

14. On this treatise and its author, see: Y. H. Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto* (New York and London, 1971), p. 122ff.
15. I. del Villar, *Sylva responsorum Juris* (Madrid, 1614), p. 54.
16. A. Fernández de Otero, *Tractatus de officialibus Republicae* (1700), p. 17.
17. I. del Villar, *Sylva*, p. 127.
18. M. de Isaba, *Cuerpo enfermo de la Milicia española* (Madrid, 1594), p. 134.
19. F. Furió Ceriol, *Consejo y Consejeros del Príncipe* (Amberes, 1558), p. 17.
20. See: H. Méctroulan, "L'alterné juive dans la pensée espagnole (1550-1650)," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 8 (1974):183ff and also see his *Raison et altérité chez Fadrigue Furió Ceriol* (Paris and The Hague, 1973).
21. J. de Huarte, *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* (Amberes, 1603), p. 258.
22. See: J. H. Eliot, "Self Perception and Decline in Early Seventeenth-Century Spain," *Past and Present* 74 (February 1977):41ff.
23. M. González de Cellorigo, *Memorial de la Política necesaria y útil restauración a la república de España* (Valladolid, 1660), fol. 25.
24. So called after the book of F. Matute, *El triunfo del desengaño* (Naples, 1632).
25. F. de Anaya, *Desengaño de los bienes humanos* (Madrid, 1681), p. 93.
26. The criticism of the attitude toward the moriscos grew more bitter following their expulsion from Spain in the years 1609-1614.

## 11

## Jew-Hatred in the Islamic Tradition and the Koranic Exegesis

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In the middle of the eighth century, most of the world's Jews, including the autonomous Jewish center in Babylonia, were in lands under the rule of Islam. In the central countries under Muslim rule, the Jews were fewer in number than the Christians. This was the case in Egypt, the Land of Israel, Syria, and also Iraq. The Christian majority underwent a gradual process of Islamization which in a few countries was very slow. In a few of the Islamic countries there are Christian minorities to this very day who have to a great extent preserved their status as the backbone of the veteran urban bureaucracy. Across the borders, there were Christian powers such as Byzantium, Ethiopia, and the Frankish kingdom. The fact that they constituted a threat to Islam provided added strength for the Christians living in Muslim lands.

### 1. The Tradition of anti-Jewish Literature

From the ninth century onward, out of the ancient tradition, there began to develop a literature of polemics against the Jews, "the people of the Book" (or "the protected people" - both terms referring primarily to the Jews and the Christians) or against the non-Muslims. Not inconceivably, this literature followed old Christian examples, extant before Islam, with parallels in ancient Persian literature as well. Several years ago, Professor Moshe Perlmann wrote an article with an interesting and instructive summary of the anti-Jewish polemic literature.<sup>1</sup> This literature in itself, however, is not our concern here but serves merely as one indication of hatred and scorn for Judaism (and Christianity). No less important an indication, and much more useful, are the decrees generally, though erroneously, called the "Covenant of 'Umar." They were not promulgated all at once but gradually took shape over a few centuries, apparently reaching their more or less final form in the ninth century. There is

no doubt that the crystallization of these regulations against the non-Muslims, especially against "the people of the Book," was connected with the name of the caliph Al-Mutawakkil, who reigned in the mid-ninth century C.E.

These regulations were intended to degrade and humiliate both the individual non-Muslim (by the different garb they were made to wear) and the religious group as a whole. One of the most important of the regulations, intended to degrade the entire group, forbade the appointment of Jews and Christians to public positions or positions of authority. We know that this regulation (and not only this one) was not always strictly adhered to in practice. In some countries and some periods there were so many exceptions that it seemed they had become the rule.

