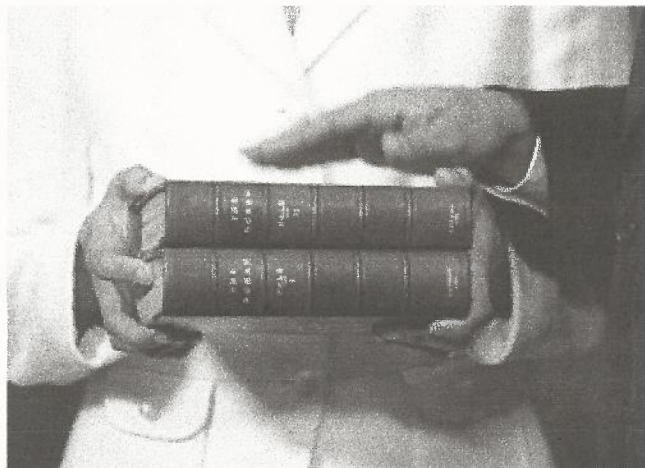


Congressman Ellison and Jefferson's Koran

Posted By [Dr. Stephen M. Kirby](#) On April 20, 2015 @ 12:02 am In [Daily Mailer,FrontPage](#) | [No Comments](#)



On January 4, 2007, newly elected Congressman Keith Ellison made history. He became not only the first Muslim to be elected to the United States Congress, but he also took the ceremonial oath of office holding his hand on the Koran that had been owned by Thomas Jefferson. Dozens of television cameras, including one from the Arab network Al-Arabiya, were on hand to record this historical event.

Ellison had explained the importance of this ceremony in an interview the day before, "...in a private ceremony...I'll put my hand on a book that is the basis of my faith, which is Islam..." ("Keith Ellison and the Jefferson

Koran," *The Nation - The Beat Blog*, January 3, 2007).

A few weeks after the swearing-in, Ellison said that the Koran "is the scripture that I read every day and it's the book that I draw inspiration from" ("Rep. Keith Ellison: First Muslim in Congress," *FinalCall.com News*, January 20, 2007).

The significance of this event was even recognized two years later, on June 4th, 2009, as President Obama was giving a speech in Cairo, Egypt. In the portion of the speech when Obama was talking about how Muslim-Americans had "enriched" the United States, he pointed out that Congressman Ellison had taken his oath on Jefferson's "Holy Koran."

So President Obama and Congressman Ellison proclaimed that Ellison had placed his hand on an actual Koran for this ceremony.

Jefferson's Koran

The Koran Ellison used was a two volume translation of the Koran done by George Sale, a non-Muslim. It was titled *The Koran, Commonly Called the Alcoran of Mohammed*. It was first printed in 1734, but the two volume translation used by Ellison was from a second printing done in 1764. Digital copies of both volumes of this second printing can be located online. So let's examine this particular Koran.

In the first volume Sale had three sections before his actual translation of the Koran began: *Dedication, Introduction, and Preliminary Discourse*. In the *Dedication*, Sale lamented the "detestation" with which the name Muhammad was laden. But then Sale contrasted the religion and laws of Muhammad to the laws of Jesus and Moses, "whose laws came really from heaven." So according to Sale, Muhammad's religion and laws had not come from heaven. Sale then went on to note that Muhammad used "an imposture [fraud] to set up a new religion."

In the *Introduction*, Sale wrote that the Koran was a "forgery" (p. vii) and it "pretends to be the Word of God" (p. xiii). Sale criticized Muhammad for "imposing a false religion on mankind" (p. x). And Sale explained that he was providing "an impartial version of the Koran" because

it is absolutely necessary to undeceive those who, from the ignorant or unfair translations which have appeared, have entertained too favourable an opinion of the original, and also to enable us effectually to expose the imposture [fraud]... (pp. vii-

viii)

In the *Preliminary Discourse*, Sale repeatedly pointed out that Muhammad had "pretended" to be a messenger from God (pp. 52-53, 93, and 96). Sale stated that Muhammad had "pretended" to receive the "revelations...which compose his Koran" (p. 55). And on numerous pages Sale repeated his assertion that Muhammad had "pretended" to receive those revelations (pp. 56, 64, 66, 82, 84, 100, 143, 190, and 192).

