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Jews, Christians, and Moslems

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JEWS, CHRISTIANS, AND MOSLEMS

ABOUT the year 740 the Khagan or chieftain of the Khazar tribes is said to have held a number of religious conversations at Atil on the Volga, the capital of his expanding domain in northern Transcaucasia. The Khazars, who appear to have disengaged themselves from West Turkish domination during the latter half of the seventh century, were shamanists: They believed that gods, demons, and ancestral spirits responded only to the mediumistic magic of their shamans. But their Khagan was under pressure to adopt a new religion. While he may have felt some desire for a change of faith, two forces pressing on him from without were the Christian Eastern Roman Empire and the Moslem Umayyad Caliphate. In 732, Emperor Leo the Isaurian had given his son Constantine to a Khazar princess, and Caliph Hisham’s cousin Marwan (himself destined to be the last Umayyad caliph) had invaded Khazaria in 737, but had withdrawn the same year. At the time of his conversations, however, the Khagan seems to have had enough independence to choose a new religion, an independence his ultimate choice clearly indicates.

No contemporary account of these conversations has survived, but some idea of the participants and the matters discussed can be gathered from later sources. Important among them is a not altogether impartial reconstruction, The Khazar (al-Khazari), written in 1140 by the Spanish Jewish scholar and poet Judah ha-Levi, later translated from Arabic into Hebrew by Judah ibn-Tibbon. According to Judah ha-Levi, the Khagan had been told by an angel that his “in-

tention was pleasing to God, but his way of acting was not pleasing, and [he] was commanded in the same dream to seek the work that would please God.” The Khagan first interviewed a Neoplatonist, who urged him to seek union with the Active Intellect, that light emanating from the First Cause, and not to be “concerned about the forms of [his] humility, worship, and benediction.” The Khagan replied: “Thy speech is convincing, yet it does not correspond to what I desire to find. . . . I will ask the Christians and the Moslems, since one of these ways of acting is, no doubt, the God-pleasing one. But as regards the Jews, I am satisfied that they are of low station, few in number, and generally hated.”

In the presentation of a Christian spokesman the Khagan is said to have seen no conclusive argument. “As for me, I cannot accept these things, because they come upon me suddenly, seeing that I have not grown up in them. My duty is, therefore, to investigate further.” Nor does the Moslem’s exposition seem to have evoked any greater enthusiasm. Having realized, though, that the Christian preferred Judaism to Islam, and the Moslem Judaism to Christianity, the Khagan found himself “compelled to ask the Jews, because they are the descendants of the Israelites. For I see that they constitute in themselves the evidence for a divine law on earth.” He asked and was persuaded; both he and his vizier accepted the Jewish faith.

Judah ha-Levi goes on to tell that first they kept their conversion secret, later disclosed it to a few friends, and in the end induced the rest of the Khazars to embrace the Jewish faith. Thus they are said to have prospered, vanquished their foes, and secured great treasures.

Judah ha-Levi’s account is, no doubt, highly imaginative, but a conversion of Khazars to Judaism is a historical fact. It draws attention to the close relationship among the three faiths the Khagan so naturally and swiftly considered, once he had concluded that the philosopher’s “theodicy” could not fulfill his quest. With the development of the modern “science” of religion, a great many systems, schemes,

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3. Ibid., p. 27.
4. Ibid., p. 29.
5. Ibid., pp. 29-30.
6. Ibid., p. 31.
7. Ibid., p. 33.
8. Probably the conversion took place in two phases. Around 740 the Khagan accepts a modified Judaism. . . . Two generations later, circa 800, a descendant of the Khagan accepts Rabbinic Judaism.” (Dunlop, op. cit., p. 170.)
and criteria have been devised in an attempt to order meaningfully the world’s religions. Nearly all of these attempts sanction the grouping of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for these three share a common heritage and many common elements that distinguish them more or less sharply from others.

Unfortunately, they are often called “Semitic religions.” The term “Semitic” was coined by August L. Schlözer in 1781 to describe a certain family of languages with common elements. The expression was an unhappy one to begin with, since it seemed to relate these languages to the descendants of Shem (Gen 10) in a manner unintended by Scripture. Its later use to denote often baseless or clearly false ethnic relationships is deplorable. An Italian scholar, Sabatino Moscati, has recently defended a guarded usage of the term based on the strictest regard for historical chronology and anthropological evidence; but even supposing that there existed an ethnic relationship among those who first spoke “Semitic” languages, by the fifteenth century B.C., the term would have lost its ethnic meaning.

Historians of religion did not originate the term, but they have certainly helped to insure its longevity. Ernest Renan, Adolf von Harnack, Friedrich Max Müller, and James G. Frazer did not disdain it; Friedrich Baethgen, William Robertson Smith, and Marie-Joseph Lagrange made it common parlance. Careful scholars never said or implied that all heirs to the “Semitic” religious traditions were “Semitic” in any ethnic sense. It was rather the origin of Israel’s faith they wanted to illuminate, as when William Robertson Smith guardedly related the term to “religious conceptions and usages [which were] the common property of a group of kindred peoples, and not the exclusive possession of the tribes of Israel.” So used, the term is not inappropriate. Indeed, as scholarship has added to, and subtracted from, the “group of kindred peoples,” so it has been able to find elements in that tradition which appear to go back to the dawn of mankind and outward to the ends of the earth.

9. The listings in Genesis appear to be political and not racial; thus the Canaanites are made “Hamites.”
12. A good illustration of how quickly the views of that generation were obliged to change is provided by George Aaron Barton’s two volumes, A Sketch of

But such widening vision must not blind us to the overwhelming presence of the tradition itself, however it be named. It requires no deep scholarship to see that particular religious notions are fused in a unique manner in the faith of ancient Israel; that the Church, Judaism, and Islam are rooted in it, each in its own way; and that they are one in believing the awesome truth that Yahweh revealed Himself and His way to the people of Israel.

THE SONS OF ABRAHAM

ALTHOUGH the Church has good reason for tracing her roots even to the earliest days of mankind, to Noah and Adam, and biblical scholarship equally good reason for stressing the influence of the work of Moses, the dynamism of her faith finds its most striking focus in Abraham, the father and first patriarch of the Hebrews. Through successive revelations God made a solemn covenant with him. While the Lord offered to him and his posterity inheritance of the land of Canaan, they were to be marked as His own by circumcision, the sign of faith in the flesh. And there was the promise that Abraham would be the father of a multitude of nations, indeed that in him “all the nations of the earth [would] be blessed” (Gen 12:3). But it was not through his first son Ishmael, born of his wife’s maid Hagar, that God willed to continue the covenant. It was Abraham’s wife Sarah, who in her old age bore the son of promise, Isaac. And God said: “I will make [Ishmael] a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac” (17:20-21). Hagar and Ishmael went into exile, and we are told that Ishmael “died in conflict with all his kinsmen” (25:18). Ratified with Isaac, the covenant was renewed with Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes.

The formulae “the Lord, the God of your fathers,” “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” appear times beyond numbering in the later Scriptures. God “remembers” His covenant with Abraham, “which He gave and swore”; for the sake of that covenant, He guides Israel out of Egypt notwithstanding its disbelief or obstinacy. For the sake of that covenant He is always merciful to Israel; He gives it judges and kings; He sends it prophets. His people is the “seed of

Abraham,’ and He lives among His people with His Shekinah, His very presence. The covenant, then, is Israel’s bond, the reason for its uniqueness. ‘[God] will forever be mindful of His covenant,’ sang the psalmist (110:5). Yet there were God’s dark words to Jeremiah: ‘Behold, the days shall come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. . . . It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers’ (31:31–32).

The New Testament begins with these words: ‘The book of the origin of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham’ (Mt 1:1). His coming, as well as that of the Baptist, is greeted with the praise of God and of His covenant in the songs of Mary and Zachary. But no sooner had John the Baptist begun his preaching in the desert of Judaea than there was intimation of the new era announced by Jeremiah: ‘For even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees’ (Lk 3:9; Mt 3:10).

To Jesus His people were indeed the sons of Abraham, but as His passion and death grew near, He spoke ever more directly of the fulfillment of Abraham’s covenant in Himself: ‘Art thou greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom dost thou make thyself?’ a crowd asked Him. And He answered: ‘Abraham your father rejoiced that he was to see my day. He saw it and was glad.’ When the crowd protested: ‘Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?’ He proclaimed: ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I am’ (Jn 8:53–58). At the Last Supper, He bade His apostles to drink of the cup, saying: ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which shall be shed for you’ (Lk 22:20).

