

Imaging Prophet Mohammed and the Orient Prototype in English Biographies

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Abstract:

From the Crusades to the present, generations of Western scholars and writers have presented and portrayed Prophet Mohamed in their writings. Many claim to be objective, while others do not hide their bias views and animosity. Many episodes from the prophetic biography were highlighted and frequently depicted in Western writings and were demonstrated in English literature as examples of the *Orientalists* from the East to simply fit the Romanticism prototype of the *Orient*. Nevertheless some less bias writings and portrayal of the Prophet appear from time to time in English writings. Michel Hart's ranking of Prophet Mohammed as the first of the top 100 most influential men in history is one of these examples. Hart's purely secular choice was justified as he viewed Prophet Mohammed as a successful personality both as a religious and war leader. During the last two centuries, some other research based writings like those of Sir William Muir, D. S. Margoliouth, Montgomery Watt and Karen Armstrong are also considered as slightly deviant from the traditional prototype of the prophet. This paper overviews the development of the image making of Prophet Mohammed in English biographic writings. Through the lights of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, a qualitative reading of Montgomery Watt's *Mohammed in Mecca* 1953 and Karen Armstrong's *Mohamed a Prophet for Our Times* 2006 are critically examined as examples.

Key Words: Islam and the West, Orientalism, Prophet Mohammed's biography, stereotyping, writings about Islam.

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