



from
Sacred Texts
to
Solemn
History

The Legacy of **ISLAMIC**
ANTISEMITISM

Edited by **ANDREW G. BOSTOM**

Foreword by **IBN WARRAQ**

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *THE LEGACY OF ISLAMIC ANTISEMITISM*

“Dr. Andrew Bostom has written and edited the definitive book on Muslim antisemitism. Bostom demolishes, once and for all, the myth that Muslim antisemitism is a twentieth-century European import, conclusively demonstrating that its grim history is as old as Islam itself. This is a priceless, indispensable, and authoritative resource that is being made available when it is most needed.”

—Richard L. Rubenstein, President Emeritus, University of Bridgeport; Lawton Distinguished Professor of Religion Emeritus, Florida State University; and author of *After Auschwitz*, *The Cunning of History*, and *Jihad and Genocide: The Nuclear Dimension* (forthcoming)

“It has long been a staple of anti-Israel propaganda that Muslims have never had anything against Judaism or Jews but only against Zionism and Zionists. Andrew Bostom debunks this spurious claim by exposing a deep and pervasive anti-Jewish bigotry dating to Islam’s earliest days, and indeed to the Muslim Prophet Muhammad himself. Small wonder that some of the hoariest and most bizarre themes of European antisemitism should have struck a responsive chord when they made their way into the Islamic and Arab worlds over the course of the centuries, turning them into the most prolific producers of antisemitic ideas and attitudes in today’s world.”

—Efraim Karsh, Head of Mediterranean Studies, University of London, and author of *Empires of the Sand: The Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East 1789–1923* and *Islamic Imperialism: A History*

“Andrew Bostom has performed a rare and welcome service with the publication of *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism*. He has patiently assembled an enormous body of primary sources that documents the brutal Jewhatred that has characterized much of Islamic culture from its earliest days. The book’s importance goes far beyond the historical record, for it shows convincingly that the fledgling movement—and widespread Western hopes—to reform Islam, and imbue it with anything approaching true toleration, faces enormous obstacles.”

—Dr. Michael Ledeen, author of *Universal Fascism* and *The Iranian Time Bomb*, and resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute

“For years scholars focused almost exclusively on the roots of Christian and secular antisemitism to understand the animosity targeted toward Jews in Western civilization during more than two millennia. But there’s a parallel tradition, one far more explosive today: Islamic antisemitism and anti-Zionism. It’s crucial that we don’t shy away from analyzing its misconceptions, its history and strategies. Andrew Bostom offers a wideranging sampler of readings to start the task, from the Qur’an itself and the early biographers of Muhammad to the premodern theologians and jurists, and onward to the major articulators of discontent in the modern era. His eye-opening anthology should become a

essential resource.”

—Ilan Stavans, Lewis-Sebring Professor in Latin American and Latino Culture and Five-College 40th Anniversary Professor, Amherst College, and author of *The Disappearance: A Novella and Stories and editor of The Schocken Book of Modern Sephardic Literature and The Scroll and the Cross: 1,000 Years of Jewish-Hispanic Literature*

“Andrew Bostom’s new book, *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism*, demolishes the fashionable but dangerous myth that there was no antisemitism in the Muslim world until the Middle East became ‘infected’ with it by Nazi propaganda in the 1930s. As in his earlier work, *The Legacy of Jihad*, Dr. Bostom has rendered an invaluable service to those who are interested in understanding the historical realities of Islam, free from the distortions of political correctness. Both books should be mandatory reading for those who wish to grasp the enormous challenge that Islam poses to the free and open societies of the West.”

—Lee Harris, author of *Civilization and Its Enemies: The Next Stage of History* and *The Suicide Reason: Radical Islam’s Challenge to the West*

“Andrew Bostom’s brilliant and extensive research and documentation put an end to the myth of Muslim tolerance of Jews often expressed when we say, ‘We don’t hate Jews, we hate Israel.’ The question now is, are we going to face uncomfortable truths and end our denial or continue the unspeakable hatred?”

