UCP Journal of Languages & Literature
Vol. 3, Issue 2 (July - December 2025)
Journal website: http://ojs.ucp.edu.pk/index.php/ucpjll

'Allah' in Early Modern England: An Analysis of the Occurrences of the Word in Early English Books Online

Hafiz Abid Masood[1*]

Abstract

Since the publication of Nabil Matar's *Islam in Britain 1558-1685* in 1998, much scholarly effort has been devoted to the study of the representation of Islam in early modern English writings. The major focus of such studies has been drama and travel writing. Because of this, our understanding has advanced much concerning approaches to Islam in the period. In recent years, scholars have paid attention to the early modern works dealing with the Prophet Muhammad and the Holy Qur'an in England and have demonstrated the early modern ways of engaging with the figure of the Prophet and the Holy Qur'an. There is, however, a need to look at more deeply at early modern English texts and analyse the content for some fundamental terms and beliefs of Islam. Therefore, this paper looks at the occurrences of the word 'Allah' and its context in early modern English works that are included in EEBO. The paper highlights the depth of our understanding concerning the conception of Muslim 'God' in early modern England.

Keywords: Allah, Early Modern England, Early English Books Online (EEBO), Representation of Islam

Introduction

Allah is the personal and specific name for God in Islam, which signifies the monotheistic foundation of the faith. Since Judaism and Christianity are also monotheistic religions like Islam, they all believe in a single, supreme deity. While these three Abrahamic religions share the same idea of one God, they use different names to address him: Yahweh in Judaism, God in Christianity, and Allah in Islam. The word Allah originates from the Arabic term Ilah, meaning "a god" or "deity." By adding the definite article Al (the) to Ilah, the word Allah came into existence, which translates to "The God". This linguistic evolution reflects the exclusivity

[1] International Islamic University, Islamabad.
[*]Corresponding author's E-mail: abid.masood@iiu.edu.pk
Available online: 05-01-2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.24312/ucp-jll.03.02.728

and indivisibility of the divine being, which is a fundamental principle of Islamic faith.

In early modern England, the figure of Allah intrigued English authors and travelers who interacted with the Muslim world, whether through trade, diplomacy, or exploration. Their encounters with Islamic societies familiarized them with the term, which they documented in their writings, often observing its common usage across various contexts, from prayer to everyday dialogue. Early modern texts, especially travelogues, illustrate how English authors endeavored to interpret the term and sought to clarify how Muslims called upon Allah in acts of devotion, legal affirmations, and even informal expressions, frequently drawing comparisons with Christian customs. Analyzing how Allah is depicted in early modern English literature reveals the understandings and misconceptions of Islam during that time, alongside the broader cultural exchanges between the Christian and Muslim realms. This paper aims to unveil the instances and portrayals of Allah in early modern English texts, reflecting the intricate relationship of theology, language, and cultural interaction during a time of increasing global involvement.

Seminal scholars—including Samuel C. Chew, Nabil Matar, Daniel Vitkus, and Matthew Dimmock—have made substantial contributions to understanding representations of Islam and Muslims in early modern English literature, with particular attention to dramatic depictions, captivity narratives, and the phenomenon of "turning Turk." While Chew's foundational work offered broad surveys, later scholars have replaced these with sustained close readings that reveal Islamic representations to be far more nuanced, fluid, and ambivalent than previously understood. John V. Tolan, working on medieval Christian–Muslim relations, has also traced wider historical patterns of anti-Muslim polemics. However, despite extensive research on Muslim figures, cultural practices, the Prophet Muhammad, and Ottoman rulers, the portrayal of "Allah" has been a noticeably understudied area in early modern English writings—a lacuna that warrants attention given the centrality and specificity of the name Allah in Islamic discourse.

This research draws on the digital resources of EEBO to examine the use of the term "Allah." EEBO-TCP provides facsimiles of approximately 125,000 volumes of early English books, giving scholars access to texts otherwise inaccessible due to spatial limitations or fragile physical condition. EEBO is particularly useful because it is searchable by author, title, and publisher; files are available within seconds and may be downloaded for convenience. Using EEBO's resources, this study

employs a mixed-methods approach that combines digital corpus analysis with existing scholarship on early modern English literature to conduct close readings of selected texts. The methodology treats the corpus as an "archive" in the contemporary sense used in literary and historical research.

