

by principles of communal segregation. A stylistic hybridity of architecture, governmental allegiances with non-Muslim aristocracies and the utilization of long-standing pre-Islamic traditions of publicity, administration, military, and craftsmanship thus constituted the foundations of yet another late antique imperial dynasty.

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The Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina. By HAGGAI MAZUZ. Brill Reference Library of Judaism, vol. 38. Leiden: BRILL, 2014. Pp. xvi + 132. \$122, €103.

Jews and Judaism matter for Islam, especially for our knowledge of the birth hour of the new faith. If for no other reason, the prominence and the amount of space both receive in the Quran and in our sources for the life and career of Muḥammad would confirm this. Yet we know surprisingly little of Arabian Jewry at all times, in particular of their religious and spiritual life around 600 CE. Anything that promises to add to our knowledge is therefore welcome. In the book under review (and also in a series of recent articles), Haggai Mazuz undertakes to extend our knowledge in this area. In part he does this by close examination of episodes and information that have been looked at in the past, and in part by means of what he describes as a new methodology. Both present difficulties.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first, devoted to “Religious and Social Leadership,” does little more than collect together what we know of the leaders of the Jews of Medina in Muḥammad’s day. It identifies a large number of Jews and tells us stories attached to them, mainly of the failure of their struggles with Muḥammad. Disappointingly, it says nothing about the character of their names, which would seem to demand discussion, or about their language. The evidence, such as it is, suggests fairly full onomastic assimilation into Arab society; and perhaps even fuller assimilation linguistically. But that leaves us with a question: did they (all? some of them? just their rabbis? any of them?) know Hebrew, to say nothing of Aramaic, without which the Talmud might have been a closed book? We have no evidence from these Jews in either of these languages. Given the subject of the book, and the concern throughout with Medinan Jews’ knowledge of Jewish law and practice as revealed in the Bible and Talmud, their linguistic competences and behavior are a matter of more than minor significance.

One example for why this should be so is that Mazuz suggests that the accusation of *tahrif*, namely, that Jews (and Christians) had received the correct texts of their scriptures from God but had altered them, is substantiated by the Talmudic practice of *derash*, which he tells us takes the form occasionally of making slight changes to a word or more in the Bible in order to offer a basis for a different—occasionally very different—interpretation from the obvious one. Attractive (at first sight even perhaps plausible) though this suggestion might be, a few moments’ thought suggests a problem: we have to envisage a real-life scenario. It is hard to imagine Jews walking around, or sitting, enjoying a discussion of small, often minute, changes to the biblical text without some knowledge of the relevant language. Would they have been doing this in front of visitors or witnesses ignorant of the language? In the presence of Muḥammad? Would he have been there, listening? How would he or they have known and understood what was going on? These and others are real questions that need to be answered before a suggestion like this can be adopted.

Mazuz seems unaware here not only of the linguistic and perhaps also socio-linguistic problem, but also of another one, no less difficult. He writes: “when the Muslims saw the Medinan Jews engaging in practices that were different than the literal meaning of the Bible they argued that the Jews had falsified it” (p. 21). Again, at first sight, this may sound plausible, but for it to tell us anything useful in the present context, it demands, if nothing else, knowledge by the early Muslims (actually, if we are strict about it, Muḥammad) of the content of the biblical text, whether in Hebrew or in translation. Not only do we have no reliable evidence of the presence of the biblical text in any language in pre- and early Islamic Arabia, but Mazuz seems not to be aware of this need. His bibliography includes nothing on this sub-

ject. Yet his wording requires that these early Muslims would have known at least the contents of the biblical text. Furthermore, the passages he cites here do not refer to actual Jewish practices, which are the issue here, but reflect simply ways of understanding the text (a similar problem in methodological approach is cited below). As a way of equating *tahrīf* with *derash*, therefore, the argument fails.

