



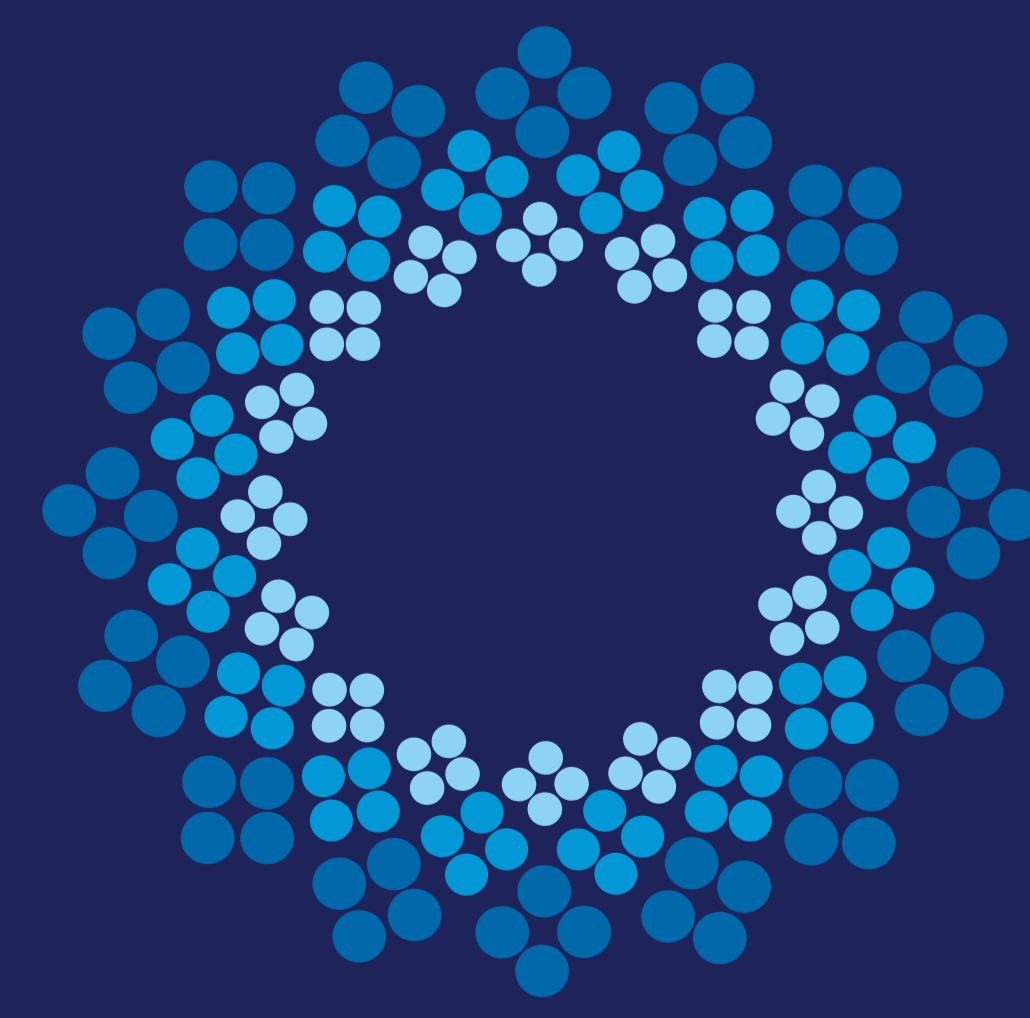
# The Celtic Crescent

Scotland's contacts and connections with the Muslim world are older and more profound than ever thought. This exhibition highlights some of the individuals and events from history that have helped shape The Celtic Crescent.

