

THE CONVERGENCE OF

Judaism and Islam

Religious, Scientific,
and Cultural Dimensions

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1

Introduction

MICHAEL M. LASKIER AND YAACOV LEV

The single and collaborative leading works on Jews and Muslims in medieval and modern times published in English during the past four decades include Shelomo Dov Goitein's *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); Bernard Lewis's *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Steven M. Wasserstrom's *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Joshua Blau's *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study of the Origins of Middle Arabic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); Norman A. Stillman's *Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979); and Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astren, eds., *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communications, and Interaction: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner* (Boston: Brill, 2000).

Goitein's *Jews and Arabs* paints a rather idyllic picture of Jewish-Muslim relations. Most of his analysis extends from the early days of Islam on into the fourteenth century. Although of superb quality, it is a general work. The same holds true for Lewis's analysis in *The Jews of Islam*, which is less diverse. It probes the links between Islam and other religions, general Judeo-Muslim traditions, as well as the late medieval and early modern periods that refer to Jews and Muslims in Sunni and Shiite milieus. Wasserstrom's *Between Muslim and Jew* sheds significant light on specific Jewish-Muslim interaction in the context of messianism, Midrash, the influence of Judaism on the emerging Shiite community, and class structure. Conceptually, Wasserstrom builds upon the findings of social and

political historians regarding interreligious symbiosis. This excellent book is confined to early Islam.

Blau's pioneering study *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic* strictly concerns the symbiotic aspects of language and linguistics. Stillman's *Jews of Arab Lands* is a historical source book that is largely based on a wealth of primary documents, many of them published in their entirety. It covers the period from early Islam until 1880. The twenty-eight essays subsumed in the edited volume honoring William M. Brinner analyze and document Jewish-Muslim coexistence from the advent of Islam until the 1970s. It encompasses religious, historical, philosophical, linguistic, literary, and political themes. Albeit an impressive thematic undertaking, it seeks to cover in a single book an extremely broad period and suffers from a periodization imbalance: the overwhelming majority of the essays relate to the Middle Ages.

The Convergence of Judaism and Islam with its sixteen chapters is the most comprehensive and exhaustively written collection of interdisciplinary essays to date on the Judeo-Muslim experience dating from medieval times to the advent of modernity. This is its *raison d'être*. There is innovative research into fresh topics pertinent to the days of the prophet Muhammad, the great caliphates, and the multiethnic Muslim empires at the height of their achievements and during their decline. The book is not rigidly structured according to chronological or thematic principles, nor does it follow a strict historical-chronological mode. The broader thematically based essays are complemented by specialized problem studies, all of which make larger points. The chapters do not run consecutively and successively from one early period or century to the next with perhaps the sole exception of studies relating to Jews in early Islam. Even the essays that focus on the modern period relate largely to the persistence and vitality of the *traditional* Judeo-Muslim relationships and commonalities. In several Islamic societies as late as the 1930s, the benefits of modern-style education or the dissemination of occidental ideals among Muslims and Jews were nonexistent or the lot of tiny privileged elites. Countries like Yemen remained immune to modernization for a long time. Changes occurred under European colonialism in much of the Arab and Islamic worlds, and among the non-Muslim minorities in their midst, owing to the gradual integration into the modern world economic system and with the rise of nation-states. These phenomena are investigated separately in our companion volume, also sixteen chapters long, entitled *The*

Divergence of Judaism and Islam: Interdependence, Modernity, and Political Turmoil.

How does this volume fit into the larger discourse in the field and contribute to its enhancement? Like other leading studies, the central thesis permeating our sixteen essays is that Judeo-Muslim ties during the medieval and early modern periods were relatively peaceful at many levels evolving around cultural diversity and intellectual and professional cooperation. This contrasted sharply with the grim realities in premodern Europe under Christendom where policies of institutionalized persecutions and acute socioreligious marginalization prevailed. At the same time, however, we contend that the positive convergence was not consistently idyllic and had been nuanced. While not denying the vitality of Goitein's "symbiosis," we share the term *commensality* expounded by Stillman as being a more suitable expression of coexistence derived from mutually advantageous gains. Similar to other books, we examine factors related to history, literature, culture, and religion. Judeo-Muslim relations are measured by the extent of closely knitted ties, mutuality, interpenetration, and occasional tensions and disagreements that arise at different levels. But there is more: several key essays extend the definition of the relationship to Jewish communal life per se in the realm of Islamic society, at times parallel to it.

As already suggested, the major studies listed above are more restricted in scope or suffer imbalances of historical periods. Other studies emphasize Judeo-Arabic language and literature or concentrate heavily on religious aspects. Several are textbook-oriented as well as reference works, or they are more theoretical in nature, expanding on works of existing scholarship by incorporating symbolic and conceptual aspects of interreligious symbiosis. We believe very strongly that our project will have a lasting value.