The apostolic writings sought to penetrate the meaning of this new dispensation. St. Paul, for instance, took Isaac and Ishmael to represent the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai, the earthly Jerusalem—bondage under the Law; the other, coming from the Jerusalem above—freedom in Christ (see Gal 4:24–31). Thus interacting lines were set for the interpretation of the covenant of Abraham and his sons.

In the first years of the seventh century, however, a new and quite unexpected interpretation of Abraham’s covenant and its inheritance was provided by the Koran. According to it, the covenant was in-deed made between God and Abraham and was meant to be inherited by his sons: “Children of Israel, remember that I have bestowed favors on you and exalted you above the nations” (2:122, p. 334). The religion of Abraham was thus God-given and true.

Who but a foolish man would renounce the faith of Abraham? We chose him in this world, and in the world to come he shall dwell among the righteous. (2:130, p. 335)

The identity of the biblical and koranic accounts goes no further than this.13 The Koran treats Ishmael and Isaac as coheirs of the covenant; and if there be disparity between them, it is Ishmael who is preferred. Normally mentioned before Isaac, he is said to have assisted his father in building and purifying “the House,” that is, the shrine of the Kaaba in Mecca.

We enjoined Abraham and Ishmael to cleanse our house. (2:125, pp. 334–335)

Abraham and Ishmael built the house and dedicated it. (2:127, p. 335)

Thus the faith preached by the Koran is identified with the faith of Abraham.

Say: “We believe in Allah and that which is revealed to us; we believe in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Moses and Jesus and the other prophets. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Allah we have surrendered ourselves.” (2:136, p. 336)

therefore cannot be identified with either post-biblical Judaism or the Church.

Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian. He was an upright man, a **musilim**, one who had surrendered himself to Allah.

(3:67, p. 400)

They say: "Accept the Jewish or the Christian faith and you shall be rightly guided." Say: "By no means! We believe in the faith of Abraham, the upright one. He was no idolater."

(2:135, p. 335)

Hence Islam, which means "surrender [to the will of God]," was seen not as a new covenant but as an urgently needed restoration of the old; the Koran was thought to have been sent down to re-establish a "pure" religion that had been defiled. Thus the Koran appeals to the Jews:

Children of Israel, remember the favors I have bestowed upon you. Keep your covenant and I will be true to mine. Revere me. Have faith in my revelations, which confirm your Scriptures, and do not be the first to deny them.

(2:40–41, pp. 326–327)

But in the eyes of the Koran it was "Mohammed's people" or "community" (Ar. ummāb), the Arabs, who were the true descendants of the chosen people, the true heirs of Abraham's covenant through Ishmael.

That the Arabs are descendants of Ishmael is neither an especially Arab nor clearly a biblical notion. The Jews seem to have felt themselves closely akin to the tribes of the Arabian peninsula. In various ancient Jewish sources the Arabs are called **dodanim**, "cousins," of the Jews, and their identification with Ishmaelites "was accepted as a fact in the whole of Jewish literature since the time of the Second Commonwealth." 16 It is from the Jewish tradition, therefore, that the Arabs must have received the thought of their origin from Ishmael.

Throughout the Koran there is an explicit appeal to the authority of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Until the Koran, however, the heirs of Ishmael were a people without a Scripture, and, hence, in this respect like all other Gentiles. It thus became a polemical neces-


sity to assert the wholly miraculous character of the Koran, particularly since Mohammed had claimed no other miracles. 10 More than once the Arab prophet is called **ummi**, "the unlettered" (7:157–158, p. 252), 17 at first glance a strange compliment. Its real meaning, when applied to Mohammed, seems to be: the prophet "to the people [as yet] without a Scripture," the prophet "to the Gentiles."

**ISLAM'S JUDEO-CHRISTIAN BACKGROUND**

One might suppose that Islam, simply because it is so much younger than Judaism or the Church, would pose fewer or at least less difficult historical problems. Such is not the case. "Islam, it is used to be said, grew up in the full light of history. Within a single lifetime that light has grown steadily dimmer. Under critical examination the foundations of the old tradition have dissolved into enigmas and hypotheses." 18 Scholars have found it necessary to reconsider many time-honored generalizations, a task barely begun in most of the fields of Islamic research.

One thing, however, is certain: Islam can never be disengaged from the life of the man who was called Mohammed. 19 He was born at Mecca in Arabia about the year 570. When he was about forty years of age, he began to make a series of claims. He maintained that he was the "reciter" of a "recitation" (Ar. **qur'ān**, hence Koran), transmitted to him by the Angel Gabriel. This "recitation," he claimed, was the final redaction of what Allah, "the God of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob and the Tribes ... and Jesus" (2:136, p. 336) wished to communicate to men. It carried in itself, as he was ult-

16. Normally the Koran is called Mohammed's only miracle (Ar. ḥadīth, "sign") by Moslems on the basis of 29:42, p. 195, but some theologians have added three others: the clefing of the moon in 54:1–2, p. 110; the assistance of angels at Badr in 3:13, pp. 395–396, and the night journey in 17:1, p. 227. Tradition, of course, has added many more.

17. See Josef Horovitz, **Koranische Untersuchungen** (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1926), pp. 51–53, and R. Paret, s.v. "Umni," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1934), IV, 1016. Incidentally, it is unlikely that there were any Arabic translations of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures for Mohammed to have read.


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mately compelled to insist, the power to invalidate the former Scriptures wherever they disagreed with his preaching. He further regarded himself as the last of a series of prophets and "messengers" whom God had sent to restore the purity of His religion, for not only had it been deformed by Jews and Christians, but it had also remained unknown to others. These claims enjoyed no striking success at Mecca, though Mohammed steadily enlisted small numbers. In 622 he and his followers fled to Medina, a city some distance north of Mecca—a flight, hijra, from which Moslems date their era. And not without reason. At Medina Mohammed both added to the number of his followers and welded them together into a community, indeed into a military power, which, at the time of his death in 632, was nearly ready to extend itself by rapid conquest to mastery over much of Asia and Africa.

Various questions concerning Islam's origins and, more particularly, concerning the sources of the notions and stories contained in the Koran, impose themselves on us. The orthodox Moslem position is a flat denial that such sources could exist. Moslems do not deny that Mohammed knew Jews and Christians; what they do deny is that Mohammed is, in any sense at all, the author of the Koran. No matter how interesting Mohammed's opinions on the number of angels or the proper way of combing one's hair may be, they enjoy infinitely less authority than God's revelation through him. Many Moslems do not even deny that there were slight variants in the first versions of the Koran, or that the arrangement of the chapters is an arbitrary one, but they hold that the present form, which was established early, is the true one, corresponding to a heavenly archetype. The Islamic concept of revelation is considerably more rigid than is the Catholic or even the orthodox Jewish, for it excludes the idea of human, though divinely inspired, authors.

Needless to say, non-Moslem scholarship takes a different view, denying the Koran exemption from that rigorous scrutiny to which nothing that comes to human ken is immune. The origin of Islam has engaged good scholars for many centuries; within the past century it has engaged great scholars.

It has nearly always been held that the major influences on Mohammed must have been principally, but not exclusively, Jewish and Christian, and that they were colored by Mohammed's own character and remade to conform to aspects and needs of the pre-Islamic Arabian mind. Within this broad framework, however, opinions have clashed. It was the prize dissertation of Abraham Geiger, the leader of Jewish reform, which stimulated much of the modern discussion; in it he argued for a dominant Jewish influence on the Koran. An opposing view, which held the influence to be chiefly Gnostic, was given the powerful support of Julius Welhhausen. This view was followed to a greater or lesser extent by Theodor Nöldeke, Henry P. Smith, and Wilhelm Rudolph, to name only a few, and strengthened by Carl H. Becker, Richard Bell, Tor Andrae, and Karl Ahrens. It is that of the standard history by Carl Brockelmann. Once the incompleteness of Geiger's source materials had been overcome, a reaction toward the earlier view was led by Hartwig Hirschfeld, Israel Schapir, and Eugen Mittwoch, and sympathetically regarded by David S. Margoliouth, Alfred Guillaume, and Erwin Rosenthal. Charles C.


25. See Hartwig Hirschfeld, Jüdische Elemente im Koran (Berlin: Im Selbstverlag, 1878) and Beiträge zur Erklärung des Korans (Leipzig: Otto Schulze, 1886); Israel Schapir, Die jagadische Elemente im erstrebten Teil des Korans
Torrey went considerably beyond them in emphasizing the Jewish influence, while the recent work of Abraham Katsh shows how well and in what detail such a view can be substantiated.26 Probably the safest and soundest view is the moderate opinion outlined by Johann Fück and Julian Obermann,27 but in all likelihood the last word on the problem will never be said.