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[www.iiscotland.org](http://www.iiscotland.org)



New to Islam

[www.newtoislam.co.uk](http://www.newtoislam.co.uk)

Sources:

The Thistle and the Crescent, Bashir Maan (published in 2009)

The Scottish Soldiers of Fortune, James Grant, (published in 1889)

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Scotichronicon, Walter Bower (15th century)

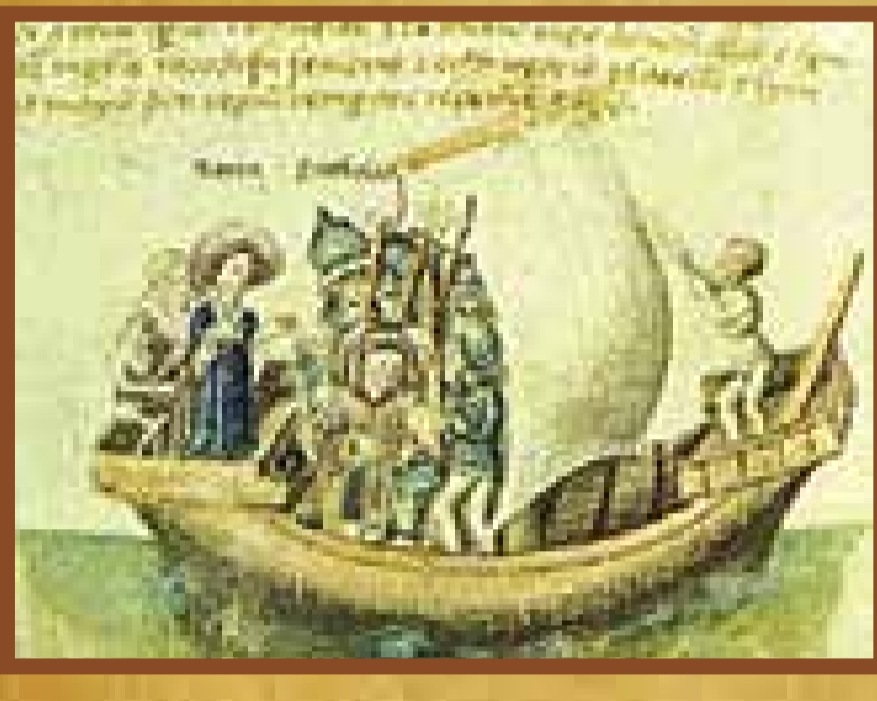




# The Origins of the Scots

The story of Gaidel Glas (Latinised as Gaythelos) and Scota was recorded in the earliest history of Scotland – before the 15th Century.

Gaidel Glas was a great warrior prince with Greek or Scythian origins. He travelled to Egypt during the time of Moses. There he became close to Pharaoh, who gave him the hand of his daughter, Princess Scota, in marriage.



(Scota (left) with Gaidel Glas voyaging from Egypt, as depicted in a 15th-century manuscript of the Scotichronicon of Walter Bower

After the Pharaoh and his army were drowned in the Red Sea, Gaidel Glas, Scota and their entourage left Egypt. Eventually they settled in north-west Spain,

where their language was standardised by Gaidel Glas to what we now call Gaelic – named after their leader. After some time, the community, known both as Gaels and Scots, migrated again, reaching Ireland. Some reached Scotland, named for the tribe of Scots, who in turn were named after Princess Scota of Egypt.



Stone Circle marking the Grave of Princess Scota

The Declaration of Arbroath cites the origins of the Scots as being from Greater Scythia. Interestingly many Scots have DNA links to North Africa and the Middle East.

Gaidel Glas and Princess Scota were said to have brought a certain stone with them from Egypt. The book of Genesis calls it "The Pillow of Jacob."

Now known as 'The Stone of Destiny', it was used for centuries in the coronation of Scots kings and queens, so true Scots, have a strong link to North Africa and share their origins, history and blood with the Middle East through Gaidel Glas and Scota. Perhaps we are not as different as we thought!



Duntulm Castle, The Isle of Skye



# King Offa

One of the earliest indications of the Islamic influence in Britain was the coin of King Offa of Mercia (757-796). Offa was one of the most powerful Anglo-Saxon kings and controlled the territory south of the River Humber, taking in most of England.

He built the great Offa's dyke dividing Wales from Mercia and he also minted the first gold coin in Britain, now on display in the British Museum. On one side of the coin is an Arabic inscription of the declaration of the Islamic faith: 'There is no god but Allah'. And on the other side is the Latin inscription: 'Offa Rex'. The coin seems to be an imitation of the gold dinar of the Muslim Abbasid Empire and was probably used for diplomacy and trade.

