.

It has become clear that two official Arabic translators in the city of Granada, Alonso del Castillo (1525–1607) and – above all – Miguel de Luna (c. 1552–1615), played a crucial role in the early interpretation process, especially of the parchment.<sup>7</sup> Luna was able to present a convincing interpretation of the often fantastic forms of both the Arabic script of the Parchment and the secret codes contained in the Arabic commentary to the Spanish eschatological prophecy. Luna was very likely one of the main authors of both the Parchment and the Lead Books, which continued to appear via successive findings until 1606.

Castillo, the older of the two, and Luna, twenty-seven years younger, lived on in Granada until their respective deaths in 1607 and 1615. They were not included in the expulsion to Castile after the suppression of the revolt of the Alpujarras in 1571, nor was Luna included in the general expulsion of the Granadan Moriscos of 1609–14. It is known that Luna, like many other Moriscos, pursued noble status (Sp. *hidalgúa*). However, most other Moriscos, including those who had been involved in the affair, were expelled, and as I will show below, it was largely (but not exclusively) thanks to them that we know about the reception and vicissitudes

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<sup>6</sup> I am following the outline presented in Wieggers, “Transmission, Interpretation, and Use of the Parchment of the Torre Turpiana and Sacromonte Lead Books by Moriscos in Exile.”

<sup>7</sup> On the involvement of Castillo and Luna in interpreting a Nasrid document forged to legitimize the pursuit of a noble status for doctor Fernando Suárez de Figueroa, and their testimony that it was genuine, see: María José Mártir Alario, “Alāma auténtica, ‘alāma falsa,” in *Alāmas nazaries. Los autógrafos de los sultanes (1454–1492). Exposición de la Real Chancillería de Granada del 2 de febrero al 18 de marzo 2022*, ed. David Torres Ibáñez *et al.* (Granada: Junta de Andalucía, 2022), 76–9. I thank Dr. Juan Pablo Arias Torres (CSIC, Granada) for drawing my attention to this publication in September 2024.

of transcripts, translations and interpretations of the Parchment and Lead Books among Moriscos in exile.

Our recent edition and study of the Lead Books shows that we are indeed dealing with Islamic texts, which propose both a forged history and a prophetic future of Arabic proto-Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula. The narrative of the Parchment and the Lead Books is organized around Jesus, the Virgin Mary and James/Santiago as main figures, while two Arab brothers, Tis'ūn ibn 'Aṭṭār and Cecilio ibn ar-Riḍā, sons of Ṣāliḥ ibn 'Aṭṭār, an Arab by origin from the town of Daws, acted as secretaries. The Virgin Mary appears as a sinless prophetess to whom a sacred scripture, the *Essence of the Gospel*, is revealed on the Mount of Olives. One of the books tells of her spiritual journey to the Heavens. James and his companions took a copy of that Scripture and texts that accompanied them, the Lead Books, to a Holy Mountain in Spain, where they concealed the texts from the pagans and were martyred. The books predicted that the mountain, later called the Sacromonte, would be a site of pilgrimage. James (Santiago in Spanish) died a martyr's death. The books tell us that the true meaning of the writings, and especially of the *Essence of the Gospel*, will be explained at the end of time by a modest young Arab during a Council which will take place on an island called 'Subbar' (Cyprus), to be presided over by a non-Arabic king who lives in the East. Thereupon all the world will convert to the true religion and "religion will be one."<sup>8</sup> The end of times is presented as imminent, and the Moriscos are pictured as a vanguard of Islam. The narrative is supported by Islamic notions, including literal quotations of Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, and mystical notions about the Unity of Being which are inspired by the thought of Ibn al-'Arabī. These sources are not mentioned by name, but a Morisco public would probably have had little difficulty in identifying them. On all these grounds we may surmise that the Lead Books, even though they were intended to draw the attention of the Christians, were also meant for a Muslim Morisco readership.

The characteristics of the *Essence of the Gospel* point very clearly to the Qur'an, the religion predicted as being the sole one at the end of times being Islam.<sup>9</sup> These texts, while firmly embedded in the Andalusī Arabic and Aljamiado text corpus, also present idiosyncrasies. Some of these idiosyncrasies can be connected to the influence of the Christian missionary campaigns and pressure on the Moriscos, to

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<sup>8</sup> Gerard Wiegers, "History and the Study of Religion. Prophecy, Imagination and Religion in the Granadan Lead Books, the Works of Jacobus Palaeologus and of Nicholas of Cusa," *Journal of Religious History*, 46/4 (2022): 675–90.