—Nonie Darwish, author of *Now They Call Me Infidel*

“*The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism* is the most comprehensive analysis of the anti-Jewish hatred that has been entrenched in Islamic culture and politics since the advent of Islam under Muhammad. This book is a must read for anyone who wants to understand what underlies the incessant Muslim animosity against Jews and the Jewish State of Israel, in particular.”

—Brigitte Gabriel, author of *Because They Hate*

“No one who wishes to assess the future—not just of Jews but of Enlightenment values—can neglect Andrew Bostom’s exhaustively researched, powerfully argued study of the past in *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism*.”

—Ron Rosenbaum, author of *Explaining Hitler* and editor of *Those Who Forget the Past: The Question of Antisemitism*

“... uses sacred texts and statements from authoritative Islamic scholars to show that antisemitism was present in the earliest stages of the religion and is not just a phenomenon of the past sixty years. By gathering these various resources, Bostom persuasively—almost overwhelmingly—demonstrates the antisemitic tendencies in Islam, presenting his case like a prosecuting attorney... Highly recommended for all libraries.”

“Dr. Bostom’s work documents Islam’s absolute hatred and systematic and barbaric persecution of Jews beginning with Muhammad, and lasting right through the twenty-first century. Islam did not have to rely upon Christian or Nazi myths about the Jews; they had their own indigenous blood libel about the Jews which prevail to this day and explain why the Muslims won’t make peace with Israel, the only Jewish state. Bostom’s work is dramatic, devastating, chilling, comprehensive, and utterly heartbreaking, persuasive. It should be required reading for journalists and scholars the world over—especially those who believe that historical and theological Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance and that to say otherwise is to engage in ‘Islamophobia.’ ”

—Phyllis Chesler, Emerita Professor of Psychology and Women’s Studies, City University of New York, and author of *The New Antisemitism* and *The Death of Feminism*

The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism

**The Legacy of
Islamic Antisemitism**
From Sacred Texts to Solemn History
Edited by Andrew G. Bostom
Foreword by Ibn Warraq



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Prometheus Books
59 John Glenn Drive
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The book is dedicated to my beautiful, rapidly growing children, Esther and Yonah, and my mother, Rifka.

Introductory Quotes

The nation of Ishmael...persecute us severely and devise ways to harm us and to debase us....None has matched it in debasing and humiliating us. None has been able to reduce us as they have. We have done as our sages of blessed memory instructed us, bearing the lies and absurdities of Ishmael. We listen, but remain silent....In spite of all this, we are not spared from the ferocity of their wickedness and their outbursts at any time. On the contrary, the more we suffer and choose to conciliate them, the more they choose to act belligerently toward us.

—Maimonides, *Epistle to the Jews of Yemen* (1172)

[T]he Jews are said never to pass under the triumphal arch of Titus in Rome. But if they were to react in a similar way to the many bitter memories they have of their treatment in Muslim countries, I do not guess where they would find a route not closed by like prohibitions.

—Abbe Goddard, *Le Maroc* (1858)

“The Koran, of course became a mine of anti-Jewish passages. The hadith did not lag behind. Popular preachers used and embellished such material.”

—Moshe Perlmann, introduction to Samau’al al-Maghribi’s *Ifham al-Yahud (Silencing the Jews)* (1964)

And humiliation and wretchedness were stamped upon them and they were visited with wrath from Allah. That was because they disbelieved in Allah’s revelations and slew the prophets wrongfully. That was for their disobedience and transgression.

—Qur’an 2:61

[A]bout His words “and humiliation and wretchedness were stamped upon them,” “These are the Jews of the Children of Israel.” I said: ‘Are they the Copts of Egypt?’ He said: “What have the Copts of Egypt to do with this? No, by God, they are not; but they are the Jews, the Children of Israel.”...E “and slew the prophets wrongfully,” He means that they used to kill the Messengers of God without God’s leave, denying their messages and rejecting their prophethood.

—Tabari (d. 923), great early Muslim historian and Qur’anic commentator on verse 2:61 above

Love of the Prophet requires hatred of the Jews.

—al-Maghili, prominent theologian in Morocco, late fifteenth century, from a verse he composed

Whenever a Jew is killed, it is for the benefit of Islam.

