Co-produced Religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

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The intersections and entanglements of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are well known, but scholars both inside and outside of the three religious traditions tend to treat their objects of study as largely independent from the others, at least after some initial point of origin. We seek to emphasize the ongoing inter-dependence, and demonstrate its implications for both historical and theological work. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism have continuously formed, re-formed, and transformed themselves by interacting with or thinking about one another. That co-production, in all the ambivalence it entails, has shaped not only the rituals and teachings of these traditions, but also some of our most enduring forms of prejudice (our racisms, our gender hierarchies, our moral economies) as well as the conceptual tools (such as history, philology, and theology) with which we undertake the study of these religions. We first offer a definition of religious co-production that we think capable of nourishing a historical and theological methodology. We then offer an example, in the many histories of the monk Sergius-Baḥīrā, of what historical and theological insights this methodology of co-production can yield. We conclude by suggesting that modern historical hermeneutics were themselves co-produced in the sectarian dynamics of these religious traditions and are not independent of them. Finally, we offer an exploration of the critical and constructive potentials of that insight, gesturing toward the possibility of both a history and a theology of co-production.

Why the term Co-Production?

To say that Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are inter-related, inter-twined, or inter-connected is not news. The intersections of their histories and entanglements of their scriptural traditions are common knowledge not only to scholars but also to believers. Few today would deny that these three traditions, in all their diversity, have often laid competing claim to a shared reservoir of prophetic authority, and have thought and talked a great deal about each other across their long histories.

But despite its obviousness and pervasiveness, or perhaps precisely because of it, the extent of this inter-dependence has proven difficult to grasp. Though scholars of a given religious tradition among these three have long been alert to borrowings, influences, receptions, appropriations, and demarcations from 'other' traditions, they have nevertheless tended to treat each as relatively independent (at least after some initial moment of intense inter-action and differentiation) succession of interpretations and teachings. We want instead to call attention to the inter-dependence itself as a fundamental attribute of these traditions, and to demonstrate how this inter-dependence created and continues to create conditions of possibility for both history and theology, that is, for thinking about the past, and for thinking about the divine.

For some forms of interaction we have a well-developed vocabulary: conversion, inter-marriage, symbiosis, conflict and coexistence, syncretism and hybridity are just a few terms that come to mind to describe very concrete forms of the togetherness of Christians, Jews and Muslims in the past and the present. For other forms we lack vocabulary, and perhaps even awareness.[1] This is especially true of the work of signification and meaning generation that "Jew," "Muslim," "Christian," do as figures of thought in the conceptual systems and interpretive habits of every sectarian community within these traditions, even in the absence of any contact with or knowledge of a "real" other. Jews, Christians and Muslims have always been neighbors in thought, with all the ambivalence that such neighborliness entails. These conceptual and cognitive interactions have also shaped possibilities of life in the world for people of all three faiths (and of no faith at all).

We need a term to express and stress the fact that not only at their origins but at every instant of their existence, including present and future, many and varied Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities are forming, re-forming and transforming themselves by interacting with, thinking about, and imagining each other. This essay seeks to call attention to that ongoing work, and to do so we will here deploy the ungainly word "co-production." In choosing a term that evokes labor we do not mean to imply that materialism governs the formation of culture, or that these dynamics are necessarily the result of consciously acting agents with discernible intentions of collaboration.[2] By co-production we mean rather to encompass within one heuristic concept a gamut of activities and a variety of dynamic processes, many of which happen simultaneously and are not easily distinguishable from each other, that are catalyzed by a fundamental inter-dependence. The goal of the rubric is to call attention to the importance of these processes for the ongoing development and transformation of the possibilities for life and thought in these religious cultures.[3]

Intercultural and interreligious studies have certainly been fruitful in deploying paradigms of representation, perception, othering and appropriation, supercessionism and colonialism to

excavate from the sources various processes of identity formation. But the focus in these paradigms is often one-sided. They help us understand how one individual or group perceives and represents the other(s) and teaches us something about the self-understanding of the group representing and perceiving, without capturing the dynamic and ongoing imbrications involved in the constant transformation of religious communities and traditions. It is this aspect of ongoing and mutual inter-relations of mind and world that we aim to explore. Speaking of religious co-production is an attempt to link research on interconnected religious histories with hermeneutical and theological reflection within, across, and about Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

To specify the scope of the concept, let us briefly point to three aspects. First, co-production can and must be studied not only across but also *within* each of the three religious traditions, all of which have a rich history of sectarian diversification and heresiological dispute in which figures of other religions were frequently deployed, as in the Sunnī saying "the Shīʿīs are the Jews of our community".[4] Second, co-production is not restricted to Muslims, Christians and Jews, or to Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. But because these specific traditions compete over a shared canon of prophetic events thought to have occurred in the past, there is a shared potential for historical hermeneutics between them. Across and within these communities the meaning of the present and the prophetic past gain meaning in relation to each other. Therefore, and this is the third aspect, co-production has shaped not only Judaism, Islam and Christianity themselves (their rituals, laws, teachings) in all their sectarian variety, but also the conceptual tools—we will focus on history and theology—with which we undertake the study of these religions.

To justify this claim would require not an article but a library. In these pages we will attempt a step toward plausibility. We will first define through an example—the Qur'an's depiction of the moment of revelation on Mount Sinai in Surah 2:93—what we mean to encompass within the concept of co-production. We will then provide a more extended example to give a concrete idea of how the sensibility for co-production can transform our understanding of historical hermeneutics and methodologies, tracing the work done by the figure of the monk Sergius-Baḥīrā in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, from Late Antiquity to the present. Finally, we will briefly call attention to some of the ways in which some dominant conceptions of history and theology were themselves co-produced within these three distinctively "historical" faiths.

Definition by way of example: the Golden Calf

Perhaps the best way to describe what we mean is to unfold salient aspects of religious co-production through example. Consider just this one verse from the Qur'an:

> And when We made a covenant with you, and raised the Mount over you, "Take hold of what We have given you with strength, and listen!" They said: "We hear, and disobey," and they were made to drink the calf into their hearts because of their disbelief. (2:93; cf. 2:60, 4:153)[5]

The passage presents itself as an eye-witness report of the founding moment in which scripture erupts into history: the giving of the commandments to Moses and to the Israelites. Already in this most general level, we can understand these lines as a "co-production" in the sense that the Prophet and his believers are creating space for themselves within sacred

history by looking toward the Hebrew Bible and the Israelite people to whom the earlier prophecies were given, re-interpreting the events of that foundational moment to appropriate their authority for Islam.