<sup>9</sup> That the contents of the *Essence of the Gospel* are Islamic and Qur'anic has recently been confirmed by Mohamed Abdelouahed el Asri of the University of Tetuan in a lecture entitled *Lo que no se editó de los Libros Plúmbeos: Haqiqat al-injil o libro mudo*, delivered on 22 February 2025. I will return to this lecture in detail in a future publication. I thank Dr El Asri for inviting me to his lecture.

which the Parchment and the Lead Books offer a response. The notion of a holy book revealed to the Virgin Mary may be such an element, and the same holds true for references to Trinitarian notions, which are connected to dissensions about the true message of Jesus within the early Christian world of the Lead Books. The idea of proto-Muslims as early Christians was not unique in an Iberian context. We also encounter these ideas in other Andalusí sources, such as the autobiographical *Key of Religion* written by the fourteenth-century Muslim at Lérida, Muḥammad al-Qaysī (fl. 1311), and in the *Gospel of Barnabas*; both of these texts thematize differences within the early Christian community and blame the Apostle Paul for having deviated from Jesus' message and led the Christian community astray.<sup>10</sup> Not all Moriscos who wrote about the Lead Books were in agreement about these texts; some understood them well, others less so. This seems to indicate that only a limited group of Moriscos was initiated in firsthand knowledge about them. It may also explain certain other religious idiosyncrasies that may have a background in Granadan Islam.

## 2 The Place of Jesus

A number of the Lead Books (abbreviated here below as LP, for *Libri Plumbei*), and especially the first to have been found, speak about the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the Trinity. Jesus' demise is also mentioned, and in these cases the verb *tawaffā* is used. In Lead Book 10, the second part (the first of the two being LP8) of *Kitāb Muntahā ālāt al-qudra* (The Book of the Ultimate Instruments of Power, Clemency and Justice in Creation), we find the following passage about Jesus:

[. . .] He [Jesus] accomplished the victory of the evangelized religion gratefully and obediently, until God *fulfilled His promise to him* (my italics, GW), elevating him and putting him at His [God's] right-hand side.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, "The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 200–28; Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld and Gerard Wiegers, "The Polemical Works of Muhammad al-Qaysī (fl. 1309) and Their Circulation in Arabic and Aljamiado Among the Mudejars in the Fourteenth Century," *Al-Qanṭara* 15 (1994): 163–99; Gerard Wiegers, "Muhammad as the Messiah: A Comparison of the Polemical Works of Juan Alonso with the Gospel of Barnabas," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 52/3–4 (April–June 1995): 245–91; Luis Fernando Bernabé Pons, *El texto morisco del Evangelio de San Bernabé* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1998), 57.

<sup>11</sup> Van Koningsveld and Wiegers, *The Lead Books of the Sacromonte*, Lead Book 10, fol. 5b, translation, p. 453, Arabic text, p. 295: *Wa-qaḍā bi-faṭḥ ad-dīn al-munjal raḍīyyan ṭayyi'an ḥattā tawaffā-hu [sic] Allāh wa'da-hu wa-aymana-hu bi-r-rafi taymīnan.*

In Lead Book 13, *Kitāb fi ṭabīʿat al-malak wa-quḍrati-hi* (The Book on the Nature and Power of the Angel), the author speaks about Jesus in a passage about the language used by the angels:

They [the angels] speak to each other whatever they wish, and their words and meanings are beautiful. Whenever he assumes a body he speaks through it in the spoken language, expressing the [divine] command given to him. Like the angel Gabriel to Holy Mary, when announcing to her the good news, and *also to our lord Jesus when his time was completed* (*ʿinda tuwuffiyā-hu waʿdu-hu*), as well as to the other prophets to whom God sent the angel, [to convey] a command He had predestined in His knowledge, a revelation concerning obedience of Him, or the contemplation of the veneration of Him.<sup>12</sup>

Lead Book 7, *Kitāb maḥāsin sayyidi-nā Yaṣūʿ wa-maʿājizi-hi wa-ummi-hi Maryam aṣ-Ṣāliḥa al-ʿAdhra* (The Book of the Outstanding Qualities and Miracles of Our Lord Jesus and of His Mother the Holy Virgin Mary), however, is one of the key books in the extant Lead Book text corpus, and it deals extensively with Jesus' demise in the context of a chronological narrative put in the mouth of Tiṣ'ūn ibn ʿAṭṭār, an Arab disciple of Jesus and later disciple of James, in a sort of Gospel text, as follows:

At that time the ruler in Rome was Tiberius Caesar and his governor in Jerusalem was Pilate. The Pharisees looked for our lord Jesus to crucify him by false witnesses. [19b] When they entered the garden, i.e. the place where he used to invoke his Lord, the Apostles dispersed and lost all their confidence. *But God took him to Himself through the angel* [emphasis added].<sup>13</sup> The one who sold him for a fixed price of silver, Judas, said to them: "Take the one kissed as the person sold." So they took the afflicted [one] who was exemplified in the *Tawrāt* and they carried him to the judge, but he found no cause against him. However, the Jews demanded that he be whipped, and Pilate chastised him, putting a turban of thorns on his head.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Van Koningsveld and Wiegers, *The Lead Books of the Sacromonte*, Lead Book 13, fol. 3a, p. 307, translation, p. 468: *Yatakallamu baʿḍun maʿa baʿḍin bi-hi kullin mā yurīdu wa-huwa ḥusayn al-aḥz [sic] wa-l-maʿāni wa-in ittakhāḍ [sic] jasadān yatakallam bi-hi ʿalā qadr lisān al-ḥāl wa-al-amr bi-hi la-hu, mithla al-malak jibril li-ṣ-ṣāliḥa Maryam fi basharati-hā wa-li-sayyidīnā Yaṣūʿ ʿinda tuwuffiyā-hu waʿdu-hu wa-li-ṣ-ṣāʿir al-anbiyāʿ al-ladhī arsala ilāhu ilay-him al-malak li-amr qaḍāʿi-hi fi ʿilmi-hi aw wahyi li-ṭaʿti-hi wa-nazrat ʿibādati-hi.*

<sup>13</sup> See Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld and Gerard Wiegers, "Marcos Dobelio's Polemics against the Authenticity of the Granadan Lead Books in Light of the Original Arabic Sources," in *Polemical Encounters: Polemics between Christians, Jews and Muslims in Iberia and Beyond*, ed. Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers (State College, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 242. We translated this as "And God completed his time through the angel," reading *waqtahu* (time) instead of *waʿdahu*. During our later study of the parallel passages mentioned we changed this reading to the present form.

<sup>14</sup> Van Koningsveld and Wiegers, *The Lead Books of the Sacromonte*, Lead Book 7, fol. 19a-b, translation p. 433–4, Arabic text, p. 275: *Wa-kāna ʿinda dhālika al-waqt amīr fī Ruma Tabarīth Sajār wa-ḥakamu-hu Bilāth fi Jarjalān [sic] wa-kānū yaftāshūnā [sic] li-sayyidi-nā Yaṣūʿ al-Faras li-yaṣlubā-hu*

We can see above that the Lead Books speak about Jesus' demise in different contexts using the words *tawaffā* and *wa'd*. All passages, but especially the above passage in Lead Book 7, seem clearly inspired by the Qur'an, as it transpires, for example, in sura 3:54–55.<sup>15</sup> According to Robinson, most commentaries assume that these verses refer to the Jews' plot against Jesus' life and God's counter-plot to rescue him by having them crucify a lookalike substitute, whereby that substitute is given Jesus' likeness so that the bystanders do not notice the substitution. Many classical and later works of *tafsīr* offer as a reconstruction that this substitute was Judas himself.

In the light of these different passages about Jesus' demise, we read the Arabic text of Lead Book 7 here as: *wa-lakīn*<sup>16</sup> *tawaffahu*<sup>17</sup> *Allāh wa'dahu*<sup>18</sup> *bi-al-malak* and translate "God took him to Himself through the angel." Here, we interpret the Andalusī Arabic used by the authors as clearly inspired by the Qur'an and moreover as an Islamic text itself, even while a literal translation might be "God fulfilled his promise through the Angel." How did the contemporary Christian translators understand this passage, and which tools did they claim to have used to interpret the texts?

