

“Judaism’s Embrace of Islam: An Historical Inquiry into the Role of Islam in Modern Jewish Thought”

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During the course of the nineteenth century, a Jewish Oriental Studies arose that sought not a denigration of Islam, but its elevation as a rational religion with an intimate relationship to Judaism. Starting in the 1830s, Jews flocked to the study of Islam in Germany, a field that was overshadowed at that time by a much stronger German interest in Sanskrit. Indeed, the publication in 1833 of Abraham Geiger’s doctoral dissertation, Was hat Muhammad aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?, a comparison of the Qur’an with rabbinic literature, is considered until today to have inaugurated the scholarly study of Islam.

Jewish men were just being granted permission to enter German universities in the 1820s and 1830s as students, but not as professors, and their study of Islam did not have conventional career goals. Let me note that these were Jewish men from religious homes who acquired fluency in Hebrew, Bible, and Talmud in their childhood, and most of whom had considered a career in the rabbinate. In 1840, Ludwig Ullmann published his German translation of the Qur’an while working as a rabbi in a small town, Albin de Biberstein, a Polish Jew, translated the Qur’an into French, and Hebrew translations undertaken by Moritz Steinschneider and Hermann Reckendorff a few years later similarly were undertaken for personal pleasure rather than career advancement, monetary gain, or theological polemics.

These were not translations commissioned by Muslims, but seem rather to have been for the sake of Jewish interests.

What were those interests? How do we understand the rapid Jewish dominance of the field of Islamic Studies, at least in the greater Germanic scholarly world by the 1920s? What does it suggest for the field of Islamic Studies, for modern Jewish thought, for our understandings of Orientalism? Why would Islam have been exalted and aligned with Judaism during an era when historians conventionally insist that Judaism was undergoing a “Christianization”? Furthermore, what was the impact of colonialism, Zionism, and National Socialism on this Jewish fascination with Islam? Finally, should we speak of a Jewish scholarship on Islam, or a distinctive Jewish Orientalism with a unique knowledge-power relationship? What were the varying politics at stake in the Jewish acquisition of knowledge about Islam?

The topic is vast, and my research is not yet completed. What I will present today is just a foretaste that will touch on three periods: from the 1830s to the 1860s, during the initial outpouring of Jewish writings on Islam; from the 1870s to WWI, as Jews finally could attain professorships at German universities, and their scholarship on Islam grew more complex; from the 1920s until the end, when Jews were expelled from their professorships and the field of Islamic Studies in Germany almost entirely shut down. What interests me is not only their scholarship, but the footprint they left on Islamicate societies. I will then conclude with some observations regarding the Jewish embrace of Islam, the varied politics that

influenced their work, including colonialism and Zionism, and suggest some revisions of our writing of modern Jewish history implied by this trajectory.

#### Part One: 1830s-1860s:

The modern Jewish fascination with Islam begins in the 1830s with a small group of Jewish students at the University of Bonn, studying under Georg Freytag, professor of Arabic studies at Bonn since 1819 and a student of Antoine de Sacy.<sup>1</sup> These students, all male (Jewish women had to wait until the 1890s), came from Orthodox Jewish families and had a strong training in Hebrew, Talmud, and medieval Jewish commentaries.<sup>2</sup> Several of Geiger's fellow Jewish students at Bonn thought of becoming rabbis; in those days, Bonn "seemed to be truly a Hochschule for Jewish theologians."<sup>3</sup> Instead, most of them became scholars: Ludwig Ullmann translated the Qur'an into modern German, published in 1840; Salomon Munk became the leading scholar of medieval Arabic Jewish philosophy; Joseph Derenbourg, initially a scholar of Second Temple-era Judaism, later turned to Jewish history under Islam; and Abraham Geiger.

Freytag, who welcomed the Jewish students warmly, was a linguistic philologist who also taught courses in Hebrew Bible at Bonn; at that time, there was no separate professorship for Islamic Studies. He formulated the topic of a prize essay out of deference to Geiger (at de Sacy's suggestion?), Was hat Muhammad aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?, submitted in Latin in 1832, but then published in German in 1833. While working on the topic, Geiger recorded in his diary the

genuine pleasure he experienced in discovering the parallels between the two religions.

Geiger was remarkably sympathetic to Islam: Muhammad was a genuine religious enthusiast, not a seducer or fraud or epileptic. He wrote the Qur'an, recognized the Pentateuch as a book of law and Moses as a lawgiver; he adopted many Jewish teachings, but also inverted some of them. He did not seek to be original nor to found a new religion, but to establish one founded on ancient traditions. Geiger noted parallels with the Mishnah, which he acknowledged might have also passed to Islam via Christianity: The seven heavens, mentioned in the Qur'an in a few places, comes from Mishnah Hagigah 9:2; seven hells from Eruvin 19:1; those who built the tower of Babel will be absolutely annihilated by a poisonous wind, Sura 11:63, or will have no place in the next world, Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:3; to save a life is to save the whole people, Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5, Qur'an Sura 5:32, and so forth. Legal reasoning also shows parallels: all commandments are of equal value, but if a parent, whom we are commanded to honor, tells us to violate a commandment, whom do we obey? Both the Talmud (Yebamot 6) and Muhammad (Sura 29:7) pose the problem and respond similarly. Purification before prayer is required by both, and how to pray – "Pronounce not thy prayer aloud, neither pronounce it with too low a voice, but follow a middle way between these," Muhammad enjoins (Sura 17:110); the Talmud says, "From the behavior of Hannah who in prayer moved her lips we learn that he who prays must pronounce the words, and.... not raise his voice loudly" (Berachot 31:2).

