



Caricatured: *Le Monde* and the Mohammed Cartoons Epilogue

At the meeting on Friday, February 3, the editors of *Le Monde* decided that they would have to publish at least two of the cartoons. As Deputy Editor Sylvie Kauffmann remembers:

It became obvious that we had to reprint at least a couple of them, yes. Otherwise how could our readers understand what we were talking about if we were not showing the objects?... So I said OK, let's take two or three of them. Not all of them. And I think I suggested we find a compromise: the least offensive ones, and the best ones.¹

In the end, the choice was not too difficult. "I think some of them were really stupid or uninteresting," says Kauffmann. "They had no aesthetical value or even no real political value. And others were quite interesting. There was a consensus that we could pick out two or three, and choose." The newspaper's artistic director helped to make the final cut.

The two cartoons which ran in the edition of Sunday/Monday, February 6/7 (and which hit newsstands on Saturday, February 5) appeared under the headline, "Twelve designs which are shaking the Muslim world." An accompanying article, datelined Copenhagen and signed by Olivier Truc, described the history of the cartoons. The package ran on p. 16 as part of a regular weekend feature called *La Fabrique de l'Info*, about the media.

One of the chosen cartoons depicted a turbaned figure on a cloud saying to a line of approaching male suicide bombers: "Stop stop we ran out of virgins!" The second showed a green crescent moon edging the face of a turbaned, bearded man, with a green star as one eye. In an editor's note beneath the illustrations, the paper said:

Le Monde, which has devoted daily one or more articles to this polemic since January 28... has decided to publish two of the cartoons as an illustration for the article above which describes the genesis in the media of this controversy. It seemed important to us to bring to our readers the graphic

¹ Author's interview with then-Deputy Editor Sylvie Kauffmann in Paris, on May 21, 2010. All further quotes from Kauffmann, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

elements for understanding this debate, while remaining careful to avoid intensifying the polemic: we therefore abstained from publishing the most offensive cartoons.²

Other articles on the subject published that day in *Le Monde* included a Page One piece: “The polemic over the Mohammed cartoons divides the Middle East,” which ran with a photo of a protest in London. There were reports from Washington and London on page 4, from Europe on page 6, and a major takeout on Islam and depicting Mohammed on page 14 (an expert commented that it was absurd to claim the Koran prohibits representations of the prophet). The European coverage included photographs of the front pages of other newspapers: *De Morgen*, *France Soir*, *La Libre*, *The Times*, *El Pais*, and *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, which either ran the cartoons or covered the controversy. An article at the bottom of page 6 referred to reaction in France: “Shocked, the Muslims of France seem more resigned than disgusted.”

Le Monde was hardly alone. On February 8, the satirical French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* published a special addition with all 12 Danish cartoons, plus their own. By the end of February 2006, at least 143 newspapers in 56 countries—including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen—had reprinted one or more cartoons. In the US, *Harper's* magazine printed all 12 in its June 2006 issue. But most British and US publications never published the cartoons.

On February 19, *Jyllands-Posten* Culture Editor Flemming Rose ran a piece in the *Washington Post* titled: “Why I Published Those Cartoons.” He reported that, to date, the newspaper had received 104 registered threats, 10 people had been arrested, the cartoonists were in hiding, and the paper's head office had been evacuated several times following bomb threats. He explained the reasoning behind the original story that ran in September 2005:

If a believer demands that I, as a *nonbeliever*, observe his taboos in the public domain, he is not asking for my respect, but for my submission. And that is incompatible with a secular democracy... We cannot apologize for our right to publish material, even offensive material.³

Meanwhile, the protests continued for weeks, while isolated incidents related to the cartoons percolated for years. In February 2006, hacker attacks closed Danish newspaper websites and blogs. Palestinians burned the Danish flag, and mobs attacked and burned Danish embassies in Damascus and Beirut. Demonstrators in Tehran attacked the Danish, French, and Austrian embassies. There were attacks on Christians in Lebanon and Nigeria. More than 200 people died in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Kenya, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, and Nigeria. The Danish government temporarily withdrew staff from its embassies in Syria, Iran, and Indonesia, and closed consulates in Lebanon

² Olivier Truc, “Douze dessins qui ébranlent le monde musulman,” *Le Monde*, February 5-6, 2006, p.16.

³ Flemming Rose, “Why I published those cartoons,” *Washington Post*, February 19, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/17/AR2006021702499.html>.

and Tunisia. The Arab boycott of Danish goods continued for months: BBC reported in September 2006 that the boycott had reduced Danish exports by 15.5 percent between February and June.⁴

⁴ BBC News, "Cartoons row hits Danish exports," September 9, 2006,
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5329642.stm>.