—Sirhindi, important Indian Sufi theologian of the early seventeenth century

[The] Koran describes the Jews with their own particular degenerate characteristics, i.e. killing the prophets of Allah, corrupting His words by putting them in the wrong places, consuming the people's wealth frivolously, refusal to distance themselves from the evil they do, and other ugly characteristics caused by their deeprooted lasciviousness...only a minority of the Jews keep their word...[A]ll Jews are not the same. The good ones become Muslims, the bad ones do not.

—Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, grand imam of Al-Azhar University, Cairo, 1996–present
from his *Banu Isra'il fi al-Qur'an wa al-Sunna (Jews in the Koran and the Tradition)* (1986)

Read history and you will understand that the Jews of yesterday are the evil fathers of the Jews today, who are evil offspring, infidels, distorters of [others'] words, calf-worshippers, prophet-murderers, prophecy-deniers...the scum of the human race whom Allah cursed and turned into apes and pigs....These are the Jews, an ongoing continuum of deceit, obstinacy, licentiousness, evil, and corruption.

—Abd Al-Rahman Al-Sudayyis, imam and preacher at the Al-Haraam mosque—the most important mosque in Mecca—April 19, 2002

Up to the very first day that I immigrated to America, I used to believe that Jewish people were not human creatures, that they had different features, different voices than the human race. Unfortunately, this is the way I was raised.

—Wafa Sultan, March 13, 2006

I have a confession to make. If you are Jewish...I used to hate you. I hated you because I thought you were responsible for the war which took my father from me for so long...When we had no water, I thought you closed the tap....If my mother was unkind to me, I knew you were definitely behind it. And when I failed an exam, I knew it was your fault. You are by nature evil, you had evil powers and you used them to evil ends. Learning to hate you was easy. Unlearning it was difficult.

—Ayaan Hirsi Ali, May 4, 2006

A Note on the Cover Art*

The cover art is a reproduction of Alfred Dehodencq's *Execution d'une juive au Maroc* (Execution of a Moroccan Jewess) painted in 1860. Dehodencq was a French painter (b. April 23, 1822, in Paris; January 2, 1882, in Paris), known for his images of Spanish and Arab life, purportedly influenced by "youthful obsession with the romantic writings of Byron and Chateaubriand."¹ Preferring color as a means of expression, Dehodencq's palette has been described as "rich, often gaudy, and his handling 'robust and sketchlike.'"² Dramatic scenes of violence, despotism, and fanaticism dominate his portrayals of Morocco.

Dehodencq's *Execution of a Moroccan Jewess* is based upon the actual execution of a Jewess from Tangier, Morocco—Sol Hachuel—believed to have occurred in 1834.³ Falsely accused of having become a Muslim, upon adamantly and steadfastly maintaining her Jewish faith ("A Jewess I was born, a Jewess I wish to die),"⁴ the seventeen-year-old Sol⁵ was beheaded publicly for this contrived "apostasy" from Islam.

A detailed near-contemporary account of Sol Hachuel's heroic martyrdom—based on eyewitness interviews⁶—was published in 1837 by Eugenio Maria Romero. The following is a summary of Romero's narrative.⁷

The younger of two children of Chaim and Simcha Hachuel, Sol was described as a beautiful young woman.⁸ Her father was a merchant of very modest means, but also a highly educated man who conducted Talmudic study groups in the Hachuel household. Through these community gatherings Sol acquired enough Jewish religious instruction to develop an unyielding confidence in her own Judaic beliefs. Typical of families that were not prosperous, Sol's mother kept house, leaving her daughter practically to herself. Sol developed a friendship with a Muslim woman, Tahra de Mesoud. Apparently Tahra entertained the pious Muslim hope—a particularly important impetus under the code of Maliki Islamic law predominant in Morocco—to convert infidels to Islam.⁹ Romero elaborates:

It being a precept of the Alcoran [Qur'an], the Arabs consider the conversion of a heretic (for such they deem all those of a different faith) to their belief as a most meritorious act; they hesitate not at the means they employ to make such conquests, when opportunities offer. The artful friend, when in conversation with the young Jewess, but as if undesignedly, never failed to boast of the excellence of her religion, the benefits it offered to its professors, and the esteem those who embraced it acquired from all true believers; but the amiable and innocent Sol,¹⁰ of a different disposition to her wily neighbor, listened to him only with pity, for firmly fixed in her belief, and an enthusiast of the laws in which she had been born, she attributed to excess of religious zeal, the constant eulogiums that the Moore bestowed on the dogmas of her faith.¹¹

Based solely on Tahra's denunciation of Sol to the Basha Arbi Esudio—which included the false claim of Sol's conversion to (and subsequent reversion from) Islam, an allegation punishable by death (for

apostasy) under Islamic law—the Basha had Sol brought before him.¹² Romero includes the following note regarding the court of Tangier:

The Governors of Tangier, when administering justice, sit at their doors, accompanied by their Secretaries. The soldiers, charged with the police and execution of their orders, stand about the same place with drawn swords and sticks; the accused is placed kneeling before the Governor; in this mode, justice is executed.

Sol told the Basha forthrightly she had never intended to convert to Islam:

You have been deceived, Sir.... I never pronounced such words: she [Tahra] proposed [conversion] to me, but I did not consent.¹³

Then, in the first of three iterations, Sol pronounced the memorable line that became her epitaph: “Jewess I was born, a Jewess I wish to die.”¹⁴

The Basha Arbi Esudio attempts to assure Sol’s conversion to Islam by enticement and coercion. He offered her protection from parental interference, wealth (in the forms of silk and gold), and “happiness,” but to no avail. Arbi Esudio then threatened the obstinate Sol for having adopted Islam and “reverted” to Judaism:

I will load you with chains....I will have you torn piece-meal by wild beasts, you shall not see the light of day, you shall perish of hunger, and experience the rigor of my vengeance and indignation, in having provoked the anger of the Prophet.¹⁵

Sol replied:

I will patiently bear the weight of your chains; I will give my limbs to be torn piece-meal by wild beasts; I will renounce for ever the light of day: I will perish of hunger: and when all the evils of life are accumulated on me by your orders, I will smile at your indignation, and the anger of your Prophet: since neither he, nor you have been able to overcome a weak female! It is clear that Heaven is not so auspicious to making proselytes to your faith.¹⁶

A further enraged Arbi Esudio then declared:

Atrocious blasphemer! ...you have profaned the name I revere; you are unworthy of my consideration; I will bury you in a secret dungeon, and smile when I see you drink of the cup of bitterness. Convey this Jewess to prison! ...Let her feel the effect of my vengeance, by being placed in the darkest cell!¹⁷

Dispatched to a lightless dungeon, Sol was detained incommunicado, with an iron collar around her neck and chains on both her hands and feet. Bribery alone secured her modest favors from the jailers.¹⁸ Her utterly distraught parents, acting in a manner that became customary for Moroccan Jews devoid of political rights and security, appealed to a European diplomat to obtain Sol’s release.¹⁹ Don Jose Rico,²⁰ the Spanish vice consul, made a vigorous but ultimately unsuccessful effort to free Sol.

The Basha ordered Sol to be sent to Fez (the imperial capital) to allow the sultan to decide her fate. Arbi Esudio also required that her hapless parents pay forty dollars for Sol's transport to Fez, as well as the fee for her execution. ²¹ Romero's account of these events includes the following details:

The Governor [Basha] summoned [Chaim] Hachuel before him and communicated the mandate of the Emperor; at the same time telling him that his daughter would depart for the Court on the following morning, and that within two hours he must bring him forty dollars for the expense of the journey.... The trembling and afflicted parent bewailed this sentence as the height of his misfortune, but the ferocious tyrant showed not the least compassion; he declared the impossibility of procuring the money in so short a period; the order was repeated, and he was told that if it was brought a single minute beyond the time, he should receive 500 blows of the bastinado.