## ARAB COINS found in Scotland



The earliest direct connections between Scotland and the Muslim world would have most likely have been based on mutual trading. The discovery, over the last one hundred years of coins dating back to the ninth century Arab empires have emphasised that connection.



In 1912 a hoard of coins were discovered in Talnotrie, Kirkcudbrightshire, perhaps belonging to traders or even Viking raiders.

Amongst this find were some silver coins from Abbasid Empire. The coins bore the name of Abbasid Caliph al Muttawakkil ala Allah who ruled from 847-62. The coins are possibly the first known direct connection between Scotland and the Muslim world.

A similar discovery was made at Storr Rock in Orkney, which uncovered around two dozen coins also originating from the Arab Abbasid Empire. These dirhams were minted at Tashkent and Samarqand between 899 and 943. A further coin was found in Ardeer in Ayrshire, which has not been fully identified other than being an Arab dirham of the 10th century.

## The Ballycotton Cross



Amongst the most fascinating of artefacts to be discovered emphasising the Celtic connection to the Muslim world was the discovery of the Ballycotton cross.,

Described as a 9th Century Christian brooch, it was discovered in the town of Ballycotton in Co. Cork. The brooch was found in a bog and came into the possession of Philip T Gardner an Antiquarian who donated it to the British Museum.

A most unusual artefact, which perhaps best symbolises the synthesis of two of the world's great religions. Designed as a Celtic cross with Kufic script enclosed in glass, bearing the inscription of the Bismillah (In the name of God) at its centre.



The Ring of Brodgar, Orkney



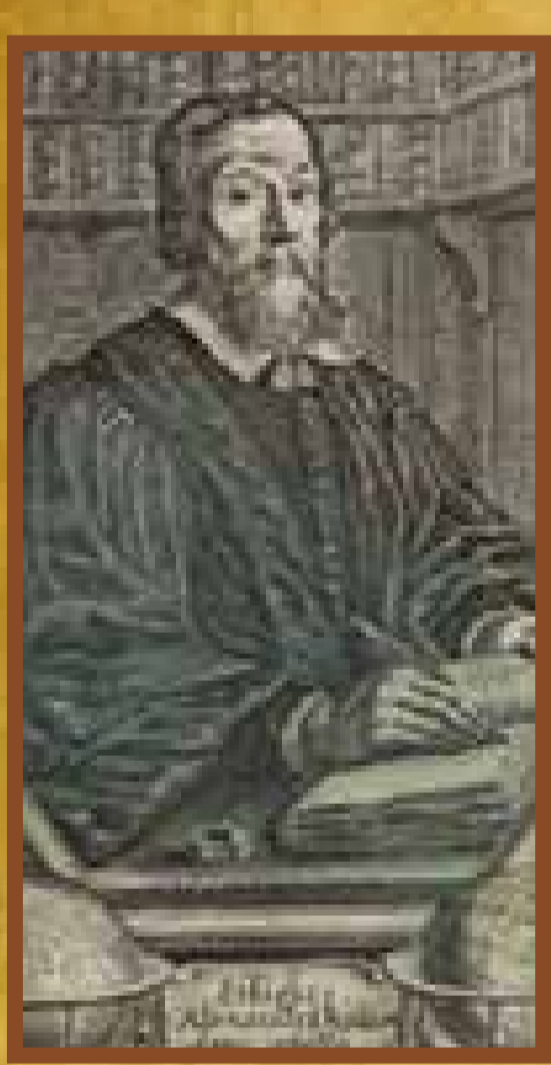
# The Wizard of Melrose

Michael Scot, known as the Wizard of Melrose was the son of a Knight in the time of King Alexander II. He was born and brought up in Balwearie, near Kirkcaldy in Fife. In a time when few travelled more than a few miles from their homes, Michael Scot travelled far in pursuit of knowledge and became a very famous philosopher, mathematician, translator and astrologer. In his youth, he travelled to Oxford and then Paris, before travelling to Toledo in Spain to study the depths of knowledge held by Muslim scholars. In Toledo, Scot quickly became proficient in Arabic and translated many important texts from Arabic into Latin.

