Facing the United States Capitol in Washington, DC, stands the Jefferson Building, the main building of the Library of Congress, the world’s largest library, with holdings of more than 140 million books and other printed items. The stately building, with its neoclassical exterior, copper-plated dome and marble halls, is named after Thomas Jefferson, one of the “founding fathers” of the United States, principal author of the 1776 Declaration of Independence and, from 1801 to 1809, the third president of the young republic. But the name also recognizes Jefferson’s role as a founder of the Library itself. As president, he enshrined the institution in law and, in 1814, after a fire set by British troops during the Anglo-American War destroyed the Library’s 3000-volume collection, he offered all or part of his own wide-ranging...
book collection as a replacement for the loans, commenting that "there is no lack to which a number of Congress may not have occasion to refer."

Among the nearly 650 books Jefferson sold to the Library was a two-volume English translation of the Qur'an, the book Muslims recite, study and reverence as the revealed word of God. (See "Translation or Interpretation?", page 1). The presence of this Qur'an, first in Jefferson's private library and later in the Library of Congress, prompts the questions why Jefferson purchased this book, what use he made of it, and why he included it in his young nation's repository of knowledge.

These questions are all the more pertinent in light of assertions by some present-day commentators that Jefferson purchased his Qur'an in the 1790's in response to a conflict between the U.S. and Barbary states of North Africa—today's Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. That was a conflict Jefferson followed closely—indeed, in 1796, he helped negotiate a treaty with Morocco, the United States' first treaty with a foreign power. Then, it was relations with Algeria that were the most nettlesome, as its ruler demanded the payment of tribute; in return for ending unpaid piracy of American merchant shipping, Jefferson staunchly opposed tribute payment. In this context, such popular as counts claim, Jefferson was studying the Qur'an to better understand these adversaries, in keeping with the adage "know thy enemy." However, when we look more closely at the place of this copy of the Qur'an in Jefferson's library—and in his thinking—and when we examine the context of this particular translation, we see a different story.

From his youth, Thomas Jefferson read and collected a great many books, and a wide variety of them. The collection he eventually sold to the Library of Congress comprised 6,476 volumes, ranging in subject from classical philosophy to cooking. Like many collectors of the time, Jefferson not only cataloged his books but also marked them. It is one unusual way of marking his books that makes it possible to establish that, among the millions of volumes in today's Library of Congress, this one specific Qur'an did indeed belong to him.

In the 19th century, the production of books was still an essentially manual process. By means of a hand press, large sheets of paper were printed on both sides with multiple pages before being folded. They were folded once to produce four pages for the folio size, twice to produce eight pages for the quartroy four times to produce the 16-page octavo. These folded sheets, known as gatherings, were then sewn together among their edges before being attached to the binding. Evidently the bookbinders would stitch the gatherings together in the correct sequence, each marked with a different letter of the alphabet on what, after folding, would become that gathering's first page.

Thus, in a large volume like Jefferson's Qur'an, there is a small printed letter on the bottom right-hand corner of every 16th page. It was Jefferson's habit to take advantage of these preexisting marks to discreetly inscribe each of his books. On each book, often gathering, in front of the printer's mark for J he wrote a letter T, and on the 26th gathering, to the printed T he added a J, thereby in each case producing his initials. This subtle, yet unmistakable signature appears clearly on the two leather-bound volumes in the Library of Congress.

Jefferson's system of cataloging his library sheafed light on the place the Qur'an held in his thinking. Jefferson's system of classification scheme was much informed by the work of Francis Bacon (1561-1626), whose professional trajectory from lawyer to statesman to philosopher roughly prefigures Jefferson's own career. According to Bacon, the human mind comprises three faculties: memory, reason and imagination. This triad is reflected in Jefferson's library, which he organized into history, philosophy and fine arts. Each of these contained subcategories: philosophy, for instance, was divided into moral and mathematical, continuing along the former branch leads to the subdivision of ethics and jurisprudence, which itself was further segmented into the categories of religious, political and economic.

Jeffersonian system for organizing his library has often been described as a "blueprint for his own mind," Jefferson kept his Qur'an in the section on religion, located between a book on the myths and gods of antiquity and a copy of the Old Testament. It is illuminating to note that Jefferson did not classify religious works with books on history or ethics—as might perhaps be expected—but that he regarded their proper place to be within jurisprudence.

The story of Jefferson's purchase of the Qur'an helps to explain this classification. Sifting through the records of the Virginia Gazette, through which Jefferson ordered many of his books, the scholar Frank Dewey discovered that Jefferson bought this copy of the Qur'an around 1787, when he was still a student of law at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. This quickly refutes the notion that Jefferson's interest in Islam came in response to the Barbary threat to shipping. Indeed, it situates his interest in the Qur'an in the context of his legal studies—a conclusion that is consistent with his shelving of it in the section on jurisprudence.