The unhappy Hebrew resigned himself to fulfill, as best he could, the command of the Governor; but on his knees entreated that, since the departure of his unfortunate daughter could not be avoided, he might be permitted to accompany her. "I prohibit under pain of death," answered the proud Arab, "that neither you nor any of your family, nor any Jew travel within ten leagues of this impious girl." Having pronounced this in a most haughty tone, he ordered from his presence the afflicted father. ²²

Romero also notes:

[I]f a person is condemned to the bastinado, after having received it, he has to pay the executioner whatever he chooses to demand for inflicting it. ²³

Fortunately the impoverished Chaim Hachuel received forty dollars from Don Jose Rico, thus avoiding the brutal punishment of five hundred blows of the bastinado for nonpayment. Sere observes in his 1991 analysis, "A Jew at this time had to pay even for his own death." ²⁴

Romero subsequently describes how Sol was bound and transported by mule to Fez:

The most obdurate heart would have felt moved at so unfeeling an act. Sol was suddenly seated on the mule; her feet fettered, and tied with a strong cord which fastened round her hands, hurting her delicate flesh, a thousand turns and twists around her body fastened by the same rope to the trappings of the beast. ²⁵

In Fez, the sultan decided to have the Cadi ²⁶ prosecute and judge Sol. The Cadi summoned the Chachamim (Jewish sages), who (in conjunction with a concerted effort by the Jewish community) attempted to spare her life. ²⁷ Informed by the Cadi that Sol would be beheaded if she did not profess Islam, and that the overall Jewish community might be endangered, the Chachamim tried to persuade Sol to convert. Sol rejected their advice and accepted her martyrdom. Romero recounts the Cadi's reaction, having overheard the discussions between the Chachamim and Sol:

[H]e dispatched them. Immediately he went to his desk, took out the papers containing the cause of the Jewess, wrote on it her contumacy, referring to her repeated blasphemy of the Prophet and his dogmas, and condemned her to be publicly beheaded. ²⁸

Having refused even a pretense of conversion, Sol was condemned by the Sultan to beheading in public square in Fez. Sol prayed and fasted as the day of her execution approached. Masses of Arabs congregated on the day of her execution held in the Soco (major market) of Fez, on market day. Romero contrasts the anticipatory emotions of the Muslims, Jews, and Sol herself:

The Moors, whose religious fanaticism is indescribable, prepared, with their accustomed joy, to witness the horrid scene. The Jews of the city...were moved with the deepest sorrow but they could do nothing to avert it [the execution]; they could only assemble, and be prepared to act according to circumstances.... The troubled Sol spent the whole day in prayer and meditation; she refused food; and anxiously awaited the moment that would terminate her miserable existence.³⁰

On the day of her beheading, Sol was dragged to the execution site, where the executioner brandished his sword two or three times over her head. Sol was allowed to wash her hands and recite the Shema prayer, as she requested.³¹ Apparently, the sultan had instructed that the executioners wound Sol (which was done), in the hope of her last-minute conversion to Islam. However, upon seeing her own blood, Sol professed her innocence and denounced her persecutors. With that utterance, she was beheaded. Impressed by the courage and sincerity of this Tangierian Jewess, Fez's Jewish community paid to have not only her corpse and head, but also the bloodstained earth, retrieved for burial consistent with Jewish law. Sol Hachuel was buried, wrapped in linen cloth, in the Jewish cemetery of Fez, and subsequently bestowed the appellation Hasadiqua—the saintly.³²

Romero provides additional details that capture all these elements of the final execution day narrative: the fanaticism of the Muslim masses, the conduct of the executioners and their heroic victim, and the reaction of the Jewish community:

Compassion, mildness, grief, and every sentiment that could move the heart, were depicted on the countenance of the lovely victim; but pity is a feeling little known in Fez: the streets were crowded with Moors of all ages and sexes, who made the air resound with the discordant cries. "Here comes," said they, "she who blasphemed the Prophet-death! death! death! the impious wretch!"³³

These men [the executioners], hardened by cruelty, gave the order to march [Sol] to [her] death; they tied a strong rope round her neck, and commenced dragging her as if she were a beast.³⁴

[Sol] then raising her streaming eyes to heaven, she repeated with the utmost devotion, the Shema, which having concluded; kneeling and casting her eyes to the ground, she said to the executioner—"I have finished, dispose of my life!"³⁵