Although pre-Islamic Arabia was still overwhelmingly pagan and, compared to other peoples of the time, uncivilized, it harbored numerous Jews and Christians. There is no difficulty in accounting for the presence of Christians by the sixth century, or even in explaining why these Christians, far removed from the influence of Rome, tended to be Nestorians and Monophysites. It is more difficult to explain why the number of Christian communities was not larger than it was. The foremost among them was Najrân, under the Nestorian influence of the king of Hira.26 There were also Jewish trading settlements at Teima, Khaybar, Medina, and again farther to the south. They are occasionally mentioned in rabbinical literature, and may have dated back to the seventh century B.C.26 It seems unlikely that Jews in large numbers should have been drawn to Arabia before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, though Torrey has suggested "an extraordinary reason why merchants in large numbers should have been attracted to Arabia in the last years of the Chaldean period and immediately thereafter," namely, the transfer of the royal residence of the Neo-Babylonian King Nabonidus to Teima.26 This city was a junction of trade routes, and, with its prestige increased by the king's presence, would naturally have held an attraction for merchants. This


30. Ibid., p. 16.

suggestion of Torrey's has recently received significant support.31 Whether the same events can be made to account for South Arabian Jewish settlements, especially in Yemen, as Torrey argues, is less certain. There is evidence, too, of a considerable number of Jewish proselytes among the Arabs. They do not seem to have had, however, any higher Jewish learning; it has been suggested that even the "city Jews" were affected by some forms of heterodox Jewish thought in which both Christian and heathen notions had been incorporated.32

What did the presence of Jews and Christians mean to the young "messenger to the Arabs," who, by his own admission, had been an idol worshipper? It is difficult to sift the Koran or the tradition literature for exact information; we are faced, moreover, with various stages in the development of Mohammed's attitudes. It is highly probable that as a boy and young man he knew, and was on friendly terms with, both Jews and Christians. He is said to have heard the bishop of Najrân preach, and to have met on a caravan a monk "well versed in the knowledge of the Christians."33 Material soon to be published by Guillaume points to an early impression left on Mohammed by some Coptic Christian murals in the Kaaba itself. The first encouragement Mohammed received after his prophetic call, if we except that of his wife, came from her cousin Waraqa, "who had become a Christian and read the scriptures and learned from those that follow the Torah and the Gospel."34 He was also familiar with various classes of Jewish scholars, whom he could name accurately, and there is reason to believe that many Jews, expecting the imminent advent of a messiah in Arabia, showed a special interest in him.35 Apparently he was also somehow connected with a mysterious group, called Hanife, "the pure ones," who, repelled by the evil of idol worship, favored a monotheism tending neither to Judaism nor Christianity.36

31. David S. Rice, in a recent excavation at the mosque of Haran, discovered a stele relating that Nabonidus went into the Hijaz beyond Teima to Yathrib (Medina) itself.

32. See Margoliouth, op. cit., pp. 57-83. An opposing view is held by Torrey, op. cit., pp. 23-25. Goitein, op. cit., pp. 46-51, suggests that there was a Karaite group among those Jews.


34. Ibid., p. 107.

35. See ibid., pp. 93-94.

After the "Night of Qadr," the night of power or glory, "better than a thousand months" (97:1-3, p. 27), when he felt summoned, Mohammed had constant and close contacts with Jews and Christians, but it is difficult to say whether and in what way he profited by them. His adversaries, among whom were many Jews and Christians, were eagerly watching for such influences, but he took a self-assured attitude toward accusations of that kind. Nevertheless, in the early Meccan period Mohammed liked to appeal, though somewhat vaguely, to Jewish and Christian authority for his teachings on the unity of God and on judgment: "All this is written in earlier scriptures; the scriptures of Abraham and Moses" (87:18, p. 32). The only way in which he then admitted differing from the ancient Scriptures was that his teachings were in Arabic. "Before it [the Koran] the Book of Moses was revealed, a guide and a blessing to all men. This book confirms it. It is revealed in the Arabic tongue" (46:12, p. 125). It is my conviction that the late Meccan and early Medinese periods saw the greatest readiness to absorb Jewish elements into Islam, for at that time Mohammed's special aim was to win Jewish converts, especially among the influential Jews of Medina.

For a time, then, he went out of his way to model Islam on the Scriptures, but later he took a sharply different attitude; it stemmed, one suspects, from the unwillingness of Jews and Christians to accept his teaching, at least in large numbers. The koranic chapters of that time clearly show Mohammed's wish to dissociate Islam from both Jewish and Christian orthodoxy and to establish the supremacy of his religion by vigorous disputation and the use of force. Incidents such as are recorded in the Sirah speak volumes:

When the Christians of Najran came to the apostle [Mohammed] the Jewish rabbis came also and they disputed one with the other before the apostle. Rabi' said, "You have no standing," and he denied Jesus and the Gospel; and a Christian said to the Jews, "You have no standing," and he denied that Moses was a prophet and denied the Torah [sic]. So God sent down concerning them: "The Jews say the Christians have no standing; and the Christians say that Jews have no standing, yet they read the scriptures. They do not know what they are talking about." 37

The apostle [Mohammed] entered a Jewish school where there was a number of Jews and called them to God. Al-Nu'mân . . . said to him: "What is your religion, Muhammad?"
"The religion of Abraham."
"But Abraham was a Jew."
"Then let the Torah judge between us."
They refused, and so God sent down concerning them: "Hast thou not seen how those who have received a portion of scripture when invited to God's book that it may judge between them, a party of them turn their backs in opposition?" 38

The Jewish rabbis and the Christians of Najran, when they were together before the apostle, broke into disputing. The rabbis said that Abraham was nothing but a Jew. The Christians said he was nothing but a Christian [sic]; so God revealed concerning them: "O Scripture folk, why do you argue about Abraham when the Torah and the Gospel were not sent down until after his time? Can it be that you do not understand?" 39

Unsuccessful in his attempt to convince these "Scripture folk," Mohammed began to attack them intellectually and physically. Only the Jews offered organized opposition; moreover, in the beginning they seem to have provided a goodly number of false disciples. 40 But they were incapable of long and effective resistance to the growing Moslem power and within a few years Khaybar and the other Jewish colonies in North Arabia had been brutally vanquished.

My sketch of Jewish and Christian elements in Islam must perforce be brief and the identifications tentative, for Obermann has rightly said:

What with the vast overlapping of Jewish and Christian lore, especially in the period and area involved, [the general impression of greater Jewish influence] may be illusory or at least inexact, unless it be borne out by detailed evidence for each element under discussion. Obviously, Old Testament and even rabbinical materials might have been transmitted to Arabia by Christian channels; while seemingly New Testament

39. Ibid. (Cf. Koran 3:76-79, p. 400.)
40. See ibid., pp. 246-270.
predominant figure in the Koran is Moses. If one follows Nöldeke's chronology of the chapters, he is mentioned more than a hundred times in the Meccan period alone. One of the earliest chapters swears by Mount Sinai:

By the Fig, and by the Olive!
By Mount Sinai, and this inviolate land [Mecca]!

(95:2, p. 23)

The "jinn" angels refer to the Koran as "a Scripture revealed since the time of Moses, confirming previous Scriptures" (46:30, p. 126). About twenty Hebrew prophets are mentioned, but not Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or any of the minor prophets except Jonah. 44 There are many clearly talmudic stories, such as the "bowing" of Aaron's calf (7:146, p. 251) and Abraham's trial by fire, a rabbinic play on Ur and the Hebrew ar, "fire" (21:68-70, p. 292). 45

Christ, by contrast, is mentioned in only two chapters of the Meccan period, and references to Him in the whole Koran are sparse. His most important utterances are never mentioned, and those that are frequently deviate from the text of the New Testament. To the end, Mohammed regarded the Gospel—in the singular—as a book revealed to Christ. 46 Some of the stories, such as Christ's speaking in the cradle (19:30-34, p. 34; 5:109, p. 386) and making a live bird out of clay (3:43, p. 399; 5:110, p. 386), echo apocryphal writings such as the Protevangel of James the Less, the Gospels of Thomas the Israelite and of Nicodemus, and especially the so-called "Infancy Gospels," all of which are known to have existed in Coptic, Syrian, and even Arabic. There also seem to be a few specifically Nestorian influences. 47 That Christ was not crucified was a belief common among some Gnostics; the same notion is found in the Koran: "[The Jews] declared: 'We have put to death the Messiah Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of Allah.' They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, 44. I say "about" twenty, because there are some problems concerning the precise identification of one or two; in addition, four "Arab" prophets are mentioned.