In the same chapter, *rabbāniyyūn* and *aḥbār*—Quranic words understood to refer to the religiously learned men of the Jews, i.e., rabbis—are equated with *ʿulamāʾ* and *fuqahāʾ*, as being people who “used their own independent thinking in order to analyze and to interpret sacred texts and make halakhic rulings” (p. 21). This would be interesting and important if we knew it on the basis of evidence from the seventh century. Unfortunately, Mazuz relies on the Quran commentary of the Jalālayn for this information. That work is a product of the fifteenth century.

The first chapter seems intended mainly to provide a historical background to what follows, which is chapter two, “Law and Custom,” the real meat of the book. It occupies nearly half of the entire text and discusses a variety of possible bits of information about Jewish religious behavior derived using the author’s new methodology. This is based in part on difference, opposition, contrariety—*mukhālaḥa* in Arabic. According to this method, outlined briefly in this chapter, Muḥammad’s desire to make Islam different from Judaism means that we should be able to discern certain aspects of Judaism—behavior, practices, beliefs, etc.—in Medina around 600 or so by looking at the practices and beliefs of early Islam and seeking their opposites as aspects of Judaism.

Unfortunately the methodology does not really stand up. The argument offered here about Jews (not) fighting on the Sabbath is probably a topos; alternatively, it could be seen as some sort of echo of the story of the Maccabees. That kind of interpretation might have served the author’s purpose better as showing, or even just hinting at, some sort of textual transmission or quasi-historical memory among Jews in the peninsula. The succeeding argument, concerning the date of the “fast of the tenth,” takes a long and circuitous route between Yom Kippur (the fast of the tenth day) and the fast of the tenth of Tevet (the fast of the tenth month—though why this could not also be considered the fast of the tenth day is not addressed), before coming back to the consensus view that Yom Kippur is what is meant.

Other cases offer major difficulties, too: Mazuz discusses the laws of marriage and divorce, concentrating on (disallowed) marriages between a priest (*kohen*) and a divorced woman. However, two basic flaws nullify any force his argument here might have had. First, in his discussion he uses the words priest and rabbi interchangeably. The problem is that the laws concerning marriage of a *kohen*—a member of the priestly caste descended from Aaron—do not apply to rabbis, viz., teachers (unless, of course, they happen also to enjoy such descent). Secondly, he tells us that the Jewish tribes of the “Naḍīr and Qurayza had many priests among them” (p. 42). The problem here is that a tribe consists of the supposed descendants of a particular man—if one member of the tribe is a priest, in the sense of being a descendant of Aaron, then all (male) members of the tribe are, not Mazuz’s “many.” Yet Mazuz argues that rabbis and priests live under the same marriage law and that only some members of these two tribes were (notionally) descended from the common ancestor. Neither of these claims is correct.

In chapter three, “Religious Beliefs,” Mazuz takes up the questions of an afterlife and the time spent by evildoers in hell. He points to such passages as Q 2:80 and 3:24 that attack the Jews for saying that they will spend “but a few days” there. He interprets these expressions as suggesting that “apparently they oppose the Talmudic belief that the maximum sojourn in hell is twelve months” (p. 71), although why that is a necessary, or even a reasonable, inference is not explained. He then goes on to cite Talmudic passages referring to a twelve-month sojourn in hell, only to turn for support for the claim that Jews believed only in a few days spent in hell to two Quran commentators: one is the well-known Muqātil b. Sulaymān, of the eighth century, who in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is described as mendacious: “His elaborations of Biblical elements in the Qurʾān and his tracing every allusion back to the ‘People of the Book’ heightened his disrepute in later centuries.” The other, al-Māwardī, wrote his commentary in the late tenth or eleventh century. Whether these two are reliable as guides to Medinan Jewry in the seventh century must be doubted. But these are used to justify the assertion that “the Medinan Jews held the Talmudic perception that one will not remain in hell longer than twelve months” (p. 72). Everything here about a twelve-month sojourn comes from (extra-Arabian, Talmudic) Jewish sources; the Quran and the later commentaries (for what the latter are worth in this context) refer only to a

sojourn of a few days. Somehow this is transmuted into the claim that the Jews of Medina knew about and believed in a maximum sojourn of twelve months. Even following the methodology implied by the word *mukhālaḥa*, our sources tell us only that Jews in Medina believed in a sinners' sojourn in hell of just "a few days," as in the Quranic expression; they imply nothing as to knowledge of the Talmud or conformity to earlier Jewish beliefs.