One of the executioners seizing the arms of the victim, bound them tightly behind her; then brandishing his scimitar in the air, holding her beautiful tresses, he slightly wounded her; in an instant, her bosom and clothes were covered with blood—"There is yet time," said he, "become Mahometan, and save your life!" But turning toward him, she said, "Do not make me linger—behead me at once—for dying as I do, innocent of any crime, the God

Abraham will avenge my death!” These were her last words—the executioner raised his arm—~~it fell—the scimitar separated the head from the trunk—in an instant, the most constant~~ her sex, fell a bleeding, lifeless corpse—she ceased to exist.—Horrid spectacle!³⁶

The Jews had engaged some Moors to take up the corpse, and gather the earth that was spotted with her innocent blood, the moment the execution was over. They faithfully performed the charge, wrapping her mortal remains in a fine linen cloth, [and] delivered it to the Jews assembled in their cemetery, where they were digging a deep grave for her adjoining to one in which reposed the ashes of a Sage of great reputation. The same day the Jewish martyr was interred amidst the tears and sobs of a numerous concourse of people who attended her obsequies.³⁷

Sol Hachuel’s martyrdom illustrates, starkly, the plight of Moroccan Jews—lower-caste, noncitizen *dhimmi* pariahs subject to the sacralized discrimination of Islamic law. Leon Godard’s 1866 travelogue, *Description et histoire du Maroc*, characterized the prevailing mid-nineteenth-century conditions for Moroccan Jewry (noting their status as being “somewhat better” in Tangier).³⁸

[I]n the cities, the Jews live in separate quarters surrounded by high walls called the *Mellah*, or the salted earth, dry and cursed. They are locked in from sundown to sunrise and on Holidays, all day. They pay the Moorish guards who protect them by guarding the door of this Ghetto, rarely cleaned, where foul-smelling trash accumulates and where a strange population swarms. It is divided by Synagogues and ruled by the rabbis who have great authority. They are the ones who allocate the capitation tax that the government sets for each *Mellah*, and who make sure the poor are helped using the common goods. They have eight days to pay the tax; after that, and without warning the *Mellah* can be pillaged. They have to give gifts to the Emperor at the four Muslim holidays and when there is a happy event like a birth or a marriage, they have to entertain the imperial family.

According to the laws, the Jews cannot cultivate earth,—own land or houses outside the *Mellah*,—use buildings as security,—ride a horse in front of a town or even in the country other than on a saddle for a mule,—or hit a Muslim, even to defend themselves except their own house if it has been violated,—be a witness in front of a Court or speak in front of tribunals. If allowed to speak in front of a tribunal, they have to be squatting in front of the judge. They cannot raise a bid for food in a Muslim market,—or walk in some streets, in front of Mosques or *Koubas*, without holding their slippers in their hands,—or get married without the permission of the Sultan....

They have to dress only in black or dark color,—wear a black hat different than the turban and not to tie with more than one knot the black scarf holding their headgear,—place to the right the opening of their *Yallah* or black or blue coat, so that the left arm is not free and the hood falls on the same side,—keep the black hat always visible, trying not to pull down the hood,—run to carry their dead to the cemetery, and be careful not to encounter a Muslim funeral.³⁹

David Littman compiled and translated primary source documents from the Alliance Israélique Universelle’s Moroccan archives covering the period between 1903 and 1912, some seventy to eighty

years after the execution of Sol Hachuel.⁴⁰ Repeated eyewitness accounts depict graphically what Littman aptly characterizes as “the humiliation, misery and exposure to physical violence which was still the lot of the ordinary Moroccan Jew in the first decade of the twentieth century.”⁴¹ A confirmatory official report presented by Jacob H. Schiff to US Secretary of State Elihu Root in November 1905, entitled “Jewish Restrictions in Morocco, Especially in the Interior,” stated bluntly in the accompanying enclosure, “which restrictions, when read by an American, appear more grotesque.”⁴² Finally, Serels provides this summary analysis of Moroccan Jewish behaviors in dealing with their oppressed status under Muslim rule, all of which are displayed in the tragic narrative *Hasadiqua*, Sol Hachuel:

The Jews had four responses to their lack of political rights and security. First, bribery; second, prayer and fasting; third, appeal for foreign intervention and protection; fourth, silent resignation to the consequences.⁴³

Editor's Note on the Text

Below I have provided a brief list of some of the most prominent spelling variants that are used given the range of translated languages, translators, and eras from which the materials derive, regardless of original language.