In his book, Geiger used the text of the Qur'an and its borrowings and deviations from rabbinic literature as grist to argue that religion is the product of historical and social forces, not of the soul, consciousness, weather, or revelation. The Qur'an is a source for him not only of the origins of Islam, but of developments within Judaism in the seventh century. His book reconstructs the history of Judaism in Arabia but most important, claims Islam as the offspring of Judaism.

Demonstrating the parallels between Qur'anic passages and texts from the Midrash and Mishnah (eg, Sura 5:35 parallels Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5), Geiger argued that Muhammad knew more of Jewish law than he adopted, and that he had little intention of imposing a new code of laws, but rather wanted to spread new and purified religious (that is, Jewish) views (much as Geiger later argues about Jesus); and as an Arab, Muhammad didn't want to deviate too far from established custom. Throughout the book, Muhammad is portrayed in language far more sympathetic than was common at the time. He was not an imposter or seducer, but a product of his social context, with a clever political skill and a desire not to create a new religion but to spread monotheism. The argument Geiger developed concerned not only the ways Muhammad composed the Qur'an to solidify his own position of leadership, but also concerned the transmission of Jewish learning. Here is where Geiger shows himself ahead of his time: he argues that Muhammad, in writing the Qur'an, deliberately constructed Abraham as a prototype of himself, as a public preacher who won converts, was a model of piety, established a monotheistic religion, and so forth. (98-9) At the same time, he implies that the rabbis of antiquity did not keep their teachings exclusively for Jews, but were happy to share their

teaching with Arab pagans. For Geiger, the significance of Scripture was not as the word of God, but as an enormous religious influence.

Geiger's book was hailed all over Europe as inaugurating a new way of understanding the origins of Islam within Judaism.<sup>4</sup> Antoine de Sacy, Heinrich Ewald, Reinhard Dozy, Theodor Noeldeke, Heinrich Fleischer, Ignaz Goldziher, were among the many scholars who praised it as "epoch-making" (Noeldeke). Geiger's work launched a long tradition of Jews outlining parallels between rabbinic literature and early Islamic texts. Let me mention a few: the work of Isaac Gastfreund, Mohammed nach Talmud und Midrasch, 1875, and Hartwig Hirschfeld, Jüdische Elemente im Koran, 1878, and Israel Schapiro, Die haggadischen Elemente im erzählenden Teil des Korans, 1907, Heinrich Speyer, Die biblische Erzählungen im Qoran, 1931, among others, such as Josef Horowitz, Victor Aptowitzer, David Sidersky, Eugen Mittwoch. These works were understood not only as contributions to Islamic Studies, but also to the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the scholarly study of Judaism, inasmuch as they argued for the important contribution of Jewish texts to the shaping of early Islam; indeed, Schapiro's dissertation was published by the *Gesellschaft zur Foerderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Their overall purpose was to demonstrate rabbinic parallels with early Islamic texts and Judaism's influence in shaping Islamic belief, ritual practice, and law. The narrative plot was repeated from the 1830s to the 1930s, but there were changes in tone, and the very repetitive quality of the narrative took on a different nuance by the early twentieth century, as I hope to demonstrate.

Another Jewish student of that generation who became a scholar of Islam was Gustav Weil, who studied in Heidelberg and Paris, then spent five years in Algiers, Cairo and Istanbul, studying and teaching, before returning to Heidelberg, where he completed his Habilitation in 1836 and became an assistant librarian. After years of scholarly publications and requests for a professorship at the University of Heidelberg, he ultimately received a chair in Oriental Studies in 1861.<sup>5</sup> Weil, a prolific scholar, published in 1843 the first European biography of the prophet Muhammad based on Islamic sources – the sira of ibn Ishaq, as preserved by ibn Hisham. Weil worked primarily with Arabic manuscripts that had been gathered for the Ducal library in Gotha by an adventurer, Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767-1811); a catalogue of the library's collection of Arab manuscripts was published in 1826 by Johann Moeller. Weil also wrote a book on Arabic poetry (1837), a five-volume history of the caliphates (1846-51), and a study of biblical legends as interpreted in Midrash and Tafsir, published in 1845. His most important work, however, was his chronology of the Qur'anic suras, published in 1844, which became the basis for Theodor Noeldeke's 1858 book on the same topic. Weil's work was well-known all over Europe, and he even appears as a character in one of Disraeli's novels, *Conningsby*. Nonetheless, Weil was forced to spend most of his life working as an assistant librarian at the University of Heidelberg, despite constant appeals for a professorship, which was denied by the faculty on the grounds that he was a Jew, but finally overridden by the ministry of education of Baden-Wuerttemberg in 1861, when he was already 58 years old.

During this period, from the 1830s to the 1860s, Islam took hold in the popular Jewish imagination as well as the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Let me mention a few examples quickly: the translations of the Qur'an included Hermann Reckendorff's Hebrew version that uses the language of prayerbook and midrash, easily accessible to any traditional Jew. Synagogue architecture in Central and Western Europe, Britain, and the United States was predominantly in Moorish style, despite the expressed desire of Jews to win acceptance into a Christian society that disparaged Muslims – hardly the path to assimilation. Popular narratives of Jewish history stressed the Golden Age of Muslim Spain, in contrast to the persecutions suffered by Jews in medieval Christian Europe. Shortly before his conversion to Christianity, Heinrich Heine emphasized precisely that point in his 1824 play, Almansor, which describes a love between a Jew and a Muslim that was forbidden and persecuted by the new Christian rulers of medieval Spain who conquered the prior Muslim rulers.<sup>6</sup> Heinrich Graetz, whose eleven-volume History of the Jews popularized the kind of argument Geiger put forth. Graetz wrote that Islam “was inspired by Judaism to bring into the world a new religious form with political foundations, which one calls Islam, and it in turn exerted a powerful impact on Jewish history and the development of Judaism.”<sup>7</sup> Other popularizers of Jewish history wrote in a similar vein, claiming Islam as the product of Judaism, even as they distinguish (as did Geiger himself) between the religion of Islam, on the one hand, and the warfare and violent conquests carried out by Muslims, especially by Ottoman Turks, over the centuries. Yet Europe's battle with the Ottomans did not represent the religion, nor undermine its relationship to Judaism, in Jewish eyes.