We do in fact again and again find Jews and Christians in positions of authority in various Islamic countries at different times; Jews or Christians were even appointed to the office of vizier, the equivalent of a head of state today. Generally, whenever such a thing happened, there was always some religious figure of authority who, at the proper moment, would privately or publicly explain to the rulers how they should conduct themselves, and the affair sometimes ended unpleasantly. Let us illustrate with one story.<sup>2</sup> The 'Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun (who ruled from 813-833) honored a certain Jew greatly. To be sure, nowhere is it said that he appointed the Jew to an official position but "he seated him higher than those most dignified - al-Ashraf" (perhaps the occurrence of this term indicated that he seated him even over the descendants of Muhammad who are normally designated as a group by this term). "One of them became angry and sent a note to al-Ma'mun on which the following verses were written:

O Son of him, obedience to whom was incumbent upon all people, and whose truth was decree and law binding (upon us), He whom thou honorst claims that the father of your fathers<sup>3</sup> (= Muhammad) is nothing but a Liar.

Al-Ma'mun answered him: 'You are right! - ordering at once that the Jew be drowned. Then al-Ma'mun told those who were present the story of al-Miqdad ibn al-Aswad, a friend of the Prophet - how, (when he was on one of his journeys), he was accompanied for a whole day by a Jew. When evening came, al-Miqdad remembered the saying handed down from the Prophet: 'No Jew meets with a Muslim in privacy unless he has some scheme to trap him.' (Incidentally, this is one version of this tradition. There are tens of parallel versions with variations.) After al-Miqdad promised the Jew that he would not hurt him, the Jew confessed to him: "I did in fact have a trap in mind. All day I have been planning to tread upon the shadow of your head." (Stepping on the shadow here apparently has some magical significance: the shadow is the soul and stepping on it is a symbolic act of trampling on the soul, i.e., a kind of killing.) "How right was the Prophet of Allah," rejoined al-Miqdad."

As already mentioned, there are many variations of the old sayings. For example, "No Jew remains alone with a Muslim unless he plans to kill him," or "No two Jews meet except to plot the death of Muslims," and many more such. The story quoted was intended against the "protected people" in general and is one of a series of similar accounts. Did the Jew have a separate status? As mentioned, legally the status of the Jew was not different in principle. All the "protected people" were equal, especially the Jews and the Christians. There is even an opinion that the fact that the Jewish communities thrived under Muslim rule for over thirteen hundred years while there was a consistent, evident shrinkage of the Christian population is proof enough of Islam's attitude toward Judaism as against its attitude toward the Christians. It seems to me that this fact indicates, no less, and perhaps even primarily, the nature of the Jewish communities everywhere, not only in the Muslim lands, in contrast to that of the Christian communities.<sup>4</sup> However, it is not my intention to discuss the laws and regulations but rather the Islamic tradition which, while it provides an underlying ideological base for the law, also has a developmental dynamic of its own beyond the letter of the law. The polemic literature, especially that which deals with the Jews, is anchored in this Islamic tradition.

The literature of the Islamic tradition in essence constitutes the continuity of the development of Islam as reflected in the Koran. One of the important findings of the famous Orientalist Goldziher was that the oral Islamic tradition, *Hadith* in Arabic, reflects the development of early Islam and its relationship to historical developments during its first two centuries. A large part of the entire spiritual creativity of Islam in that period developed as oral tradition. It is a vast, complex mosaic composed of an infinite number of tiny pieces (including Islamic historiography). Naturally, Koranic exegesis is the first area in which this creativity took on an oral tradition form. An examination of this literature, especially the exegesis of the Koran, indicates that the main core of the attitude toward Jews and Christians had already been almost fully shaped before 750 C.E. If we accept the proposition that the main decrees against the Jews were first institutionalized in the days of the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz about the year 100 of the Islamic Era (i.e., about 720 C.E.), then there is no doubt that there is a close connection between this fact and the crystallization of the attitude toward the Jews in the mid-eighth century which we shall describe below. Our examination indicates that the attitude toward the Jews as reflected in this tradition during that period had already been crystallized in the main centers of Islam: in Medina, in Syria, and in Iraq.