Such appropriation or supersession does not require any true knowledge of or contact with "real" Israelites, who had disappeared more than a millennium before the Prophet's birth. But if we wished to emphasize the "co-" in this co-production, we could stress that this Qur'anic passage not only adopts the general shape of the biblical narrative, but also demonstrates an awareness of the languages and interpretive practices of other communities that considered themselves heirs of the Mosaic covenant with Israel, in this case, the Jews. The mount of revelation, *Ṭūr Sīnīn*, is named not in Arabic but in Aramaic, the language of many Jews (and Christians) in the area of Islam's birth.[6] Moreover the image with which the verse begins suggests a familiarity not only with ancient Israelite scripture, but with the much later teachings of the Jewish rabbis. "We raised above you the towering height of Mount Sinai" is not a citation from the Hebrew Bible but from rabbinic Midrash. Commenting on Exodus 19:17, the Talmud's tractate Shabbat reports the following discussion:

> "And they stood beneath the mount": Rabbi Abdimi the son of Hama son of Hasa said: This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be he, overturned the mountain upon them like an inverted cask, and said to them, "If you take upon yourselves the Law, good. If not, here you will find your grave."[7]

And what of the devastating line "we hear and we disobey"? In Deuteronomy 5:24 the Israelites declare to Moses, "We hear, and obey." (cf. Exodus 24:7.) Elsewhere the Qur'an borrows this phrase and applies it to the early community of believers in Islam (2:285; 5:7; 24:51). But here, discussing the Israelites to whom these words were originally attributed, it transforms the phrase through a multilingual pun, playing on the homophony between Hebrew *shama'nu v-'asinu* (we heard and obeyed/we will hear and obey), and Arabic *sami'inā wa-'aṣaynā* (we hear and disobey).[8]

The Qur'an often alludes to beliefs it characterizes as Christian or Jewish, and although we should not treat every such characterization as accurate, or as evidence of real interaction between the early community of Muhammad's followers and a specific Jewish or Christian community, the Qur'an does bear traces of such interactions. The citations and plays on words in this passage are an example, pointing to a shared scriptural and linguistic space. Many modern scholars (and before them, many Muslim, Christian, and Jewish exegetes) have pointed out that the Qur'an's Arabic vocabulary is deeply influenced by Hebrew and Aramaic, and that its revelations show an extensive awareness of rabbinic and Christian (especially Syriac) exegesis.[9] In this sense too, we might call the Qur'an a co-production, a product of interaction with and thinking about Jews and Christians (among others).[10]

But our example also makes clear that co-production does not mean collaboration. On the contrary, in this case the Qur'an evokes commonality precisely to shatter it, so as to appropriate the space and place of prophecy for Islam rather than Judaism. In fact, this passage will underwrite the Islamic doctrine of *taḥrīf* (the charge of Jewish and Christian alteration and falsification of previous scriptures), allowing the Islamic community to recognize and appropriate the authority of the previous scriptures while simultaneously setting them aside as tampered with and therefore incapable of providing a path to true interpretations of God's teaching. (cf. Q 4:46: "Among those who are Jews are those who

distort the meaning of the word, and say, 'We hear and we disobey' . . . twisting their tongues and disparaging religion.") To continue with our definition through example: the "co-" in "co-production" need not be symmetrical, collaborative, or irenic. Conflict begins with the same prefix.

Nor need co-production be contemporaneous or synchronic. For example, the rabbinic tradition cited by the Qur'an, Tractate *Shabbat* 88a, is itself a type of co-production. It can be understood as the product of an earlier supersession, a rabbinic response to the Pauline Christian critique that cast Jewish observance of Torah as coerced slavery to law, opposed to the freedom of Jesus' followers (cf. Galatians 3-5; Romans 7). In the next line of the midrash cited by the Qur'an, Rabbi Aḥa bar Ya'akov responds to the divine threat described by Rabbi Abdimi: "this provides a substantial protest against the Law." Rava concludes the discussion by looking forward in history. The first revelation may have been coerced, he grants, but the Jews later accepted the law of their own free will, "in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written" (in Esther 9:27).

The Talmudic passage was, in other words, part of a rabbinic hermeneutics that emerged in reaction to and influenced by the pressures of a dominant Christian culture. The Qur'anic Mount Sinai is not independent of the Pauline Mount Sinai "which stands for slavery" (Galatians 4:25). Nor for that matter was it independent of the sectarian dynamics present already in the Hebrew Bible itself. The Golden Calf, and Israelite histories and historical hermeneutics more generally, were a co-production long before followers of Jesus or of Muhammad began to reinterpret them in the context of later cultures (Hellenistic and Roman, Sassanid and Arabian) that had, in turn, their own historical sensibilities. This is another characteristic of co-production we wish to stress: every instance of co-production stands in relation to other instances, earlier and later.[11]

This dia-, ana-, and meta-chronic aspect of co-production is difficult for us to capture. In narrative as in physics the arrow of time tends to flow in only one direction. Moreover, as historians we are trained to mine a particular context, to accumulate the artifacts and the intentions of agents of a given place and time, with the goal of determining what an object of knowledge might have meant to specific people in a unique historical moment. Narrative coherence and contextual interpretation are important and must not be ignored by historians. But because of their interrelated prophetic claims and traditions, every moment in the history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is also inter-connected with prior moments, even if evidence for such interconnections has not survived, or is not known to us. And similarly, every moment is potentially interconnected with later ones as well. Just as the early Islamic community drew on traditions co-produced in other times and places to imagine its own place in salvation history relative to other traditions, the co-productions of early Islam would be put to similar work in countless futures, shaping the possibilities of existence for Muslims, Christians, and Jews in sometimes very surprising ways.

In tenth-century Baghdad, for example, the judge Ibn Kuraia (d. 367/978) was apparently asked:

> "What does the *kâdi* (may God favor him!) say of a Jew [m.] who committed fornication/*zanā* with a Christian [f.], and she brought forth a child with a human body/*jismuhu lil-bashar* and the head of an ox/*wa-wajhu lil-baqar*? They are now both under arrest. What does the *kâdi* opine respecting them?"[12]

The judge gave immediate answer: "This is plain evidence that the accursed Jews were made to drink the love of the calf into their hearts/*fī ṣudūrihim* (sic)[13], so that it now comes out from their penises/*min ʾuyurihim*." The calf imbibed by the disobedient Israelites at Sinai is here somatized in the sexual organs of their descendants. The passage teaches us something about the evolution of ideas about the sexual reproduction of religious difference within the judge's own historical context of tenth-century Baghdad. But it affects the future as well. The Kurdish scholar Ibn Khallikan (d. 681/1282) chose to transmit the story in his *Biographical Dictionary*. The fourteenth-century Egyptian Muhammad ibn Mūsā al-Damīrī made use of Ibn Khallikan's account in his *Great Book of Animals*, where the golden calf is first associated with the Jews, and then deployed for intramural critique, representing all who rush toward error, specifically Muslims who are too interested in "the dirham and the dinar," and Sufis who dance and sing ecstatically during religious gatherings (as the Israelites were said to have done before the calf) rather than listening reverently as the Qur'an is read.[14]

This anecdote suggests that the calf has a place in the history of systems of values such as the stigmatization of money and the association of the pursuit of wealth with Judaism: a vast and enduring moral economy that was also "co-produced." Or we could use the calf to explore the ways in which the intersection of sectarian dynamics and natural histories produce bio-theologies. Analogies between sect and species such as this one of Israelites, Jews, and "Judaizers" with the Golden Calf were neither rare nor inconsequential. Other verses of the Qur'an (2:65-66; 7:163) suggest that the Jews are transformed (or reincarnated: *musikhu*) into apes because they transgress the sabbath. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, to leap more than a millennium, these verses have underwritten characterizations of Jews as sub-human.[15] We might then put these analogies into dynamic relation with similar analogies and strategies in Judaism and Christianity, seeking to write a history of the racialization of religious difference, and to understand that phenomenon, too, as "co-produced."