## Part Two: 1870s-WWI

Let me turn to a more complex era, as the scholarship became more sophisticated, Jews received professorships, Germany became a colonial power, Zionism arose, and racial theory invaded the humanities and social sciences. During this second phase of Jewish scholarship on Islam, I want to call attention to several new developments.

First, Ignaz Goldziher was one of several European Jews whose travels to Islamicate regions brought them into long-term, significant relationships. Gustav Weil seems to have been the only one of the Jewish scholars of the earlier era who travelled to the Middle East. But the last decades of the century show a new development. The Hungarian Jew Max Herz, who studied architecture at the University of Vienna, became a consultant in Cairo at the turn of the century for restoring the al-Azhar and al-Rifai'i mosques, and established the collection that ultimately became the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo;<sup>8</sup> the Hungarian Jew Gottlieb Leitner, who spent part of his childhood in Turkey, helped create the University of the Punjab and later built the first mosque in England, opened in 1889 in the London suburb of Woking; the German Jew Josef Horowitz, who completed his doctorate at the University of Berlin under Eduard Sachau, took a professorship of Arabic at the Aligarh Muslim University from 1907-1914. One of his colleagues at Aligarh who studied Hebrew texts with him was Hamiduddin Farahi, one of the most distinguished Qur'an scholars of his day known for his work on the coherence of the Qur'an. Farahi's student, Amin Ahsan Islahi, an eminent scholar of Qur'an and

of Islamic law, and one of the founders, with Mawdudi, of the religious party Jamaat e-Islami, cites Hebrew texts in his tafsir, explicating Qur'an passages, no doubt as a result of Horovitz's teaching. Just a footnote on Horovitz: forced to leave Arligarh with the outbreak of WWI, he took a professorship at the University of Frankfurt, where he trained several significant scholars, including Shlomo Dov Goitein. In the 1920s, Horovitz was asked by Judah Magnes to devise a plan for an institute for Oriental Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, which he envisioned as dual language, Hebrew and Arabic, with professors of European philology but also imams teaching contemporary Islamic theology. His plan never came to fruition, and Horovitz died at a young age in 1931.

Goldziher established personal relationships with scholars, religious reformers, and political leaders during his trips to Cairo and Damascus in the 1870s, a trip cut short due to the death of his father back in Hungary. While in Cairo, Goldziher also came to know Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and his group of students, and used to meet with them at a coffee house, discussing topics that he said were "free-thinking and heretical," just the sort of approach Goldziher wanted in relation to Judaism as well. That relationship brought forth not only correspondence with al-Afghani, but also writings by Goldziher against British colonialism, and a sharp defense of al-Afghani against Ernest Renan's racist attacks. Goldziher was not an opponent of religion, but an advocate of reform, starting with his first publication, at age 12, in 1862, of *Sefer Yitzchak*, a diatribe against the Orthodox Judaism that dominated Hungary.

Goldziher's study of Hadith, the traditions about the prophet Muhammad, Muhammadanische Studien, argues that few Hadith are authentic teachings of Muhammad, but instead they offer a full history of the arguments of central importance to Muslims: "Minute study soon reveals the presence of the tendencies and aspirations of a later day, the working of a spirit which wrests the record in favour of one or the other of the opposing theses in certain disputed questions."<sup>9</sup> Isnads were used to legitimate later teachings by projecting them into the past. Goldziher's Muslims were like the rabbis of the Judaism's rabbinic tradition, who attributed their teachings to noted rabbis of earlier eras, and who modified their rulings in accordance with the political and social and economic environment of the Jews: Goldziher emphasized that even Muhammad had to adapt his teachings to the circumstances of the Arabs to whom he was preaching. Religious practice was malleable, and interpretations of the Qur'an were bound to vary in different eras, a sign of the religion's vitality – the same argument Goldziher made with regard to Judaism in his earlier study of Midrash, Hebrew Myths.

Goldziher's work combined a radical suspicion of the historical claims of religious texts with a sensitivity to the religious experience underlying the texts. These are methods he learned, so he tells us in his diary, from Geiger, who transmitted to him the methods of the famed New Testament scholarship known as the Tuebingen School, founded by F.C. Baur. In turning to Islam, we find in Goldziher both a profound appreciation and what seems to be a disparagement of its originality. During his travels in the Middle East, for instance, Goldziher prayed in mosques in Damascus and Cairo, writing that.....