Readers may also wish to reference the indices if they have additional questions.

A'isha, Ā'isha, Aïscha, Aisha, A'isha, Āyishah, Aysha

Cadi, cadi, Qadi, qadi,

Caid, caid, caïd, Qaid, qaid, Kaid, kaid

Banu, Banū, Benou

Banu, Banū, Beni, or Benou Qurayza, or Qurayzah

dimmi, *dimmi*, *dimmī*, *dimmī*, *dhimmi*, *dhimmi*, *dhimmi*, *dhimmi*

Hijaz or Hijāz

jizya, jizyah

Muhammad, Mohammed, Mahomet

Sabbath or sabbath

Foreword by Ibn Warraq

Is Islamic antisemitism only a modern phenomenon? What of the so-called Golden Age of Islam, with its tolerance, above all as depicted in Islamic Spain? Here the willingness to accept the clichés of the Romantics is palpable. And for those whom we expect to have done their own research, and not merely to accept and pass on, these clichés so often disappoint.

Consider the case of Amartya Sen, a celebrated economist and winner of the Nobel Prize. Sen has, in recent years, written on subjects outside his normal area of research. Unfortunately, he seems not to have bothered to check his history, something that would have been easy given the resources available to him.

Here is how Amartya Sen treats, for example, the Myth of Maimonides. Amartya Sen tells us twice in his book *Identity and Violence* that when “the Jewish Philosopher Maimonides was forced to emigrate from an intolerant Europe in the twelfth century, he found a tolerant refuge in the Arab world.”¹ I do not know how to characterize this misinterpretation of history—“willful,” “grotesque,” “dishonest,” or “typical”? It is certainly an indication that in the present intellectual climate one can denigrate Europe any way one wishes, to the point of distorting history, without, evidently, any one of the distinguished scholars who blurbed the book raising an eyebrow. Ironically, the one reviewer who did object to Sen’s “potted history,” which “is tailored for interfaith dialogues,” was Fouad Ajami in the *Washington Post*.² Ajami reminded Sen that

this will not do as history. Maimonides, born in 1135, did not flee “Europe” for the “Arab world”: He fled his native Córdoba in Spain, which was then in the grip of religious-political terror, choking under the yoke of a Berber Muslim dynasty, the Almohads, that was to snuff out all that remained of the culture of *convivencia* and made the life of Spain’s Jews (and of the free spirits among its Muslims) utter hell. Maimonides and his family fled the fire of the Muslim city-states in the Iberian Peninsula to Morocco and then to Jerusalem. There was darkness and terror in Morocco as well, and Jerusalem was equally inhospitable in the time of the Crusader Kingdom. Deliverance came only in Cairo—the exception, not the rule, in a social peace maintained by the enlightened Saladin.

Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), Jewish rabbi, physician, and philosopher, was fleeing the Muslim intolerance of the intolerant Almohads who conquered Cordoba in 1148. The Almohads persecuted the Jews, and offered them the choice of conversion to Islam, death, or exile. Maimonides’ family and other Jews chose exile. But this did not bring any peace to the Jews who had to be on the move constantly to avoid the all-conquering Almohads. After a brief sojourn in Morocco and the Holy Land, Maimonides settled in Fostat, Egypt, where he was physician to the Grand Vizier Alfadhil, and possibly Saladin, the Kurdish sultan.