When we look at the contemporary interpreters, we can see that the Morisco translator Miguel de Luna interpreted Lead Book 7 in the presence of Pedro de Castro (and under his close supervision) and of an official notary in 1596.<sup>19</sup> He reads the passage in question as follows:

And the Pharisees looked for our Lord Jesus in order to crucify him with false witnesses and having entered the garden where he was praying to his creator; all the apostles dispersed and they did not remain steadfast. God had, however, had explained to him his will through the Angel.<sup>20</sup>

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*bi-shawāhid az-zūr; [19z] fa-lammā dakhālū ft-l-jinān ay mawdī' [sic] kāna yud'ā rabbu-hu tafarraqū al-hāwarīn [sic] wa-lam yabqā la-hum shay' min al-yaqīn, wa-lakīn [sic] tawaffa-hu [sic] Allāh wa'da-hu bi-al-malak, fa-qāla ilay-him bay'u-hu [sic] Yudāsh bi-l-thamān [sic] al-mu'addad min al-waraq, hatī al-mabī' bi-l-iqbāl, fa-akhadhū al-maftūn al-mumaththal ft-t-tawriya wa-ḥamālu-hu ilā sh-shurra' fa-lam yajid 'alay-hi 'uḍran [sic], wa-lakīn yad'ū lahu al-yahd [sic] jalda-hu wa-ḥadāda-hu Bilath wa-alqa [sic] 'alā ra'si-hi 'imāmat [sic] ash-shawk.*

15 For the content of these two verses, see below.

16 = *wa-lākīn*.

17 = *tawaffā-hu*.

18 = *wa'da-hu*.

19 It cannot be excluded that the other earlier translations are found in the Archive of the Royal Chancellery (Real Chancillería de Granada). A large part of the records about the evaluation process of the Lead Books which were transferred from the Archives of the Sacromonte Abbey to this archive have been in restauration since 2009, and not accessible.

20 Miguel de Luna, 11 May 1596, ARCG, 2432-14, fol. 556b (260b)- 557a (261a): "[. . .] y buscauan a nuestro Sr Jesus los Phariseos para crucificarlo con testigos falsos y auiendo entrado en el huerto

From this translation it is clear that Luna does not do justice to the word *tawaffā-hu* and translates that God makes His will clear to Jesus. Luna's translation of *wa'-da-hu* avoids a problem by translating *tawaffā-hu* as *explicar* (explain). This sentence marks the transition between the arrest sought by the Pharisees and Judas' betrayal. No Islamic meaning transpires. The passage could refer to God's will that Jesus would be betrayed and crucified, since it suggests that much.

Upon arriving in Spain from Rome in 1610–11, Marcos Dobelio, who had worked on the Lead Books in the service of archbishop Pedro de Castro, made it clear to the archbishop that he had reached the conclusion that these were Muslim Morisco texts and rejected a Christianizing interpretation of the Lead Books. He was dismissed right away. At the time of writing these polemics, Dobelio, many years later, and still in Spain, no longer had access to the Arabic texts of the Lead Books themselves due to the conflict he had had with Pedro de Castro many years earlier.<sup>21</sup> The rupture which accompanied his dismissal by Castro will surely not have contributed to a better mood. In his strongly polemical text, Dobelio focuses attention on a Spanish translation of Lead Book 7. The translation he had before him had very likely been carried out by a translator, Sergio, a Maronite who worked in the service of the Marquis of Estepa, and was the only Spanish translation.<sup>22</sup> Dobelio found this text very suitable for demonstrating his views on the Lead Books by showing how the author of the translation had dealt with the said passage. According to Dobelio, the translator rendered: "And [the Pharisees] looked for false witnesses against our Lord Jesus in order to crucify him with and when they entered the garden where he used to pray to his Lord, everyone dispersed with great fear, and no faith remained in them. For this, God chastised them and promised the Kingdom,"<sup>23</sup> likely reading *mulk* (kingdom) instead of *malak* (angel). Dobelio, who was convinced that the Lead Books had a Morisco authorship and were written with clear Islamic intentions, points to the many historical errors in the said passage but does not comment on the fact that the passage might have an Islamic connotation, as Marracci later would.

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en aquel lugar donde oraua a su criador se desaparecieron [sic] los apostoles y no les quedo constancia ninguna, *mas ya le auia Dios explicado su determinada uoluntad por medio del Angel* [. . .]."

21 Van Koningsveld and Wiegers, "Marcos Dobelio's Polemics," 206.

22 Van Koningsveld and Wiegers, *The Lead Books of the Sacromonte*, 83.

23 Marcos Dobelio, *Nuevo Descubrimiento de la falsedad del metal* (Toledo, Biblioteca Castilla-La Mancha, MS 285), fol. 135a: "[. . .] y buscaron testigos falso contra nuestro Señor Jesus para crucificarlo, y como entraron en la huerta donde solia hazer oraçion a su señor partieronse todos con grande temor, y no quedò en ellos ninguna fe, por esto Dios los castigò y les prometio el Reyno."