At the same time, Goldziher echoed Jewish denials of Islamic originality: Islam contains “practically nothing original”; “Muhammad did not proclaim new ideas” (5); “Muhammad’s teaching was not the original creation of his genius... but all his doctrines are taken from Judaism and Christianity”; Islam “was the most important manifestation of the Semitic genius ever made.”<sup>10</sup> Such denials of Islamic originality were not intended by Goldziher to disparage Islam, but to demonstrate its vitality – and also that of Judaism. Writing against the Semitic philologist Ernst Renan, who viewed both Islam and Judaism as stagnant Semitic religions, incapable of development, and lacking mythology, Goldziher argued that Islam, like Judaism, has a receptive nature, a capacity to assimilate foreign ideas and rituals and adapt itself to changing circumstances. Freed of the matrix of mythology, Judaism and Islam raised themselves to monotheism, which allowed them to inaugurate a history of scientific understanding.<sup>11</sup>

More than an alliance between Judaism and Islam, we see in Goldziher’s Islam a template for presenting Judaism to the European Christian audience. Like Islam’s Hadith, Judaism has Aggadah; like fiqh, Judaism has halakha. Both are religions of monotheism, rejection of anthropomorphism, and emphasize ethical behavior. After joining Friday prayers at a mosque in Damascus, Goldziher wrote: “I became inwardly convinced that I myself was a Muslim.” In Cairo, at a mosque, “In the midst of the thousands of the pious, I rubbed my forehead against the floor of the mosque. Never in my life was I more devout, more truly devout, than on that exalted Friday.” “I only wish I could elevate my Judaism to the same rational level as Islam.” Such comments are not heard from Jewish scholars who visit a church. With

Judaism's alliance with Islam, Christianity is theologically marginalized; it is the religion that rests on dogma contrary to reason, miracles, and the supernatural.

Goldziher's scholarship continues to inform contemporary scholars, but his appraisal of Islam was not typical of his era. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the field of Orientalistik had established itself at German universities, studying all religions, ancient and modern, except Judaism. Jews, however, continued their interest in Islam, as academics and also in the popular sphere – synagogues continued to be built in Moorish architecture (Oranienburgerstrasse, completely in 1872), and students at European rabbinical schools learned Arabic – even at the Orthodox yeshiva of Wuerzburg, even at Jewish high schools in Germany, where children were sometimes taught Qur'an.

Here is the voice of the German-Jewish philosopher of the turn of the century, Hermann Cohen: "The Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages does not grow so much out of Islam as out of the original monotheism. The more intimate relationship between Judaism and Islam--more intimate than with other monotheistic religions-- can be explained by the kinship that exists between the mother and daughter religion." <sup>12</sup> A sharp contrast, of course, from Cohen's well-known polemics against Christianity. Muslim society permitted the emergence of the so-called "creative symbiosis" that emerged between medieval Jewish and Muslim cultures; S.D. Goitein writes, "It was Islam which saved the Jewish People."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Goitein expresses explicitly what others only implied, that Islam is a religion of "ethical monotheism." Not all Jewish theologians followed suit; Leo Strauss forged an alliance between Judaism and Islam, in opposition to Christianity, whereas Franz Rosenzweig is the

famous exception to the Jewish embrace of Islam, and there is virtually no significant attention to Islam in the writings of post-WWII American Jews until the recent rise of Jewish-sponsored Islamophobic propaganda, which parallels the shift in Israeli propaganda from presenting Arabs as the enemy to presenting Islam as the enemy.

What was the reaction to the European Jewish embrace of Islam by European scholars who were not Jewish began to enter the field of Islamic origins with a denial of Jewish influence? Julius Wellhausen, for example, transferred traditional Christian theological denigrations of Judaism to his evaluation of Islam, and both he and C.H. Becker transferred the origins of Islam to Hellenism, not Judaism.<sup>14</sup> Wellhausen, in switching his scholarship from the Old Testament to Islam, intended, he wrote, “to learn about the wild stock upon which the shoot of Yahwe’s Tora was grafted by the priests and the prophets.”<sup>15</sup> What he hoped to find, Josef van Ess explains, “was religiosity without priests and prophets, that is, without the Law and without institutions.”<sup>16</sup> Wellhausen was looking for liberal Protestantism, purged of Judaism. For Wellhausen, the era of classical prophecy was the high point of ancient Israel; the priesthood and religious law were viewed by him as later developments marking a degeneration of biblical Israel’s religiosity into Judaism. Similarly, Becker assumed a dichotomy between subjective religiosity and institutionalized religion – an implied dichotomy between Protestantism and Judaism. Van Ess writes, “In his [Wellhausen’s] view, the shari’a fosters conservatism and makes progress impossible; its idealistic character makes those who are subject to it despair of adequate accomplishment and thus favors their indolence.”<sup>17</sup>

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, some Jewish scholars, too, changed their tone, initially by growing European colonial interests. The German-born and trained Hartwig Hirschfeld, for example, writes that the Qur'an is "monotonous to read, in spite of its bombastic rhetoric," and its "manifold difficulties repel rather than encourage the study of the Qur'an."<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere he writes that the "Qur'an, the textbook of Islam, is in reality nothing but a counterfeit of the Bible."<sup>19</sup> His tone is echoed by Israel Schapiro, who spoke in the introduction to his study of aggadic influences on the Qur'an, published in 1907, of the Qur'an's "dependence on Jewish texts." The Qur'an elaborated on Jewish texts as a kind of "bejeweling" of the original, Schapiro wrote.<sup>20</sup> Hirschfeld's tone, expressed in his book on *The Composition and Exegesis of the Qur'an*, may reflect his move to England, where he became Principal of Jews' College; the tone of British scholarship on Islam was far more denigrating and hostile than that of their counterparts in Germany. Eugen Mittwoch, who eventually replaced Eduard Sachau as professor of Oriental Studies and director of the Oriental Studies Institute at the University of Berlin, continued in Geiger's path regarding parallels between Judaism and Islam, but his tone, too, is negative. His study of liturgy and ritual in Islam, published in 1913, insists on its derivation from Judaism, even in its ruling of five prayers per day, in contrast to Judaism's prayers three times a day, with an underlying tone to "prove" Islam's lack of originality.<sup>21</sup> Here the motivation is not like Goldziher's effort to refute Renan's racism, but rather stems from Mittwoch's semi-governmental engagement in German colonial projects. Mittwoch was a propagandist for the German government during WWI, disseminating literature and inducing Muslim POWs to join the

Ottoman army. He also reported on the deported Armenian community in Berlin, gave support to the Turkish-language policy, and also supported the elimination of Armenians from the economic life of Turkey as beneficial to German business. Hilmar Kaiser has named Mittwoch one of the German scholars implicated in propagandistic support for policies that ultimately facilitated the Armenian genocide. In 1920, Mittwoch became director of the Seminar for Oriental Languages at the University of Berlin, and oversaw the instruction of a wide range of languages of China, Africa, and the Middle East. Instruction involved both philology and modern spoken dialects, and students received certificates of qualification that enabled them to receive positions in German businesses doing international trade, and also in the German diplomatic corps.