Two broadly defined sections guide this volume: (1) premodern Jewish-Muslim religious judicial and mystical interaction, commonalities, and conflicts; and (2) scientific-intellectual, professional, and cultural pursuits. The opening chapter, "Fourteen Hundred Years of Intertwined Destiny in Judaism and Islam?" provides a comprehensive overview by Norman A. Stillman. Like Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, a leading scholar of Islam, Stillman points out that medieval realities significantly differed from modern ones. While taking a bird's-eye view of Jewish-Muslim interrelationships throughout the centuries, Stillman characterizes this

intertwined destiny as “commensality,” derived from the Spanish term *convivencia* (cohabitation, coexistence), which implies living together in a shared environment. This sharing applied well throughout the duration of the Ottoman Empire. Whereas much of the focus in his analysis is set on the Middle Ages and the early modern era, Stillman deviates to some degree by going beyond these periods. He admits that political factors of the modern era did hurt the Judeo-Muslim *entente*, yet other central reasons including the adoption by Muslim secular intellectuals, nationalists, and religious leaders of modern western anti-Semitic notions as well as Christian traditions of the blood-libels. Over time, anti-Jewish feelings gained momentum in the Muslim milieu through the radical Islamism—Sunni and Shiite—that extended beyond the Middle East and North Africa, including the European Union, where large concentrations of Jews and Muslim migrants could be found.

Section One—Religion, Law, and Mysticism—opens with Brannon Wheeler’s chapter, “Quran and Muslim Exegesis as a Source for the Bible and Ancient History.” Wheeler examines the concept of the “Arab” prophets in the Quran and early Muslim exegesis. Using Muslim exegesis and documentary evidence from the ancient and late antique Near East, he details how Muslim exegetes used biblical references and other pre-Islamic conceptions of prophethood to demonstrate that Muhammad was a continuation and culmination of an ancient Arab history of prophecy. In addition to illustrating how Muslim exegetes fashioned their authority vis-à-vis Judaism and Christianity, this Islamic conception of prophecy highlights the more general historical context from which biblical and Quranic notions of religious authority emerged from the common culture of the ancient Near East.

Bat-Sheva Garsiel’s “The Quran’s Depiction of Abraham in Light of the Hebrew Bible and Midrash” also analyzes the Quran, stressing the possible Jewish, Christian, Judeo-Christian, or Gnostic sources of inspiration for the Quranic revelation. Abraham emerges as a figure that is respected by the Bible and Quran. Although at first glance the Quranic depiction of Abraham “seems to be a modification of some earlier Jewish traditions,” Abraham is perceived in the Quran as a prophet, the father of the believers, and the first Muslim. The Prophet saw himself as the final prophet in the footsteps of Abraham, whose true monotheistic religion was falsified by the Jews and Christians.

In “Present at the Dawn of Islam: Polemic and Reality in the Medieval Story of Muhammad’s Jewish Companions,” Shimon Shtober contends with other aspects pertinent to the early Islam. He discusses the relationship between the Prophet and Arabia’s Jewish elite, concurrent with the precarious cultural and social climate to which ordinary Jews were then exposed.

“The Use of Islamic Materials by non-Muslim Writers” by Yehoshua Frenkel, provides a full spectrum of Jewish-Muslim interrelationship by painting a broad picture of Jews within the matrix of Muslim state and society. This essay is neither an investigation into the interdependence between Islam and Judaism nor an attempt to reveal commonalities in the holy sources. Relating to the post-632 CE periods under the caliphates, Frenkel argues that the Muslim version of the rise of Islam and the position of the Jews within the Muslim state was not challenged by the Jews, who instead chose to “manipulate the dominant Islamic version of the past and used it to tell a historical story that supported their own case.” He utilizes a sixteenth-century Hebrew text of Joseph b. Isaac Sambari (edited and published by Shimon Shtober) that recounts Jewish history under Islam, concluding that the non-Muslims “learned to read Islamic tradition in a subversive way” and have produced what can be dubbed a “counter history.”

It is thus acknowledged that all non-Muslim religious groups under the caliphates and later Muslim central authority usually refrained from challenging the hegemonic position of Islam and its laws head on. Notwithstanding, tensions arose when the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims were at a low ebb or once the latter felt particularly threatened as communities or as individuals.

Juliette Hassine’s “The Martyrdom of Sol Hachuel: *Ridda* in Morocco in 1834” is a case in point, focusing on the problem of Jewish conversion under Islam. In 1834, Sol Hachuel, a fourteen-year-old Jewish girl from Tangier, was beheaded, having been charged by a *Shari’a* court in Fez with accepting Islam and then reverting back to Judaism—an accusation which she denied. Backed by source material in French, Judeo-Arabic, and Hebrew, hitherto untapped, this study analyzes Judeo-Muslim relations based on the concept of *ridda* (apostasy). It defines Hachuel’s execution as martyrdom in the collective memory of Moroccan Jewry, while myths about her abounded. Thereafter, Jews in significant numbers

regarded the Muslim *qāḍīs*, Muslim witnesses who incriminated her, and even the Sharifian Sultan Abd al-Rahman as “losers,” “immoral men,” and “dishonest.” Whereas Hassine does not rule out that her sources may well be regarded as “apologetic literature” favoring Hachuel, there can be no doubt that her beheading affected Jewish-Muslim relations adversely in precolonial Morocco with long-range consequences.

As in nineteenth-century Morocco, Jews in other Muslim lands were either victimized by certain stringent aspects of Islamic jurisprudence or sought to benefit from its contents that proved advantageous to them. This appears to have been the case for Yemen in the 1930s, where issues concerning both Islamic Law and Halakha emerged. The study produced by Mark Wagner, “Halakha through the Lens of Shari‘ah,” is a case in point. In 1935, Jews in Ṣan‘a were in conflict over whether the Kuḥlānī Synagogue was private property or within the domain of a pious endowment (*waqf*). The Jewish leadership enlisted the ruling Imām Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn to help resolve the crisis. Simultaneously, prominent Yemeni Muslim jurists, too, became involved. What was the decision adopted by the Imam? Did it differ from the recommendations offered by the Muslim jurists? In the broader sense, to what extent were non-Muslim legal systems regarded as legitimate in post-Ottoman Islamic Yemen? Wagner addresses these and other intriguing issues.