One of the extant manuscripts includes the translation carried out under the supervision of Adán Centurión, marquis of Estepa (1582–1658), one of the staunchest defenders of the authentic early-Christian character of the Lead Books. It reads:

And when they entered the garden where he was praying to his Lord, all the apostles dispersed, and there did not remain any hope, but He [God] made him afraid and comforted him through an angel.<sup>24</sup>

Here, the Islamic connotation remains unnoticeable as well. It is unclear why this translation differs from the one studied by Dobelio, for that version very likely went back to the translation done under the supervision of the same Estepa. But we will see below that Estepa's translation certainly underwent changes over the course of time.

In 1642, the Lead Books finally arrived in Rome, where they were put under evaluation by a committee of scholars who worked in the service of the Holy Office. There, Ludovico Marracci, as one of the committee members and probably even acting as the prosecutor in the 'trial', participated in the evaluation and in 1666 wrote a masterful and personal critical evaluation in five parts, the *Disquisitio*. As it is one of the issues dealt with in the third part, Marracci discusses the theme of Jesus' demise.<sup>25</sup>

Marracci, perhaps making use of Dobelio's work, which he knew, recognized the qur'anic meaning of *tawaffā-hu* and presents a long discussion about the implications of this passage for understanding the story of Jesus' passion as presented in the Lead Books, and in particular Lead Book 7.

Interestingly, he points out that the passage in question had originally been read in the same way by all papal interpreters in the committee, demonstrating a consensus about: "sed compleuit illi Deus promissionem suam per Angelum" ["but God fulfilled his promise to him through the Angel"]. However, they stepped back from that reading and eventually proposed the following: "There did not remain in them any faith, and when a trembling got hold of him God consoled him through the Angel."<sup>26</sup> The last reading is the reading that also made it to

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24 Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 10503, fol. 25a-b: "y cuando entraron en el guerto en donde estava orando a su señor, fueron desparçidos los apostoles, y no quedo en ellos alguna confiança, mas hizole auer pavor /25b/ Dios y confortole por medio de un angel." Miguel José Haggerty, *Los Libros Plúmbeos del Sacromonte* (Granada: Editorial Comares, 1998 [reprint 2007]), p. 120, translates: "mas hizole haber pavor Dios y confortole por medio de un ángel," apparently following Estepa.

25 Ludovico Marracci, *Disquisitio Laminarum Granatensium quinque partibus comprehensa*, Città del Vaticano, Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede (henceforth: ACDF), r7e, fol. 104a-107a (issue XII).

26 ACDF, r7e, fol. 104b: "Unde advenit illi tremor Deus confortavit eum per Angelum."

the official Latin translation of the Lead Books that was later approved of and disseminated.<sup>27</sup> Why did the committee change its view? The answer may be: Spanish diplomacy. Alonso notes that after the committee had reached a consensus, a new translation came into being between 1652 and 1655 because of the activities of the Spanish Council of State and the Marquis of Estepa, who had heard about the process of collation. Estepa requested that this version be collated with his own. He succeeded in his efforts. Indeed, the Pope gave orders to further collate the evaluators' existing, collated Latin version with Estepa's translation.<sup>28</sup> This may explain the change in the wording of the Latin translation of Lead Book 7 that was observed by Marracci. Marracci criticizes the new interpretation as very difficult to reconcile with the Arabic text of the Lead Book. He preferred the earlier translation, with regard to which he pointed out that the Arabic *tawaffā-hu* can be read in another way, in addition to the way mentioned: namely as “recipere ad se spiritum alicuius mediante morte,” “to receive someone's soul through death.”<sup>29</sup> This meaning appears, according to him, from the “camus”, i.e. *Al-qāmūs al-muḥīt*, the well-known Arabic dictionary of the 14th-century lexicographer al-Firūzābādī, and in other lexicons, which he did not mention by name. He proposed to read this passage against the background of sura 3:54–55<sup>30</sup>, and 4:157<sup>31</sup>, and then quoted a Latin translation of the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (“glossa Gelalis”) about sura 3:54:

And the children of Israel sought to deceive Jesus so that they might kill him. But God deceived them, because He cast the figure of his likeness upon the one who wanted to kill him, and they [the children of Israel] killed him instead of Jesus, and God elevated Jesus to himself.<sup>32</sup>

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27 Toledo, Biblioteca Castilla-La Mancha, MS 265, a version of the Vatican translation of the Lead Books, pp. 40–41.