Ludmilla Hanisch finds that the field of Oriental Studies, especially scholarship on Islam, was dominated by Jews by the 1920s, and she estimates that in 1933 about 25% of the chairs in Orientalistik were occupied by Jews, with many more Jews (and a few women!) occupying lower positions on the academic totem pole.<sup>22</sup> The result, however, was that the field of Islamic Studies was decimated once the Nazis came to power and Jews lost their academic positions. Eugen Mittwoch, for example, was expelled from his professorship and emigrated to England, Gotthold Weil, who had replaced Josef Horovitz in Frankfurt, left for Palestine and took with him Goldziher's extensive library. The Islamic Studies diaspora took on a very different character in the countries and universities where it took root after WWII and after the establishment of the State of Israel.



During the Nazi era, Semitic philology at the University of Berlin, for example, was supposed to be changed to Aryan philology.<sup>23</sup> Many – but not all – of the Jewish scholars who went into exile re-established their scholarly work at universities in Israel, the United States, and elsewhere, but the nature and tone of their scholarship inevitably shifted in the post-World War II era, as it did in Germany as well. During the Third Reich, Jewish scholarship was neither cited nor recognized, and following the war, the work of Jewish scholars, especially in the field of Qur'an studies, was not continue until very recently, primarily under the efforts of Angelika Neuwirth.<sup>24</sup> Jewish contributions were erased, for example, from Johannes Fueck's survey of Islamic Studies, published in 1955. Yet I also find it striking that the many Jewish books published in Germany during the Third Reich, especially around the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Maimonides's birth in 1935, emphasize approvingly Islam's rejection of anthropomorphism, as if symbolically repudiating the deification of Hitler by contemporary Christian theologians.

Now let me say a word about Zionism before I conclude. Judaism, Sidra Ezrahi writes, is a mimetic religion. A culture of substitution in all the lands of their dispersion, such as Zionism, implied a reconnection with the original space that was "perceived as the bedrock of the collective self."<sup>25</sup> What is longed for in Zionism is supposed to be what is remembered: the spaces and moments of biblical history. Yet, as Ezrahi writes, memory is imagined, "as mimesis takes on the authority and license of memory and memory becomes an article of faith."<sup>26</sup>

The role of mimesis in the Jewish fascination with Islam and, especially, Arab Muslims and the Bedouin of Palestine, intensified in the early Zionist movement. As

Gil Eyal writes, early Zionists, arriving in Palestine at the turn of the century, required a “myth of autochthony, a project of inventing a new Hebrew culture, almost out of whole cloth, and for this very reason it required the mask of the Arab.”<sup>27</sup> Zionism meant a negation of exile, but also the Jews’ romantic appropriation of European Orientalism; the Jew was now the Arab. In a pamphlet published in 1946, Shlomo Dov Goitein, who trained in Islamic Studies under Josef Horowitz at the University of Frankfurt, wrote that Zionists, children of the Orient, “should learn Arabic as part of their “return to the Hebrew language and to the Semitic Orient.”<sup>28</sup> Zionists in Palestine, recently arrived from Europe, rode camels and wore keffiyahs, hoping to reclaim an authentic biblical identity preserved through the centuries by Arabs and Bedouin. Joseph Klausner gives us a cynical description of the phenomenon: “If a Jew happens to adopt Bedouin customs; if he manages to ride a horse and shoot a gun and wear an Arab robe – right away our Hebrew writers get excited.... If the establishment of a Jewish Yishuv [settlement] in Erets Israel [the land of Israel] [means] ... assimilation into Arab backwardness, it is better to stay in the Diaspora and assimilate into the enlightened Western culture.”<sup>29</sup>

Theirs was a reverse conversion. Jews traveled to the Holy Land not as missionaries, to convert native Arab Christians and Muslims to Judaism, to be re-converted by interacting with them and appropriating elements of their identity in order to purge themselves of European Jewish identity and restore an Israelite Jewish identity. This is not to deny the colonialist nature of the Zionist aliyah; even Christian missionaries were seeking not only to convert the natives to Christianity,

but to experience a taste of biblical life in the Holy Land, a dual mixture of piety and modernization, as Usama Makdisi points out.<sup>30</sup>

Early Zionist writers embraced the Orient as the original, authentic Jewish identity, even while rendering the Arab population obsolete and holding the Mizrahim, Jews from Muslim and Arab countries, in contempt. "From the outset," writes Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Zionist discourse was premised upon the adoption of orientalist attitudes, and orientalism was essential to the nationalization of the Jewish collectivity and the ways in which the nation was imagined."<sup>31</sup> By this, Raz-Krakotzkin means the conventional, Saidian European orientalism. Jewish orientalism, by contrast, channeled its elevated view of Islam as a rational, idealized religion into the small binational Brit Shalom movement, inaugurated in 1925 by Josef Horovitz during his visit to Palestine.

