

THE GIANT LUNAR LEAP AND THE LODGE



The Islamic Ummah has a unique relationship with the Moon; Allah the Almighty swears an oath by it [The Holy Qur'an, 74:32], its rotation forms the basis for the Hijra calendar [The Holy Qur'an, 9:36-37] and its Crescent form the premier emblem of the Ummah.

On July 21, 1969, as the commander of NASA space mission, Apollo 11, Neil Armstrong stepped out of NASA lunar module Eagle and became the first person to walk on the Moon. He famously said, "That's one small step for Man, one giant leap for mankind," upon taking his first steps.

After many years of unrelenting privacy, Armstrong for the first time authorised James R. Hansen to write his biography. Titled *First Man: The Life of Neil A. Armstrong*, it was published in December 2005 and hold special reference for Muslims.

In 1983, a rumour began to circulate in the Islamic world that Armstrong had converted to Islam after hearing the *adhan*, the Islamic call to prayer, on the Moon. The following is a sample of headlines from articles published in the Islamic world about Armstrong's alleged conversion: "Armstrong Astronaut Embraces Islam," *Radiance Delhi*, Mar. 20, 1983; "Did Armstrong Hear Azan on the Moon?" *Gulf News*, Apr. 2, 1983; and "Neil Armstrong Embraces Islam," *Yaqeen International*, p. 22, 1983.

Hansen's authorised biography of Armstrong gives us the first genuine opportunity to see how the rumour came about and whether it had any credence, as the following extract in verbatim will demonstrate:

'Even more deeply entrenched is the rumour that Neil Armstrong converted to Islam.

For the past three and a half decades, stories have been repeated around the Muslim world that when Armstrong and Aldrin walked on the Moon, they heard a voice singing in a strange language that they did not understand. Only later, after returning to Earth, did Armstrong realise that what he heard on the lunar surface was the *adhan*, the Muslim call to prayer. Neil then allegedly converted to Islam, moved to Lebanon (the country in [p. 630] the Middle East, not Lebanon, Ohio) and subsequently visited several Muslim holy places, including the Turkish *masjid* where Malcolm X once prayed.

The story of Armstrong's conversion grew so far and wide by the early 1980s that, not only Armstrong himself, but also an official body of the United States government, found it necessary to respond. In March 1983, the U.S. State

Department sent the following message to all embassies and consulates in the Islamic world:

1. *Former astronaut Neil Armstrong, now in private life, has been the subject of press reports in Egypt, Malaysia and Indonesia (and perhaps elsewhere) alleging his conversion to Islam during his landing on the Moon in 1969. As a result of such reports, Armstrong has received communications from individuals and religious organisations, and a feeler from at least one government, about his participation in Islamic activities.*
2. *While stressing his strong desire not to offend anyone or show disrespect for any religion, Armstrong has advised department that reports of his conversion to Islam are inaccurate.*
3. *If post receive queries on this matter, Armstrong requests that they politely but firmly inform querying party that he had not converted to Islam and has no current plans or desire to travel overseas to participate in Islamic religious activities.*

[Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC, to Middle Eastern and Pacific Diplomatic Posts, "Subject: Alleged Conversion of Neil Armstrong," Mar. 2 , 1983]

Whatever help the State Department might have been in clarifying Armstrong's views, it wasn't enough. Requests for him to appear in Muslim countries and at Islamic events became so frequent in the mid-1980s that Neil felt compelled to act. "We are getting such a barrage of information, just inundated with questions about this, predominantly from the Islamic world but also from the non-Muslim world, the latter of which was saying, "This can't be true, can it?" Finally, we decided that we needed to have something official that journalists could refer to. We again used the State Department, this time to assist in setting up a telephone press conference to Cairo, Egypt, where a substantial number of journalists from the Middle East could be there to ask me questions and get my response. That way they all heard the same thing.

Just how much that helped is impossible to know, but it certainly didn't completely stem the questions." Some clung to the notion that the U.S. government didn't want their great American hero to be known as a Muslim, and thus was somehow forcing him publicly to deny his faith. [631]

"One I was visiting the Phi Delta Theta [fraternity] house at Purdue and a student came up that seemed to be living in the fraternity house. His father was a professor at Stanford. Apparently the young man was of Middle Eastern descent, and his father had told him about my conversion to Islam. So he asked me if it was true and I, of course, told him that it wasn't true. I could tell that he thought I was lying to him. He did not believe me. He'd been convinced that I would lie about it."

In recent years the story has even got embellished to include the assertion that Apollo 11 discovered that the Earth emitted radiation (which it does) and that the source of the radiation came from the Ka'aba in Mecca, proving that Mecca is "the centre of the world." ["Islamic Science: Neil Armstrong Proved Mecca is the Center of the World" (Interview with Dr. Abd Al-Baset of the Egyptian National Research Center), Clip No. 545, Jan. 16, 2005, accessed at www.memrity.org/Transcript.asp?P1=545]

Today Vivian White [Armstrong's personal assistant] tries hard to set the record straight with a form letter that states, "The reports of his conversion to Islam and of hearing the voice of the *adhan* on the Moon and elsewhere are all untrue."