28 Carlos Alonso, *Los apócrifos del Sacromonte (Granada): Estudio Histórico* (Valladolid: Estudio Agustiniiano, 1979), 348–9, 353.

29 ACDF, r7e, fol. 104b.

30 Sura 3:54–55 reads, in Arberry's translation: “And they devised, and God devised, and God is the best of devisers. When God said ‘Jesus, I will take thee to Me and will raise thee to Me and I will purify thee of those who believe not. . . .’”

31 In Arberry's translation: “And for their saying, ‘We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God’—yet they did not slay him, neither crucify him, only a likeness of what was shown to them.”

32 ACDF, r7e, fol. 105a. Et filii Israēl struxerunt dolum contra Jesum ut interficerent eum; et Deus deceptit eos, nam posuit figura de similitudine Jesu in illo, qui volebat occidere eum, et occiderunt illum pro Jesu et Deus elevavit illum ad se. See Jalāl ad-dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl ad-dīn as-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mar‘ashlī (Bayrūt: Dar al-iḥyā’ at-turāth al-‘arabī, 1999/1420) ad 3:54.

This, Marracci adds, connects well with the Qur'an. The translation for the passage under scrutiny that he arrives at as the most likely one would read [with *wa'd* in apposition or, in Arabic grammatical terminology, *tamyiz*]: "And God received his spirit (a promise by the angel), i.e. as he had promised him through the angel ["et recepit Deus ad se spiritum eius (promissio eius per Angelum), id est, sicut promiserat ei per Angelum"], or: and God took to himself his spirit (his promise through the angel), and he had taken him away [before the crucifixion of his substitute] through the angel ["vel et recepit Deus ad se spiritum eius et avertit eum per angelum"]."<sup>33</sup>

Marracci then observes other noteworthy aspects of Lead Book 7, which, so he tells us, strengthened him in this second interpretation. While acknowledging the ambivalence of the formulations in it with regard to the correct interpretation, he observes that the author of Lead Book 7 stops mentioning Jesus' name after the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. This, he says, makes the Islamic interpretation more likely, since its subtext suggests that Jesus is no longer in the Garden, and that someone else, who has taken his likeness, was the one being crucified. We will return to this below.

In conclusion, Marracci, in his twelfth section of part three of his *Disquisitio*, having examined the said case, basing himself among other sources on the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, argues for an Islamic interpretation of the said passage, and more broadly for an Islamic interpretation of the Lead Books. As we know, in 1682 Pope Innocent XI eventually condemned the Lead Books as Muslim heresies.

While the condemnation was based on correct insights into the Islamic nature of the Lead Books and situated them against the background of Iberian Islam, the Vatican was not interested in a deep understanding of these sources on their own terms but in the question of whether they could be admitted as foundational for the Roman Catholic church. Returning to the author of Lead Book 7, we may ask how his Islamic views were related to other contemporary Islamic texts, in particular *tafsir*.

First of all, it is difficult to gauge from the Sacromonte texts which interpretation traditions influenced the said passages. Their points of view are Islamic and polemic, it seems, but phrased carefully as a subtext. Some other Morisco texts written around the time of the expulsion were more outspoken, and it is to these that I now turn.

First of all, we will discuss a polemical text written in Spanish by the Morisco known as Muḥammad Alguazir, called *Apología contra la ley cristiana*. This text

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33 ACDF, r7e, fol. 105a.

was very likely written at the court in Marrakesh in about 1609.<sup>34</sup> With regard to the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Alguazir writes: “The crucified by a hidden judgement of God was a man with the same outer appearance as Christ, whom we understand was Judas, who, as a traitor had proceeded to sell him to the Jews [sic] and when he in a dissimulated way entered the garden where Christ was with his disciples to hand him over and point to him by giving him the kiss of peace, God ordered that Judas take the appearance of Jesus, was arrested, and God elevated Christ to the heavens, taking him from among them. And this matches well with what the gardener’s son said, namely that he had seen a white gown (?) which disappeared.”<sup>35</sup>

It is clear that in this polemical text, the suggestion of some of the *mufassirūn* that it was Judas who took Jesus’ outer appearance was accepted, albeit with some reservation: “se entiende”.