This tradition, shaped over a thousand years ago, has continued with a vital dynamism of its own to this very day. There are many instances of it in twentieth-century literature. For example, the publication containing the discussions at *The Fourth Conference of the Academy of Islamic Research* held in Cairo in 1968<sup>5</sup> has very instructive articles about attitudes toward the Jews. Every year sees the publication of scores of books written by Muslims containing anti-Jewish traditions. Their authors are from various circles: In some of

the books the religious outlook is the decisive factor; in some, the secular outlook is couched in European antisemitic terms. In this connection, one should mention an example which is a curiosity. About forty years ago, a work of intrinsic interest was printed in Egypt. It is called *Ifham al-Yahud* ("Silencing the Jews"), composed by Samau al al-Magribi, an apostate Jew, in the middle of the twelfth century C.E.<sup>6</sup> Samau al explains how he came to the truth of Islam – after a dream one night – and why the religion of the Jews is so contemptible that it deserves to be degraded and suppressed. This treatise was published in one volume, along with a similar one, also by an apostate Jew who converted to Islam apparently at the end of the nineteenth century. The volume has an introduction by a Muslim scholar named Muhammad Mahmud al-Faqi who, at that time, was the head of some Muslim society. The introduction very precisely repeats all the traditions found in the literature for a thousand years, plus an interesting insertion of a number of motifs from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This is of interest because at that time the "Protocols" had not yet penetrated the Muslim religious circles but were more widespread among people who had access to modern secular literature.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The Curse Against the Jews

A central place in the traditions concerning the Jews is held by the words of the Koran in Sura 2:61/58: "And abasement and poverty were pitched upon them, and they were laden with God's anger; that because they had disbelieved the signs of God and slain the Prophets unrightfully; that because they disobeyed and were transgressors."<sup>8</sup> The reference is actually to the Israelites in the wilderness, but to all of the Muslim exegetes, without exception,<sup>9</sup> it was absolutely clear that the reference was to the Jews of their day. The Arabic word translated as "pitched upon them" also means, literally, that the "abasement and poverty" were decreed for them forever.<sup>10</sup> The "abasement" is the payment of the poll tax and the humiliating ceremony involved. As for the "poverty," this insured their remaining impoverished forever. There are traditions which attribute this interpretation to Muhammad himself.<sup>11</sup> The text continues: "and they were laden with God's anger." Here the text is speaking of a fearful rage decreed upon them forever, and many traditions, in parallel versions repeated again and again in different sources, connect this "anger" with the anger in the Koran 1:7 where are mentioned "those against whom Thou art wrathful." In this verse, Muslims ask that God lead them in the right path, not in the way of those who must bear His wrath. This last is connected to Koran 5:60/65 in which it is said of the Israelites: "Say, Shall I tell you of a recompense with God, worse than that? Whomsoever God has cursed, and with whom He is wrath, and made some of them apes and swine, and worshippers of idols<sup>12</sup> – they are worse situated, and have gone further astray from the right way." Who are the people who have incurred perpetual degradation, who suffer God's wrath forever and who have become the apes and swine referred

to in this verse? Many Muslim exegetes interpreted this as referring to the Jews, and some cite various stories of Jews who actually became apes or swine.<sup>13</sup> They associate this with another verse. Koran 5:78/82: "Cursed were the unbelievers of the Children of Israel by the tongue of David, and Jesus, Mary's son," and explain it to mean the Jews who were cursed by David when he passed the house of a certain Jew, or by Jesus when he passed the house of a certain Jew, who because of these curses were transformed into swine or apes.

