

Cross Veneration in the Medieval Islamic World: Christian Identity and Practice under Muslim Rule.
By CHARLES TIESZEN. *The Early and Medieval Islam World*, vol. 1. London: I.B. TAURIS, 2017.
Pp. x + 229. \$95.

Charles Tieszen has written a fascinating book. In it he traces the history of Christian defenses of cross veneration in the face of Muslim criticisms. These criticisms were far-reaching and included the charges that the practice was idolatrous; that the cross brought shame on God's prophet Jesus, especially the suggestion that he died on the cross; and that on his return, in the events preceding the final judgment, the Jesus of Islam will destroy this false symbol. The author's treatment of this topic is largely synchronic and passes with ease from works of the eighth and ninth centuries CE to those of the thirteenth and fourteenth.

Some forty or so texts written over the course of around seven hundred years form the basis of the study. They stem primarily from a variety of eastern Christian confessions: Melkite (Chalcedonian), East Syrian (Nestorian), and West Syrian (Jacobite/Miaphysite). While some attention is given to Muslim polemical texts, the focus is largely on Christian texts written in response to Muslims. Much of the literature with which the author deals was written in Arabic, though some is in Syriac or Greek, or other languages. In terms of genre, some of these texts were letters, others purport to record theological debates between Muslims and Christians, yet others were more discursive theological treatises. Most of the texts in question were produced in the eastern Mediterranean.

While Tieszen is primarily concerned with the theological arguments Christians used to defend cross veneration, he also seeks to elucidate the rhetorical and logical strategies underlying these theological arguments, and to understand how such strategies served to maintain, clarify, and defend communal boundaries.

He begins with a brief overview of the role that debates about cross veneration played in pre-Islamic apologetic literature. The topic of cross veneration, as he shows, was prominent in the defense of Christianity against Greco-Roman paganism and against Judaism, as well as in some of the early debates arising out of the iconoclast controversy. Further, as Tieszen repeatedly demonstrates throughout, many of the themes of later Christian defenses of cross veneration represent a reworking of these earlier materials.

Tieszen next examines a series of arguments in defense of cross veneration that work by means of what he terms "displacement"—that is to say, how Christians sought to defend this aspect of their own faith by displacing the criticism and instead attacking aspects of the Muslim faith. In the case of cross veneration, this typically resulted in Christians seeking to deflect the charge that cross veneration was an idolatrous practice by arguing that it was in fact Muslims who were practitioners of idolatry. Cross veneration, said Muslim critics, was introduced after the time of Jesus as part of a broader corruption of Christianity. The chief malefactors identified were typically either Constantine or the apostle Paul. Constantine, for instance, was believed to have substituted the cross and its veneration for an earlier Greco-Roman polytheistic veneration of the planets and stars. Rather than respond to such specific objections, the authors examined by Tieszen instead tried to turn the argument back on Muslims, by arguing that it was they rather than Christians who have a faith derived from idolatrous roots. In this regard, Christian authors might point to the veneration shown by Muslims to physical copies of the Quran, for instance, or to the Black Stone of the Ka'ba. Sometimes these displacement arguments were expanded by efforts to show that the Muslim faith has its overall origins not in monotheism but in polytheism, such that the Black Stone, for instance, was venerated not because of any putative connections to Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael, but because it was originally an idol of Aphrodite or some other deity.

Tieszen then turns his attention to how Christians responded to the Muslim charge that the cross by its very nature was degrading and dishonorable, a claim sometimes linked to a denial of the crucifixion itself, insofar as God would never let a prophet suffer such a fate. Somewhat surprisingly, the texts examined evince few efforts to lay out serious theological accounts of the saving nature of Christ's death. The authors tended to argue instead, more generally, that the cross marks not a sign of dishonor but of honor, and that through it the mind of a Christian is raised to the contemplation of the saving work accomplished by it. Related to this same theme, the authors also frequently included typological

readings of the Hebrew Bible, which sought to establish that the cross was there foreshadowed: in the striking of the rock by Moses, for instance, in his lifting up of the serpent in the desert, or in his use of the staff at the crossing of the Red Sea.