Analysis and Discussion:

One of the first examples of the use of the word "Allah" is found in Bartolomej Georgijivec's book on the history of Ottoman Turks. The book was translated into English by Hugh Goughe and printed in London in 1569. One of the chapters provides information about the religious rites among the Ottomans, and it starts with a description of the mosque. He calls their place of worship a temple but clarifies that in their language, they call it "Meschit." While describing the design and architecture of the mosques in the Ottoman Empire, the writer suggests that there are no images or pictures displayed in the mosques that show their resemblance to Protestant churches as opposed to the Catholic ones. According to the writer, the mosques have these words written in them:

> *La Illah Illellah. Mehemmet, Iresul, Allab, Taure Bir Pegambir Hath:* which is as much to saye as, their is no god but one, and Mehemmet his prophet, one receatour, and the rest of his Prophets equall. Or these *Fila Galib Illelah,* whiche thuse maye be englished, their is none so stronge as God. (Georgijivec, 1569).

He goes on to describe the Muslim way to call to prayer, where he mentions a "turret of exceeding height," and the person appointed to call for prayer goes up the turret and calls people to prayer by repeating "Allah Hecbar, which doth signify, there is one trewe God." (Georgijivec, 1569). The author also mentions the practice of remembrance (Zikr) among the Turks and says that they repeat "*La Illah Illelah"* shaking their head from right to left and left to right for around half an hour on certain days. This all shows that the author had deep knowledge of Islam and the rites performed by the Ottoman Turks. This also shows that the earliest mentions of the word "Allah" or its derivatives had its origin in the basic formula, viz. La Ilaha Ilallah Muhammad Rasul Allah."

> Georgijivic presents one more example of the use of word Allah among the Turks. When Turks wake up from their beds and come out of their bedrooms, they loudly say "Allah, Allah, Allah" which means "O god, O god, O god." (Georgijević, 1569).

The word Allah occurs in a description of the manner of circumcision among the Turks in a book titled *The Policy of the Turkish Empire* (1597). At the circumcision ceremony, while the guests are having their dinner, the child who has to undergo circumcision is brought among the guests. The surgeon, skillful in his work, takes his position to perform the minor surgery. But before he uses his tools, a Muslim "priest" utters these words: "*La Illah, Illelath Mehemmet Iresul Allah: Taure Begamber Hach:* that is, There is but one onely God, and MAHOMET his Prophet; one Creator, and his Prophets are equall." (Fletcher, 1597). One of the chapters of the book presents the Turkish manner of offering their prayers in great detail, and probably this is the first time that an author has attempted to present a translation of the opening chapter of the Qur'an recited by Muslims in each prayer. The translation closely resembles modern day translation of the chapter Al-Fatiha:

> In the name of the religious and merciful God: praised bee the Soueraigne Lord of the world, the pittifull, the mercifull: The Lord of the day of iudgement. Thee we serue, from thee we looke for helpe. Shew unto us the right way, that which thou hast shewed vnto thy Prophets: not that for which thou art angrie with the wicked. *Amen.* (Fletcher, 1597, 29)

The translations of the Qur'an into Latin existed since the Middle Ages, but the first translation of the Qur'an into English was published in 1649. This translation of the first chapter of the Qur'an is a testimony to the fact that knowledge about the Qur'an existed in England long before the first translation of the sacred text became available for English readers in the form of a book. Fletcher also uses the word "Sabanallah," which the Turks use before starting their prayer and which means "*O God bee mercifull vnto vs most miserable Sinners"* (Fletcher, 1597, 29). Another occurrence of the word Allah in the same text is also found in the chapter dealing with prayer. As per the text, the person who is assigned the duty to call for prayer is known as "Meizin," and he "get vp into the towers of their Temples, which are built round in the manner of watch-towers, or lanternes, and are of a wonderfull height: and there they doe sing out aloud a certaine Hymne or Song" (Fletcher, 1597, 27-28). This call to prayer that is characterized as "Hymne or Song" by our author includes repeating these words three times: "*Allah Hethber,"* which means "God is God alone." (Fletcher, 1597, 28). There are clearly many similarities between Georgijivec and Fletcher in their description of prayer, though the latter text is more detailed in its description than the former. The call to prayer in both cases is said to be the repetition of "Allahu Akbar" which Georgijivec transliterates as "Allah Hecbar" and Fletcher as "Allah

Hethber" and their translations also differ as "their [sic] is one trewe God" and "God is God alone" respectively and both are unable to capture the true meaning which should be "God is the greatest."

Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* (1599-1600) includes an anonymous account of annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and Madina. The word 'Allah' occurs in this description of Hajj. This account is an interesting record of a journey from Alexandria to Hejaz and we find the description of the city of Alexandria, Cairo, the Christians of Cairo as well as the places on the way to Madina and Mecca. In the beginning of the description of the voyage, the author writes about the last meeting between the captain of the caravan and his crew with the "Basha" in his palace who presented gifts to the captain and his team. The Basha also gave to the captain "*Chisua Talnabi,* which signifieth in the Arabian tongue, The garment of the Prophet." (Hakluyt, 1599-1600, 203). The garment was made of silk and in the middle it was embroidered with gold with following words: "*La illa ill alla Mahumet Resullala"* and the translation of these words is given as "There are no gods but God, and his ambassadour *Mahumet"* (Hakluyt, 1599-1600, 203). Rasul here is translated as "ambassador" though Gerogijivec above correctly translates it as prophet.

The anonymous author also describes the well of Zam Zam which he calls "pond Zun Zun" and when the pilgrims go there and "they wash themselues from head to foote, saying, *Tobah Allah, Tobah Allah,* that is to say, *Pardon lord, Pardon lord,* drinking also of that water…" (Haklyut, 1599-1600, 208-209). The expression Toba Allah seems to be an expression that does not sound to be Arabic. The author might have heard this from some non-Arab pilgrims who arrived in Mecca from places like India, Malay archipelago, Safavid Persia and Ottoman Turkey.

Another example of the word "Allah" is found in the description of Medina, specifically when the pilgrims reach a place fourteen miles from the city of Medina. This is a mountain called "*Iabel el salema,* that is to say, the mountaine of health" (Hakluyt, 1599-1600, 211). The pilgrims go up the mountain from where they can have a glimpse of the tomb of Prophet Muhammad. On seeing the tomb, they loudly say the following words: *Sala tuua salema Alaccah larah sul Allah. Sala tuua Salema Alaccah Ianabi Allah, Sala tuua Sale/ma Alaccha Iahabit Allah:* which words in the Arabian tongue signifie: Prayer and health be vnto thee, oh prophet of God: prayer and health be vpon thee, oh beloued of God." (Hakluyt, 1599-1600, 211). The author correctly characterizes this Arabic expression as the salutation. The same account of pilgrimage is later reproduced by Samuel Purchas in *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1613).

William Bedwell's *Mohammadis Imposturae* (1615) has an annexure appended to it that gives the meaning of Arabic terms as used by historians. These terms as explained by Bedwell indicate the knowledge of Islamic terms that was possessed by an Arabist in early seventeenth century. Though Bedwell's book displays a strong sense of hatred for Islam, the "Arabian Trudgman" at the end of the book offers useful insights into the early modern English understanding of Islam. The terms include the names of important cities in the Muslim world, the words for titles used in the Islamic courts, the names of months in Hijri calendar, the terms for the pillars of Islam among many other entries. Probably the first use of Islam (as Alesalem) and Muslim as well as Mussliman in early modern England are found in Bedwell. In this context, we find a mention of call to prayer in his entry on prayer under the term "Salie." He mentions that Turks pray six times in 24 hours and he mentions the names of these prayers as Sallie, Sabaha'lhhair, Dahour, Lashour, Mogrubey, and Lashahra (Bedwell, 1615). The caller to prayer is called as Modon which shows a different transliteration of the term form our earlier examples of the word. The Modon "cryeth with a loud voice *Allah cabir, la allah, illa ilellah,* that is, God is almighty, there is no God, but the Lord." (Bedwell, 1615). Bedwell, unlike Gerogijivec and Fletcher above, has rightly added a few more words to the Muslim call for prayer. The earlier writers only mentioned Allahu Akbar is their own transliteration while Bedwell has added the last few words of the call which he has transliterated as "la allah, illa ilellah" by which he meant "La Ilaha Illa Allah" which is both followed by Allahu Akbar and also makes the last few words of the call to prayer.

The testimony of faith or the creedal statement of Islam known as Kalima-e-Tayyaba finds an expression in William Lithgow's travel narrative. One of the sections deals with the description of the Ottoman city Constantinople "together with the customes, manners, and religion of the Turkes, their first beginning, and the birth of MAHOMET; and what opinion the Mahometanes haue of Heauen and Hell." One of the occurrences of the word "Allah" is found quite expectedly in Lithgow's narrative about Muslim call to prayer. Like other authors, he mentions that Muslims don't make use of bells in their mosques (churches) in order to contradict the Christians. Rather they have high "crying men" (Lithgow, 1616, 50). In Lithgow's words:

> when they goe to pray, they are called together by the voyce of crying men, who go vp on the bartizings of their Stéeples, shouting and crying with a shrill voyce: *La illa, Eillala, Mahomet Rezul alla,* that is, *God is a great God, and Mahomet is his Prophet, or other/wise there is but one God.* (Lithgow, 1616, 50).