None of this implies continuity, essentialism, teleology, positivism, or necessity. We should not assume that these Qur'anic verses about the Golden Calf necessarily produced racism, or that they were understood in the same way by Ibn Kuraia in Baghdad as they had been by the early community of believers in Medina three centuries before him, or would be understood in Egypt four centuries after. But we should also recognize that the work done by the Golden Calf in the Islamic community's imagination of difference between (in this case) Muslim and Jew cannot be contained within one moment or historical context. It has served the imaginations of many times and places and made possible new kinds of work in each of those times and places.

We hope this definition through example has made clearer what we mean by co-production: the ongoing dynamics of forming, re-forming, and transforming the three religious traditions in their manifold sectarian forms through mutual interaction in thinking and (sometimes) living with and against each other.

An exemplary figure of co-production: the monk Sergius-Baḥīrā

One relatively straightforward way to gain a sense of the powers of co-production is to choose any scriptural passage, personage, place, or prophetic pedagogy and trace the work to which it is put across different times, places, and communities. We offer here the example of the

monk Sergius-Baḥīrā, a figure so fruitful that its products can be found in multiple traditions and centuries, helping us perceive the ongoing and mutually constitutive roles that Muslims, Christians, and Jews (whether real or imagined) played and play in each other's self-understanding. The example will also suggest that although the *term* co-production is not found in the sources we are studying (i.e., it is not *emic*), the historical actors that produced those sources recognized and participated in the *phenomenon*. To put it in our terms: through the Baḥīrā tradition the multiple Muslim, Christian, and Jewish traditions that deployed Sergius as a figure of "interfaith" interaction and influence recognized historical co-production and reflected on its theological meaning, a reflection that at times even treated co-production as a counter-concept to true revelation. In the resulting archive of stories about Sergius-Baḥīrā we can therefore perceive the theologically creative albeit often polemical power of co-production from the internal perspective of each of the traditions, as well as observe from the outside the historical dynamics involved in moments of co-production between groups and traditions.

According to tradition, the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation at the age of forty in the cave at the Mountain of Light (Jabal al-Nur), where the angel Gabriel "taught man that which he knew not" (Q 96:5). By this account the Prophet is a vessel transmitting the angel's revelations to mankind (cf. Q 17:105-6; 25:5-6; 33:39-46). However, the Qur'an also attests to the charge that Muhammad received his teaching not from God but from a human being, and in a "foreign language," that is, not in Arabic (Q 16:103). Clearly there was debate about the role of the prophet and the source of the prophecy in the early Islamic community. Sergius-Baḥīrā stepped into that debate.

We cannot determine whether he first appeared in Christian or in Muslim communities, a question already posed by the name of the monk. In Muslim Arabic sources he is called by the proper name Baḥīrā. Christian Arabic and Syriac legends call him Sergius the monk and explain that Muslims call him *bḥīrā*, implying that the name is an epithet (a passive participle of *b-ḥ-r*: 'the approved, eminent one') rather than a proper name.[16] Some put the two names together: Mar Sergius Baḥīrā. Most Latin sources call him simply *Sergius*, apparently not understanding the Semitic name or epithet.[17] For our topic, however, the question of origin is secondary. What is important is that since the eighth century, a wide variety of allusions to the relationship between the Christian monk Sergius-Baḥīrā and the youthful Muhammad flowed from both Muslim and Christian pens. Jewish authors also referred to the story, and to the role of the Jews in it.

We will not analyze these diverse and sometimes contradictory versions in detail.[18] Nor will we inquire into the historicity of Sergius Baḥīrā or into the influence of Christian monks on Muhammad, although questions about the relationship between real interactions and figures of thought are always important to bear in mind when speaking of co-production. We will focus on hermeneutical key points of the Sergius-Baḥīrā narrative that are relatively stable in the respective traditions, as well as on some particularities in individual sources that are especially informative for understanding co-production from an emic or etic perspective.

The core of the traditional Islamic narrative is the recognition and blessing of the twelve-year-old Muhammad by the Syrian monk Baḥīrā. The latter, gifted with prophetic spirit, knows that a prophet will arise among the Arabs. When the caravan of Muhammad's uncle and guardian Abū Tālib arrives to water at his well, Baḥīrā sees an unusual shadow above the child,

examines him, and concludes that this is the expected prophet. He reveals Muhammad's prophetic mission to Abū Tālib, warning him of Jews and other adversaries who wish to harm Muhammad and prevent his mission.

This ostensibly positive portrayal of the Christian monk, and negative portrayal of the Jews, may have been inspired by (or perhaps itself inspired) verses of the Qur'an:

> "You will surely find the most hostile of men toward those who believe to be the Jews and those who ascribe partners unto God. And you will surely find the nearest of them in affection toward those who believe to be those who say, "We are Christians." That is because among them are priests and monks, and because they are not arrogant." (Q 5:82)"[19]

But the tradition goes farther than the surah. By recognizing Muhammad's mission, Baḥīrā implicitly contradicts the charge, repeatedly invoked in Christian efforts to rebut Islam and deny Muhammad's prophetic status, that the New Testament promised no prophet after Christ. The Baḥīrā story presents Muhammad as the successor of Moses and Jesus, a lineage underscored by intertextual details such as the shading cloud, which recalls Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:15-18; cf. 40:34-38), the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:5 par; cf. Acta 1:9), and apocalyptic imaginations of the "Son of Man coming in a cloud" (Luke 21:27; Revelation 14:14). The scene of encounter at a well resonates with the calling of King David by the Prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 16), conveying Davidic authority to the blessing of Muhammad.[20] Muhammad's age may also be an allusion to the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:41-44). In Ibn Isḥāq's (d. 150/768) influential version of the legend, Baḥīrā is in possession of an ancient book of prophecies to which he owes his foreknowledge of Muhammad's mission, perhaps implying (with a nod toward the doctrine of *taḥrif*) that Baḥīrā possessed a more complete set of Christian prophecies than the corrupted canonical gospels from which Christians had deleted the promise of a prophet to come.

This over-determination is characteristic of a certain type of co-production, in which one community claims the prophetic power of another, while at the same time seeking to make the other tradition superfluous, even presenting it as proclaiming its own obsolescence. Early and Late antique Christianity had made intensive use of this strategy (which in this case is called "supersession") with regard to the biblical prophets and the Jews, and vis-à-vis pagan oracles, prophecies, and wisdom. Confronted by Islam, Christianity now found itself on the other side of this co-productive strategy, itself threatened by a hermeneutics of self-dissolution.