Even after his departure from Toledo, Michael Scot continued to dress in Muslim robes and kept a Muslim style cropped beard. He was held as the leading intellectual of his age by many notable contemporaries including Pope Honorius, who is reputed to have urged Scot to accept an offer of a position as a Bishop – a post which Scot declined.

After some years in the service of Emperor Frederick of Sicily, Michael Scot returned to Scotland, where he died in 1232. Scot is buried in Melrose Abbey in the Borders, where a statue was erected by his grave, depicting him dressed in his Muslim style robes. Michael Scot's legacy remained long after his death and he is considered to have made a significant contribution towards Europe's Enlightenment, through both his own works and his translations of classical Arabic works.

# The First English Qur'an



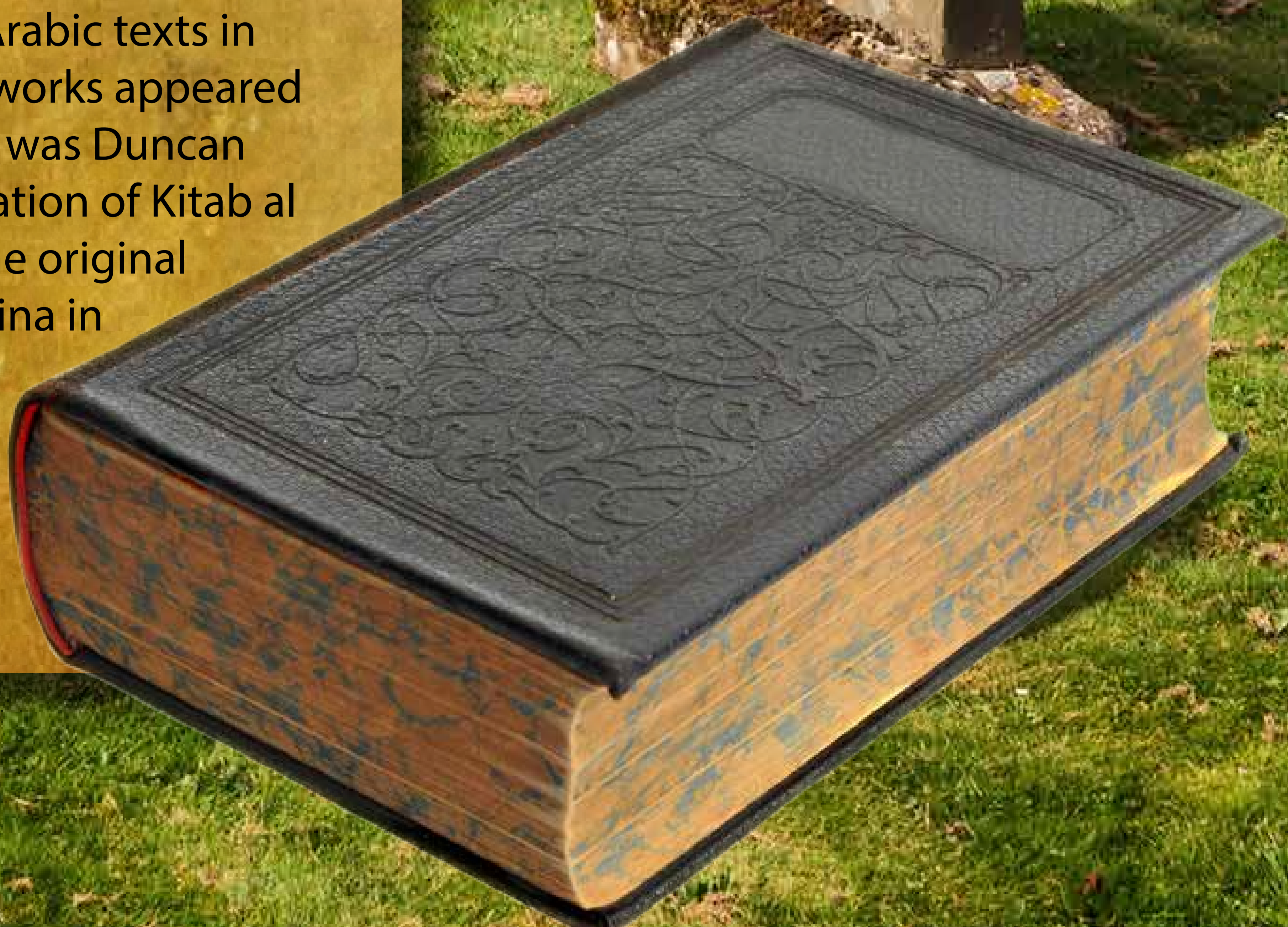
Alexander Ross has the unique distinction of writing the first English translation of the Holy Quran.