Maimonides’ *The Epistle to the Jews of Yemen*³ was written in about 1172 in reply to inquiries by Jacob ben Netan’el al-Fayyūmi, the then head of the Jewish community in Yemen. The Jews of Yemen were passing through a crisis, as they were being forced to convert to Islam, a campaign launched about 1165 by ‘Abd-al-Nabi ibn Mahdi. Maimonides provided them with guidance and with wh

encouragement he could. The Epistle to the Jews of Yemen gives a clear view of what Maimonides thought of Muhammad the Prophet, “the Madman,” as he calls him, and of Islam generally. This is what Maimonides writes:

You write that the rebel leader in Yemen decreed compulsory apostasy for the Jews by forcing the Jewish inhabitants of all the places he had subdued to desert the Jewish religion, just as the Berbers had compelled them to do in Maghreb [i.e., Islamic West]. Verily, this news has broken our backs and has astounded and dumbfounded the whole of our community. And rightly so. For these are evil tidings, “and whosoever heareth of them, both his ears tingle” (1 Samuel 3:11). Indeed our hearts are weakened, our minds are confused, and the powers of the body wasted because of the dire misfortunes which brought religious persecutions upon us from the two ends of the world, the East and the West, “so that the enemies were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side” (Joshua 8:22).

Maimonides points out that persistent persecutions of the Jews by the Muslims amounts to forced conversion:

[T]he continuous persecutions will cause many to drift away from our faith, to have misgivings, or to go astray, because they witnessed our feebleness, and noted the triumph of our adversaries and their dominion over us ...

He continues: “After him arose the Madman who emulated his precursor since he paved the way for him. But he added the further objective of procuring rule and submission, and he invented his well-known religion.” Many medieval Jewish writers commonly referred to Muhammad as *ha-meshugga*—the Madman—the Hebrew term, as Norman Stillman notes, being “pregnant with connotations.”⁴

Maimonides points to one of the reasons for Muslim hatred of Jews:

Inasmuch as the Muslims could not find a single proof in the entire Bible nor a reference or possible allusion to their prophet which they could utilize, they were compelled to accuse us by saying, “You have altered the text of the Torah, and expunged every trace of the name of Mohammed therefrom.” They could find nothing stronger than this ignominious argument.

He notes the depth of Muslim hatred for the Jews, but he also remarks on the Jewish tendency to denial, a feature that he insists will hasten their destruction:

Remember, my co-religionists, that on account of the vast number of our sins, God has hurled us in the midst of this people, the Arabs, who have persecuted us severely, and passed baneful and discriminatory legislation against us, as Scripture has forewarned us, ‘Our enemies themselves shall judge us’ (Deuteronomy 32:31). *Never did a nation molest, degrade, debase and hate us as much as they...* Although we were dishonored by them beyond human endurance, and had to put up with their fabrications, yet we behaved like him who is depicted by the inspired writer, “But I am as a deaf man, I hear not, and I am as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth” (Psalms 38:14). Similarly our sages instructed us to bear the prevarications and preposterousness of Ishmael in silence. They found a cryptic allusion for this attitude in the names of his sons “Mishma, Dumah, and Massa” (Genesis

25:14), which was interpreted to mean, “Listen, be silent, and endure” (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, ad locum). We have acquiesced, both old and young, to inure ourselves to humiliation, as Isaiah instructed us “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to the one that plucked off the hair” (50:6). All this notwithstanding, we do not escape this continuous maltreatment which well nigh crushes us. No matter how much we suffer and elect to remain at peace with them, they stir up strife and sedition, as David predicted, “I am all peace, but when I speak, they are for war” (Psalms 120:7). If, therefore, we start trouble and claim power from them absurdly and preposterously we certainly give ourselves up to destruction.

During the last fifteen years, certain Western scholars have tried to argue that, first, Islamic antisemitism—that is, hatred of Jews—is only a recent phenomenon learned from the Nazis during and after the 1940s, and, second, that Jews lived safely under Muslim rule for centuries, especially during the Golden Age of Muslim Spain. Both assertions are unsupported by the evidence. Islam 1—that is, the Islam of the texts, as found in the Qur’an and hadith (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet and his companions) and in the sira (the biography of Muhammad, which obviously overlaps with the hadith), and Islam 2—that is, the Islam developed or elaborated from those texts early on by the Qur’anic commentators and jurists, and then set in stone more than a millennium ago—and even Islam 3, in the sense of Islamic civilization—that is, what Muslims actually did historically—have all been deeply antisemitic. That is, all have been anti-infidel, so that Christians too are regarded with disdain and contempt and hatred, but the Jews have been served, or been seen to have merited, special animus.

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