In the same section, we find a description of Muslim paradise and hell. He talks about seven levels of paradise and says that the name Mahomet is written on seventh paradise near God's name in this manner: "Alla, illa, he, allah, Mahomet Rezul allah" (Lithgow, 1616, 59). According to Lithgow, if a Christian repeats these words, he is either punished with death or forced to renounce his religion.

George Sandys, another early modern traveller to the Ottoman Empire furnishes the details of Muslim call to prayer in a slightly detailed manner. The caller to prayer is called as Tasilmanni by him. He goes up a turret from where he calls the people for prayer in a loud voice "pronouncing this Arabicke sentence "*La Illah Illella Muhemet re sul Allah:* viz. *There is but one God, and* Mahomet *his Prophet."* (Purchas, 1625, 1282-83).

Edward Terry's account of his stay in Mughal India is also included in the same volume of *Purchas His Pilgrimes*. He also displays an impressive knowledge of Islamic culture and tradition in seventeenth century India. He also describes the Muslim manner of praying in their mosques. He calls the mosque as church and praises their beauty and also mentions the "high pinnacles" which are used by the "Moolaas" to go up and call for the prayer. Rather than Mezzin or Modon as we find in other texts, here we find the term "Moolaa" in plural form for the person who calls others for prayer. We find that Terry does not mention Allahu Akbar as part of the call. He only mentions the creedal statement: "*La Alla, illa Alla, Mahomet Resul-Alla:* that is, No God but one God, and *Mahomet* the Ambassadour of God." (Purchas, 1625, 1476).

Terry also narrates a strange anecdote of another English traveller in the Mughal Empire Thomas Coryat, who, once in Agra, "got vp into a Turret, ouer against the Priest, and contradicted him thus in a loude voyce: *La Alla, illa Alla, Hazaret-Eesa Ebn-Alla,* No God but one God, and Christ the Sonne of God…" (Purchas, 1625, 1476). This shows that Coryat clearly knew that Muslims and Christian both had a common belief in the oneness of God but the Christians did not believe in the Prophet-hood of Muhammad. The word Hazaret is a Persianate expression that Muslims used and still use with the names of Prophets. This anecdote also shows the missionary nature of Coryat, though he came to India as a free-lancer and is dubbed as the "English fookeer" by Jonathan Gil Harris. Edward Terry, after narrating this action of Master Coryat highlights that had he done that at some other place in Asia, he would have lost his life because of the torture. "But here" in Mughal India "euery man hath libertie to professe his owne Religion freely, and for any restriction I euer obserued, to dispute against theirs with impunitie." (Purchas, 1625, 1476). Mughal

India was much liberal as compared to Ottoman Empire or Safavid Persia in the eyes of Terry.

The same volume of Purchas contains the account of Ludovico de Varthema's account of his travels in the Middle East in the early sixteenth century. When he arrived in Aden, he was arrested by the locals on charges of being a spy of Christians. He was presented before the Sultan of the region who demanded of him to "say *Leila illala Mahumet resullala"* which he refused to do. As a result, he was sent to prison. (Purchas, 1625, 1491). While he narrates the story of his stay in the prison, he informs his readers that there were two other fellows who were also imprisoned and they planned to pretend to be mad periodically in order to gain the sympathy as the Arabs took mad men to be holy (1492). When it was his turn to be mad, he narrates his mad follies with a fat sheep. He says: "Vnder the colour of madnesse, I laid hand on this sheepe, saying, *Leila illala Mahumet resullala:* which words the *Sultan* before, when I was brought to his presence, willed me to say, to prooue whether I were a *Mahumetan,* or a professed *Mamaluke."* (Purchas, (1625, 1492)

The sheep did not respond to this "mad folly," he asked the company present there whether the sheep was a Jew, Christian or a Mahumetan. He wanted to convert the sheep to Islam so he repeated the creedal statement again. According to Varthema, "And willing to make him a *Mahumetan,* I rehearsed againe the said words, *Leila illala Mahumet resullala* (that is to say) there is one God, and *Mahumet* his chiefe Prophet: which are the words which they speake in professing their Faith." (Purchas, 1625, 1492)

On finding no answer from the sheep, he says that he broke the legs of the sheep with a staff. This story of sheep is an allegory of alleged coercion in Islamic lands to convert non-Muslims to Islam and in case of refusal, the non-Muslims faced the torture. Varthema clearly knew that "*Leila illala Mahumet resullala"* are the words which Muslims speak in professing their faith.