What is the explanation of this fearful decree? Why were the Jews so terribly cursed? The main reason was that from time immemorial the Jews rejected God's signs, the wonders performed by the prophets. They did not accept the prophecy of Jesus whom the Koran counts among the prophets. But this is all part of the Jews' nature: they are by their very nature deceitful and treacherous. In Sura 2:89/83 it says: "When there came to them a Book from God, confirming what was with them – and they aforesometimes prayed for victory over the unbelievers – when there came to them that they recognized, they disbelieved in it; and the curse of God is on the unbelievers." In this connection the tradition recounts that at first the Jews truly hoped for Muhammad's victory over the Arab nonbelievers and said: "Would that Allah send this prophet of whom our Book says that his coming is assured." But when the prophet finally came and they saw that he was not of them, they then denied him out of jealousy of the Arabs, though they knew that in truth he is the prophet. Furthermore, this Jewish trait brought them to grave heresy. They thought that they would succeed not only in leading humankind astray but also in fooling God. Sura 5:64/69 reads: "The Jews have said, God's hand is tied." And in the continuation of the verse: "As often as they light a fire for war, God will extinguish it." Exegetes cite traditions which prove that the Jews always hated the true prophets and put them to death. Therefore they always failed in their wars and their Temple was destroyed time and again. According to one tradition: "These enemies of God (mentioned in the verse) are the Jews. Whenever they kindle the flame of war, God extinguishes it. Never are the Jews found in any land but that they are the lowest of the inhabitants. (You know) that Islam came upon the scene when the Jews were under (the rule of) the Majus (i.e., the Zoroastrians) who are, of all creatures, the most detested by God."

The vile characteristics inherent in Jews are also stressed by the commentaries and traditions dealing with Sura 5:41/45 which reads:

O Messenger, let them not grieve thee, that vie with one another in unbelief, such men as say with their mouths "We believe" but their hearts believe not; and the Jews, who listen to falsehood, listen to other folk, who have not come to thee, perverting words from their meanings, saying "If you are given this then take it; if you are not given it, beware!" Whomsoever God desires to try, thou canst not avail him anything with God. Those are they whose hearts God desired not to purify; for them is

degradation in this world; and in the world to come awaits them a mighty chastisement.

In his commentary, Tabari<sup>14</sup> cites many traditions on this verse of which these are the main ones:

1. 'Abd Allah b. Suraya was the most expert and wisest of the Jews in Medina. When Muhammad reached Medina, he passed the House of Study (*Bayt al-Midrās*). The Jewish sages were dealing with the case of an adulterer and adultery and could not come to a decision. At their request, Muhammad made the decision for death by stoning in accordance with the Torah. The end of the matter was that Ben Suraya admitted that Muhammad was the most expert in the Torah but that the Jewish sages would not admit it out of jealousy.

2. A Jew tried to lie to Muhammad and claim that the penalty for adultery in the Torah is lashes. Only after Muhammad had him swear by the Torah, did the Jew admit that the punishment is stoning; and added that since adultery is widespread among the Jewish dignitaries who were afraid that they might be exposed if they differentiated in the penalty between dignitaries and the simple folk, they replaced stoning with lashes. At that Muhammad said: "My God, I am the first who has revived Your commandment<sup>15</sup> after these have killed it."

3. A combined version of these two traditions – perhaps a later one – opens with the story as in the first version. The Jewish sage finally admitted that the Jews ignored the Torah's proper punishment for adulterers, that is, stoning, and had substituted lashes. Then, after the Jew had confessed, the verses under discussion were revealed to Muhammad (i.e., 41–44/45–49 of Sura 5).

4. An exegetical tradition ties this verse to those called *munāfiqun*: according to the accepted interpretation, a Koranic term for those whose mouths and hearts are not one, that is, who stated that they accepted Islam but secretly remained hostile to it and even actively assisted the tribes fighting Muhammad. Tabari opted for this interpretation and even connected it to the first tradition: The verse refers to 'Abd Allah b. Suraya who told Muhammad that he believed in his prophecy (for he had presented the case for his decision), but in his heart he did not believe.