The Christian Sergius-Baḥīrā traditions seek to subvert and reverse this hermeneutics, turning it against Islam. In them the monk is Muhammad's mentor. The encounter at the well, if mentioned at all, is only the beginning of a long relationship between student and teacher, a relationship designed to strip Muhammad of any claim to prophecy. Narrations about the monk who instructed Muhammad were (and continue to be) so widespread in the Christian world that their origins, transmission, and intertextuality can hardly be reconstructed. They circulated in Syriac, Arab, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Greek, and Latin speaking communities. Each variant accentuates different motifs, each testifies to a particular context-dependent way of approaching Islam (and Judaism), and therefore to a specific type of literary and intellectual co-production.

Syriac formulations are attested already in the early ninth century. In them the young Muhammad, informed by the monk about his prophetic future, asks about the religion he will teach, and Sergius-Baḥīrā imparts to him the most important teachings of Christianity. This tradition stresses the similarities between Christianity and Islam, and thus creates a cognitive basis for Christian life under Muslim rule. We might call this an “irenic” use of the Baḥīrā co-production, insofar as it is meant to further co-existence by tracing to the Christian monk everything that Muhammad preached, including even the claim that the Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. This catechesis agrees entirely with the teachings of the Qur’an, most remarkably even in response to Muhammad's question about Christ. "Christ is," Baḥīrā replies in perfect harmony with Q 4:171, "His Word, which He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him." The incarnation is omitted, as is worship. Penned by Christians under Islamic rule, this account presents their faith as compatible with Islam, a concern foregrounded in the grateful Muhammad’s grant to his Christian tutor: that no evil will happen to the Christians in the coming age of Islamic rule. Baḥīrā thus becomes a chief witness to the compatibility of Christianity and Islam, guarantor of Muslim protection for Christians.

But the Syriac narrative simultaneously seeks to undermine Islam’s claim to revelation, making it a Christian invention. Without Baḥīrā Muhammad would not have recognized his prophetic calling, without his instruction he would have no teachings to spread. In the second part of the Syriac legend a disciple of Baḥīrā, who has converted from Arabian polytheism to Islam, reports that the wise monk had written the Qur’an for Muhammad to give him guidance as a political leader. The suspicion quoted in Q 16:103 and vehemently rejected by the early Islamic tradition is here affirmed: Muhammad received his teaching from a human being in a foreign language. The revelation is a man-made work. Baḥīrā serves Syriac Christianity as the secret author of the Qur’an. But the price for this service is high: the Christianity co-produced in this “conversation” with Islam renounces much of the Christological content of its faith.

This price is highlighted in the Arabic Christian versions of the legend, which conclude with a dying Baḥīrā repenting the unforgiveable sin of having created Islam. The Arabic version is rich in details about Muhammad’s repeated visits to Baḥīrā, always nocturnal so that the tutelage can remain secret. These become negotiations in which the Christian monk’s message is adapted to the Arabs, characterized as a people too primitive for unadulterated truth. Baḥīrā first informs Muhammad of the pure doctrine and the ideal way of life, Muhammad returns with misgivings, and Baḥīrā then adapts the original precept. The angel Gabriel is nowhere to be found. What emerges from this conspiratorial cooperation between monk and Muhammad, according to the Arabic Christian polemicist, is “Islam,” that is, a simplified version of (Eastern) Christianity suitable for the uncivilized Arabs.

The Arabic Baḥīrā legend offers a comprehensive Christian interpretation of Islam, providing “historical contexts” for numerous Qur’anic verses. Similarities and differences between the two traditions are made to serve as historical evidence for the superiority of Christianity over Islam. In our terms, we might say that for Christians confronted with Islam, the demonstration of historical co-production was a hermeneutic strategy to prove the inferiority of the "product," Islam.

“The product,” however, proved so powerful that the religiously superior (from the Christian point of view) became the politically inferior. In his Arabic form Baḥīrā realizes this himself, becoming a tragic figure, "for I know that I have played into the hands of those who will be

their enemies (...) The door I have opened for myself and for others is the worst door: I have passed falsehood off as truth and asserted absurdities."[21] But even in this realization, Baḥīrā continues to serve his fellow Christians, for he alone can testify about Muhammad: "I taught him many things like this and none of it resembles prophecy."[22] Co-production is here presented as a tragic counter-concept to revelation. Byzantine and Western sources would stress the tragic potential even further, having Muhammad (or one of his followers) murder Baḥīrā to keep secret the Christian origins of Islamic teachings.[23]

The Christian Arabic legend is distinctive in its tragic rendering of Baḥīrā, and it is also distinctive in that it assigns no role to the Jews. In all other versions of the narrative, Christian as well as Muslim, the role of the Jews is central, and that role is precisely to exonerate Baḥīrā and through him all of Christianity from any guilt in the creation of Islam. We have already seen how, in the Muslim literature, Baḥīrā warns Abū Tālib that the Jews would seek to harm Muhammad.[24] For the Muslim author Al-Suhayli (d. 581/1185), Baḥīrā was himself a Jew, a rabbi from Medina who warned Muhammad against his co-religionists. In the Christian legends, the danger posed by the Jews is more subtle: they enter the scene after the death of Sergius-Baḥīrā, bringing Muhammad under their influence and corrupting his message even further. In this telling, the Qur'an emerges from the collaboration of the monk and Jewish scholars.

In Eastern Mediterranean sources one Jew wins Muhammad's trust after Baḥīrā's death: Kaᶜb al-Aḥbār, described in Muslim sources as a prominent convert to Islam. Kaᶜb teaches Muhammad that he is the Paraclete whom Christ has proclaimed, presumably an allusion to Jesus' announcement of the Messenger Ahmad in Q 61:6 (cf. John 14:16-16:7). This mapping of Muhammad onto Ahmad "the comforter" and thence the Paraclete also appears in other early Islamic traditions without reference to Kaᶜb. For Muslims this was presumably a "positive" co-production, in the sense that it identified a place for Muhammad (Ahmad) in Christian revelation. But for Christians accustomed to interpreting the Holy Spirit as the announced Paraclete, placing the teaching in the mouth of a Jew is "negative," highlighting the common carnality of both Jews and Muslims. In this Christian tradition Kaᶜb is credited with revising Baḥīrā's work to pollute it with Judaism. "Sergius gave them the New and Kaᶜb the Old [i.e. Testament], Sergius gave them the sounding-board and Kaᶜab the announcer with a loud voice."[25] Here again Islam is presented as a mixture, co-produced by a Jew and a Christian, with virtue and guilt clear. The Jew has corrupted the good foundation laid by the Christian. The strategy highlights similarities between Christianity and Islam, suggesting that if not for the Jews, there would be no irreconcilable differences between the two.[26]

In our definition we emphasized that co-production need not imply collaboration, and often works without mutual agency. The Christian Sergius-Baḥīrā offers a paradoxical confirmation of this claim. The emergence of Islam is here a story of collaboration, with the polemical aim of denigrating the result. But at the same time, the story itself turns out to be a complex co-production in which "Judaism" and "Islam" are used by the various Christian communities to shape and strengthen their own self-image. The authors comb Christian, Jewish, and Islamic texts to prove that the Qur'an was compiled in several stages by several editors of different religious affiliations, and thereby to disprove its claim to divine revelation. Historical hermeneutics is here deployed to uncover traces of co-production that can serve as evidence of human fabrication.