The Judeo-Muslim interrelationship went beyond religious orthodoxy to include mysticism. Ronald C. Kiener’s chapter, “Jewish Mysticism in the Lands of the Ishmaelites: A Re-orientation,” is an attempt to rewrite the history of Jewish mysticism by examining its geographical origins and focusing on its medieval and premodern manifestations. It is also an effort to wrest the account of Jewish mysticism from its Eurocentric focus and place it instead in the context of Islamic culture. Kiener elaborates at length on the ways in which Islamic culture helped shape mysticism among the Jews beginning in ninth-century Baghdad and continuing with such currents as the Sufi-tinged Jewish pietist movement of thirteenth-century medieval Egypt, the ecstatic Kabbalah movement founded by Abraham Abulafia, and the origins of the so-called Spanish Kabbalah. His major thesis is that based on this research the centrality of Islamic culture cannot be ignored in developing a historical account of the evolution of Jewish mysticism.

Islam and Judaism complemented each other in other vital domains: the mathematical sciences, the professions, and cultural diversity. Section

Two—Scientific, Professional, and Cultural Pursuits—begins with Michael Katz’s chapter, “Al-Khwarizmi’s Mathematical Doctrines in Ibn Ezra’s Biblical Commentary.” Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (1098–1164) was something of a polymath, best known for his biblical commentaries. He was also a mathematician, and Katz discusses the impact of al-Khwarizmi’s mathematics on Ibn Ezra’s writings. Al-Khwarizmi (780–845) was a luminary from whose name and works are derived terms such as *algebra* and *algorithm*, while Ibn Ezra is considered a transmitter of al-Khwarizmi’s mathematical ideas to Europe. As far as Ibn Ezra’s use of al-Khwarizmi’s mathematical principles in his biblical commentary, Katz points out that “over the years Ibn Ezra’s approach was challenged from both the religious and scientific points of view.” Nonetheless, he states, “No one can deny the elegance with which Ibn Ezra integrates mathematics into his biblical exegesis.”

Although during the Middle Ages Jews and Muslims collaborated in mathematics and other sciences, while Jews are known to have contributed to the field of medicine, the point that pharmacy was a Jewish profession is less well known. The fact that two of the most popular pharmacopoeias were composed by Jews is even more esoteric. Leigh N. Chipman’s chapter, “Pharmacopoeias for the Hospital and the Shop: *al-Dustur al-bimaristani* and *Minhaj al-dukkan*,” examines two thirteenth-century pharmacopoeias, one written by Jewish Karaite physician Abu al-Fadl Dawud ibn Sulayman ibn Abi al-Bayan al-Isra’ili and the second by the other little known Jewish druggist, Abu al-Muna Dawud ibn Abi Nassar al-Kuhin (Cohen) al-‘Attar al-Haruni al-Isra’ili. One of these pharmacopoeias (*al-dustur al-bimaristani*) was aimed at hospital use, while the second (*Minhaj al-dukkan*) was designated for private pharmacies. Both texts were written in Arabic, and Chipman asks whether the Jewishness of the authors is reflected by their works or had influence on the content. She states that these works were “aimed principally at a non-Jewish audience” and that they “express no clear-cut religious identity beyond a general monotheism.”

The benefits reaped by the Jews under Arab Islam at its zenith through the enrichment of medieval Hebrew and poetic creativity—infused by Arab poetry—compares well with the progress they made in science and the professions. This is lucidly corroborated by Libby Garshowitz’s “Jewish Parody and Allegory in Medieval Hebrew Poetry in Spain,” where she refers to Anadaluia as the place this decisive encounter took place. Her

discussion is focused on the transmission of Arabic culture in Hebrew guise into the Jewish communities of twelfth-century Christendom. Of particular importance is the love poetry of Jacob ben Elazar (c.1170–1235), author of a ten-chapter collection (*maqama/mahberet*) of love stories composed in about 1233. She singles out chapters 7 and 9 and points out that Jacob ben Elazar's poetry testifies to his "virtuosity and adroitness in the Hebrew language" and the contribution of Arabic poetry in this context.

The following three chapters complement Garshowitz's study on Andalusia: Merav Rosenfeld-Hadad's "The Holy Book of Praises of the Babylonian Jews: One Thousand Years of Cultural Harmony between Judaism and Islam," Amnon Shiloah's "Encounters between Jewish and Muslim Musicians throughout the Ages," and Efrat E. Aviv's "'Estos Makames Alegres' (These Cheerful Macams)—External Cultural Influences on the Jewish Community of Izmir on the Eve of the 'Young Turk Revolution.'"

Merav Rosenfeld-Hadad devotes attention to the impact of Arabic-Islamic paraliturgical songs on Jewish culture and Hebrew poetry, with roots in Iraq, pointing out that since the days of the 'Abbasid Caliphate in the lands of Islam, the content of the Jewish religious poems "comprises themes and ideas that were inspired by the Quran and the Hadith as well as Arabic poetry, Islamic philosophy, theology, and mysticism. . . . It lasted more than a thousand years . . . and continued across the Ottoman Empire, when Islam was no longer as strong and powerful. Such influence is still evident in the Aleppo-Syrian Jewish community of New York."