Samuel Purchas has also included a description of Ottoman Sultan's seraglio in the second volume of his *Purchas His Pilgrimes*. The description is an unacknowledged translation of Bon Ottavio's work on Ottoman harem by Robert Withers. In one of the chapters of this description, Withers provides details of the manner of converting to Islam. The paragraph where we find this detail actually deals with circumcision and we learn that circumcision is a rite that Turk children and new Muslims have to undergo. After the circumcision, a new Muslim who

> turne from any other Religion and become *Turkes,* who in token that they imbrace the Religion of *Mahomet,* hold vp their fore-finger, saying these words, *La illaheh il Alloh Muhamet resull Alloh,*[transliterated as *Law illawho illaw Allhah ve Muhammed resul Alla* in Bon, 1653] that is, there is but onely one God, and *Mahomet* is his Messenger. (Purchas, 1625, 1610).

What is important in all the above examples of Arabic transliteration of Muslim profession of faith is that not a single transliteration is identical with the other which shows that all these writers had different sources of knowledge for this information.

The word "Allah" is spelled as "Alloh" by this author. He is uniform with this spelling as we find some other examples of the use of this word in the same work. Writing about the place of other prophets in Islam generally, he acknowledges that Muslim respect all the other prophets. In his own words:

> All the Prophets are held in great honour amongst them. They call *Moses, Musahib Alloh,* that is, a *talker with God;* and *Christ, Meseeh, Rooh-lloh,* and *Hazrettee Isaw,* that is, *Messias,* the *Spirit of God,* and *venerable Iesus:* and *Mahomet, Resul Alloh,* that is, the *Messenger of God.* (Purchas, 1625, 1608)

A little later in the same work we have examples of "Subhawn Alloah" and "Alloh Ekber" which mean "God is pure and true" and "God is great" respectively. (1610)

We find the mention of word "Allah" in one of the sermons preached by Mile Smith, the Lord Bishop of Glocester. The sermons were transcribed from the manuscript sources and printed in London in 1632. Smith praises Arnobius and Lactantius, early Christian apologists, and their skill in convincing the non-Christians of the truth of Christian beliefs. Then he discusses Bartholomew Gerogeniez and says that while having a polemical debate with a Turk scholar in 1547, he proved the notion of trinity by citing the example sun which has form, brightness and heat and is still one. According to Smith, on hearing this, the audience who comprised of common 'Turks' was forced to exclaim "Allah, Allah." (Smith, 1632, 50) What is significant in this is that the author does not bother to translate the word Allah for his audience attending the sermon as if they understood the meaning of the word.

Robert Baron's closet drama titled *Mirza: A Tragedy* was based on a story about Persia in Thomas Herbert's travel narrative of his journey to Persia

in the company of English ambassador Sir Dodmore Cotton. At the end of the play, Baron has provided annotation about the important exotic terms used in the play. One detailed annotation, equipped with references from Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (which Baron calls Sunè) is about the Muslim idea of paradise. Baron mentions a huge tree in paradise whose leafs have the name of "Mahomet written on it "joyntly with the name of God, running thus, *Le ilche ille allah* Mahumed *razolloa, (i. e.*) There is no other God but the Lord, and *Mahomet* is his Messenger." (Baron, 1647, 245).

Ottavio Bon was a Venetian representative at the court of Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul in the first decade of the seventeenth century. He recorded his observations of the Ottoman life and culture which were rendered into English by Robert Wither around 1620 and Purchas included it in his *Purchas His Pilgrimes*. Bon's work was later published in London in 1653 and was edited by John Greaves and this work is much more detailed as compared to the part included in Purchas. We find some further insight into the place of God in Ottoman religion and culture. Chapter 12 of the book deals with Ottoman religion, their clergymen, sacred times, places and rites etc. The chapter opens with the statement that "the Turks believe in Almighty God" (Bon, 1653, 158). He mentions some of the important terms used by the Ottomans for God. They are "Hoo, Alloh, Tangree, Hack, Hackteawlaw, Alloh teawlaw, Jehawnee awfreen, Hodoy…" Bon has added footnotes to explain these terms along with the mention of the language in which that specific term is used. For example, Alloh is explained as "Arab. God" and Tangree as the word for God in Turkish. Similarly, Hodoy is used as the word for God in Persian. He further writes that Muslims consider God to be the creator of the universe and the forgiver of all virtuous people on the day of judgment. (Bon, 1653, 158) Moreover, God is on the highest heaven and that he has created Hell and Heaven for the eternal life after death. The whole information, specifically the names of God in various Muslim languages is a new addition to our knowledge.