Jefferson's legal interest in the Qur'an was not without precedent. There is of course the entire Islamic judicial tradition of religious law (Shari'a) based on Qur'anic scripture, but Jefferson had an example at hand that was closer to his own tradition: The standard work on comparative law during his time was The Law of Nature and Nations, written by the German scholar Samuel von Pufendorf and published in 1673. As Dewey argues, Jefferson studied Pufendorf's treatise intensively and, in his own legal writings, cited it more frequently than any other text. Pufendorf's book contains numerous references to Allah and the Qur'an. Although many of these were disparaging—typical of the European works of the period—and other occult writers cited Qur'anic legal precedents approvingly, including the Qur'an's emphasis on promoting moral behavior, its proscription of games of chance and its citation in make peace between warring countries. As Kevin Hayes, another eminent Jefferson scholar, writes: "Wanting to avoid his legal troubles stemming from possible mischief, Jefferson found the Qur'an well worth his attention."

In his reading of the Qur'an as a law book, Jefferson was aided by a relatively new English translation that was not only technically superior to earlier attempts, but also produced with a sensitivity that was unlike Jefferson's own emerging attitudes. Edited The Koran, commonly known as the "Arabian or Mohammed," it was prepared by the Englishman George Sale and published in 1734 in London. A second edition was published in 1756, and it was this edition that Jefferson bought. Like Jefferson, Sale was a lawyer, although his heart lay in oriental scholarship. In the preface to his translation, he lamented that the work "was carried on in leisure time only, and amidst the necessary interruptions of a ten years less profound," this preface also informed the reader of Sale's intentions: "If the religious and civil institutions of foreign nations are worth our knowledge, those of Mohammed, the lawyer of the Arabs, and founder of an empire which is less than a century spread itself over a greater part of the world that the Romans were ever masters of, must needs he so like Pufendorf. Sale strives of Mohammed's role as a "lawgiver" and the Qur'an as an example of a distinct legal tradition.

This is not to say that Sale's translation is free of the kind of prejudices against Muslims that characterize most European works on Islam of this period. However, Sale did use the to the kind of allusions that tend to fill the pages of earlier such attempts at translation. To the contrary, Sale felt himself obliged to treat "with serious decorum, and even reverence, to approve such particulars as seemed to me to deserve approbation." In keeping with this commitment, Sale described the Prophet of Islam as "richly furnished with personal endowments, beautiful in person, of a sublime, agreeable behavior; shewing liberality to the poor, courtesy to every one, fortitude against his enemies, and above all, a high reverence for the name of God." This portrayal is markedly different from those earlier translators, whose primary motive was to assert the sanctity of Christianity.

In addition to the relative liberality of Sale's approach, he also spared ear in the quality of his translation. Previ-
"Translation" or "Interpretation"?

In this Qur'an, we have put forward all kinds of illustrations for people, so that they may take hold—on Arabic Qur'an, free from any distortion."

Trial question from Qur'an 30:8, Version 27-29. The Qur'an is rendered into English by Mufti Muhammad S. Aziz Hakeem, Professor of Islamic State at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. It is aimed at a listener, not a teaching text. The idea behind it is simply how the book of Islam was received and received in the Arabic language. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is an inspiration to the Arabic language, and which value which it was created, and for this reason, all Muslims worldwide read it in Arabic, even though today the vast majority of Muslims are neither native Arabic speakers of the text.

text of Muslims into his native English. Noting the absence of a reliable English translation, he aimed to provide a "truer perspective on the original." Lest his readers be unduly alarmed, he justified his choice of fidelity to the original by stating that "we must not expect to read a version of the Qur'an, a book with the same ease and pleasure as a modern composition." Indeed, even though Sale's English may appear overwrought today, there is no denying that he brought a new sense of the beauty and poetry of the original Arabic. Sale's aim was to provide an accurate rendering of the Qur'an matched by that desire also to provide his readers with a more honest presentation of the Qur'an. This "Preliminary Discourse," he entitle it, runs to more than 200 pages in the An Inscription inside the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. quotes Jefferson's 1777 statute on religious pluralism that inspired the constitutional right to the freedom of religion, in 1776 Jefferson purchased a number of Arabic grammarians, it is far more significant for what it may have reinforced his commitment to religious freedom. Two examples support this idea.

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The style of the Koran is generally beautiful and florid, especially where it imitates the prophetic manner, and scripture passages. It is concise and elegant, but the Koran is filled with figurative language, and to protect the dignity and piety of the Koran, God has thus preserved it in the Koran.

Ramoh Amundsen version)

The present-day translation of the Qur'an is an attempt to explain the meaning of the original and the most suitable equivalent in the target language. These particular Qur'anic verses are described as "solemnly binding on the religious community" in 1879 by Muhammad S. Aziz Hakeem, and it is clear that he recognized the importance of the Qur'an in the Arabic language, and which the translation is aimed at.