In his discussion of what he sees as the notion that Jews believe that they are forgiven their sins twice every day, Mazuz writes of the "common Jewish perception" that "every young boy has no sins until he reaches thirteen years old and every young girl until she is twelve years old" (p. 78). He provides a note for this: "Cf. Avōt 5:21." But that extremely interesting passage says nothing whatsoever about young boys and girls (or, for that matter, about daily forgiveness of sins).

In chapter four, "External Characteristics," Mazuz takes up the question of sidelocks (*pe'ot*) worn by Jews. Several pages are devoted to discussion on the origin of the Jews of Yemen, and the route by which they might have come there as early as the seventh century BCE. This brings us to the example of Zayd b. Thābit, in Medina (not in Yemen) some twelve or thirteen centuries later, who may have worn sidelocks as a child living among Jews. This in turn leads to the conclusion that wearing sidelocks may have existed among the Jews of Medina in general, and furthermore, because of the alleged existence of such a habit among Jews in Palestine in biblical times, may go back to the seventh century BCE, when some Jews may have passed through Medina (of whose existence at that time we have no knowledge at all) on their way south. If that is the case, however—and it is a fairly complicated case to build and probably impossible to sustain (much of it depending on alleged oral tradition among Yemenite Jews stretching back for twenty-seven centuries)—then any connection with or knowledge of Talmudic practices seems irrelevant; yet it is just such connection and knowledge that constitute the central claim of the book.

Curiously, at the end of this discussion (p. 93), Mazuz quotes the well-known passage in Tacitus on the Jews, where it is said that the Jews adopted circumcision in order to differentiate themselves from other nations (*Hist.*, 5.5.2; the last three words, "from other nations," stressed, unnecessarily, by Mazuz, are actually not in the Latin). However, this most striking of characteristics of (male) Jews then and now seems not to attract the author's interest. This is worrying because one might have expected the early Muslims, if indeed they were so concerned about *mukhālaḥa*, to take the opportunity offered by this custom to differentiate themselves from the Jews by abandoning it.

Does *mukhālaḥa* or its application here fulfill its promise? Are we now richer in knowledge of the Jews of Medina? The answer must be negative. In a sense this is what we should expect. If it were otherwise, that would impose a kind of reductiveness on the formation of Islam. Everything that the Muslims did, or what we are told they did, could be used as a source for information about what others in Arabia—Jews, Christians, perhaps in particular pagans—did. Although that need not apply to later developments, it seems a lot to suggest that early Islam formed itself in a serious manner on little more than a contrary attitude to another major monotheistic presence in its world. Borrowings and influences are certainly to be seen, but the retrojection of such information, especially in the way that is done here, does not persuade. Apart from everything else, the dates of our sources as well as the ways in which they are used here raise too many problems.

It is regrettable that this is so. Quite apart from the clear benefit of new knowledge, the new methodology, too, would also constitute an advance. But novelty may be too strong a word in this respect: in part, as we have seen, it goes round in a circle to derive what is seen as knowledge of Median Jewish life and practice. In part, too, it actually mirrors an old methodology in historical study: deriving knowledge of something from its opposite. When we find laws against, say, coin-clipping in the Middle Ages, we can fairly assume that coin-clipping occurred. When we find laws against murder, murder was a fact of existence. Generally speaking, laws on such specific matters as coin-clipping are not made without a perceived need for them. This does not tell us about people's beliefs, but it does tell us what at least some laws were aimed at stopping. Coin-clipping as such is not forbidden by law today—for good reason.