Western Christianity developed similar strategies, producing a number of Latin works that recount the Sergius-Baḥīrā legend in order to denigrate the Qur'an as a diabolically inspired work co-authored by heretical Christians and evil-minded Jews.[27] The historical efforts of Western Christians, however, are devoted to producing an understanding of the Qur'an as the product of many redactions, falsifications and revisions by numerous people with diverse intentions, rather than (as in the early Syriac and Arabic legends) as the work of one Christian. One has only to count the nouns and verbs with the Latin prefix co- in William of Tripoli's *De statu Saracenorum of* 1273 to be convinced of the polemical force of such claims.[28] The Latin translation of the Arabic word *qur'an* as *collectio* (instead of *recitatio*), common throughout the Middle Ages, concentrates as in a burning glass the power of co-production to serve medieval Christians as a counter-concept to revelation.

We might say that the accusation of falsification of the scriptures (*taḥrif)* brought by Islam against Jews and Christians is here turned against Muslims. The 15th century Christian scholar Nicholas of Cusa, writing in the context of the Ottoman threat to Western Europe, provides a relatively sophisticated example. He proposed that the Qur'an had to be 'sifted'. To this task he devoted his writing *Cribratio Alkorani* (1460/1), in which he distinguished "moments of truth" in the Qur'an that were consistent with Christian doctrine, from the many co-productions (or so we would call them, Cusanus does not) with which it had become corrupted.[29]

Regarding the role of Judaism in these Christian counter-revelatory co-productions, we might propose the following correlation: the greater the aversion of the Christian authors to the Qur'an, the greater the share they attribute to the Jews in the process of its compilation. This correlation reinforces our sense that the function assigned to Judaism in Western religious history is that of the enemy of Christianity *per se*, dangerous not only in the guise of "real Jews," but even more as a "Jewishness" that, in the form of heresies and falsifications, repeatedly tries to infect and corrupt Christianity. This figure of Judaism had over centuries proven tremendously useful for the formation of Christian traditions and societies, and was easily integrated into the Christian argument with Islam.[30] The more Judaism could be discovered in Islam, the more dangerous Islam would seem for Christianity.

In our definition we asserted that co-production in thought affects the possibilities of life and co-existence for people in the flesh. "Real" Jews paid an obvious and high price for the involuntary service of "Jewishness" as a negative foil in the co-production of Christian understandings of Islam, but we will not address that here. Instead, we will stress a less obvious point: the Christian "co-production" of Islam as "Jewish" had implications for "real" Muslims as well.

The Dominican historian Jaime Bleda, for example, used Sergius-Baḥīrā to legitimate the extermination of Muslims in his *Chronicle of the Moors in Spain* (1610/1618). Bleda split the figure into three: Baeyra (as Bleda called him), presented as Muhammad's Jewish uncle and possibly his biological father, a man learned in magic and astrology; Sergio, a Nestorian monk and Muhammad's teacher; and another teacher called John, an Arian from Antioch. Deploying the most up-to-date Spanish ideas about purity of blood, Bleda suggested that Muhammad himself was the son of an incestuous relationship between Muhammad's mother and the Jew Baeyra, her astrologer brother, making him "Iudio de los quatro quartos" (that is, 100% Jewish). Aspects of Islamic practice, such as circumcision and abstinence from pork, were

borrowings from Judaism. Islam was merely a debased form of Judaism, and therefore the descendants of Muslims, even if they were baptized Christians, should be expelled from Spain just as the Jews had been by the Most Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabel in 1492. Bleda's "judaizing histories" of Islam were addressed as memoranda to the royal court, and thereby contributed, as he himself boasted, to legitimating one of pre-modern Europe's largest forced transfers of humanity, the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Moriscos from Spain in 1609-1614.[31]

Jewish authors, for their part, also took part in the Baḥīrā tradition, adapting some of the uses to which Jews were put in both Muslim and Christian versions. A few decades after Bleda, the Egyptian Jewish scholar Josef Sambari discussed "Buhayran" in his *Sefer Divrei Yosef* (1673), presented him as a Christian (though not a monk) who was Muhammad's most intimate counselor and companion, responsible for the Qur'an and for all the errors and deviations from the true Jewish faith that it contained.[32] Sambari's Christian does the work that Jews did for Bleda: that of turning the Baḥīrā tradition into a weapon against Islam.

Sambari may have known of Christian predecessors like Bleda, but such direct transmission of knowledge was not necessary, for Jews had long ago developed their own counter narratives to the anti-Jewish Sergius Baḥīrā. An early one told of ten Jewish sages who, to safeguard the Jewish community, convert to Islam and write the Qur'an for Muhammad.[33] The story may reflect Jewish knowledge of a *hadith* attributed to the Prophet: "If only ten Jews had followed me, every Jew on earth would have followed me."[34] According to some 10th century Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic manuscripts the ten sages placed the mysterious "disjointed letters" (*ḥurūf muqaṭṭaʿāt*) in the Qur'an as secret proof of their authorship. The hidden message: "Thus do the sages of Israel counsel the mute, wicked man."[35]

The ten sages function for their Jewish authors much as the Eastern Christians' Baḥīrā: deploying similarities between their faith and Islam in order to preserve the superiority of their own religion while building bridges to the dominant faith with the view of avoiding persecution. Unlike the criticism aimed at the monk in the Arab-Christian version of the Baḥīrā legend, the ten sages are presented as Jewish heroes. None of the relevant texts contain the slightest condemnation of their conversion. The Arabic manuscript preserved in the Cairo Genizah even pronounces a curse against anyone who reveals their secret authorship of the Qur'an to non-Jews.[36] As in the Christian tradition about Sergius-Baḥīrā, here too traces of co-production are used as an historical argument against the Quran's claim to divine revelation.

Thus far Sergius-Baḥīrā has served us as a figure incorporating multiple histories of co-production between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. But it is worth noting that he plays an important role in the creation of difference *within* religious groups as well as between them. In all but the oldest Christian sources, for example, Sergius-Baḥīrā is assigned to a variety of Christian "heretical" sects (we put heresy in quotes here because the classification is itself the outcome of sectarian struggle). Arian, Nestorian, Jacobite, Nicolaite, Sabellian, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox: like a chameleon, the monk assumes the coloration of whatever sect the version's author seeks to combat with the bludgeon of "Islam." The characterization of Sergius-Baḥīrā as heretic has a double effect. On the one hand it additionally reduces the quality of the Qur'an, presenting it not only as a joint work of Christians and Jews, but of *false* Christians and Jews. On the other hand, for those who consider themselves orthodox, the

portrayal of their rivals in terms of past heresies may carry a reassuring message, prefiguring their overcoming.