Performance and mimicry were, of course, essential components of Orientalism. The Orient was an identity to be assumed and performed; its authenticity lay in its appropriation by Westerners, and the Orient's negation lay with Arabs and Mizrahi Jews, much like Christians who celebrate Hebrew but vilify the Jew. The adoption of Bedouin customs and the encouragement of Arabic language study by Jews seemed to be tools to fashion a new Jewish identity. Who, then, was to be the real oriental, the Jew or the Arab? Was authenticity rooted in the mimetic efforts of the European Jews adopting oriental dress, or in the lives of Jewish immigrants from Arab lands? At a deeper level, it is about the erotics of racism, not just the fear of miscegenation that Ann Stoler has so brilliantly

described, but about race as the disciplinary tool of imperialism, and the erotic incestuous desire that ripens in racist cultures.

Initially, Zionist historiography was devoted to Jews of the Arab world; the first series of the journal Zion was devoted to oriental and Palestinian Jewry. Yet in that same year, 1936, the denial of Mizrahi history began and historians shifted to the study of European Jews, while anthropologists were assigned to study orientals.<sup>32</sup> Those shifts were accompanied by a growing ambivalence toward the orientalist nature of the Zionist project. Arabic language study in Jewish schools in Palestine fell into disfavor, Mizrahi immigrants were viewed as uncultured, and the Hebrew University did not implement the curricular plan formulated by Horovitz in the mid-1920s for its Institute for Oriental Studies. Horovitz had called for dual languages at the Institute, in Hebrew and Arabic, and, in addition to the European philological methods of Islamic Studies, classes taught by Islamic imams on contemporary theological and legal debates in the Muslim world.<sup>33</sup> For a variety of reasons, including Horovitz's sudden death in 1931, his vision was not realized. Nonetheless, the study of Islam became an important field in Israeli universities, and a field mined by political interests.

## Conclusion

Let me now turn to some general conclusions and comparisons and questions, to try to understand the attraction of Jews to Oriental Studies, especially in light of the frequent orientalizing of Jewishness in Germany. After all, Jews were called “deutsch redende Orientalen” (Treitschke); “orientalische Fremdlinge”

(oriental aliens, Marr); “Wuestenvolk und Wandervolk” (Sombart). The historicization of biblical studies by German Protestants in the nineteenth century created an orientalization of Judaism, in the sense of the orient as a shelter from the vicissitudes of progress. Friedrich Max Mueller and Ernest Renan spoke of Semitic monotheism as the product of desert nomads foreign to European Aryans. The concept of the Semitic linked Jews and Arabs and participated in the racialization of philology and of the study of religion.

Islam has been drafted into a number of different roles in the imperial nation-states of Europe: as a guarantor of European Christian superiority and an excuse for its overseas adventures; as the material on which philology honed its skills; as the foundation for an orientalist imaginary that encouraged (male) erotic adventures; and as Judaism’s template for self-presentation to the Christian world. We still must ask how Muslims responded when encountered such Jewish mirrors of Islam.

In contrast to the orientalism described by Edward Said and a host of others, Jewish writings on Islam are most striking for the absence of erotic material. The imagined harem as a site of erotic fantasies, or Islamicate cultures as offering sexual adventures are simply not explored in Jewish-authored texts of the modern period. A second contrast is the shift in direction. As Suzanne Marchand has argued, orientalist hoped to find an alternative context in the East for Christian origins, or perhaps for the Aryan soul, and they worked to dethrone Classics from its position of preeminence in the German academy. For Jews, however, the search was for Judaism’s influence in creating Islam (as well as Christianity, modernity). Yet this

emphasis also calls our attention to the exaggerated importance of autochthony in the creation of modern Jewish thought.

The Jewish embrace of Islam, both as an object of scholarship and as a template through which to present Judaism to the European world, whether symbolically via synagogue architecture or theologically as a united front against Christianity, gives us a lens through which to reconsider aspects of modern Judaism. Islam was imagined by Jews as a religion of strict monotheism, rejection of anthropomorphism, adherence to an ethical religious law – a kind of purified, rational Judaism. Thus, one motivation was the larger, nineteenth-century German-Jewish agenda of purifying Judaism, not simply liberalizing it – purging it of religious excess, that is, pietism and messianism, exoticism and eroticism, internationalism. Modernity should not be understood as a moment or place that Jews entered, but as a rhetorical device, one requiring an invented archaic, savage, or primitive to be repudiated – most often, East European Jewish pietism.

The effort to “rationalize” Judaism has been described in the histories of nineteenth-century Jewish thought and social history. Yet the role played by the imagined rational Islam of Jewish scholars has never been included. Jewish attitudes shifted, of course, with the rise of Zionism, and with the twentieth century’s new possibilities of Jewish alliances with Christianity. World War II and the establishment of the State of Israel created entirely new conditions, political and theological, in Jewish self-understanding and relations with Islam as well as Christianity. But initially, identifying Judaism with Islam became a tool to deorientalize Judaism.

There is an additional feature of the Jewish historiography that deserves mention: the role of imperialism. The standard narrative of modern Jewish history in Europe tells us that the emergence of nation-states in Europe excluded Jews from membership in the respective national identities, leading to the rise of Zionism as the nationalism of the Jews protected by their own state, the nation-state as the alleged best guarantor of security and cultural flourishing.<sup>34</sup> Yet these European nation-states were also empires, opening questions of the roles played by European Jews in colonialist economics, but also the influences of imperialist motifs on Jewish culture. Indeed, seen from the perspective of the new imperial turn, Jewish thought of the nineteenth century seems less concerned with an identification with nation-state Germany as with Judaism's imagined imperial role as a world power within the realm of religions. Jews possess a religious genius, wrote Abraham Geiger, and gave the world monotheism, giving birth to both Christianity and Islam. In this scholarship, Judaism functions as the "empire" and Christianity and Islam as the vassal states, metaphorically speaking, acting on behalf of Judaism in bringing its monotheism to the pagan world, Greek and Arab, with eschatological consequences.