Amnon Shiloah's chapter is about music and musicians. He describes the collaboration of the renowned Jewish musicians and their Muslim counterparts and fleshes out important illustrations of such interaction mainly in Tunisia, Iraq, Egypt, Uzbekistan (Bukhara), and Tajikistan. Whereas Rosenfeld-Hadad speaks about Arabic-Islamic songs enriching Hebrew poetry, Shiloah turns to the influence of Jews on their non-Jewish milieu.

Efrat E. Aviv provides a wide array of cultural phenomena to include Ladino, Turkish, and aspects of early modernization. Yet her main concern is with the influence by Ottoman Turkish musicians and theatrical performers on Izmir's Jewry in the final decades of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Covering mid-eighteenth-century Morocco until the inauguration of the colonial era in 1912 is Jessica Marglin's "Poverty and Charity in

a Moroccan City: A Study of Jewish Communal Leadership in Meknes, 1750–1912.” This final chapter tackles the “culture of giving” and the ways Jews and Muslims coped with their less fortunate populations in one of Morocco’s most traditional urban conglomerations. The case study of Meknes is considerably important, for it is one of the key inland royal Moroccan cities where the Jewish community was sizeable. Marglin applies charity and poverty to the broader Middle Eastern/North African context. Her findings reveal that (1) prior to the penetration of European concepts about charity, Jews and Muslims viewed poverty as a permanent and natural reality that could be treated but by no means eradicated; (2) both groups portrayed the poor either as inferior beings worthy of some contempt or innocent victims of their fate; (3) donating to charity in order to assist the poor or scholars was a religious duty (by way of *waqf* endowments among Muslims and *heqdeshim* among Jews), particularly pronounced during holidays and feasts; and (4) while Meknessi Jews regarded poverty as a fact of life that could not be altered, they nevertheless went beyond providing temporary relief. Part of the communal leadership’s goal had been to protect their members from avoidable impoverishment, by centralizing their responses to poverty and charity. Their Muslim counterpart chose not to act in a similar fashion.

2

Judaism and Islam

Fourteen Hundred Years of Intertwined Destiny? An Overview

NORMAN A. STILLMAN

One does not have to be a specialist in Comparative Religion, Islamic, Jewish, or Middle Eastern Studies to know that Muslim-Jewish relations are not—on the whole—ideal at this moment in time. Usāma bin Lādin has on numerous occasions over the past few years called for a *jihād* against “the Jews and the Crusaders.”¹ The tropes and themes of both European medieval and modern post-Enlightenment anti-Semitism are to be found among the principal tenets of virtually all contemporary Islamist groups. This is irrespective of whether they are Sunni, such as the Ikhwān al-Muslimūn, al-Qā’ida, al-Jamā’a al-Islāmiyya, and Ḥamas, all in the Middle East, or Jamī’at al-’Adl wa’l-Iḥsān and an-Nahḍā in the Maghreb, or Ḥizb ut-Taḥrīr in Europe, or for that matter whether they are Shī’ī, as in the case of Khomeinism or Ḥizbollāh.²

But it is not only among the Islamists who, after all, represent a small minority among Muslims, that such ideas have currency, but alas, among many members of the broader Muslim population as well. When the Malaysian prime minister, Mahathir Mohammed, said in a speech before the Organization of the Islamic Conference in October 2004 that “today the Jews rule the world by proxy” (an allusion to the topos of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*), he not only received unanimous applause from the kings, presidents, amirs, and ministers in attendance, but was praised even by such a widely respected and generally enlightened figure as the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai.³

There can be no doubt that the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism across the broad spectrum of contemporary discourse is a concomitant of the Muslim world's emotional and political engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, such ubiquitous fantasies as the Blood Libel or the Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world are without any precedence in the *longue durée* of Islamic thought. Like so many aspects of modernity in Asia and Africa, these ideas are Western imports, historically un-Islamic, and have been branded as such by a few bold and enlightened Muslims.⁴

This lamentable hostility has, regrettably, been reciprocated within certain quarters of Jewry as well. Visceral anti-Islamic sentiments can be found among extreme religious-nationalist quarters both in Israel and the Diaspora. For decades, popular, generally nonacademic, historians have been producing revisionist accounts of the Judeo-Islamic historical encounter which emphasize a "persecution and pogrom" approach that is the very antithesis of the *Wissenschaft des Judentum's* "golden age" vision, but like the latter, this is a polemical distortion of the past and, indeed, a more seriously distorted one. Fortunately, this anti-Islamism is even more of a minority fringe phenomenon in the Jewish world than is its homologue in Muslim society.⁵

The widespread contemporary animus obscures the fact—in the public mind, at least—that the historical relations between Muslims and Jews, and between Islam and Judaism, have been far different in the course of the 1,400 years since the birth of Islam. And while never idyllic—nothing in human history has ever been so—the cultural interaction was for long periods mutually beneficial, and interpersonal relations were often good, at times even cordial, and certainly far more nuanced than the contemporary state of affairs would suggest. There is also a tragic irony in all of this, since Islam and Judaism have so much in common and have contributed so much to each other's development.