45. For other examples, see Torrey, op. cit., pp. 105-126; Obermann, op. cit., pp. 98-114.


47. Several are discussed by Thomas O'Shaughnessy, The Koranic Concept of the Word of God (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1956).
but they thought they did” (4:156, p. 370). From what is missing in
the Koran, Torrey argues that much of Mohammed’s information
about Christ must have come from Jewish informants.48

Contrary to orthodox Moslem belief, Mohammed did have knowl-
edge of the biblical narratives, and that knowledge was, no doubt,
secondhand. Probably he had heard improvised translations of the
Jewish Scriptures by learned men, and of the Christian by unlearned
ones. It is quite possible that information concerning one group may
have come from the other, and more than possible that wherever
Scripture is misrepresented or distorted, Mohammed followed homi-
iletical embellishments by Jews or Christians.49

In the realm of religious legislation, the Jewish influence seems
clearly to predominate. Like Judaism, Islam is a religion not only of
a book, but also of a law minutely regulating day-to-day living of its
believers (Heb. halakah, Ar. sbāriʿah). Both the Islamic profession
of faith, the shabādāb: “There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is
Allah’s messenger,” and chapter 112 of the Koran: “Say: Allah is One” (p. 257) bear a resemblance to the Jewish Shema, and may
have been modeled after it.50 The Sabbath was not, as is often said,
“changed” to Friday, but rather the Sabbath as a day of rest was done
away with entirely. Instead, Mohammed made the day of preparation
for the Sabbath a day of public meeting for prayer.51 The prayer pos-
tures of the Moslem community, its genuflections, prostrations, and
ablutions, resemble closely those practiced in the synagogues, and even
the five daily prayers of Islam have rabbinic usage behind them.52 The
fast of the month of Ramadan is probably patterned after the Chris-
tian Lent, the fast of Ashura, however, after the Day of Atonement.
The manner of fasting—from dawn to dusk—is Jewish, as is the
method of determining dusk and dawn by the possibility of telling a
white from a black thread (2:187, pp. 340-341).53 The pilgrimage
to the Kaaba in Mecca was part of pre-Islamic paganism, but as a

49. See Obermann, op. cit., p. 94.
50. See Torrey, op. cit., pp. 133-134.
51. See Ibid., p. 134; J. Montgomery Watt, Muhammad at Medina (Oxford:
52. See Mittwoch, op. cit.; Torrey, op. cit., pp. 135-137. Louis Ginzberg, The
Palestinian Talmud (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1947),
p. ixii, writes: “As we can see from the Palestinian Talmud, the Jews in the
Talmudic period met five times daily for prayer in the synagogue.”
53. See Torrey, op. cit., p. 138; Watt, Muhammad at Medina, p. 199.

mark distinguishing Moslems from others, the direction of prayer
toward Jerusalem—a custom certainly of Jews and possibly of some
Christians—was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca.54

In the case of social legislation the influences are less distinct.55
Some of the rules concerning trade, marriage, divorce, and slavery
are of purely Arabian origin. Respect for parents and almsgiving
have a Judaico-Christian background, while certain provisions of the
inheritance and marriage laws, especially the restriction of marriage
among blood relatives and the punishment for adultery, seem to point
to Jewish, rather than Christian, influence. The prohibition against
pork has an obvious Jewish parallel. Finally, in practicing circum-
cision Islam pointedly ignored the New Testament. Though not or-
dered in the Koran, the practice was an unmistakable attempt to re-
turn to Abraham’s covenant.

Soon after Islam had achieved the proportions of a political state at
Medina, Mohammed instituted what Margoliouth regards as his “chief
experiment in constructive politics.”56 Legal recognition and rights
within the Islamic community were given to the “followers of Scrip-
ture,” the Jews and Christians. Though the Koran ordered warfare
against other non-Moslems, the “followers of Scripture” were to be
treated as abl al-dhiimma, “people of the covenant” (hence dāimmis),
that is, as more or less tolerated minorities. Since they be-
lieved in the true God, although not as Moslems, they were the least
objectionable of “unbelievers.”

Had the followers of the Scriptures accepted Islam, it would surely
have been better for them. Few of them are true believers, and most of
them are evil-doers.

If they harm you, they can cause you no serious harm; and if they
fight against you they will turn their backs and run away. Then there
shall be none to help them. Ignominies shall attend them wherever they
are found, unless they make a covenant with Allah or with man. They
have incurred the wrath of Allah and have been utterly humbled: be-
because they disbelieved His revelations and slew His prophets unjustly;
and because they were rebels and transgressors.

55. See Robert Roberts, The Social Laws of the Qurān (London: Williams and
Norgate, 1925).
56. David S. Margoliouth, The Early Development of Mohammedanism (Lon-
Yet they are not all alike. There are among the followers of the Scriptures some upright men who all night long recite the revelations of Allah and worship Him; who believe in Allah and the Last Day; who enjoin justice and forbid evil and vie with each other in good works. These are righteous men: whatever good they do, its reward shall not be denied them. Allah knows the righteous.

(3:106–112, p. 404)

The dhimmis were obliged to pay a poll tax and a land tax in excess of that levied on Moslems.57 They suffered certain disabilities in judicial proceedings, particularly in those against Moslems. Their "covenants" with the Islamic ummah, often concluded in writing, guaranteed them, however, certain rights of life, liberty, and property.58 It was not until after Mohammed's death that the dhimmis had to endure many humiliations and privations. It must be said to Mohammed's credit that he gave these people of related faiths a not intolerable status, which appears seldom to have been violated.

After Mohammed's day, Jews and Christians were to have mixed fortunes in the Islamic community, but their cultural interpenetration was to bind all three together more firmly than did their common religious roots. The fruitful results of this interpenetration are still with us.

JUDAISM AND ISLAM

The swiftly spreading thrust of the Islamic community, which within one century carried its shahādah of Allah and his messenger to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, the valleys of the Taurus Mountains, and the steppes of Central Asia, seemed to imperil all who would not hear the Prophet. Still, Edward Gibbon's view of Mohammed, bearing "the sword in one hand and the Koran in the other," erecting "his throne on the ruins of Christianity and of Rome," is regrettably facile.59 For some stood to lose more than others, and some even stood to gain.

At first the Jews seemed to be in particular jeopardy. As residents of Africa and Asia, the great majority of them were quickly incorpo-

58. See footnote 85.

rated into the Islamic empire. The fearful vengeance Mohammed took against the city of Khaybar, and the subsequent loss of their prosperous settlements in North Arabia, boded ill for Jews. But they saw beyond these immediate disasters. The Islamic conquest could, and in fact did, promise them, in the words of a Jewish scholar,

a great improvement in their situation in various respects: first they ceased to be an outcast community persecuted by the ruling church and became part of a vast class of subjects with a special status . . .

secondly, the actual provisions which regulated the legal status of so large a part of the population were by the very force of circumstance less oppressive than those intended by the Byzantine rulers especially for the Jews; finally, when the once mighty Empires of Persia and the Byzantines were vanquished, there were good prospects for other changes as well—in particular, for the messianic restoration of the Jewish people.

It is therefore not surprising that everywhere, and especially in Palestine, Syria and Spain, the Jews actively helped the Muslim conquerors and were regarded by them as their allies.60

Their hopes were not disappointed. Although early legal restrictions prohibited the dhimmis, among other things, from holding governmental positions and from practicing medicine, these disabilities were mitigated in later Islam. Jews then rose to the highest positions in government, even to the vizierate, and served as court physicians to caliphs, sultans, and amirs. Occasionally, such success provoked strong antagonism which led to forced conversions and to a wider and more vigorous application of Islamic law. Physical harm was rare; what the Moslem community sought was to keep the Jews in an inferior state, marked by special dress or badges, and to curtail their liturgical functions.61 Interestingly enough, the worst persecutions took place under Moslem heretics, in the eleventh century, under the probably insane Shiite caliph al-Hākim of Egypt and, in the thirteenth, under the al-Muważhirid caliphs in North Africa and Spain. The great caliphs of Baghdad and the Umayyads of Cordova, on the other hand, were not loath to favor Jews for important positions.62 A Fatimid poet was moved to write:

The Jews of this age have attained their highest hopes
and have grown strong.

62. See ibid., pp. 18–36.
Power is theirs and wealth;  
from them are chosen the counsellor and the king.  
Men of Egypt, turn Jews, I advise you;  
the sky has turned Jewish.  