The politics of the Jewish discourse on Islam differs from the orientalism prevalent in Europe during the same era. It reflects a double-natured political sensibility: a revolt of Jews against their position as Europe's internal colony, and an assertion of Judaism as an imperial theological power in the Western monotheistic context. John Kucich, in his book, Imperial Masochism, speaks of nineteenth-century British fiction as a site for negotiating class identities through sadomasochistic fantasies of "conquest and defeat, egotistical self-aggrandizement and melancholic

abjection.” Jewish historicism is marked by similar conflicts: Judaism is both the progenitor of Western civilization through its daughter religions, Christianity and Islam, and the abject victim of persecution by both. The imperialist impulse is thus not simply one of conquest and domination, denigrating and controlling the colonized other, but a conflicting self-image ruled by fantasies of supremacy and superiority matched by historical descriptions of persecution, suffering, and victimization. The two phases of supremacy and victimization coexist in a politics that easily repudiates liberal democracy for the sake of a hysterical claim to self-preservation at all costs.

In Germany, the orient was simultaneously primitive and degraded, and an object of desire and identification. As August Schlegel put it: “if the regeneration of the Human species started in the East, Germany must be considered the Orient of Europe.”<sup>35</sup> German nationalism was ambivalent about identifying Germany as Western or Central European, as Liah Greenfeld points out, and that encouraged the German fantasies of identification with the abject, colonized others that Zantop called to our attention.<sup>36</sup> Those fantasies of identification, indeed, were a pivot for the shift from nationalism to imperialism.

Yet Jews and Judaism never became those objects of Germans’ fantasized identification, as did Aryan Indians, Native Americans, or pre-Islamic Persians. In what ways, we might ask, did Judaism participate in the creation and growth of an Orientalist alliance with the East against the West that Todd Kontje identifies as the result of Germany’s “lack of a unified nation-state and the absence of empire”?<sup>37</sup> As Sheldon Pollock has argued, Orientalism served to bolster national culture in



Germany. Was Moorish architecture, for example, used for synagogues not only in identification with the Sephardi tradition, but also as part of a Jewish effort at an assimilatory alliance with Germany's fantasized East?

In his study of Orientalism in Ireland, Joseph Lennon writes that "Imperial British texts had long compared Ireland with other Oriental cultures, at first in order to textually barbarize Ireland and later in order to discover intra-imperial strategies for governing its colonies."<sup>38</sup> The response of the Irish, however, was not withdrawal. The Irish studied the Orient to know themselves. Irish Orientalism developed, Lennon writes, "both imperial and anticolonial strains, mirroring the Irish population in their participation in and resistance to the British Empire," even as "Irish connections with the Orient... were used to both distinguish and denigrate Ireland."<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the turn to mysticism by W.B. Yeats has been interpreted by Seamus Deane not as a turn away from politics, but as a nativist or negritude phenomenon, an interpretive approach we might find useful when considering the renewed interest in Jewish mysticism and Hasidism among Central European Jews at the turn of the century.<sup>40</sup> Rather than view Martin Buber's popular reclamation of Hasidism as a repudiation of the orientalism developed from Geiger to Cohen, we might interpret its underlying politics as Said interpreted Yeats: "In a world from which the harsh strains of capitalism have removed thought and reflection, a poet who can stimulate a sense of the eternal and of death into consciousness is the true rebel, a figure whose colonial diminishment spur him to a negative apprehension of his society and of "civilized" modernity."<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, Jews inhabited German nationalism, with its colonial fantasies about Muslims, but also attempted to expand and redirect it, with an insistence on historicism, a rejection of racial explanations for religious origins, and an idealized projection of Islam that points to Judaism, the religion of ethical monotheism best suited, as Jewish thinkers from Geiger to Hermann Cohen argued, to modernity, reason, and a European continent reveling in its imperial conquests.

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<sup>1</sup> On Freytag's career at the University of Bonn, see Christian Renger, Die Gründung und Einrichtung der Universität Bonn und die Berufungspolitik des Kultusministers Altenstein (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1982), 237-9. Due to loss of university records, it is no longer possible to determine in which seminars and lectures Geiger enrolled.

<sup>2</sup> Monika Richarz, "Juden, Wissenschaft und Universitäten. Zur Sozialgeschichte der jüdischen Intelligenz und der akademischen Judenfeindschaft, 1780-1848," Jahrbuch des Instituts für deutsche Geschichte, Beiheft 4, Tel Aviv 1982, 55-72.

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Geiger, "Introduction," Abraham Geigers Briefe an J. Derenbourg, Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums (1896), 52. For a discussion of the relationship between the two men, see Michael Graetz, "The History of an Estrangement between Two Jewish Communities: Germany and France during the 19th Century," in Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model, ed. Jacob Katz (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1987), 159-169.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Geiger, Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen? Eine von der Königl. Preussischen Rheinuniversität gekrönte Preisschrift. (Bonn, 1833; reprinted Leipzig: M. W. Kaufmann, 1902; Osnabruck: Biblio Verlag, 1971). For further details on Geiger's studies in Bonn and the reception of his book, see Susannah Heschel, Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 50-62.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Ivry, "Salomon Munk and the *Melanges de Philosophie juive et arabe*," Jewish Studies Quarterly 7 (2000), 120-126.