As to the issue of "Intertwined Destiny" as posed by the title of this chapter, it should be emphasized that one does not mean to imply the element of Divine Providence or preordination—something best left to the theologians—but rather, whether or not these two religious civilizations, Judaism and Islam, have been intertwined in what the arbiter dictum of English usage, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, calls the "weakened sense" of the word *destiny*, namely, "What in the course of events will become or has become . . . ultimate condition."⁶ When suggesting the title of this

chapter to the editors of this volume, it was debated whether or not it could be with or without the question mark, the reason being that with regard to the past the declarative is most appropriate, whereas as far as the future is concerned, the interrogative is more prudent. As a historian, this author feels more at ease when looking at the past, and it is in the course of the 1,400 years of the Judeo-Islamic *longue durée* that an intertwined destiny is most apparent.

The intimacy and mutuality of the social and cultural interaction between Judaism and Islam has been characterized by many leading scholars using the biological metaphor of symbiosis. The term was popularized by Shelomo Dov Goitein in the book *Jews and Arabs*, in which he referred to a period of “creative Jewish-Arab symbiosis, lasting 800 years [ca. 500–1300], during the first half of which the Muslim religious faith and Arab nationhood took form under Jewish impact, while in the second half traditional Judaism received its final shape under Muslim-Arab influence.”⁷

Goitein’s schema is too neat and tidy an oversimplification: first Judaism gives to Islam and then Islam to Judaism. Further, it does not properly appreciate the later Middle Ages, during which, he notes, Jews “had their full share in the appalling decline of those [i.e., Arab] countries,” and it totally ignores the modern era. Nevertheless, both the notion of symbiosis and Goitein’s basic periodization took hold and became the standard conceptualization in scholarship.⁸

However, since symbiosis can be characterized by either a parasitic or a commensal form of mutualism, it may be more appropriate to describe the interrelationship—the intertwined destiny—by the concept of “commensality,” which not only implies living together in a shared environment (like the Spanish term *convivencia*, often used by historians of Islamic Spain and early kingdoms of the *Reconquista*), but also, as its Latin root would indicate, “sharing from the same table” (in this case a table of culture, not comestibles).⁹

The destiny of Islam and Judaism was intertwined from the time of the prophet Muhammad’s mission in seventh-century Arabia. Without wishing to become involved in what has become on the whole an arid and futile debate that began with Abraham Geiger in the nineteenth century and was followed by Charles Torrey, Richard Bell, Tor Andrae, and Goitein in the twentieth, as to whether Jews, Christians, or Judeo-Christian and Gnostic sectarians were the primary sources of inspiration for the

Quranic revelations, suffice it to say that there was a significant and specifically Jewish component among those influences, including religious ideas, ethical notions, and biblical lore. This is being said while taking cognizance of Julian Obermann's still valid caveat that seemingly Jewish material could have come into earliest Islam from Christians, and seemingly Christian material could have been transmitted by Jews (although this author has always found this much less likely).¹⁰ However, there are simply too many significant parallels between Judaism and Islam to be reasonably explained as coming exclusively, or primarily, from non-Jewish sources. It is noteworthy that the great body of extra-Quranic lore which comprises an important part of Muslim scriptural exegesis (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān*) is actually called *isrā'īliyyāt*, or Israelite narratives, and some of the earliest transmitters such as 'Abd Allāh b. Salām and Ka'b al-Aḥbār were converts from Judaism. Early Islam's receptivity to Jewish hagiographic lore is further reflected in the oft-quoted *Ḥadīth* that enjoins traditionalists: *Ḥaddithū 'an Banī Isrā'īl wa-lā Ḥaraj* (Relate traditions from the Israelites without any qualms).¹¹

As to parallels, it is the very structural model of the Islamic religion, which is far closer to that of Judaism than it is to Christianity, that testifies to an early formative Jewish influence. But more importantly, this structural similarity laid the foundation for the historical commensality, the intertwined destiny of Judaism and Islam, over the centuries that followed. The most distinguishing features of this structural congruence were the shared, strict, uncompromising monotheism of the two faiths which rejects all iconography of Deity; the analogous notions of an all-encompassing Divine Law that is partially revealed in a written scripture and partially oral in form and that is conceived of as the path one follows (*halakha/sharī'a*); the parallel notions of purity and impurity (*ṭahara, ṭum'āl ṭahāra, najas*) and of religiously permissible and impermissible food (*kasher, ṭaref/ḥallāl, ḥarām*); and the physical marker of circumcision. All of these structural affinities helped to create the psychological possibility for a productive mutual existence. The Islamic perception of Jews as *ahl kitāb* (scriptural people) together with the more numerous Christians and Zoroastrians and the absence in Islam of the Christian claim to being *Verus Israël* and of the *odium theologicum* precluded the Jews being the ultimate "other" in Islamic society and also laid the groundwork for an interaction considerably less fraught with the tensions obtaining in Christendom despite the limitations of the *dhimma* social system.

For their part, the Jews' perception of Islam as not being idolatrous in the way Christianity was perceived also contributed to the course of the intertwined destiny. Jewish apocalyptic writings (the *midreshē ge'ūla*) interpreted the Islamic conquests as divine retribution visited upon wicked Edom (Byzantine Christendom).¹²

The five hundred years following the Muslim conquests were an axial period for both Judaism and Islam. The majority of world Jewry at that time now lived in the *Dār al-Islām*. The conquests engendered a veritable wave of urbanization, the like of which the world west of India had not seen since Greco-Roman times, and it was during this period that the majority of Jews (particularly in their great demographic center of *Bavel/Iraq*) completed the transition that had already begun in Late Antiquity from an agrarian to a cosmopolitan way of life.¹³

It was also during the first half of this period that Jews, from Iraq in the east to Spain in the west, went over to speaking Arabic, the lingua franca of the new *oikoumene*. But more important than merely adopting Arabic as their spoken vernacular, Jews by the tenth century were using Arabic in Hebrew characters for nearly all forms of written expression, including in the religious domain. Queries and responsa (*she'elōt u-tshūvōt*), scriptural exegesis (*parshanūt*), legal documents (*shetarōt*), and treatises of all sorts were written in Judeo-Arabic.