Secondly, in another polemical text, written in a Morisco context though perhaps not by a Morisco author, the already mentioned *Gospel of Barnabas*<sup>36</sup>, we find the same idea. As in Lead Book 7, it is as part of a first person narrative. Extant in one Spanish and one Italian manuscript, quoted by Moriscos in Tunis as a text in which “light” can be found, the *Gospel of Barnabas* may very well be connected to the Lead Books, even though there are some important differences in addition to similarities between them. Here, the author, Barnabas, who we are told had a disagreement with the apostle Paul about matters of doctrine, tells us the true story of Jesus’ life and demise. Interestingly, Paul is not mentioned at all in the Lead Books, in which James in fact takes center stage as the main missionary figure whose travels to Palestine and the Iberian Peninsula seem almost to be a substitute for Paul’s travels. What matters here is that Judas is with all polemical “certainty” pictured as Jesus’ substitute who was crucified in his stead. In this way the author of the *Gospel of Barnabas* takes the proposals of the *mufassirūn* a step further.

A final Morisco text which discusses Jesus’ demise was BNE MS 9655, a polemical work in the form of a comparison between Judaism, Christianity and Islam by

34 Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 9074, and Oxford, Wadham College MS A 18.15, see Gerard Wiegers and Mercedes García-Arenal, “Polemical Comparisons in the *Apology against the Christian Religion* by Muhamad Alguazir (c. 1610),” *Entangled Religions* 5 (2020): 1–28.

35 Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, BNE, 9074, fol. 40a: “Y el cruzificado por oculto juicio de Dios fue un hombre en la misma semejança de Chisto, el qual se entiende ser Judas, el que como traidor procuró bendelle a los judíos, anssi quando entró disimulado a donde xpto estaba en el guerto con los dizípulos para abelle de entregar con el beso de paz hordenó Dios que el Judas tomando la semejança de Xpto le assieron a él y a Chisto le alço dios [fol. 40b] a los çielos sacándole de entre ellos. Y siendo como es anssi biene bien colo que el hixo del ortelano dijo aber bisto un bulto blanco y dessapazerse.”

36 See above, note 10.

Juan Alonso Aragonés, a converted priest, who very likely wrote his work in Tetuan in about 1610. Alonso may have been of Morisco descent and in any case must have had close contacts with Moriscos, in whose circles his work was disseminated.<sup>37</sup> According to Juan Alonso, it was not Judas but a King from Syria who had volunteered to take Jesus' place on the cross.

### 3 Discussion

The Lead Books allow us to gain a surprising insight into the Islamic ideas about Christianity which circulated in the Morisco communities of late sixteenth-century Spain and the Diaspora. In the discussions about the correct interpretation of the Lead Books, Ludovico Marracci played an important – perhaps even decisive – role. While authors such as Miguel de Luna and Adán Centurión, marquis of Estepa, translated in such a way that the passage about Jesus' demise seemed in harmony with Christian interpretations, Marracci disagreed. In 1666 he completed his *Disquisitio* and in the third section, devoted to studying disagreements between the Christian sacred writings and church-historical data on the one hand and the Lead Book texts on the other, he quotes both lexicographical works and the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* as evidence for his interpretation of the said passage. In their study about Marracci's work on the translation and refutation of the Qur'an which would be published in 1698, Gleis and Tottoli among many other things discuss Marracci's work on *tafsīr*. They note that in the context of these preparations, Marracci in 1671 requested that the Pope allow him to use a number of manuscripts extant in the Vatican library to start work on a refutation of the Qur'an.<sup>38</sup> He had first copied out (part of) a manuscript of Ibn Abī Zamanīn's *tafsīr* that was in the possession of Cardinal Camillo Massimo (who had very likely acquired it in Spain) and was perhaps of Morisco provenance, like other Arabic and Spanish Islamic manuscripts which reached libraries in Italy during these years.<sup>39</sup> During his work on his edition of the Latin translation of the Qur'an, Gleis and Tottoli note, Marracci turned more and more to this *tafsīr*. In the 1698 edition of the Qur'an, *Al-Jalālayn* had become a key *tafsīr*.<sup>40</sup> The use of this *tafsīr* for the understanding of this passage (and other

<sup>37</sup> See Wiegers, "Muhammad as the Messiah," *passim*.

<sup>38</sup> Reinhold Gleis and Roberto Tottoli, *Ludovico Marracci at Work. The Evolution of His Latin Translation of the Qur'an in the Light of His Newly Discovered Manuscripts. With an Edition and a Comparative Linguistic Analysis of Sura 18* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 28.