Tabari explains "Those they are whose hearts God desired not to purify"<sup>16</sup> meaning that God wanted to lead the Jews astray and hence created their hearts this way. They will never walk in the straight path. Further on in the Koran, in 42/46, the Jews are described as (the ones) "who listen to falsehood and consume the unlawful." Most of the commentaries explain "the unlawful" as bribery, and there are those (in a tradition ascribed to 'Ali b. Abi Talib, Muhammad's cousin, son-in-law, and the fourth Caliph) who interpret this also to mean the pay for blood-letting, the dowry for an adulterer, the price of a dog, the price of wine, the price of a dead animal (i.e., one not properly slaughtered), and more.

### 3. Differences in Attitudes to Jews and Christians

The examples cited here are but a tiny fraction of the material which could be quoted on this subject. An interesting question is: Do the Koran and the tradition differentiate between Jews and Christians? In fact, the attitude would appear to be the same. In Sura 5:51/56 we have: "O believers, take not Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends of each other. Whoso of you makes them his friends, is one of them." Interestingly, the traditions cited in connection with this verse<sup>17</sup> deal with the question: What is the law on consuming animals slaughtered by Christian Arabs and marrying their daughters? This is proof that these traditions are early, since they are from a period when the problem was still acute and the process of Islamization was just beginning. One tradition tended to forbid it, specifically mentioning the Arab-Christian tribe of Taghlib which it compared to the "Christians-of-the-children-of-Israel." (Is this merely confusion or is it directed at the Judeo-Christians?) Another tradition set a special law for the Arab Christians and permitted consumption of animals slaughtered by them and the marriage of their women.

However, there is another verse which differentiates between Jews and Christians. In the same Sura, 82/85: "Thou wilt surely find the most hostile of men to the believers are the Jews, and the idolaters; and thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to believers are those who say 'We are Christians'; that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud." The tradition connects this verse with another, Sura 3:55/48: "When God said, 'Jesus, I will take thee to Me and will raise thee to Me, and I will purify thee of those who believe not, I will set thy followers above the unbelievers, till the Resurrection day,'" about which there is a tradition: "The Christians are to be above the Jews until the day of Judgment, for there is no land where the Christians are not above the Jews, neither in the east nor the west. The Jews are degraded in all the lands."

In these traditions the Christians have a clear priority over the Jews. If we posit that the early tradition reflects the historical development of early Islam and that the political, economic, and social reality was apt to produce this preference, there is no doubt that these traditions reflect this reality.

As has been stated, this tradition has remained alive to this very day. It is interesting to see this tradition of preference for Christians over Jews in nineteenth-century Egypt. The accounts of the orientalist Edward William Lane's travels in Egypt<sup>18</sup>, written in 1835, contain interesting confirmation of this. To be sure, Lane was a Christian observer and clearly a concerned party, but his testimony is generally accepted as reliable. Besides which, the Jewish minority in Egypt at that time was too small to create the impression of being an economic or any other sort of power which might arouse antisemitic associations.

On the difference in the Muslims' attitudes toward the Jews and the Christians, Lane first of all mentions the verse mentioned above, Sura 5:82/85,

according to which the Jews are the greatest foes of the believers. Apparently, that is what Lane heard in Egypt, and he says that that is the reason why the Jews are most hated. Later on he recounts the tale of the Jew who greeted another Jew and (in error) said to him "Good morning, sheikh Muhammad," for he thought he was a Muslim acquaintance. The Jews seized the Jew and beat him severely because he thought to wish a Muslim well. Lane heard this account from a Muslim who sought to prove to Lane that Jews would beat anyone who means to wish a Muslim well. Lane also cites a standard phrase which he says he heard in Egypt: "Such a one hates me with the hate of the Jews."

Describing the living conditions of the Jews, Lane reports: "Though their houses have a mean and dirty look from without, many of them contain fine and well-furnished rooms. The more wealthy among them dress handsomely at home, but put on plain or even shabby dress before going out." In his opinion, the reason for this is that the Jews thought they must appear condemned to perpetual misery and degradation in keeping with the interpretation of Sura 2:61/58, as mentioned above.