Sale addresses Muhammad's "Night Journey" on pp. 61-62 of the *Preliminary Discourse*. In this journey Muhammad claimed to have traveled from Mecca to the seven levels of Heaven. He claimed he was accompanied by the angel *Jibril* (Gabriel) and rode on *Al-Buraq*, a white, horse-like animal, smaller than a mule and bigger than a donkey. Muhammad claimed that he had visited the first six levels of Heaven, meeting one or more of the earlier prophets on each level. On the seventh level he had met Abraham and Allah, and received certain instructions from Allah. Sale wrote that Muhammad "feigns to have made a journey to heaven," and only pretended that he had spoken with Allah. Sale summed up his feelings about Muhammad's "Night Journey":

And I am apt to think this fiction, notwithstanding its extravagance, was one of the most artful contrivances Mohammed ever put in practice...

And Sale believed that Islam was simply a "human invention" based on violence:

It is certainly one of the most convincing proofs that Mohammedism was no other than a human invention, that it owed its progress and establishment almost entirely to the sword...

(Preliminary Discourse, p. 65)

Questions Sent to Congressman Ellison

There had been much excitement over Congressman Ellison using Jefferson's Koran for his ceremonial swearing-in. Jefferson's Koran had been declared an official Koran by Ellison and President Obama. Yet this translation of the Koran had been done by a non-Muslim who not only considered Islam to be a manmade religion "that it owed its progress and establishment almost entirely to the sword," but who also considered Muhammad to be a charlatan, and the Koran itself to be false and a forgery.

With this in mind, on March 13, 2015, I sent an e-mail to Congressman Ellison in Washington DC, in care of his Communications Director, Mike Casca. The e-mail summarized the information above with regard to Sale's beliefs about Islam, Muhammad, and the Koran, and I presented the following two questions for the Congressman's consideration:

1. Do you think Sale's negative beliefs about Islam affected the accuracy of his translation of the meaning of each of the verses in the Koran? If they did, how might they have affected that translation, and can his translated work then be accurately referred to as a Koran?
2. If you consider his work to be an accurate translation of the meaning of the verses in the Koran, how would you explain to your Christian and Jewish constituents verses such as these found in this work:

They are infidels, who say, Verily God is Christ, the son of Mary.

Vol. 1, p. 133 (Koran 5:17)

(So Christians are infidels.)

War is enjoined [sic] you against the Infidels...

Vol. 1, p. 38 (Koran 2: 216)

...for the infidels are your open enemies.

Vol. 1, p. 114 (Koran 4:101)

Take not the Jews, or Christians for your friends; they are friends one to the other...

Vol.1, p. 141 (Koran 5:51)

Thou shalt surely find the most violent of all men in enmity against the true believers [Muslims], to be the Jews, and the idolators...

Vol. 1, p. 147 (Koran 5:82)

My first e-mail to the Congressman went unanswered. After I had sent a second e-mail on March 19th, Casca responded that same day asking when I needed the answers. I replied that with the Congressman's busy schedule, one or two weeks would be fine.

Now, four weeks, and two unanswered e-mails to Casca later, it appears that the Congressman has decided not to respond.

Based on the available evidence, Congressman Ellison apparently considers Sale's work to be an accurate translation of the meaning of the verses in the Koran, and to also be a legitimate Koran. Consequently, it might be worthwhile for the congressman's Jewish and Christian constituents to ask him why he has such high esteem for a book that speaks ill of Jews and Christians, and specifically calls Christians the "open enemies" of Muslims.

So let's close with some verses from the book upon which Congressman Ellison placed his hand, and from which he said he draws inspiration:

As for the infidels...they shall be the fuel [fuel] of hell fire.

Vol. 1, p. 55 (Koran 3:10)

O true believers [Muslims]! wage war against such of the infidels as are near you; and let them find severity in you...

Vol. 1, p. 265 (Koran 9:123)

When ye encounter the unbelievers [non-Muslims], strike off their heads, until ye have made a great slaughter among them...

Vol. 2, p. 376 (Koran 47:4)

Mohammed is the apostle of God: and those who are with him are fierce against the unbelievers, but compassionate towards one another.

Vol. 2, p. 387 (Koran 48:29)

Dr. Stephen M. Kirby is the author of three books about Islam. His latest book is *Islam According to Muhammad, Not Your Neighbor*.

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