One reason for this thorough linguistic assimilation, as Joshua Blau has pointed out, is that in the Jewish Middle Eastern heartlands, Arabic supplanted Aramaic, the previous *koiné* of both Jews and Gentiles, which had already been used for both religious and profane writing. Thus the transition to Arabic seemed a natural process affecting everyone irrespective of nationality or confession.¹⁴ Three additional reasons should supplement Blau's explanation. First, there was the recognized linguistic kinship of Arabic to Aramaic and Hebrew that mitigated any feeling of foreignness. In fact, this kinship was duly recognized by the medieval grammarians and philologists. Second, there was the tremendous prestige of Arabic within Islamic society. This cult of language had a definite psychological impact upon the Jews of the Caliphate. Perhaps the most remarkable example of the profundity of this impact is Moses Ibn 'Ezra's well-known statement in his *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa'l-Mudhākara* that it was due to the power of their "eloquence and rhetoric" that the Arabs had been able to subjugate their great empire.¹⁵ The third reason for the thoroughgoingness of the linguistic assimilation is that there was a secular aspect in medieval

Islamic general culture for which Arabic was the medium, and thus it could safely be shared. By contrast, no such parallel existed in medieval Christian Europe where Latin was the language of a thoroughly clerical culture, and the vernaculars enjoyed no comparable prestige.

As noted previously, the centuries following the Muslim conquests proved to be an axial age for both Judaism and Islam. This period of more than half a millennium saw the classic systematization and formulation of their respective religious systems. Within the major urban centers of the Caliphate, Jews, together with other non-Muslims, took part in creating the secular aspects of the emerging medieval Islamic civilization and developed their own flourishing Jewish culture along parallel lines.

In Iraq, where the Gaonic academies were already flourishing centuries before Baghdad became the 'Abbāsid capital, some of the early schools of Islamic jurisprudence were established in close propinquity to the *battē midrash* and the *yeshivōt*. In fact, in early Arabic usage *majlis* was a Muslim parallel to *yeshiva/methivta*. Although the many striking parallels between *halakha* and *sharī'a* with regard to their scope of application, formulation, and methodology pose problems rather than solve them, they are indicative of a shared universe of religious, legal, and intellectual discourse, shared attitudes, and an awareness of what each other was doing. Already at the end of the nineteenth century, the father of Islamic Studies, Ignaz Goldziher, noticed the striking parallel—indeed, almost identical phraseology—in the formulas used by Muslim and Jewish jurisconsults in their responsa. But as Gideon Libson has astutely observed, the relationship between the legal sources of Jewish law and those of Muslim law “may involve a feedback model, according to which the Jewish system first influenced the Muslim, which at a later stage exerted influence on Jewish law.”¹⁶

This awareness was at its height during the Hellenistic renaissance in the medieval Islamic world, a period that Goitein has dubbed the Intermediate Civilization and Adam Mez, *die Renaissance des Islams*. In the cosmopolitan urban environment of Baghdad and other cities, there was widespread interconfessional contact within intellectual society. The famous shocked eyewitness account by the tenth-century Andalusian theologian Ibn Sa'di of an open philosophical *majlis* in Baghdad is but one of many accounts of nonsectarian cultural intercourse. Within this intellectual environment, Jewish religious leaders followed their Muslim counterparts in adopting philosophy in the defense of religion, often to meet

similar challenges raised by freethinkers, such as Ḥiwi ha-Balkhī coming from within the Jewish fold or Ibn al-Rawandī and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, who emerged from the Muslim community.¹⁷

The cultivation by Arabic-speaking Jews of Hebrew grammar and lexicography under the direct inspiration of Arab linguistic science (*fiqh al-lughā*) is yet another area in which Jewish culture was nourished and enriched by its contact with medieval Islamic High Culture.

But perhaps nowhere was this enrichment more evident than in the new style of Hebrew poetry that emerged in al-Andalus in the late tenth century which adapted not only the rhymes and meters of Arabic prosody but even some of its profane themes as well. Jews cultivated this new Hebrew poetry, not as Blau has suggested because they did not possess the necessary mastery of Classical Arabic, but rather because they had so thoroughly assimilated the cultural *mentalités et sensibilités* of the surrounding Islamic society in which poetry was considered the ultimate national art form, that they, therefore, consciously chose to compose their own poetic artistic endeavors in their own national language.¹⁸

There were, to be sure, limits to this Judeo-Islamic commensality on the level of high culture—limits that were inherent in a premodern, hierarchal society in which religion was the primary mark of identity and in which one religious community was regnant and all others subordinate.