The importance of the heretical in these narratives suggests that we should not differentiate too easily between co-productions that are within religions and those that are across or between them. Peter the Venerable's *Summa totius Saracenorum* (1122) exemplifies this interweaving of reflections on differences within and outside of one's own religious community. The *Summa* appeared as a supplement to the Latin translation of the Qur'an Peter had initiated. After presenting the Qur'an as a toxic mixture composed in dangerous collaboration by the Nestorian heretic Sergius and several Jews, Peter discusses whether the Muslims are to be called heretics (*haeretici*) or pagans (*ethnici).*[37] He cannot – or does not want to – come to clear conclusion, for in his view what makes Islam so dangerous for Christianity is precisely that it is a mixture of Jewish, pagan, and heretical Christian elements. If we focus on the author's intention, we might say Peter uses co-production polemically as an argument against Islam. But if we choose to ask about the aporetic reasoning that characterizes the hermeneutical dynamics underlying this representation of religious communities, we might conclude that the categories of "heresy" and "religion" are themselves co-productions.

The oldest oriental versions of the Christian Sergius-Baḥīrā legend do not identify the monk as a heretic. For writers in these circles, the entrance of a false Christology into Islam comes from the Jew Ka'ab, not from any heretical tendencies in Baḥīrā. Nevertheless, Syrian and Arab Christians also found ways to relate their representation of Islam to important inner-Christian controversies. According to the Syriac account, Baḥīrā destroyed crosses in churches, preaching that since Christ suffered on only one cross, only one cross should be venerated. Persecuted by the ecclesiastical authorities, he took refuge among the "sons of Ishmael." In other words, it was because he was an iconoclast that Sergius-Baḥīrā met Muhammad, who in turn adopted his teacher's views.[38]

We could follow this path into yet another vast field, that of the place of images—ranging from iconophilia to iconoclasm—in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This field, too, yields co-productions a-plenty, among them many of the motifs and strategies we have just encountered in the stories about Sergius-Baḥīrā. These include the attribution of iconoclasm to alien influence from a neighboring faith (as when iconoclast emperors are called "Saracen minded" and accused of "follow[ing] the lawless Jews and infidel Arabs"[39]); the role of the Jews as "instigators" of Christian and Muslim error (in this case, iconoclasm); and the linkage of heresy to paganism through historical genealogy, as when the "iconoclasm" of Jews and Muslims is attributed to paganism by iconophilic Christian authors. The cultivation of such fields would nourish our claim that co-production affects all dimensions of the religious – not only thinking, storytelling, and reasoning, but also cultic practice, everyday prayer, bodily devotion. Not only the mental, but also the physical, not only the textual but also the artistic heritages of Christianity, Islam and Judaism are constantly formed, re-formed and transformed by mutual engagement, both real and imagined.

It is because all these pasts and many more are contained in the figure of Sergius-Baḥīrā that he has served us as example of what we mean by co-production. He is a personification of historical apologetics, a figure put to the work of represent and justify multiple views of the proper relationship between various communities each claiming to live according to divine

teachings revealed in particular historical contexts. This is "normative" and dogmatic work, but its results are plural, often producing opposed valances and purposes. We have seen Sergius-Baḥīrā used to assert similarity and difference, kinship and enmity.

That work continues, and so does its plurality. The Şehitlik Mosque in Berlin recently named its "Violence Prevention Information Site" *Bahira*, interpreting the monk's instructions that Muhammad's uncle should protect the young prophet from his enemies (and omitting Bahira's identification of those enemies as the Jews) as a normative statement about "protecting people from violence." Bahira here serves to promote the "peaceful and tolerant understanding of Islam." [40] In his short film "Innocence of the Muslims" of 2012 the Coptic-American producer Nakoula Basseley Nakoula staged the Christian Baḥīrā legend to a very different effect, using it to present Muhammad as an undesirable character manipulated by a renegade monk into pretending to have revelations. Reaction to the film (or to rumors about its content) provoked the burning of Qur'ans by evangelical Christians in Florida, the murder of Christian nuns by Muslims in Palestine, and an attack on the U.S. diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya that resulted in the death of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and dogged Hillary Clinton's political career.

We are not suggesting that one of these interpretations—the irenic and tolerant or the polemic and intolerant—is truer to the obscure history of Sergius-Baḥīrā than the other. As we have seen, both potentials are already contained in the earliest traditions. Our point is that these interpretations are produced by a shared sense across all these religious communities that historical hermeneutics are a powerful tool with which to establish and legitimize the truth or falsity of any particular interpretation of God's multiple revelations to humanity across time. To put that point at its most general: not only are Islam, Christianity, and Judaism co-produced, but so are the conceptual tools – history and theology – through which we think about and within these religions.

History and theology: a co-production

In asserting this we do not mean anything like the claims of Mircea Eliade and of his Chicago colleague Marshall Hodgson that the establishment of "a historical God" was an Israelite innovation, nor that "the traditions that grow out of the Hebrew experience" have produced "all of the excesses of communalism and persecution which have gone with these traditions wherever they have travelled."[41] What we mean is that historical hermeneutics have long been and remain a tool for the generation of authoritative meaning within Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. They were shaped by and gained power from their use in the sectarian co-productions of these faiths, and that process continues to shape the possibilities for historical thought in every culture touched by those faiths, including many of even the most deliberately secular historical hermeneutics available to us today.

The point is confounding but vital. Insofar as prophecy is understood as revealed in a particular historical moment, but authoritative for all time, every encounter with scripture, indeed every moment in the life of a believer, has the potential to provoke questions (and answers) about the proper relationship between the moment of interpretation and the moment of revelation, the time of the prophet and that of the believer. This was Hodgson's point when he claimed that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were "'kerygmatic' lifeorientational traditions – those

that call for ultimate commitment on the plane of the historical."[42] The believer's plane of the historical is not the same as that of today's theologian or academic historian, but neither is it entirely separable. These too are co-produced, and relationship between them is one of the ongoing labors of modernity.

Again, we are not talking of origins. Many ancient cultures imagined that the favor or disfavor of supernatural beings toward a given person or people could be recognized in the unfolding of their fortunes through time.[43] Certainly the Israelites put these ideas to their own use, seeking to "unfold the mysteries of the past," so that "we will tell to a generation still to come" "what our ancestors have told us" (Psalm 78:3-5). In this psalm the lesson of that past, much of it collected from Exodus, is that when the people honored God he supported them, when they disobeyed him he punished them, but still they did not learn, so he "abandoned his power to captivity." Here a people's political status is an index of its piety, and God gives as he receives, making history a barometer of fidelity. In the much later and more lapidary phrasing of the Qur'an, "Systems have passed away before you. So travel the earth and see how those who denied [the Messengers] fared in the end." (Q 3:137).

The histories that the Hebrews considered authoritative are significant for the future of historical thought not because "the Hebrews invented history" (they did not), but because their histories remained relevant to the work that some later communities—most influentially, Christian and Islamic communities—would do to produce their own "historical God." The history of the Hebrews came to be read competitively, but through shared commitment to the meaningfulness of a common canon of *events* (n.b., we do not say texts) in the distant past. This combination gave historical hermeneutics a role in the production of prophetically authorized meaning within and across these three traditions that is distinctive from the work historical hermeneutics might do in the encounters (real or imagined) of these three with traditions such as the Hindu, the Inca, or any other.