<sup>6</sup> Heinrich Heine, "Almansor," Saemmtliche Werke, ed. Hans Kaufmann (Munich: Kindler Verlag, 1964, volume 4.

<sup>7</sup> Heinrich Graetz, Geschichte der Juden 11 volumes (Berlin 1920-28), vol. 5, page 101.

<sup>8</sup> Istvan Ormos, "Preservation and Restoration: The Methods of Max Herz Pasha, Chief Architect of the Comite de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe, 1890-1914" in: Historians in Cairo: Essays in Honor of George Scanlon, ed. Jill Edwards (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2002), 123ff).

<sup>9</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, "The Principles of Law in Islam," Muslim Studies vol. 2, 302. Note that D.S. Margoliouth, a contemporary of Goldziher's and professor of Arabic at Oxford University, took the argument even further, as did Henri Lammens and Joseph Schacht.

<sup>10</sup> For these and other such comments, see Robert Simon, Ignac Goldziher: His Life and Scholarship as Reflected in His Works and Correspondence (Leiden and Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1986), pp. 11-156.

<sup>11</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, The Dogma and Law of Islam (Heidelberg, 1910), 16.

<sup>12</sup> Hermann Cohen, Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism, trans. Simon Kaplan (New York: F. Ungar, 1972), 92; "Die jüdische Philosophie des Mittelalters erwächst nicht sowohl aus dem Monotheismus des Islam, als vielmehr aus dem

ursprünglichen Monotheismus, und höchstens kann die Verwandtschaft, die zwischen dieser Tochterreligion und der der Mutter besteht, die innige Beziehung verständlich machen, welche intimer als sonstwo zwischen Judentum und Islam sich anbahnt." Religion der Vernunft, 107-08.

<sup>13</sup> S. D. Goitein, "Muhammad's Inspiration by Judaism," Journal of Jewish Studies 9 (1958), 144-162;162.

<sup>14</sup> C. H. Becker, "Der Islam als Problem," Der Islam 1 (1910), 1-21.

<sup>15</sup> Julius Wellhausen, Muhammed in Medina (Berlin, 1882), 5. See Peter Machinist, "The Road Not Taken: Wellhausen and Assyriology," in: Homeland and Exile: Studies in Honor of Bustenay Oded, ed. Gershon Galil, Mark Geller, and Alan Millard (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Josef van Ess, "From Wellhausen to Becker: The Emergence of Kulturgeschichte in Islamic Studies," in: Malcolm H. Kerr, ed., Islamic Studies: A Tradition and Its Problems (Undena Publications, 1980), 27-51; p. 42.

<sup>17</sup> Josef van Ess, op. cit., 43.

<sup>18</sup> Hartwig Hirschfeld, New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Quran (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Hartwig Hirschfeld, Preface, Composition and Exegesis of the Qur'an (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), page ii.

<sup>20</sup> Israel Schapiro, Die haggadischen Elemente im erzählenden Teil des Korans, Teil I. (Berlin: H. Itzkowski, 1907), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Eugen Mittwoch, Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des islamischen Gebets und Kultus (Berlin: Verlag der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1913).

<sup>22</sup> Hanisch, "Akzentverschiebung," 218.

<sup>23</sup> "Der Lehrstuhl fuer Semitische Philologie wird kuenftig fuer Arischen Philologie in Anspruch genommen werden." From: Der Reichs- und Preussische Minister fuer Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, dated December 6, 1935, to the University of Berlin rector and to Eugen Mittwoch. Eugen Mittwoch Personalakten UK M 225, page 25. Humboldt University archives, consulted on January 26, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> "it is important to emphasize the achievements of the Geiger project. Perhaps for the first time, the Qur'anic texts are reintegrated into their original cultural context and seen for what they were before they were canonized into the foundational document of a new religion – namely, answers to pressing contemporary questions and problems, answers that engaged, modified, adapted, and re-interpreted narratives and motives with which their audience must already to some degree have been familiar. For Geiger, Horovitz, and Speyer, the Qur'an presented itself not merely as the starting point of Islamic history but rather as a transitional text that needed to be relocated within a complex, religiously and linguistically pluralistic milieu of origin." The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations Into the Qur'anic Milieu, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Sidra Ezrahi, Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ezrahi, Booking Passage, 9.

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- <sup>27</sup> Gil Eyal, The Disenchantment of the Orient: Expertise in Arab Affairs and the Israeli State (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 2.
- <sup>28</sup> Cited by Liora R. Halperin, "Orienting Language: Reflections on the Study of Arabic in the Yishuv," Jewish Quarterly Review 96:4 (2006), 481.
- <sup>29</sup> Joseph Klausner, "Fear," HaShiloah (1905); cited by Yaron Peleg, Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).
- <sup>30</sup> Usama Makdisi, "Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity," American Historical Review 102:3 (1997), 680-713.
- <sup>31</sup> Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective," in: Orientalism and the Jews, ed. Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press 2005), 162-181; 164.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Menahem Milson, "The Beginnings of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem," Judaism 45:2 (Spring 1996), 169-183.
- <sup>34</sup> See interview with Zygmunt Bauman in Haaretz March 2013
- <sup>35</sup> August Schlegel, Geschichte der romantischen Literatur, 37.
- <sup>36</sup> Liah Greenfeld, Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
- <sup>37</sup> Todd Kontje, German Orientalisms (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).
- <sup>38</sup> Joseph Lennon, Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2004), xviii.
- <sup>39</sup> Joseph Lennon, 116.
- <sup>40</sup> Seamus Deane, Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980 (London: Faber and Faber, 1985).
- <sup>41</sup> Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Edward W. Said, eds., Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 81.