We have cited only a few examples. Tracing the chain of the tradition is a very arduous task in which scholars more able and gifted than I am have already labored, researched, and brought to light much that is new on the subject. The important thing, however, is that if the oral tradition reflects the developments in early Muslim society, then the traditions about the Jews, without doubt, not only formed the ideological infrastructure of the anti-Jewish legislation but were also a reflection of the actual attitude toward the Jews in the first two centuries of Islam's existence. It is not inconceivable that in these traditions something of the Byzantine or the early Iranian legacy was absorbed. It is also not beyond possibility that apostates had a hand in the matter. It may even be that the influence of these traditions on the Arabic speaking Muslims over the generations was greater than their influence upon other Muslims. For all practical purposes, however, it makes no substantial difference.

## Notes

1. M. Perlmann, "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Cambridge, Mass., 1974, pp. 103-138), and especially the article mentioned in the bibliography *ibid.* of G. Vajda, "Jahs et musulmans selon le hadith," *Journal Asiatique* 229(1937):57-129 which also extensively treats early Islam's attitude to the Jewish Halakha and the laws of Islam suspected to be of Jewish origin.
2. From the treatise by Ghazi Ibn al-Wasiti (end of the thirteenth century), published with English translation by R. Gottheil, "An Answer to the Dhimmis," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 41(1921):366, 429.
3. The Abbasid caliphs claimed descent from Abbas, Muhammad's uncle.
4. See: S. D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs* (New York, 1967), especially p. 65.
5. The complete text of the Conference was published in Arabic and English in Cairo in 1970. (Its English title is *The Fourth Conference of the Academy of Islamic Research*). Selections from the English edition were published by D. F. Green, *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel* (Geneva, 1971).

6. The edition under discussion was published in Egypt in 1939 (and apparently was reprinted there in 1961; see Y. Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes to Israel* (Jerusalem, 1972), p. 492, n. 7). M. Perlmann published a critical edition of the treatise by Samau'al al-Magribi, with English translation, in the *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 32(1964).
7. On the development in Islam from a traditional hatred of the Jews to antisemitism of the European type, see: Y. Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes*, p. 218ff. On *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and its connection with the Arab-Jewish conflict, see E. Rubinstein's survey "The Protocols of Mizrah he-Hadash 26(1978):37-42.
8. The verse numbers cited are from the European edition by G. Flügel. Where these differ from those of the Royal Egyptian edition, the Egyptian numbers are given first and then the numbers according to the Flügel text. The English rendering is mostly that by A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, Oxford 1964.
9. There are interpretations ascribed to Muhammad's companions such as his cousin, 'Abdallah Ibn 'Abbas. These attributions are most doubtful, but by the mid-eighteenth century the earliest interpretations were already in writing.
10. The identical expression, in the sense of an everlasting decree, also occurs in Sura 3 of the Koran, 108/112.
11. As was apparently done with most of the traditions during the second century of the Hegira. Most of the traditions cited here are from the comprehensive commentary of Muhammad b. Jarir at-Tabari (died in the year 923 c.e.) and are found in parallel versions in most of the collections of the tradition assembled in the ninth and early tenth centuries c.e.
12. The source of the Arabic word (untranslated in the Hebrew by Rivlin) is apparently Aramaic (there are those who think it reached the Arabic language from the Ethiopic) and means worship of the idols.
13. See, for example, Tabari, part 4, p. 293.
14. Part 1, p. 232ff. With parallels in all the collections of the tradition. These collections are discussed at length by Vajda (see above, n. 1), pp. 93-99.
15. That is, he restored it. In this connection the phrase "revitalizing the commandment" or "revitalizing the custom" was widely used.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 277ff. On the Christians of the Taghlib tribe see Vajda, *op. cit.*, p. 114 n. 4.
18. E. W. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London, 1860). For this material see pp. 554-556.