All this is not to deny that advances in our knowledge can be made. But the temptation is often to go further than our sources can take us. In the present case, a general injunction such as the one cited, in

favor of *mukhālaḥa*, can be used to generate new knowledge only if we have much more, more detailed, and more reliable surrounding information, and if it is properly applied. For real advances to succeed and win acceptance, the methodology itself and the way in which it is applied need more solidity.

The short subject index—really a general index—is incomplete: it lacks, e.g., Rabīʿa and Ḥamīs (p. 38). Muqātil is absent from the bibliography.

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Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī, *The Life and Times of Abū Tammām*. Edited and translated by BEATRICE GRUENDLER. Library of Arabic Literature. New York: NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015. Pp. xxx + 421. \$40.

Beatrice Gruendler opens her introduction to the volume under review with a quotation from Virginia Woolf's diary. Recalling Katherine Mansfield's reaction to Joyce's *Ulysses*, Woolf wrote that, regardless of how subjective they may be, such reactions "should figure [. . .] in the history of literature" (p. xiii). And what constitutes the history of literature more than the reaction it elicits from its readers, writers, and critics, from both contemporaries and those who continue to discover it across time? Abū Tammām, the Abbasid poet and anthologist, and probably one of the most controversial poets of his era, provoked extreme reactions from his readers and critics. His contribution as a poet and rewriter of his poetic tradition was a counterpoint in the life of Arabic poetry. Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī's (d. 335/947) *Akḥbār Abī Tammām*, published now as *The Life and Times of Abū Tammām*, is a book as much about the impact of Abū Tammām's poetry on contemporaries as it is about the ongoing intervention of his project in the life of Arabic poetry to this day.

This edition and translation is another welcome addition to the Library of Arabic Literature, a series funded by a grant from the New York University Abu Dhabi and published by NYU Press. The volumes published thus far range in topic from religion, science, poetry, history, and historiography, and some have already received considerable recognition and celebration. In the field of Arabic poetry and poetics in general, and classical Arabic poetry and criticism in particular, I expect the impact of this project to be groundbreaking. The study of Arabic poetry, both modern and classical, has the potential of being significantly affected by the introduction of voices like al-Ṣūlī's, especially when presented in fresh and timely translations as is the case here.

The editor and translator, Beatrice Gruendler, has succeeded in communicating the urgency of al-Ṣūlī's work; its ninth-century Abbasid context has been smoothly transposed to readers in the twenty-first century. The discourse on modernizing trends in the Arabic poetic tradition, and their relationship to and their effect on that tradition, will benefit from this publication, as will scholars of modern Arabic poetic forms, such as the free verse poem and the prose poem. Not only has a relatively understudied poet been introduced widely, but the volume illuminates a foundational moment in Arabic criticism in the aftermath of the clash between the modernist (*muḥdath*) poet, Abū Tammām, and a critical tradition struggling to make sense of him.

Abū Tammām gave rise to a whole critical culture and set the ground for new poetic sensibility. Most controversial of all was his ability to channel the Arabic poetic tradition in such a way that he made it seem unrecognizable and even threatening to some of his contemporaries: his poetry "echoed the tradition but gave it a new feel, so much so that it shocked" (p. xv). Views on Abū Tammām diverge starkly and al-Ṣūlī's *Akḥbār* is probably the most passionate defense we have of him. Written in the last two decades of al-Ṣūlī's life, this account allows its readers a window into the "heart of the classical Arabic literary and court culture" (p. xix), for it is probably the closest we have to the heated debates around Abū Tammām and his fellow modernizers. The work is a compilation of snapshots, each capturing "one situation from one specific angle and together with the others creat[ing] a kaleidoscope" (p. xviii). The final product is a biography, a critical treatise, a passionate endorsement, and a trailblazing poetic statement, all at the same time. Al-Ṣūlī was a companion of caliphs, as well as a compiler