Paul Rycaut's *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668) furnishes us some further knowledge of the word among the Turks. The shout "Allah, Allah" was variously used in the harem of the Ottoman Sultan at many occasions. For example, one of the chapters that describes the old queen's conspiracy against Ottoman Sultan Mahomet, we find that the guards of the Sultan go to different chambers to awake their companions and one young man cries loudly "God grant our King ten thousand years of life at which all the Chamber shouted Allah, Allah" (Rycaut, 1668, 17). Similarly, when the royal guards, on the instructions of the Mufti, reach

the Women's lodging to arrest the grandmother of Sultan, outside the chamber, they shout "Allah, Allah" (20) as if they use these words as an announcement that they are about to enter the space only specified for women. The grand mother is reported to have been strangled by a cord and after this, one of the ministers of the Sultan instructs the officers "to produce the Banner of Mahomet" which is reverenced and respected by all the Turks. "The Banner being brought forth with a rich covering, was advanced with great shouts of *Allah, Allah…"* (22). All these examples show that the expression "Allah, Allah" was common among the Turks especially inside the Royal court and careful European observers had picked up this expression and reported it to their readers. What is again to be noted here is the repletion of the expression without explaining the meaning of the expression which shows, as noted above, that early modern reader interested in Ottoman affairs was thought to have a fair idea of the word Allah.

This same expression "Allah, Allah" is reported as the Turk's war cry. The third book of Rycaut's work discusses the details of the Turkish militia. In this part of the book, he states that the Turks "begin their onset with Allah, Allah, and make three attempts to break within the Ranks of the Enemy, in which if they fail, they then make their retreat." (Rycaut, 1668, 185).

There are other examples of the use of the word Allah in Rycaut. One interesting use is once again in the call to prayer. The person responsible to gather people for prayer is called "Emoum" and it is their duty to call people to prayer from top of the minaret repeating these words: Allah ekber, Allah ekber, Eschedu…Ilahe ilaliah we eschedu… Muhammed: cuan Fleie ala Selah heie ala Felah Allah ekber, allah ekber, la Ilahe ilallah; that is, God is great, God is great, I profess that there is no Diety but God, and confess that Mahomet is the Pro|phet of God… (Rycaut, 1668, 108). This is fairly substantial addition to earlier versions of Muslim call to prayer cited in this paper above. This is a compete call as opposed to earlier versions that only mention the first four words in Rycaut's call to prayer. This is how slowly and gradually Englishmen were improving their knowledge of the various aspects of Islam.

Lancelot Addison who spent a few years in Tangier as chaplain wrote a book upon his return from Morocco. In chapter VIII, Addison discusses the Moor's way of praying to God. He mentions the five prayers and then highlights the significance of washing prior to prayer. Interestingly, he uses the "Giamma" for the collective prayer in the "Mosch" (mosque) which reveals his acquaintance with some Arabic terms used by Muslims. (Addison, 1671, 147). He also uses the term "Salah" and explains it as "a

Word that signifies the whole Form of their Prayers." The prayer leader who is called as "Emoum" by Rycaut is called as "Alfaqui" by Addison. The method of prayer is also described in some details and is worth quoting:

> … the Priest begins the Prayer in a Voice moderately elevated, which the People humbly repeat after him. At the pronouncing of *Illah El Gheber,* that is, *God is the great,* they all use an Elevation both of Hands and Eyes to Heaven: at the name of *Mecha,* they all kiss the Ground; but when they mention *Muley Mahumed,* and the Mercies he procures them, they fall prostrate, and upon the sudden, in a kind of Rapture, reassume an erect. When the Priest hath repeated *la illah Mahumed Resul Allah* four times, the *Almuden* dis|misseth the People.

There are some apparent misconceptions here. There is no mention of "mecha" in Muslim prayer, nor is Muley Mahumed's name is mentioned. Illah El Gheber is a transliteration of Allahu Akbar, which is transcribed in a better manner by some earlier authors. Mahumed has replaced earlier Mahomet, which is a little improvement towards better pronunciation of the name of the Prophet.