From the tenth to the twelfth century, an economic and communal transformation of the Jewish people occurred within the Islamic world. In early Abbasid times, despite statutory restrictions, Jews entered a new economic class, becoming business and professional people. Wherever the circumstances were normal, the medieval "Islamic" Jew prospered particularly in commerce. Ultimately, there evolved in every major city the office of "Representative of the Merchants" to protect their position and rights. This led to a remarkable collaboration of Jewish enterprises and interests throughout the Islamic countries, which in turn encouraged a standard legal procedure for Jewish affairs and much travel by Jews from country to country.

It was chiefly because of the wide cultural contacts between Jews and Moslems during these times that there developed nothing less than a Moslem-Jewish "symbiosis," to use Solomon D. Goitein's term. Mohammed had borrowed from, and adapted elements of, the earlier religions; the great men in medieval Islam reflected the same spirit. To the task of creating Islamic civilization the Arabian Moslems had brought little beyond their outlook on life and their language. Indeed, in most of its essential aspects Islam continued the Greco-Roman civilization and thus served as a bridge between the Roman Empire and the High Middle Ages.

The splendor and the creativity of Islamic civilization owe a heavy debt to Jews. Many Jews became Moslems; some, like the philologist abu-Ubaydah and the poet Ibrahim ibn-Sahl, were among Islam's greatest lights in the arts and sciences. But there was also a strong Islamic influence on the intellectual life of professing Jews. Arabic rapidly came to be the language of most of them; they even adopted Arabic names. In absorbing the language, Jews inevitably adopted

66. A good example is Benjamin ben-Jonah of Tudela, in the twelfth century; the fascinating account of his journeys has been translated by M. N. Adler, The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela (London: H. Frowde, 1907).

Arabic patterns of thought and its world of subtle beauty, Exegesis and theology, Hebrew grammar, and other secular fields of learning felt their impact. The Jewish-Arabic translations of, and the commentaries on, the Bible, such as that of Sa'diya Gaon, and even more clearly the Bible dictionary of David ben-Abraham al-Fasi, created the first system of Hebrew grammar and lexicography that was to endure.

Both Judaism and the Church had come to terms with the challenge to revealed truth posed by Greek philosophy. Not only the school of Alexandria but others as well met this challenge in their apologies and polemics. They appropriated the concepts in which the learned men of the Greco-Roman world thought; with the aid of these concepts they created a rational exposition of their faiths. When, after the closing of the Academy of Athens by Justinian in 529, the Moslems inherited the most vital centers of philosophical activity, they approached Greco-Roman learning with attitudes similar to those of their Jewish and Christian predecessors. The first task they set themselves was to translate the major philosophical works into Arabic. It took the devoted labor of countless scholars over several centuries to make these translations—one of the most memorable feats of scholarship of all time.

The grandeur of later medieval Jewish thought owed much to the philosophical interest of the Moslems who transmitted and enriched the ancient tradition. It would be wrong, however, to think that Jews and Moslems did not differ in the forms they gave philosophy and the uses to which they put it. There were more variants among the Jews than among the Moslems; one has only to remember the differences between "the scholastic mind of Sa'diya Gaon, the Pietist

mood of Bahya, the synthetic thinking of the poet Yehuda Halevi, and the systematic original reasoning of the 'rationalist' Maimonides. Among these Maimonides stands out, because his main philosophical work, The Guide of the Perplexed, "is a great monument of Jewish-Arab symbiosis, not merely because it was written in Arabic by an original Jewish thinker and was studied by Arabs [and taught by them to Jews], but because it developed and conveyed to large sections of the Jewish people ideas which had so long occupied the Arab mind."

The Jewish-Arab symbiosis made itself felt in the realm of mysticism too. At its outset, Islam did not champion asceticism, let alone contemplative prayer, but the transnatural aspirations of the Moslem soul, nourished by Neoplatonism and other influences, soon gave rise to Sufi mysticism. Sufism was anything but uniform; its phases of development were many: from asceticism to mysticism, from mysticism to theory, and then the flowering of this movement, the Sufi orders. Later their adherents diluted the contemplative ideal and caused its decline. Among the material found in the Cairo genizah (a synagogue storeroom for religious writings too worn to be used) there are fragments of Sufi poetry in Hebrew characters, and Jews are known to have attended Sufi "mystic sessions." There are also undeniable Sufi influences in the works of Jewish mystics, those of Salomon ben-Jehudah, ibn-Gabirol, and Bahya's The Duties of the Heart, a book analogous to the Christian Imitatio. Such influence is freely admitted by Abraham Maymuni, Maimonides' son, who succeeded him as head of the Jewish community in Egypt, in his The Complete (Guide) for the Servants of God. Medieval Jewish mysticism, however, shunned not only the Greek ambition to be identified with the

One, the thirst of Plotinus to be "alone with the Alone," but also the Christian longing for union with God, Augustine's prayer to rest in His love. Desires like these were also suspect to orthodox Moslem theologians and they caused the Sufis no small difficulty.

Goitein considers the Hebrew poetry of the Middle Ages, especially that of Spain, the "most perfect expression" of Jewish-Arab symbiosis. Certainly here Arabic influences are striking: The idea of "pure," classical language; the complex metrical systems; the arrangement of stanzas, alternately Hebrew and Arabic, sometimes with a concluding verse or two in the Spanish vernacular; the secular and religious models, ideas, and imagery; the love poetry, even the "advertising jingles," all these manifest a readiness on the part of Jewish poets to follow the lead of their Arab neighbors. It is impossible to read the poetry of ibn-Gabirol or ibn-Ezra or, greatest of all, Judah ha-Levi, without seeing its greatness, a greatness largely due to this vital interchange. On the other hand, Hebrew poetry with its influence on Romance literature played a significant part in the creation of later Spanish civilization.

There are other evidences of Islamic impact on Jewish life: AbuhÌ in the seventh century, one of a host of false messiahs, taught that both Jesus and Mohammed were true messengers of God and counseled his fellow Jews to study the Christian and Moslem Scriptures. The Karaite schism, though rejecting the Talmud, indeed the necessity of an oral law, nevertheless borrowed generously from shari'ah, the Islamic law. Again, Abraham Maymuni contended that certain Moslem practices were Jewish in origin and should therefore be reinstated. But the impact was reciprocal. As Jewish legends retold stories from Moslem hadith, so Moslem storytellers profited from Jewish tales. Moslems and Jews exchanged saints, pilgrimages, ceremonies, eschatology, and art, even a superstition or two.

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70. Goitein, op. cit., p. 144.
71. Ibid., pp. 146-147.
73. See Arberry, op. cit., pp. 31-92.
78. See Goitein, Jews and Arabs, pp. 155-156.
One cannot but wonder why this fruitful interpenetration declined after the medieval period. The reasons are many, but one is paramount. From the eleventh to the fifteenth century the Islamic world was invaded by Turks, Franks, Mongols, and others. These invasions were too much for its cultural vitality to withstand; Islamic culture hardened under the pressure of peoples who lacked both the impetus and the means to infuse it with new life. But in spite of this arrested development, large numbers of the Jews expelled from Spain were willing to settle under Ottoman Turkish rule. When all is said, the Jewish-Moslem symbiosis lives on forever in the written word, in song, and in stone.

CHRISTENDOM AND ISLAM

The Christian-Moslem encounter was bound to be different. For although Christians were absorbed in great numbers as dhimmis by the Islamic community, the vital Christian centers remained outside it. To be sure, in the ninth century Islam failed by the breadth of a hair to subjugate Rome as in the seventh it had overpowered Constantinople, "the second Rome." Tribute was exacted from both. Together with Greek and Latin Christendom, Islam finally became one of three main political and cultural units west of India in medieval times. These three had more in common than many religious elements and the inheritance of the political ideals and the administrative structure of the Roman Empire—more, in fact, than they themselves realized. Unhappily, eastern and western Christendom stood apart as two separate entities, challenging, and challenged by, Islam.

Christians might have taken heart from at least one kornic passage:

You will find that the most inpicable of men in their enmity to the faithful [the Moslems] are the Jews and the pagans, and that the nearest in affection to them are those who say: "We are Christians." That is because there are priests and monks among them; and because they are free from pride.