<sup>39</sup> Gleis and Tottoli, *Marracci at Work*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> Gleis and Tottoli, *Marracci at Work*, 32–35.

passages) in Lead Book 7 confirms that he was aware of its value as a *tafsīr* that presented comments on all verses of the Qur'an. It was in this same period that he also already profited from the insights of the Lebanese Maronite scholar Ibrāhīm al-Hāqilānī (1605–1664), Abraham Ecchellensis, whom he quotes. Ibrāhīm al-Hāqilānī knew the value of the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* very well. Du Ryer had also used the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* extensively in his French translation of the Qur'an published in 1647.<sup>41</sup>

Marracci correctly saw the clear Islamic intentions of the Lead Books, as is confirmed by the other places in the texts where similar statements are made, analysed above. Moreover, the overall use of Qur'an and Tradition in the Lead Books confirms this interpretation of the Lead Books as Islamic texts, which in addition to a general inclusive message also has strongly polemical elements. Interestingly, Marracci's discussion about this particular passage also may shed light on the – apparently effective – Spanish attempts to interfere with the evaluation process: the final Latin text was adapted.

The other texts we have studied confirm that the place of Jesus was not only a key issue in the missionary activities directed against the Moriscos, but also played important part in Moriscos' apologetical and polemical texts. The *Gospel of Barnabas*, "authored" by Barnabas, companion of Paul and "eyewitness" to Jesus' life and demise, presents an alternative reading to the Lead Books narrative by attacking Paul directly and openly. In the *Gospel of Barnabas*, Judas miraculously replaces Jesus and is crucified instead of him. Here, the *possible identity* suggested in the *tafsīr* becomes a posited historical *reality*. Muḥammad Alguazir does the same, but does not claim to rely on the authority of an eyewitness. Other texts, such as the polemical treatise written by Juan Alonso Aragonés, point to a King Jesus of Syria, who had voluntarily substituted Jesus.<sup>42</sup> During roughly the same period, the testimony of the Morisco Jerónimo de Rojas before the Inquisition confirms that, partly under the influence of the Lead Books, the debate about Jesus' demise was very much alive among the Moriscos as a polemical theme.<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, the final years of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries witness a great interest in the narrative of Jesus' demise among the Moriscos. We may perhaps see this as a response to Christian missionary attempts, and as a follow-up to the expulsion of the Granada Moriscos to Castile

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<sup>41</sup> See Gleis and Tottoli, *Marracci at Work*, 34, note 64; Bernard Heyberger, "L'islam et les Arabes chez un érudit maronite au service de l'Église catholique (Abraham Ecchellensis)," *Al-Qanṭara* 31/2 (2010): 481–512, 500–501.

<sup>42</sup> Wiegers, "Muḥammad as the Messiah," 288.

<sup>43</sup> Mercedes García-Arenal and Rafael Benítez Sánchez-Blanco, *The Inquisition Trial of Jerónimo de Rojas, a Morisco of Toledo (1601–1603)* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 154–80.

in 1571 and the discussions about imminent expulsion of all Moriscos from Spain. However, not all Morisco texts witness it.

In the manuscript now referred to as the *Qur'an of Toledo*, for example, we do not find any traces of the said discussions. The Morisco manuscript, copied out by a Morisco scribe in 1606, very likely in Villafeliche in Aragón, presents us with a complete Spanish translation of the Qur'an along with inserted and intercalated comments. In the case of sura 3:54, however, it offers some small clarifying remarks only, and the case of sura 4:157 a mere translation, with no extensive comments.<sup>44</sup>

## 4 Conclusions

The Lead Books and the process of their interpretation and qualification took place in an interreligious context that featured some noteworthy social and political elements. While Islamic, the Lead Books themselves can also be seen as a resilient response to missionizing and to the repression of culture and language. Unravelling the message of these texts was a process which saw nascent studies of Arabic and Islam in Europe become entangled with the globalization of the Roman Catholic church, which was starting to direct itself towards the Christian communities in the Islamic World. It is in this context that the Lead Books were evaluated and condemned. Marracci played an important part in the evaluation. We have seen how he made use of *tafsīr* to build his arguments that the texts should be read in an Islamic interpretive framework. Around the Lead Books, and perhaps in connection with them, Moriscos continued to debate such themes as the demise of Jesus. They, too, used *tafsīr* to strengthen their views. It was in their circles that texts such as the *Gospel of Barnabas* and the polemical works of Juan Alonso Aragonés became influential, works that built upon views of the commentators about the identity of the person allegedly crucified instead of Jesus.

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