John Baptista Tavernier, in his *Six Voyages* (1677), describes the religious significance of coinage in the Safavid empire noting, "which upon one side bear the Names of the twelve Prophets of the Law of *Mahomet,* and in the middle this Inscription, *La Illah allah Mahomet resoul Allah, Ali Vaeli Allah:* on the back-side, *The Conquerour of the World,* Abas II. *gives us permission to coyn this Money in the City of* Cashan." (51) There are other occurrences of the same phrase at other places in Tavernier. "*La Illahé Illa Alla, Muhammed Resoul Alla,* That is to say, There is no other God than God, *Mahomet* is sent by God. *Resoul* signifies *sent,* which is the greatest Title given by the *Turks* to their Prophet." (25-26) This occurs in the last part of Tavernier's travels where he describes the Seraglio of the Ottoman Sultan. In the same work, while describing the architecture of the Ottoman Sultan's treasury and the offices, he mentions the following words inscribes on the top of the entrance: "*La Illahé Illa Alla, Muhammed Resoul Alla."* Here he does not translate the formula as he does earlier and he is aware that these words are "ordinary enough in the mouths of the Turks." (67)

Girolamo Dandini, an Italian Jesuit visited Maronite of Lebanon in 1596 which was recorded by him as his travel narrative. This was translated into French and later into English. The French translator of the Italian version commented on some of the chapters related to Turks and corrected the

errors of Dandini. The Italian writer, in Chapter IV of his book provides details about Muslim prayer and including ablution and the call to prayer. According to him "the *Turks* wash therein the crowns of their Heads, Hands and Feet, before they enter into the Mosque, at the ordinary hours, and particularly in the Afternoon, at which time these Villains invoke their false Prophet, and cry without measure, *Halla, Halla, Chibir, Mehemme Sur Halla;* that is to say, *God is a great God,* Mahomet *is the Companion of God" (p. 16).* Characteristic of late sixteenth century bias towards Islam, the quotation reveals the author's hatred of Islam by the use of negative expressions such as villains and false prophet. His transliteration of the Muslim call to prayer is both incomplete and incomprehensible. By *Halla*, he probably means *Allah,* and *Chibir* stands for *Akbar* as his translation of this part of the phrase testifies (God is a great God). The second half has similar problems.

Commenting on this chapter, the translator points out many inaccuracies in the description of the Turks, their beliefs, and customs. The translator's transliteration of the Muslim call to prayer is much better than the original author's. He renders it like this: *Allah Ecber,* that is, *God is Great;* then he continues to say for three times, *Esched en allah illah allah, I testifie there is no other God, but God:* then he says again three times, *Eschen en Mohammed resoul allah, I witness that* Mahomet *is his Prophet.* He adds some other Articles, as, *Hai allassalat, God live by Prayer; Hai alaphaleh, Live to Salvation; Allah Ecber, God is Great; L'allah illa, allah, There is no other God but God.(p. 82)* On page 96-97 of the book where we find commentary by the translator, he presents Islam as a copy of Judaism, especially when it comes to the profession of their faith through the axioms of their theology.

The French traveller to the Orient, Jean de Thevenot, also mentions Allah in his travel narrative when he describes the rite of circumcision among Muslims. In this regard, he writes, "…the Turks circumcise not their Children before the age of eleven or twelve years, to the end they themselves may pronounce the words, *La illah illallah Mehemet resoul allah,* that is to say, there is no God but God, *Mahomet* is his Prophet, which is their profession of Faith" (p. 42). About the profession of the Muslim faith, the writer further sheds light in these words: "the Turks bear so great respect to these words, *La illah illallah Mahomet resoul allah,* that if a Christian or Jew should pronounce them, even inconsiderately, before Witnesses, he must absolutely and without remission turn Turk, or be burnt." (43)

In another chapter in the book that deals with the mosques and the method of prayer, Thevenot makes an attempt to transliterate the call to prayer by the Muslims. Here is how he describes it:

> When the hour of any of these Prayers is come (for they whose business it is to mind that, have for that end Hour-glasses, and besides are regulated by the Sun when it shines) a *Muezim*, who is he that calls to Prayers, goes up to a *Minaret* at every Mosque, and stopping his Ears with his Fingers, he sings and crys these words with all his force; *Allah ekber, allah ekber, allah ekber, eschadou in la illah illallah eschadou in Mahomet resoul allah, hi alle sallatt, hi alle fellat, allah ekber, allah ekber, allah ekber, allah ekber, la illah illallah;* which is to say, God is great, God is great, God is great, God is great, shew that there is but one God, shew that *Mahomet* is his Prophet, come and present your selves to the mercy of God, and ask forgiveness of your Sins, God is great, God is great, God is great, God is great, there is no other God but God (49)

Conclusion

This examination of the word 'Allah' in early modern English texts reveals a gradual yet significant evolution in English understanding of Islamic theology and practice. From Bartolomej Georgijivec's pioneering account in 1569 to the more sophisticated observations of late seventeenth-century travellers, we witness a progressive refinement in both transliteration and comprehension of this fundamental Islamic term. The early texts demonstrate that English writers initially encountered 'Allah' primarily through the Muslim profession of faith (Kalima) and the call to prayer (Adhan), which served as the most audible and public manifestations of Islamic devotion.