Some less common themes in the apologetic literature are next examined, e.g., that the cross functions as a kind of *qibla* for the Christian community; that it serves as a proxy of Christ, between the time of his ascension and the time of his return; and that through the cross and the sign of the cross Christians have power over wicked spirits and the elements of nature itself. Of particular interest in this regard, Tieszen argues, is how Christians regarded the sign of the cross as a means of preserving the boundaries between Christianity and Islam, ensuring that Christians would be disinclined to reinterpret Christianity in ways more amenable to their Muslim neighbors.

Throughout, Tieszen argues—rightly, I believe—that most of these Christian apologetic arguments were designed for internal consumption: they were intended not to convince actual Muslims of the truth of Christian theological claims, but to confirm the faith of those who were already Christian. No matter what their actual literary form, these texts were written for Christians rather than for Muslims. Few of the actual arguments given would have been convincing to Muslims, not least the frequent typological interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. While the authors were evidently aware of the general outlines of Muslim criticisms of Christianity, their apologetic efforts were not primarily designed to respond. Instead, they sought mainly either to convince Christians that their religion was not threatened by Islam or to prevent conversion to Islam.

An additional theme that emerges repeatedly in the book is the remarkable degree of uniformity in these texts, from such different times, such different places, and such different Christian confessions. Similar arguments were recycled from text to text and author to author, over the course of many centuries, and many of these same arguments were borrowed directly from earlier Christian literature against Judaism. Unsurprisingly, it is thus sometimes difficult to distinguish living arguments from apologetic topoi. A fuller examination of Muslim sources could perhaps shed some light on this question, especially if it were to reach beyond the explicitly apologetic and polemical literature, to examine the broader Muslim discussions of images, idolatry, and the cross, in a wider variety of literature: not least, *tafsir*, hadith and hadith commentaries, chronicles of primeval history, legal texts, *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, literature on the signs of prophecy, and so forth. While Tieszen's work by no means ignores Muslim discussions of the crucifixion, the cross, and the veneration of the cross, these materials are not the focus of his study, and they are sometimes perhaps treated rather summarily, making it occasionally difficult to contextualize the arguments of the Christian apologetic literature.

As well, there are enticing hints throughout the book of a deeper and more complex historical context underlying this apologetic literature: indigenous aniconic and iconoclastic movements among Christians living under Islam, leading, for instance, to the refashioning of figural mosaics within churches; intense antipathy to the public display of crosses among Muslims, perhaps especially in the early Islamic period, whether for theological reasons or because the cross was taken to represent the Byzantine empire and its challenge; internal Christian debates over the nature of the material from which crosses should be made (silver, gold, wood, etc.) and how such crosses should be used in a liturgical context. It is often difficult, however, as Tieszen himself acknowledges, to understand whether and how such physical realities were connected to the more rarefied, ahistorical theological debates of the apologetic literature. It may be that future research could shed light on these questions, perhaps especially by the systematic exploitation of a more diverse body of Christian source materials, above and beyond the more strictly apologetic literature.

The book ends with two appendices. The first provides an overview of the forty main texts that form the basis of the study, with brief biographies of their authors, discussions of their date of composition, and succinct overviews of their content. A second appendix offers a concise chart of the same material for easy reference. As many of these texts will be unfamiliar to readers, both appendices are quite helpful.

Overall, Tieszen has written a valuable and accessible book, one that patiently and systematically explores an important theme in the earliest Christian encounter with Islam. While his book will certainly be of interest to historians of Muslim-Christian relations, other readers too will find much of

value here, including historians of late antiquity, early Islam, and Byzantium, as well as specialists in the history of iconoclasm and liturgy.

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Opposition to Philosophy in Safavid Iran: Mulla Muḥammad-Ṭāhir Qumī's Hikmat al-ʿArifin. Edited by ATA ANZALI and S. M. HADI GERAMI. Islamicate Intellectual History, vol. 3. Leiden: BRILL, 2018. Pp. ix + 56 + 402 (Ar.), illus. \$138, €119.