One symptom of the importance of this work is that it ranks among the first tasks that the author of Luke-Acts assigned to the risen Jesus when, encountering his disillusioned disciples on the road to Emmaus, "starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained *(διερμήνευσεν)* to them throughout all the scriptures what were about himself." (Luke 24:27). A similar dynamic emerges in the earliest biographies of the Prophet to the Arabs, in which "the people of the Torah" are hired by Muhammad's Meccan enemies to question and confound him, or do so of their own accord, motivated by their hostility to true teaching. The refutation of these rabbis' interpretations was said to be a primary motive for the revelation of the Qur'an. "It was the Jewish rabbis who used to annoy the apostle with questions and introduce confusion, so as to confound the truth with falsity. The Qur'an used to come down in reference to these questions of theirs."[44] Insofar as the teachings of Jesus and Muhammad took the form of re-interpreting the Israelite past, we can say that they authorized and were authorized by (among other things) the emergence of new historical hermeneutics.

Insofar as any later community chose to claim the authority of the Israelite past as its own rather than abandon that past as irrelevant (as so many pasts have been abandoned), it could legitimate that claim by claiming that the Jews did not correctly understand their own history; or that the records of that history had been corrupted or intentionally altered; or that in the interval God had offered new teachings, new prophecy, and new history, transforming the

meaning of the old. All three of these strategies required the development of a historical hermeneutics appropriate to the new claim.

The importance of these hermeneutics only grew once the gates of prophecy were sealed and the canon of revelation closed in each of these traditions. Disputes about the proper interpretation of a word or an event produced and arbitrated sectarian differences, both within Christian, Jewish, or Islamic communities and across them. In this sense the historical replaced the prophetic as a mode for revealing divine instruction, and history became, as we saw in our examples, a weapon of apologetics.

This co-production of the historical and the theological did not end with Reformation, Enlightenment, modernity, or secularity. Some of the most influential Enlightenment efforts to separate the study of history from that of prophecy, or the study of philology from that of theology, such as those of Immanuel Kant or Friedrich August Wolf, were themselves co-productions, attributing the intertwining of history and prophecy, or of theology and philology, to the corruption of Christianity by Jewish superstition.[45] Likewise some of the most "modern" understandings of history, such as those of Hegel or of Marx, can be understood as secularizations of the historico-theological complex we have tried to describe, secularizations in which the unfolding of humanity's progress toward ultimate fulfillment is understood as legible in history.

Our point is not that the historical and the theological should be fully separated, but that they cannot be. Our contemporary historical practice, no matter how secular its intention, is already influenced by theology, and theology continues to be transformed by historical hermeneutics. In short, history retains the potential to do theological work, and vice-versa. Can we as historians become conscious of the theological potentials of our work? Can we as theologians imagine how different historical questions and emphases might produce different theological possibilities?

These are, we realize, dangerous questions, so let us conclude by pointing to some of their perils, as well as their opportunities. First, a peril. To grant that the history of religion retains a constructive potential is *not* to suggest (as so many Christian, Muslim and Jewish thinkers did in the past) that the historical should serve as an instrument of the apologetic, or that the historian should wield their research as polemical shield or spear. It is only to recognize that the work of the historian *can* be put to work by believers, and in ways capable of changing belief within their communities. Would greater historical attention to co-production produce a greater awareness within faith communities of just how entangled their histories are with the histories of others? Would such awareness in turn produce constructive theological work? Therein lies the opportunity for what we might call co-produced theologies. These would have to reflect on what it means that one's own religious tradition is deeply indebted to others, real or imagined. They would need to be both critical and constructive, questioning identitarian narratives by revealing them as in fact co-produced, and offering new narratives and interpretations from this realization. Co-produced theology would recognize the powerful potentials of co-production, including the potential for violence.

We could hope that co-productive theologies might nurture epistemic gratitude toward other traditions and interpretations. We think here of the Christian historian Sozomen, who mused (a few centuries before Muhammad), about the diversity of prophecy in the various religious

traditions. He explained that diversity by attributing it to a musical strategy of divine providence, that "in harmony with what is to come, not only put the future into the mouths of [Hebrew] prophets, but also partially into the mouths of foreign ones, just like a musician who, for the sake of a foreign melody, strikes superfluous strings or adds more to the already existing ones."[46] But religious co-production itself has always been deeply ambivalent, as capable of producing exclusion as inclusion, extermination as well as co-existence. Making co-production the explicit object of our historical attention will produce new meanings, but it will not eliminate the plurality of those meanings or their multivalent potentials. To imagine otherwise would produce, not gratitude, but yet another intolerance.[47]

References

[1] There have been other recent efforts to name dynamic conceptions of the interdependence of cultural traditions. One such is "Allelopoiesis", introduced to designate the mutual construing of a sphere of reference and a sphere of reception in reception processes. See Johannes Helmrath, "'Transformations of Antiquity,' A Berlin Concept," *Aegyptiaca* 4 (2019): 139-151.

[2] The concept of co-production has not yet been systematically applied to religious history, although some have used the term: Galit Hasan Rokem, *The Wandering Jew: Jewish Christian Co-production of Mobility as Blessing and Curse*, Fellows' Plenary Lecture at the American Folklore Society annual meeting in Milwaukee October 2006; David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths. Christianity, Islam and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014); Jason BeDuhn, "The Co-Formation of the Manichaean and Zoroastrian Religions in Third Century Iran," *Entangled religions* 11.2 (2020); Katharina Heyden, Dialogue as a Means of Religious Co-Production: Historical Perspectives, *Religions* 13/2 (2022): 150. The concept has been applied in the social sciences to processes of knowledge formation and meaning building. See *States of Knowledge. The coproduction of science and social* order, ed. Sheila Jasanoff (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); Stephen P. Osborne, Zoe Radnor, and Kirsty Strokosch, "Co-Production and the Co-Creation of Value in Public Services: A suitable case for treatment?", *Public management review* 18/5 (2016): 639-653; Victor Pestoff, *Co-Production and Public Service Management: Citizenship, Governance and Public Service Management* (London: Routledge, 2019); *The Palgrave handbook of co-production of public services and outcomes,* ed. Elke Loeffler and Tony Bouvaird (Cham: Palgrave, 2021).

[3] Jasanoff, *States of Knowledge*, 2: "coproduction is shorthand for the proposition that the ways in which we know and represent the world (…) are inseparable from the ways in which we choose to live in it."

[4] On this saying see Steven Wasserstrom, "The Shīʿīs are the Jews of our Community': an interreligious Comparison within Sunnī Thought", *Israel Oriental Studies* 14 (1994): 297–324.

[5] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Qur'an are from *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr *et al.* (HarperCollins: New York, 2015). We have occasionally modernized its diction.