The chronological analysis reveals several important patterns. First, the transliterations of Arabic phrases containing 'Allah' varied considerably across different authors, indicating diverse oral sources and the absence of standardized orthographic conventions for rendering Arabic into English. Second, translations of these phrases evolved from simplistic renderings to more nuanced interpretations, reflecting deeper engagement with Islamic concepts. Third, by the late seventeenth century, authors like Rycaut and Thevenot provided substantially complete versions of Islamic prayers and practices, demonstrating increased familiarity and accuracy.

Moreover, the frequency with which authors left 'Allah' untranslated in later texts suggests a growing assumption that English readers possessed

basic knowledge of Islamic terminology. This paper thus contributes to our understanding of how early modern England engaged with Islam not merely through dramatic representation or polemical discourse, but through careful, if sometimes imperfect, documentation of lived religious practices. The word 'Allah' served as a linguistic and theological bridge, facilitating cross-cultural comprehension even amid persistent religious tensions and misunderstandings.

Reference

Addison, Lancelot. *West Barbary, or, A short narrative of the revolutions of the kingdoms of Fez and Morocco with an account of the present customs, sacred, civil, and domestic*. Oxfordshire: Printed at the Theater in Oxford, sold by John Wilmot, 1671.

Baron, Robert. *Mirza a tragedie, really acted in Persia, in the last age*. London: Printed for Humphrey Moseley, 1647.

Bedwell, William. *Mohammedis Imposturæ*. London: Printed by Richard Field, 1615.

Bon, Ottaviano. *A description of the grand signour's seraglio or Turkish emperours court*. Edited by John Greaves. London: Printed for Jo. Ridley, 1653.

Chew, Samuel C. *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance*. Oxford University Press, 1937.

Dimmock, Matthew. *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England*. Ashgate, 2005.

Dandini, Girolamo. *A voyage to Mount Libanus wherein is an account of the customs, manners, &c. of the Turks... written originally in Italian by the R.F.J*. London: Printed by J. Orme for A. Roper and R. Basset, 1698.

Fletcher, Giles. *The policy of the Turkish empire. The first booke*. London: Printed by Iohn Windet, 1597.

Georgijević, Bartolomej. *The ofspring of the house of Ottomanno...* Translated by Hugh Goughe. London: Thomas Marshe, 1569.

Hakluyt, Richard. *The principal nauigations, voyages, traffiques and discoueries of the English nation*. London: Printed by George Bishop, Ralph Newberie, and Robert Barker, 1599-1600.

Lithgow, William. *A most delectable and true discourse, of an admired and painefull peregrination....* London: Printed by Nicholas Oakes, 1616.

Matar, Nabil. *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Purchas, Samuel. *Purchas His Pilgrimes*. London: Printed by William Stansby for Henrie Fetherstone, 1625.

Rycaut, Paul. *The present state of the Ottoman Empire....* London: Printed for John Starkey and Henry Brome, 1668.

Smith, Miles. *Sermons of the Right Reuerend Father in God Miles Smith, late Lord Bishop of Glocester*. London: Printed by Elizabeth Allde for Robert Allot, dwelling at the Blacke Beare in Pauls Church-yard, 1632.

Text Creation Partnership. "*Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership (EEBO-TCP).*" *Text Creation Partnership*, 17 Nov. 2025, textcreationpartnership.org/tcp-texts/eebo-tcp-early-english-books-online/.

Tolan, John V. *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*. Columbia University Press, 2002.

Tavernier, Jean Baptista. *The Six Voyages of John Baptista Tavernier... through Turky into Persia and the East-Indies*. London: 1677.

Thévenot, Jean de. *The travels of Monsieur de Thevenot into the Levant in three parts, viz. into I. Turkey, II. Persia, III. the East-Indies. Newly done out of French*. London: Printed by H. Clark, for H. Faithorne, J. Adamson, C. Skegnes, and T. Newborough, 1687.

Vitkus, Daniel J. *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570–1630*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.