A bigoted cleric famous—or notorious—for his anti-Sufi writings and activities, Muḥammad-Ṭāhir Qumī held office as chief jurist, or *shaykh al-islām*, in the shrine city of Qum for much of the last two-thirds of the seventeenth century. Qumī's life and long career are shrouded in obscurity, as acknowledged in the introduction written by Ata Anzali for the volume under review. Qumī's dates are given only in ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Khātūnābādī's (d. 1105/1694) annalistic universal chronicle, *Waqāyīʿ al-sinīn wa l-aʿwām*. This source has unfortunately escaped the editors' attention. Instead, a late nineteenth-century biographical dictionary is referenced (p. 51, citing Muḥammad-Bāqir Musavī Khʿānsārī, *Rawżāt al-jannāt fī aḥwāl al-ʿulamāʾ wa l-sādāt*, ed. A. Ismāʿīlīān, 8 vols. [Tehran: Maktabat Ismāʿīlīān, 1391], 4: 143–46); this compilation contains no dates for Qumī, however. From Khātūnābādī (ed. M.-B. Bihūdī [Tehran: Kitābforūshī-i Islāmiyya, 1352sh/1973], 546), who seems to have known Qumī in person, we know that he died a centenarian in 1100/1689.

Further biographical evidence contextualizing Qumī's life and works can be gleaned from his own writings as well as from the works of his enemies and contemporaries. These latter sources include three unpublished treatises dating from the 1670s–80s, which have been overlooked by the editors of the book under review. A native of Bavānāt, a rural townlet some 140 miles northeast of Shiraz, Qumī started his schooling in his late teens and eventually ended up in the shrine cities of Arab Iraq, where he completed his studies to become a *faqīh*, or jurist. One of his detractors, a court physician in Safavid Iran named Muḥammad-Muʿmin Tunkābunī, claimed that Qumī had been indoctrinated into Sufism during his stay there. After completing his studies in the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala, Qumī moved to Ottoman Baghdad, where he frequented the residences of local European Christian missionaries. There he witnessed with dismay and resentment European missionaries' success in converting numerous dervishes and mystics to Christianity. It was this experience that made Qumī fiercely opposed to mysticism in particular and any form of non-Sharia-minded religious inquiry in general.

Upon his return from Arab Iraq, which is datable to the mid-1630s, Qumī started posthaste his attacks on exponents of the so-called *ʿirfān*, a highly eclectic brand of mysticism that incorporated diverse elements from illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosophy, Nuqtavi/internalist (*bāṭinī*) millennialism, and Twelver Shiʿism. Qumī initiated his anti-Sufi campaign from Qum, where he persecuted and eliminated local circles of mystics and dervishes with success. He reached the apex of his power during the last two decades of the reign of the Safavid Shah Sulaymān (r. 1077–1105/1666–94). Throughout those years, as a contemporary court chronicler points out, the Safavid ruler “let the curtains of isolation and retirement drop down separating him from involvement with the pillars of the state.” Subsequently, an era of chaos and turmoil was ushered in during which “the good and the bad, the well-off and the wretched . . . suffered likewise as savagely as possible” (Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Naṣīrī, *Dastūr-i shahryārān*, ed. M. N. Naṣīrī-Muqaddam [Tehran: Bunyād-i Mawqūfāt-i Afshār, 1373sh/1994], 7–8).

Amid the state of political *saue qui peut* that engulfed Safavid Iran during the closing quarter of the seventeenth century, Qumī raised a militia of several hundred loyal guards from among the Arab nomads of the Qum region and entrusted them with policing and enforcing the religious law in the shrine city. Before long, these nomads become engaged in money-making. With Qumī's consent, they charged the well-to-do families of Qazvin, Gilan, Rayy, Sava, Tehran, and Kashan hefty sums to perform the perilous *hajj* pilgrimage on their behalf. Qumī is also reported to have arranged for his private