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In 1777, the year after he drafted the declaration of independence, Jefferson was tasked with revising the language of the Virginia code. As part of this undertaking, he drafted a bill for the establishment of religious freedom in Virginia. The bill was enacted in 1786. In his autobiography, Jefferson recounted his strong desire that the bill not only should extend to Christians of all denominations but also include "within the mantle of its protection, all sects and all sects." This all-encompassing attitude to religious pluralism was by no means universal, particularly among Jefferson's contemporaries. As the historian Robert Allinson notes, many American writers and statesmen in the late 18th century made reference to Islam for their political arguments. Armed with tendentious translations and often grossly distorted accounts, they portrayed Islam as embodying the very dangers of tyranny and despotism that the young republic had just overcome. Allinson argues that many American politicians who used the "Muslim world" as a reference point for their own society were not concerned with historical truth or with an accurate description of Islam, but rather with this description of political convenience.

These attitudes again came into conflict with Jefferson's vision in 1878, when the United States voted to ratify the United States Constitution. One of the matters at issue was the provision—now Article VI, Section 3—that "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." Some Anti-Federalists singled out and opposed this ban on religious discrimination by painting a hypothetical scenario in which a Muslim could become president. On the other side of the argument, despite their frequent opposition to Jefferson on other matters, the Federalists praised and drew on Jefferson's vision of religious tolerance in supporting unincorporated rights both to faith and to ecclesiastical office for all Christians. As the historian Stephen Spiegelberg shows in his examination of this dispute among delegates in North Carolina, in the course of these constitutional debates, Muslims became symbolically embroiled in the definition of what it meant to be an American citizen.

It is intriguing to think that Jefferson's study of the Qur'an may have influenced him to a degree that today's Muslims are more likely to experience resistance against Islam's moral and religious values, and it may have informed his conviction that Muslims, as well as no more than any other religious group, were entitled to all the legal rights his new nation could offer. And although Jefferson was an early and vocal proponent of going to war against the Barbary states over their attacks on shipping, he never framed his argument for doing so in religious terms, sticking firmly to a position of political principle. Far from reading the Qur'an to understand better the mindset of his adversaries, it is likely that his earlier knowledge of its confirmed his analysis that the roots of the Barbary conflict were economic, not religious.

Sale's Koran remained the best available English version of the Qur'an for another 150 years. Today, along with the original copies of Jefferson's Qur'an, the Library of Congress holds nearly one million printed items relating to Islam—a vast collection of knowledge for every new generation of lawmakers and citizens, with its roots in the law student's leather-bound volumes.

Related articles from past lassies can be found on our web site, www.islamicworldnews.com under "History."Lost on the crossover of the issue indicated section 3: The United States treaty with Morocco: 509/5 "Barbarian pirates"; 11b, IV: 93

THOMAS
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QUR'AN

A Preliminary Discourse.

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2 Thomas Jefferson’s Qur’an
Written by Sebastian R. Prange
Photographed by Aasif Ahmad

While he was a law student, Thomas Jefferson bought a newly published English rendition of the Qur’an. What can that purchase tell us about him? About his politics, as an ambassador and as third president of the US? Or about the legacy of religious freedom and pluralism that he left to his country?

8 In the Shade of the Royal Umbrella
Written by Stewart Gordon

Call it an umbrella plain, prosaic or mainly practical, but, to a historian, it opens up to reveal a colorful and powerful past. Invented at least four times over more than 3,000 years in places as different as Africa and Japan, umbrellas were—until very recently—reserved for royalty and religious figures.

Spine of the Silk Roads
Written by Andrew F. Lawler
Photographed by Tom Schutteyzer

Like today's airports with their restaurants, hotels and shopping malls, caravanserais and khans were once where business happened, along every highway and in every city, for more than 1,000 years. Some of the best of the few that remain are in Lebanon and Syria.

Listening for Al-Andalus
Written by Kay Hardy Campbell
Photographed by Tor Egeland

Born in Madrid, Eduardo Punquiao is perhaps best described as a musical archeologist. He is both a performer of early music and the founder of Preama, a recording label that is seeking out lost sounds—and producing a few new ones—from one of the world’s most influential musical cultures.

One Card at a Time
Written by Piney Keating
Photographed by Aasif Ahmad

"Making cards is my small effort," says 16-year-old Saima Haswani, who has turned a basement full of craft supplies into $60,000 for education and disaster relief—and into inspiration for young people to "grow into something beyond your expectations."

Classroom Guide
Written by Julie Weiss

Events & Exhibitions

Mughal Maal
Written by Louis Werner
Photographed by David H. Wells

Embroidery has been a refined art in India since even before the extravagance of the Mughals, and today’s artisans are stitching newly eclectic, dazzling designs and ornaments called maal into neo-traditional fashions with appeal that reaches beyond Delhi to the runways of Paris, New York and London.