Judeo-Islamic commensality on the level of high culture did indeed decline as the more cosmopolitan, secular aspects of the medieval Hellenistic renaissance and overall material prosperity of the Arabic-speaking parts of the Muslim world waned after the mid-thirteenth century. This marks the end of the “creative symbiosis” in Goitein’s historical vision. For him, as for many other students of “Classical Islam,” the social and intellectual transformation of the Middle East and North Africa in the later Middle Ages is interpreted according to a Spenglerian model of decadence after efflorescence. However, I would contend that the changes that took place ought to be seen as an adaptation by Islamic civilization to historical challenges from within and without.

In spite of the changed atmosphere and the concomitant tendency toward greater marginalization of non-Muslims generally within the Muslim world, Judeo-Islamic commensality remained strong on the level of popular culture up until the modern era. Even in those places where Jews were compelled by force of law or custom to reside in their own ghettoized (such as the *Mellāh*, the *Ḥārat al Yahūd*, the *Qā’ā*, or the *Maḥalleh*)

quarters, they were never as hermetically separated from their Gentile neighbors socially, linguistically, or culturally, as were their coreligionists in much of Christian Europe prior to the Emancipation.¹⁹

Jews were both producers and consumers of vernacular literature. They continued to occupy an important place in musical composition and performance. In Iran, Jewish musicians were guardians of the courtly musical tradition through the Qajar and Pehlavi dynasties, since music was something the Shi'ī mullahs viewed somewhat askance. In the Maghreb, Jewish musicians preserved *zajal* and *malhūn* notebooks brought over by Andalusian emigrés. In some countries—most notably the Maghreb and Yemen—they were the master artisans par excellence.²⁰

Almost everywhere, Jews were an integral part of the local economy, and with the coming of the Sephardim after the Expulsions from Iberia and Sicily, Sephardi and Livornese Jews not only infused new physical and intellectual life into Islamicate Jewish communities, which had undergone a serious demographic decline in the pandemics of the later Middle Ages, but played a significant role as middlemen between the Muslim world and Europe.

Modern times brought about a weakening and eventually an end to Judeo-Muslim commensality, and this, too, was part of the intertwined destiny in *OED*'s sense of “what has become.” The process of modernization which began with the mercantile and later physical penetration of the European powers into the Islamic world had a profound impact upon Jews and Muslims, albeit affecting them very differently. As noted above, commensality always had its limits. And while most Muslims tended to view the cultural, economic, and political forces from without with a natural suspicion and no little hostility, Jews and their minorities saw new horizons and were relatively quick to avail themselves of the opportunities afforded them first through the *Imtiyāzāt* (capitulations) and then, in far greater numbers, through the modern education provided by religious and cultural missionaries—in the case of the Jews, particularly by the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools. The latter gave its pupils far more than Western education. It gave them a new sense of themselves, new rising expectations, and an advantage of opportunity over the largely uneducated Muslim masses as the Middle East and Maghreb were being ineluctably drawn into what Emanuel Wallerstein has dubbed “the World Economic System.”²¹ Thus, even before our contemporary phenomenon of globalization, Jews participated in what Charles Issawi has referred to as “the rise of

the Millets,” and they came to have a place in the new economy that was out of all proportion to their numbers or their traditional social status.²² Having no true proprietary investment in the Islamic social system, many Jews came to identify with the colonial powers, and irrespective of the strength of their attraction to Zionism, only a tiny few were attracted to local or Pan-Arab nationalisms and virtually none to Pan-Islamic nationalism. The intertwined destiny had become a parting of the ways.²³

But did this spell the end of the intertwined destiny? The lack of a resolution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, the heightened tensions between Jews and the Muslim populations in several Western European countries, particularly in France, and the sorry state of Muslim-Jewish relations worldwide referred to at the beginning of this chapter would all seem to indicate that, for better or for worse, Muslims and Jews still share a destiny that is intricately intertwined.

Notes

1. The text of the document in English translation may be found at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223_fatwa.htm>. The text is discussed in Bernard Lewis, “License to Kill: Usama bin Ladin’s Declaration of Jihad,” *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1998).

2. See Norman A. Stillman, “Islamic Fundamentalism,” and “Islamic Diaspora,” in *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2005), 1:358–60 and 360–61, respectively.

3. Mahathir’s remarks received extensive press coverage. See, e.g., David E. Sanger, “Malaysian Leader’s Talk Attacking Jews Draws Ire from Bush,” *New York Times* (October 21, 2003); Paul Krugman, “Listening to Mahathir,” *New York Times* (October 21, 2003); and the editorials “Islamic Antisemitism,” *New York Times* (October 18, 2003), and “Le modèle Mahathir,” *Le Monde* (October 29, 2003).

4. See, e.g., Muqtedar Khan, “Some Muslims Give Islam a Bad Name,” *Wall Street Journal* (October 30, 2001).

5. This historiographical process is discussed in Stillman, “The Judeo-Islamic Historical Encounter: Visions and Revisions,” in *Israel and Ishmael: Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations*, ed. Tudor Parfitt (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 1–12.

6. *OED*, 1:702b, s.v.

7. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages*, rev. ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 10. For a thoughtful discussion of the notion of symbiosis in this context, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3–12.

8. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs*, 8. Bernard Lewis, e.g., speaks of “symbiosis” as well and adopts a similar periodization in *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). See particularly 77–78, referencing Goitein.

9. Stillman, "The Commensality of Islamic and Jewish Civilizations," in *Middle Eastern Lectures 2* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1997), 81–94. For the classic expression of the notion of *convivencia*, see Americo Castro, *The Spaniards*, trans. Willard F. King and Selma Margaretten (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). See also the comment on Castro's terminology in Thomas F. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 292–93.