Born in Aberdeen in 1590, Ross having graduated from Kings College Aberdeen settled in Southampton from where he rose to become one of King Charles I's chaplains. From 1634 up till his death in 1654 Alexander Ross served as Vicar at St. Mary's Church, Carisbrooke in the Isle of Wight.

Since Alexander Ross knew no Arabic, his translation of the Quran was based on the French version by Du Ryer which appeared in 1657 and entitled; *L'Alcoran de Mahomet*, (The Koran of Muhammad). Ross also wrote other general Christian works, however he remains best known for his English rendering of the Qur'an.

Although Ross's rendering of the Quran was later superseded by other versions in English most notably George Sale's "Alcoran of Mohammed" (1734), which remained the definitive English version well into the twentieth century.

Ross's English translation of the Quran came about during a heightened interest in Arabic texts in Britain, during which numerous works appeared of Arabic origins. Amongst these was Duncan McConacher's 1598 Gaelic translation of *Kitab al Tibb* (The Canon of Medicine). The original Arabic work was written by Ibn Sina in 1256, it remained an influential source of medical knowledge until the 19th century when the last English translation was published.



Melrose Abbey



## The Red Haired Empress of Morocco

Helen Gloag was born in the village of Wester Pett, near Muthill in Perthshire in the year 1750. Her father, Andrew Gloag was a blacksmith, however her mother died when she was still a child and her father remarried. Helen and her step-mother did not get on well and matters came to a head in 1769 due to Helen's friendship with a farmer in the area.

Many Scots were taking the opportunity to travel to the Americas to start a new life in a new land at this time and Helen saved some money before setting off with some friends for Greenock, to sail to North Carolina. Disaster struck however, when the ship that Helen and her friends were travelling aboard was attacked by Salle Pirates off the coast of Spain with all on board being taken captive.

Helen and the other women on board were taken to Rabat in Morocco, where the pirates would make their living by selling captives into slavery. In the slave market, Helen caused considerable interest from would-be purchasers as she was young and strikingly beautiful with red hair and green eyes. An astute businessman saw an opportunity and bought Helen, before gifting her to the Emperor of Morocco, Sidi Muhammad ibn Abdullah – a deeply religious man, well known for his wisdom and diplomacy. Sidi Muhammad very quickly fell in love with the young Scottish lady and married her, also giving her the title of Empress of Morocco. During the years of their marriage, Helen bore Sidi Muhammad 2 sons.



Sultan Sidi Muhammad

Helen is credited with having influence which secured the release of many British seafarers from the pirates' grasp. She was also able to send letters and gifts back to her family in Perthshire and her brother Robert visited her in Morocco on a number of occasions.

Empress Helen's husband, Sidi Muhammad was a skilled diplomat and was the first head of state in the world to recognise the United States of America after the war of independence from the United Kingdom and also the first leader to sign treaties with the U.S. guaranteeing their ships safe passage through sovereign waters.

In 1790 however, Sidi Muhammad died and his son by another lady, Mawlay Yazeed (also known as Mad Yazeed) seized the throne. Yazeed's first priority was to dispose of any potential rivals to the throne, and his attention quickly fell upon Helen's two sons. It is said that Helen sent a plea for help to the British Navy, who dispatched a gunboat to Rabat, however help arrived too late and Helen's sons were already dead, murdered by Yazeed's forces. After this time, nothing is recorded of Helen although there are varying tales of her suffering the same fate as her sons, or a return to Britain, or a different narration of a monument having been erected in Rabat in memory of a Scottish Empress, implying that she survived the chaos of the time. The name Gloag is still a common name in Perthshire giving a living link to these events from the past.



Kasbah Ait Benhaddou, Morocco