Armstrong understands why such projections — phenomenal and otherwise — are all made onto him. "I have found that many organisations claim me as a member, for which I am not a member, and a lot of different families — Armstrong families and others — make connections, many of which don't exist. So many people identify with the success of Apollo. The claim about my becoming Muslim is just an extreme version of people inevitably telling me they know somebody whom I might know." [632]

One conspiracy theory dealt with, finally. The time to remove Armstrong's name from famous converts to Islam has finally availed itself. However, the story does not end there. The previous extract was immediately preceded by the following.

'Assertions linger that the telephone number connecting President Nixon to Armstrong and Aldrin on the lunar surface was 666-6666, a sign of the Anti-Christ, as well as equally ridiculous claims that the Moon landing was a conspiracy of the Freemasons. (The "evidence": that Aldrin carried a Masonic flag with him in his PPK, which Buzz presented upon his return to the lodge's Sovereign Commander of the Supreme Council of the World, which is true, and, second, that Neil's father was a thirty-third degree Mason. Stephen Armstrong was a Mason, but Neil does not know his rank.) [630]'

"True". One word which necessitated verifying Hanson's statement that Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, a companion of Armstrong on the Apollo 11 mission, carried a Masonic flag with him in his PPK, the Personal Preference Kit that astronauts took on board, "a beta-cloth pouch about the size of a large brow lunch sack, with a pull-string opening at the top coated with fireproof Teflon" [522] and upon his return gave it to the most eminent Masonic lodge.

The following assertions have been made publicly by Freemasons. Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin was the at time of the Apollo 11 mission, a 32nd Degree Scottish Rite Mason, Valley of Los Angeles, and a member of member of Clear Lake Lodge No. 1417, AF&AM, Seabrook, Texas. — two Freemasonic lodges in the U.S. Aldrin took up a small Masonic Supreme Council flag to the moon and upon his return, gave the flag to the Sovereign Grand Commander of the Council of the 33rd Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry of the Southern Jurisdiction — the highest-ranking officer in world Freemasonry. The flag was then displayed at the American Museum in the House of the Temple, Washington D.C., which is where the Supreme Council of the Freemasons resides. Aldrin became a 33rd Degree Mason, but Fred Kleinknect, head of NASA at the time of the Apollo Space Program, became a Sovereign Grand Commander himself.

But it was not just the flag, but a Freemasonic ritual is also said to have been performed on the moon. According to the Southern California Research Lodge, Aldrin also carried a special disputation from his Grand Master in Texas to claim the moon as being in territorial jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Texas. In fact, the charter of the Tranquillity Lodge in Waco, Texas, named after the Apollo 11 landing site of "The Sea of

Tranquillity”, states it was to “claim Masonic Territorial Jurisdiction” on the Moon for the Lodge. In essence, the Freemasons claim dominion over the moon. Aldrin carried with him special deputation of then Grand Master J. Guy Smith, constituting and appointing Aldrin as Special Deputy of the Grand Master, granting unto him full power in the premises to represent the Grand Master as such and authorise him to claim Masonic Territorial Jurisdiction for The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Texas, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, on The Moon, and directed that he make due return of his acts. Aldrin certified that the special deputation was carried by him to the Moon on July 20, 1969, deputising him to claim the moon as the Masonic Territorial Jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Texas.

Additionally, this pioneering spirit received support from the U.S. government. The U.S. House of Representatives on January 4 2005 passed a resolution “recognising the thousands of Freemasons in every State in the Nation and honouring them for their many contributions to the Nation throughout its history,” from “the Founding Fathers of this great Nation and signers of the Constitution, most of whom were Freemasons, provided a well-rounded basis for developing themselves and others into valuable citizens of the United States” such as those sent as astronauts.

But what Armstrong himself and his own beliefs? First of all, Armstrong is not a Freemason. David O. Norris, one of the authors of ‘The Songs of Freemasonry’ stated that when attempting to send a complimentary copy of their work to Armstrong, his personal assistant advised that he had never been a Mason and returned the recording. As for own religious beliefs, Armstrong identified them as ‘Deist’, which Hanson describes as “a person whose belief in God was founded on reason rather than on revelation, and on an understanding of God’s natural laws rather than on the authority of any particular creed or church doctrine.” [33]

From Armstrong’s first steps to planned missions to Mars and the encroaching emergence of space tourism, a Qur’anic verse acts as a reminder that man’s feats are inextricably linked to Divine Will, and a warning against those who challenge in coveting celestial dominion:

“O assembly of jinn and mankind! If you possess the power to penetrate the spheres of the heavens and the earth, then do so! But you will never be able to penetrate, except by the authority of ALLAH! (The Holy Qur’an, 55:33)