(5:85, p. 385)


But their initial advantage, whatever its value, was short-lived. No symbiosis of the Jewish-Moslem type was possible so long as the most powerful resistance on the frontiers of what the Moslems termed "the territory of warfare" (as distinguished from "the territory of Islam," the territory of surrender to Allah) came from Christians, and that situation was never to change. Moreover, the Islamic conquest had been more disastrous to Christendom than to Judaism in that immense numbers of Christians had become Moslems. Indeed, the lines following the passage just quoted suggest that Christians were viewed more kindly than Jews or pagans because so many of them apostatized more readily. 82 "From one point of view," Richard Bell wrote, "the triumph of Islam in the East in the seventh century A.D. may be regarded as the judgement of history upon a degenerate Christianity." 83 It is certain that eastern Christendom was blighted by a lax priesthood, by mushrooming heresies, and by imperial cruelty alternating with indifference. In some areas, too, Christian faith and life had never really taken root, and forced conversions were no source of solid strength. Christian groups surviving within the Islamic empire were compelled to exercise extreme caution in their relations with their Moslem rulers and even with their fellow subjects, for waves of anti-Byzantine or anti-European emotion put them in a situation less stable than that of the Jewish dhimmis. In later times, doubtless on this account, the Islamic polemic against Christians was more frequent and bitter than that against Jews. 84 A good summary of the kinds of restrictions imposed upon Christians is the so-called "Covenant of 'Umar," which was concluded and circulated in many forms. 85

82. See Laurence E. Browne, The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933).
84. See Erdmann Fritsch, Islam and Christentum im Mittelalter (Breslau: Müller, 1930).
85. "When thou camest into our land we asked of thee safety for our lives and the people of our religion, and we imposed these terms on ourselves; not to build in Damascus and its environs church, convent, chapel, monk's hermitage, not to repair what is dilapidated of our churches nor any of them that are in Muslim quarters; not to withhold our churches from Muslims stopping there by night or day; to open their doors to the traveller and wayfarer; not to shelter there nor in our houses a spy, not to hide one who is a traitor to the Muslims; to beat the nakkâz only gently in our churches, not to display a cross on them, not to raise our voices in prayer or chanting in our churches, not to carry in procession a cross or our book, not to take out Easter or Palm Sunday processions; not to raise our voices over
Nonetheless, the special plight of Christians under Moslem rule can be exaggerated. To mention only three signs of peaceful living together: the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, the monastery of St. Sabas near Jerusalem, and that of St. Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai. With the caliphs’ permission, half of the Umayyad Mosque, which once was the cathedral and which housed, as it does today, the shrine of the Baptist’s head, seems to have been used for Christian worship for a considerable time. St. Sabas is the place to which St. John Damascene, the last of the Greek Fathers, retired. Like his father and grandfather before him, he had served as counselor to the Umayyad caliphs; not infrequently his enemies called him “the Saracen,” and this despite his classic defense of icons against an emperor whose iconoclasm may have been nourished by Islamic contempt for images. Finally, within the very walls of St. Catherine’s there is a small mosque, a mark of the favor in which the shrine of Moses and its attending monks have invariably been held by Moslem sovereigns. The fact is that the status of Christians within the Islamic world varied considerably from place to place, from period to period.

At one moment the dhimmi appears as a persecuted worm who is entirely negligible, and the next complaint is made of his pernicious influence on the Muslims round him. Laws were made, observed for a time, and then forgotten till something brought them to the remembrance of the authorities. There is no constitutional growth; events move in irregular curves, not in a straight line.\(^{86}\)

our dead, nor to show fires with them in the markets of the Muslims, nor bring our funerals near them; nor to sell wine nor parade nudity in companies of Muslims; not to entice a Muslim to our religion nor invite him to it; not to keep slaves who have been the property of Muslims; not to prevent any relative from entering Islam if he wish it; to keep our religion wherever we are; not to resemble the Muslim in wearing the kalamsa, the turban, shoes, nor in the parting of the hair, nor in their way of riding; not to use their language nor be called by their names; to cut the hair in front and divide our forelocks to tie the zunnar round our waists; not to engrave Arabic on our seals; not to ride on saddles; not to keep arms nor put them in our houses not wear swords; to honour Muslims in their gatherings, to guide them on the road, in public meetings when they wish it; not to make our houses higher than theirs; not to teach our children the Koran; not to be partners with a Muslim except in business; to entertain every Muslim traveller in our customary style and feed him in three days. We will not abuse a Muslim, and he who strikes a Muslim has forfeited his rights.\(^{7}\) This is the version of abu-‘Ubaydah, translated by Tritton, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 6-8. The nābars is a board beaten with a stick or hammer, taking the place of bells in Eastern churches; in Spain the word was used for bell. The kalansuwa was a tall cap, and the zunnar a waistband.

Like Jews, Christians played a role in the Islamic state. For a long time they were the civil servants simply because there were no others. They spoke and read Arabic, engaged in commerce and some trade, rose to high positions, and generally shared the fortunes and misfortunes of the Moslems. The translations from Greek and Syriac into Arabic—the most important single factor in the later development of Moslem thought—were almost exclusively the work of Christians.\(^{87}\) Yet there was a clear decline of Christian literature and art in the succeeding centuries. Generally, Christians took a less active part in Islamic civilization than did Jews. Even in Spain, probably because of her violent opposition to Islam, Christians failed to match Jewish achievement. In sum, it seems safe to say that “antipathetic symbiosis,” a tense, partial, and intermittent exchange, best describes the Christian-Moslem encounter from within.

Quite a different situation obtained where Christendom faced Islam from without. The reaction of Christians to Islam, whether in the East or in the West, was ambivalent. On the one hand, there was warfare with all its partisan propaganda and ill will. The Byzantine armies, naturally, were the first to meet the Moslems, and for many centuries they were forced to engage in sporadic wars against them.\(^{88}\) Their propagandists, even their chroniclers from Theophanes onward, gave a distorted picture of Mohammed and Islam.\(^{89}\) But when well-informed, the Byzantines, even their emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus, could not repress admiration for Islamic culture.\(^{90}\) Embassies from the Abbasid caliphs were treated exceptionally well when they visited Constantinople, and in the Byzantine view the Moslems seemed gradually to have inherited the position once occupied by the Persians, that of “worthy foe.” Byzantine citizens were treated to the amazing spectacle of legates from Caliph al-Mu‘mān, Harūn al-Rashīd’s son,

\(^{87}\) In addition to many individual Syrian Christians, there were the translating schools of Nestorians under Ūmayn ibn-‘Ishāq in the ninth, and of Jacobites under Yaḥya ibn-‘A‘id in the tenth centuries. The Sabian school of Thabit ibn-Qurrah in the ninth and tenth centuries also translated many works. See George Sarton, \textit{Introduction to the History of Science} (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1927), I, 720–723.


combing their lands for the best manuscripts of Greek texts. The same caliph even competed with the emperor for the services of the best mathematician of the times, one Leon, who was ultimately given the archbishopric of Thessalonica as an inducement to stay with Byzantium.\textsuperscript{91} Emperor Theophilos built a palace at Byzas entirely in Islamic style.\textsuperscript{92} Byzantine physicians soon realized that Moslems were surpassing them in the development of their science, and were obliged to learn from them. There was scholarly contact between Baghdad and Byzantium even at the time of the Seljuk Turks, although their rule was to mark the end of this interchange.\textsuperscript{93}

The same ambivalence was shown by the Christians of the West. Islam's thrust against Europe—checked none too easily, when one remembers that for a long time the Pyrenees were the frontier and that raids were launched as far as Poitiers and Tours—had strengthened Europe's tendency to look toward the north and west, rather than to the east.\textsuperscript{94} When, in the eleventh century, Europe finally turned her attention again to the now weakened Moslem lands, it was with a hostile spirit. The successful reconquest of parts of Spain and the whole of Sicily encouraged an even more ambitious undertaking. Emperor Alexis' call for help against the Seljuks in Anatolia in 1094 merely set in motion a plan which had been long in the making: the crusade or "holy war," aspects of which may in themselves reflect Islamic influence upon Europe.\textsuperscript{95} For nearly two centuries the Crusaders' Latin kingdoms were enclaves within the Islamic world. The hostility which they provoked lasted well into modern times, and was reinaforced by the severe and long-lasting threat of Ottoman Turkish expansion into central Europe.