10. For a review of the historiographic debate, see Stillman, "The Judeo-Islamic Historical Encounter," 3; and also Julian Obermann, "Islamic Origins: A Study in Background and Foundation," in *The Arab Heritage*, ed. Nabih Faris (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 58–120.

11. See M. J. Kister, "Ḥaddithū 'an banī Isrā'īla wa-lā ḥaraja," *Israel Oriental Studies 2* (1972): 215–39.

12. For these apocalyptic midrashim, see Yehuda Ibn Shemuel (Kaufmann), ed., *Midreshē Ge'ūla* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Mossad Bialik, 1953), 31–48, 49–54, 162–98, and 254–86. See also Bernard Lewis, "An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History," *BSOAS* 13, no. 2 (1950): 308–38.

13. The main outlines of this process of transition are described in Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979), 27–35, and Stillman, "The Jew in the Medieval Islamic City," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. Daniel Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 3–13.

14. Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study of the Origins of Middle Arabic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 19–22. David J. Wasserstein has recently offered compelling new arguments concerning the Arabization process that provide considerable nuance to Blau's schema. See his "Why Did Arabic Succeed Where Greek Failed? Language Change in the Near East after Muhammad," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 22 (2003): 257–72, in particular 271–72 concerning the Jews.

15. Moses Ibn 'Ezra, *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa'l-Mudhākara*, ed. Montserrat Abumalhan Mas (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1985), 1:42; Hebrew translation, B. Halper, *Sefer Shirat Yisra'el (Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa'l-Mudhākara)* (repr. Jerusalem, 1966–67).

16. Ignaz Goldziher, "Über eine Formel in der jüdischen Responsenlitteratur und in den muhammedanischen Fetwās," *ZDMG* 53 (1899): 645–52; Gideon Libson, "Halakhah and Reality in the Gaonic Period," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam*, ed. D. Frank, 98n105. For a brief survey of the question, see Yaakov Meron, "Points de contact des droits juif et musulman," *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984): 83–117. On the possible Jewish influences at the early stage, see J. R. Wegner, "Islamic and Talmudic Jurisprudence: The Four Roots of Islamic Law and Their Talmudic Counterparts," *American Journal of Legal History* 26 (1982): 26–29. However, see Goitein's caveat in his essay "The Birth Hour of Muslim Law" in *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Leiden: Brill, 1966): 126.

17. Goitein, "The Intermediate Civilization," in *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (ed. S. D. Goitein), 54–70; and Adam Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islams* (Heidelberg, 1922; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968). From the time of Wissenschaft des Judentums scholars, the philosophical encounter between Islam and Judaism in this period

has been one of the two principal foci of scholarship in Judeo-Islamic studies. The pioneer work is Salomon Munk, *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe* (Paris: 1859; repr., Paris: Librairie Philosophique de J. Vrin, 1927) and one of the best recent works is Lenn E. Goodman, *Jewish and Islamic Philosophy: Crosspollinations in the Classic Age* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). Ibn Sa'di's account is quoted by Alexander Altmann in his Translator's Introduction to Saadya Gaon, *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (Oxford: East and West Library, 1946), 13–14.

18. For the juxtaposition of Blau's views and my own, see Blau, "Medieval Judeo-Arabic," in *Jewish Languages: Themes and Variations*, ed. Herbert H. Paper (Cambridge, Mass: Association for Jewish Studies, 1978), 121–31, and Stillman, "Response," 137–41.

19. For an overview of the process of social isolation, see Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands*, 64–94.

20. For Jews and vernacular literature, see Stillman, "The Judeo-Arabic Heritage," in *Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry: From the Golden Age of Spain to Modern Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 48–51, 54nn20–23; on Jews as musicians in the Maghreb, see Amnon Shiloah, "Music," in *Morocco*, ed. Haim Saadoun (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2003), 205–12 [Heb.]; Shiloah, "Music," in *Tunisia*, ed. Haim Saadoun (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2005), 184–92 [Heb.]; and Norman A. Stillman and Yedida K. Stillman, "The Art of a Moroccan Folk Poetess," *ZDMG* 128, no. 1 (1978): 66–67; for the Jewish role in Iranian music, see Habib Levi, *Ta'rikh-i Yahūd-i Irān*, vol. 3 (Tehran: Beroukhim, 1960), 435–36, 1011. The literature on the Jews as artisans par excellence in the Maghreb and Yemen is very rich. See Robert Attal, *Les Juifs d'Afrique du Nord: Bibliographie*, rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1993); Erich Brauer, *Ethnologie der jemenitischen Juden* (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1934), 233–55; and Esther Muchawsky-Schnapper, "The Arts," in *Yemen*, ed. Haim Saadoun (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2002), 155–60 [Heb.].

21. The role of the Alliance has been the subject of several major studies, the two most important of which are Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862–1962* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983) and Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). See also Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 3–64.

22. Charles Issawi, "The Transformation of the Economic Position of the Millets in the Nineteenth Century," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (London: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 261–85.

23. Stillman, "Frenchmen, Jews, or Arabs? The Jews of the Arab World between European Colonialism, Zionism, and Arab Nationalism," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner*, ed. Benjamin Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astren (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 123–38; also Stillman, "Middle Eastern and North African Jewries Confront Modernity: Orientation, Disorientation, Reorientation," in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 59–72.