Islam captivated Latin Christians in many ways. The Norman rulers of Sicily, for instance, the "half-heathen kings" of legend, wore Moslem garb, kept harems, and openly sponsored Moslem craftsmen and scholars. Pilgrims and papal legates to the Holy Land were often dismayed by the extent to which the Latins there had adopted Moslem tastes and ways. Most important in this connection was the reconquered land of Spain. Avid scholars from every part of Europe—Adelard of Bath, Rudolf of Bruges, Plato of Tivoli, Herman of Carinthia—rushed to it, eager to acquire the riches of science and philosophy that had been stored up there during those centuries when Moslems had been the most fruitful bearers of ancient learning.\textsuperscript{96}

A century of great translations was inaugurated, this time from Arabic and Hebrew into Latin; Christians were often assisted in their labors by Jews. Certainly by the thirteenth century there was hardly a branch of learning, from logic and psychology to medicine, astronomy, and navigation, in which the influence of Moslem achievements was not visible. Christian scholasticism, even, indeed particularly the masterful summation of St. Thomas Aquinas, would have been impossible without the philosophical texts and commentaries of Ibn-Sina, al-Ghazzali, and Ibn-Rushd, known to the West as Avicenna, Alpazel, and Averroes. Through three great gates, Spain, Sicily, and the Holy Land, Islamic civilization poured in, leaving untouched neither the arts nor the fabric of daily life. So deep was its force that it later influenced the sublime imagery of Dante, and still later that of the Spanish mystics.\textsuperscript{97}

92. See ibid., p. 98.
93. See von Grunebaum, <i>op. cit.</i>, pp. 54-63.
99. See Miguel Asín Palacios, <i>Islam and the Divine Comedy</i>, trans. Harold Sutherland (London: John Murray, 1926), and the revised edition, <i>La esotetolgia musulmana en la Divina Comedia</i> (Madrid: E. Maestre, 1943); Enrico Cerrilli, <i>Il "Libro della Sala" e la questione delle fonti arabo-fagutale della Divina Commedia</i> (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949); José María y Sendino, <i>La Escuela de Mahoma</i> (Madrid: Ministerio de Assuntos Exteriores, 1949); Giorgio Levi Della Vida, "Nuova luce sulle fonti islamiche della Divina Commedia," <i>Al-Andalus</i>, XIV (1949), 377-407; Miguel Asín Palacios, <i>El Islam Cristianizado</i> (Madrid: Platero, 1931).
Christians have often been guilty of ignoring or misunderstanding the nature of Islam, and their ignorance has produced the evil of resentment and prejudice. Even when there was real cultural contact between them and their Moslem neighbors, a surface acquaintance with the faith of Moslems was thought sufficient. Still, there exists the tradition of a different attitude on the part of some Christians; deploring ignorance, calling for better education and understanding, they shunned prejudice and favored an approach which would be reasoned, sympathetic, and loving.

One of the first to express this attitude was St. John Damascene, notably in his Dialogue between a Christian and a Saracen. There, in a calm and informal discussion a Christian delicately leads a Moslem to the realization of certain inconsistencies in Islamic theological formulations about free will and creation. "Let us make use of your scripture as well as mine," the Christian says in one passage. "Your scripture says that God cleansed Mary beforehand above all womankind, and that the Spirit and Word of God came down to her. And my Gospel says: 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee' (Lk 1:35). Thus it seems that the two have one and the same meaning."

The same attitude inspired a disciple of St. John Damascene, Theodore Abu-Qurrah, who reminded Moslems that, despite all the differences separating them, both would profit by theological discussion. This tradition lived on in later disputations. In one held before Caliph al-Mahdi in 782, the patriarch Timothy had kind words for Mohammed: "As all the prophets turned men away from wickedness and sins, and led them to integrity and virtue, so Mohammed turned the children of his people away from wickedness and led them to integrity and virtue." Yet the patriarch presented a strong case for Christianity, based largely on the miracles of the Old and New Testaments, and on the messianic prophecies. The Apology of al-Kindi, said to have been presented to Caliph al-Ma’mūn, praised the Moslems for permitting him not only to speak in defense of the Christian faith, but even to challenge the authenticity of certain passages in the Koran. If we can trust the account, al-Kindi and his Moslem partner, al-

Hashimi, were the closest of friends. But Moslem rule lasted. Christians grew weary of the demands of an approach so sympathetic and patient; later Byzantine polemics became, unfortunately, ill-informed and implacably hostile.

At the time of the crusades preposterous tracts against Islam were widely circulated in the West. Outrageous lies were told about Mohammed; others, less malicious, made him a conventional heresiarch or a renegade cardinal. Some thought the Moslems were godless heathens; others thought they polytheists who worshipped a blasphemous trinity of gods; still others thought they worshipped Mohammed. In the twelfth century Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, felt ashamed of such ignorance, and aligned himself with the tradition of understanding and sympathy. He spared no expense in hiring scholars in Spain to produce a series of translations, which included the first rendering of the Koran from Arabic. Having failed to enlist the help of St. Bernard of Clairvaux in the project, Peter concluded it himself with two original works, a clear and accurate handbook of Islamic beliefs and a lengthy treatise addressed to the Moslems. "I attack you," he wrote in the latter work, "not, as some of us often do, by arms, but by words; not with force, but with reason; not in hatred, but in love . . . I love you; loving, I write to you; writing, I invite you to salvation." He had resolved that he would not speak unkindly of Mohammed, but would only examine the plausibility of his claims in the light of the Koran and the Bible. He praised the Moslems for their leadership in philosophy and the sciences, and urged them to apply their well-trained intellects to the case he was presenting for the Christian faith. Peter’s collection was to remain the basis for intelligent Christian study of Islam for almost half a millennium.

Other translations of the Koran, those of Mark of Toledo and John of Segovia, continued the attempt to inform Christians. William of Tyre is said to have written an important book on Islam, but it has not survived. The Dominican William of Tripoli, who had con-
vered many Moslems to the Christian faith "by the simple word of
God, without philosophical arguments or military weapons," penned
a careful sketch of Islamic history and doctrine, emphasizing the praise
given to Christ and to Mary by the Koran.

The greatest figure in this tradition was Ramon Lull, an amazingly
gifted Catalan who, in the second half of the thirteenth century, wrote
on many subjects and in many styles and languages. The promotion
of a reasonable attitude toward Islam became the ruling passion of
his long life. He spent many years learning Arabic, and like Peter
the Venerable found Moslems more open than Jews to the Christian
faith. He wrote of their conquests without bitterness; he dwelt on
their love of justice and mercy with unconcealed admiration; he
praised their steadfast belief in the unity of God, even to the point
of seeing in it an example to Christians. Lull was impatient only with
the refusal of Moslems to examine their own religion more critically,
and to weigh arguments against it. He was scandalized by the crusades,
and regarded them as the chief obstacle to a fruitful dialogue.
"Since the Christians are not at peace with the Saracens," he wrote,
"they dare not hold discussions upon the faith with them when they
are among them. But were they at peace together, they could dispute
with each other peacefully concerning the faith, and then it would
be possible for the Christians to direct and enlighten the Saracens in
the way of truth, through the grace of the Holy Spirit."

Among Lull's works are many imaginary conversations with Moslems,

placid yet exciting, and often including Jews as well. For decades he
wandered over Europe, tirelessly begging prelates to found schools for
the study of oriental languages, but his advice was scarcely heeded.
Yet he is said to have made many converts in Tunis, and enjoyed the
protection of the mufti, or chief lawyer, there. At eighty, he traveled
west from Tunis to Bugia, where tradition says he was stoned to
death while preaching.

In the fifteenth century, two men as eminent as Nicholas of Cusa
and Denis the Carthusian were assaying the wealth of Peter the
Venerable's collection and urging theologians to resume the aban-
donen task. Owing to the hostility of the Ottoman empire, however,
the Islamic world was almost totally excluded from the vital and en-
larged missionary efforts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,
which produced a Ricci for China and a de' Nobili for India. Only
in Persia, by means of the papal mission to the Safavid rulers, was
the noble tradition partly continued. Shah 'Abbās the Great played
host to religious discussions with the Discalced Carmelite friars on
several occasions, taking part himself with curiosity and intelli-
gence. In our day there have been a few signs that the noble tradi-
tion of Peter the Venerable is not dead; its future may be greater
than its past.

THE THREEFOLD DIALOGUE

JALĀ'I-AL-DĪN RŪMĪ, perhaps the greatest of the Moslem mystics,
was once voiced a strange complaint:

"What is to be done, O Moslems? For I do not recognize myself.
I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gabr, nor Moslem."

Had he meant this literally—that a good Sufi is no Moslem and so
has no common ground with Christian or Jew—then indeed he might
have lost all hope. But in spite of all disappointment, Moslems,
Christians, and Jews can speak with one another. Is not Abraham
father of them all? Yet there has never been a genuinely productive

References:
105. See Hans Prutz, Kulturgeschichte der Kreuzzüge (Berlin: E. S. Mittler,
1883), pp. 575-598.
106. See Ugo Monneret de Villard, Il Libro della Peregrinazione nella Parti
oriental di Prato Ricoldo da Montecroce (Rome: Istituto Storico Domenicano,
107. Book of Contemplation, chap. 204, quoted in E. Allason Peers, Ramon Lull
108. See A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia (2 vols.; London: Eyre and
109. Reynold A. Nicholson, Selected Poems from the Divan Shamsh Tabriz
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898), pp. 124-125. A "Gabr" is a
Zoroastrian.
dialogue among the three; surely not the Khazar Khagan's conversations. Even the free disputations permitted and indeed called for by the early Abbasid caliphs failed to achieve their full effect because of the forced inequality of their participants and the foregone conclusions of their outcome. The co-operation of Christians and Jews in making Latin translations of Arabic works did not lead to such a dialogue. Theologians, orientalists, and historians of thought have contributed a great deal toward removing obstacles to fruitful contacts among Christians, Jews, and Moslems, but their work is no substitute for the dialogue itself.

No one can deny that there would be advantages and deep meaning in a conversation embracing all the sons of Abraham. But it would be blindness to miss the obstacles that stand in the way of Moslem participation. Moslems remain aloof for many reasons: toward Christians especially because of the seeming alliance of Christianity with states whose policies the Moslem peoples have come, rightly or wrongly, to despise; toward Jews especially because of the establishment of the state of Israel, and the bloodshed and bitterness that went with it. On the other hand, Christians have labored to plant their faith securely in native cultures, and have often condemned with courage the injustices and brutalities of colonialism. "Union," a Zionist association championed by Judah Magnes and Martin Buber, saw the only solution for the Palestine problem in a binational state of Jews and Arabs, "a common country for two equal peoples," in which "the two nations have equal freedom and independence, equal participation in government and equality of representation, and one people shall not be stronger than the other." Although the political aims of this association were bypassed, its spirit of friendship and partnership between Jews and Arabs will, it is to be hoped, soon assert itself in one way or another.

Some would contend that there are essential factors in the Moslem mind that militate against co-operation in such a dialogue. As a matter of fact, many Moslem states place serious social and legal handicaps in the way of Christians as well as of Jews. A Christian of Jewish background finds his position especially difficult, and even Arab


Christians are regarded as second-class citizens. The recent legislation concerning the teaching of the Koran in all Egyptian schools has seriously endangered the work of the Church in that country, and yet such legislation stops short of the extremes advocated by such groups as the Moslem Brotherhood. The pressure and antagonism within the Moslem community is often too great to permit the creation of an atmosphere of peace and good will by law. That same pressure may account for a disparity of attitudes in various Moslem nations which otherwise defies analysis. Thus the situation of Jews and Christians in an avowed Moslem state like Pakistan is in many respects better than it is in a secularized Moslem state like Turkey. Moslem states, in many ways similar, will occasionally present opposite attitudes. There is no possibility of non-Moslem intellectual or humanitarian work in Saudi Arabia, while in the Sudan there are at least a few such opportunities. Morocco seems to favor a moderate policy toward religious minorities, while Afghanistan would never consider such tolerance. In countries as different in their political orientation as Iraq and Syria, the position of Jews and Christians, however, is not significantly different. In Persia, where Islam tends toward laxity, there is great hostility toward the non-Moslem, while in parts of East and West Africa, where Islam is militant in proselytizing, the hostility is less strong.

But who would say there is no hope? In spite of all difficulties, we can still concentrate upon limited objectives. Several Christian approaches to Islam commend themselves. In the last century Cardinal Lavergne founded a religious community, the White Fathers, who work in North and Central Africa as Moslems among Moslems—to vary St. Paul's expression. Wearing Moslem garb, speaking native

111. In what he calls notes on "Israel and Ishmael," Lukas Ramaz H. Malik, O.P., discusses the relationship of Jews and Moslems in the light of the Bible and the Koran. He ends his article with a few startling questions that deserve to be recorded. "Could it be that the divine answer to today's atheistic materialism is the reconciliation of all who believe in the God of Abraham, of all who are the children of Abraham, of Jews, Christians, and Moslems? Could it be that Israel's return to Palestine is an important factor in that reconciliation? Does the Holy Land still play a significant role in God's plan of salvation? Does this land play an important role in the relationship of Israel and Ishmael? Does, according to God's will, the initiative now lie with Ishmael? Ought Ishmael to give the Holy Land to his brother Israel, and would Israel accept it from his brother Ishmael?" See Freiburger Rundbrief: Beiträge zur Förderung der Freundschaft zwischen dem Alten und dem Neuen Gottesvolk im Geste beider Testamente, X, 37/40 (October 1957), p. 38.
dialects, the Fathers strive to root the Church in Moslem Africa. A heroic example of the best Christian approach to Islam is that of Charles de Foucauld, first a restless officer and explorer in Morocco, then a simple gardener of the Poor Clares in the Holy Land, and finally a hermit and priest in the silence of the Sahara. For fifteen years he spent his days and nights in contemplation before a crude altar, interrupting that life of prayer only for a loving service among the Moslem Touaregs, who killed him in 1916. De Foucauld’s work has been carried on by the communities he founded, the *Petits Frères* and *Petites Soeurs*, whose life is very much like the austerity of the desert.\(^{112}\)

The Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies in Cairo is performing an altogether new function in the deepening of Christian-Moslem relations. The friars are well-trained orientalists; they are entirely freed from other duties to devote themselves exclusively to scholarship. Their principal aim is to establish contact with Moslem scholars on a purely scientific basis, especially in the fields of Islamic theology and of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish spiritual literature. They have won a gratifying response from the Moslem Al-Azhar University, and their *Mélanges*, now in its third volume, is rapidly becoming one of the best scholarly journals in its field.\(^{113}\) The work of this Institute has been repeated by the friars of the same order in Algiers, and by the Franciscans in Cairo. Egypt has been the scene of other hopeful efforts. A group called *Dâr al-Salâm* has fostered important intellectual and social contacts between Christians and Moslems. The “School of Prayer” of the Discalced Carmelite friars in Shubrah has emphasized an approach to Islam by way of its rich tradition of interior prayer. The Jesuit Father Henry Ayroust has done pioneering work toward housing, feeding, and educating the *fâllâhâin*, the poor Egyptian villagers.\(^{114}\)

\(^{112}\) See Anne Fremantle, *Desert Calling* (New York: Holt, 1949); René Voillaume, *Seeds of the Desert*, trans. Willard Hill (Chicago: Fides, 1955). In his book, Father Voillaume, the present Prior General of the Little Brothers, says of Father de Foucauld that he not only loved the people among whom he lived “with a tremendous fraternal love,” but that he also took great care in knowing and understanding them completely; that he gave himself fully to them, spiritually and humbly, till he “became a Touareg, to the depth of his soul.” (Ibid., pp. 67, 19.)


\(^{114}\) See Henry H. Ayroust, *The Vollahets*, trans. Hilary Waymont (Cairo: R. Schindler, 1945). In 1952, a community of contemplative Benedictine monks from France founded a priory at Tioumiline, high in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. At first, in their infirmary and school, these monks assisted the neighboring Moslem Berbers, but rapidly the priory became a center of dialogue, in the beginning between French colons and Moroccan nationalists; then between Christian and Moslem students, and finally, for the past two summers, between distinguished theologians, orientalists, and others from all parts of the Christian and Moslem worlds. One of the chief contributors to the Tioumiline meetings has been Louis Massignon of the Collège de France, an active participant in all recent efforts at promoting Christian-Moslem understanding.\(^{115}\)

To each of these efforts there has been sympathetic response, the beginning of dialogue, on the part of Moslems. There have also been Moslem efforts which invite response. A recent novel, *The Unjust City*, written by the Egyptian Moslem scholar Kamel Hussein, is one of them. In this book, for the first time in Islamic literature, the passion of Christ has been treated with infinite respect and with a profound sense of the problems it raises for the Moslem. Prescinding from later traditions, and returning to the simple narrative of the Koran, Hussein has been able to portray the suffering Christ in a way astonishingly close to the Gospels. Never before has a Moslem scholar come so near to the meaning of the Cross.\(^{116}\)

Who would say, then, there is no hope? There is always hope. There will yet be threefold dialogues more effective than those which crowded Ramon Lull’s imagination. There will be further efforts among Jews, Christians, and Moslems to understand each other better, and to realize more fully both their common tradition and their common debts. This realization will enable them the better to know, to love, and to serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Peace to all the sons of Abraham: *shalom, salâm*, and, in God’s mercy, *salus*.