[6] Cf. the Targum's Aramaic: *ṭūrā de-sīnai*. The language may also be Syriac, but the citation from the Talmud that follows makes Aramaic the more likely source. The Qur'an consistently refers (with one exception) to the site of revelation in Aramaic (or Syriac), not Arabic, as in the opening of Surah 52: "By the Mount [*Ṭūr*] (of revelation)! By a decree inscribed in a scroll unfolded!"

[7] BT *Shabbat* 88a. See also BT *Avoda Zara* 2b.

[8] Though grammatically in the past tense, the phrase can be taken in the future and the present tense. The Qur'anic transformation of this phrase was itself deeply influenced by rabbinic Jewish commentaries, as Julian Obermann demonstrated in "Koran and Agada: The Events at Mount Sinai," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 58 (1941): 23–48. See also Gordon D. Newby, "Arabian Jewish history in the Sīrah", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986): 136–38; and Ignazio di Mateo, "Il Tahrīf od alterazione della Bibbia secondo i musulmani," *Bessarione* 38 (1922): 64–111, 223–360.

[9] For a summary of some of the modern scholarship, see Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qur'an* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

[10] Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2013); Guillaume Dye and Mohammmad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran des Historiens* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2019); Angelika Neuwirth and Samuel Wilder, *The Qurʾan and Late Antiquity: a Shared Heritage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[11] For a study of the golden calf, quite different from ours in its sense of the sectarian dynamics at work, see Michael Pregill, *The Golden Calf between Bible and Qur'an: Scripture, Polemic, and Exegesis from Late Antiquity to Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[12] Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn Kuraia, as reported in Ibn Khallikan, Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abī Bakr (607-681 /1211-82). *Biographical Dictionary*, trans. Baron MacGuckin de Slane. 4 vols. (Paris: printed for the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1868) 3:95. Idem, *Wafīyāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān* [Obituaries of eminent men and history of the contemporaries], ed. Yūsuf ʿAlī Ṭawīl, Maryan Qāsim Ṭawīl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 1998). 6 vols. 4:184.

[13] Though not quite exact, the reference is clearly to Q 2:93: "and they were made to drink the calf into their hearts/*fī qulūbihim* because of their disbelief/*fī kufrihim*".

[14] We cite from al-Damīrī's Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā, vol. 2, 6 (Qum: Manshūrāt al-Radī, 1985).

[15] Uri Rubin, "'Become you apes, repelled!' (Qur'an 7:166): the Transformation of the Israelites into Apes and its Biblical and Midrashic Background," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 78 (2015): 25-40; and

more generally Pierre Lory, *La Dignité de l'homme face aux anges, aux animaux et aux djinns* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2018).

[16] East-Syrian Recension 10.2, ed. Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā. Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2009), 268.

[17] On the origins of the Baḥīrā traditions see Roggema, *The Legend*, 56-60.

[18] For such analyses, see Roggema, *The Legend*; Sidney H. Griffith, "Muhammad and the Monk Bahira: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times," *Oriens Christianus* 79 (1995): 146-174; Uri Rubin, *The eye of the Beholder. The life of Muḥammad as viewed by the early Muslims. A textual analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Krisztina Szilágyi, "Muhammad and the Monk: The Making of the Christian Baḥīrā Legend," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 169-214; Abjar Bahkou, "The Monk Encounters the Prophet—The Story of the Encounter between Monk Bahīra and Muhammad as It Is Recorded in the Syriac Manuscript of Mardin 259/2," *Cultural and Religious Studies 3* (2015): 349-357; David M. Freidenreich, "Muḥammad, the Monk, and the Jews: Comparative Religion in the Versions of the Baḥīrā," *Entangled Religions* 13/2 (2022, DOI: 10.46586/er.13.2022.9644).

[19] For our argument we can remain agnostic about the historical relationship between Qur'an and tradition. Classical Islamic scholars already associated this verse with Baḥīrā: Al-Jaḥiz (d. 255 AH/869 CE), *al-Radd ᶜala l-Naṣārā* (ed. Finkel, 324) and Al-Wāḥidi (d. 467 AH/1075 AH CE), Asbāb al-nuzūl (ed. Shaᶜbān, 167-168).

[20] Ibn Isḥāq's (d. 150/767) version of the story is contained in the redaction of Ibn Hishām (d. 219/834), *Sīrat sayyidinā Muḥammad* razūl All*āh* (ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, 1858-1868) vol. 1, 115-117; and Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Kitāb al-siyar wa l-maghāzī li-* Muḥammad *ibn Isḥāq* (ed. Suhayl Zakkār, 1978)*,* 73-76.

[21] Long Arabic Recension 18.9 and 18.31 (ed. *Roggema, The Legend, 508*/9 and 514/5).

[22] Long Arabic Recension 18.61 (ed. Roggema, *The Legend*, 522/3). "Things like this" refers to Q 33:37 as given (nota bene by Bahīrā, not Gabriel) to legitimize Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab.

[23] For the Christian tradition see Roggema, *The Legend*, 189-194. For the Jewish part, Elijah Capsali the 16th century chief rabbi of Crete, told the story of Baḥīrā's death in his *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*. See Martin Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte in jüdischen Chroniken* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 129.

[24] See Roggema, *The Legend*, 39-41.

[25] East-Syrian Recension 22 (ed. Roggema, *The Legend*, 304/5).

[26] For late 20th century examples of a similar strategy see Pierre-André Taguieff, *La nouvelle judéophobie* (Mille et une nuits: Paris, 2002). Compare Saddam Hussein's claim in his second Open Letter to the American People (2001) that the Jews are the source of conflict between Islam and the West.

[27] On the Latin Sergius-tradition and its polemical use see Katharina Heyden, "Der Beitrag historisch-theologischer Hermeneutik zur interreligiösen Verständigung – am Beispiel des christlichen Erzählmotivs von den Lehrern Muḥammads und der Entstehung des Koran," *Erlanger Jahrbuch für interreligiöse Diskurse* 1 (2021): 225-262.

[28] William of Tripoli, *De statu Sarracenorum*, ed. Peter Engels, Corpus Islamo-Christianum 4 (Würzburg: Echter, 1992), 334–336.

[29] Pim Valkenberg, "Sifting the Qur'an. Two Forms of Interreligious Hermeneutics in Nicholas of Cusa," in: *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe. Between Texts and People*, ed. by David Cheetham, Ulrich Winkler, and Judith Gruber (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 27-48.

[30] This is the general argument of David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013).

[31] For Bleda's treatment of Baeyra see Jaime Bleda, *Coronica de los moros de España. Diuidida en ocho libros. Valencia, en la Impression de Felipe Mey* (Valencia, 1618). For Baeyra, see pages 3, 5 ("Iudio de los quatro quartos), 7; for Sergio, 6, 7, 16, 54; and for John, 6, 16, 54. On the mapping of Islam on Judaism as justification for the Morisco expulsion, see Benny Bar-Lavi, *Politics Against God: Judaism and Islam in the Political-Theological Discourse of Sixteenth- And Seventeenth-Century Spain* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2022), 145-150, 187-234. We thank Dr. Bar-Lavi for assistance with references to the *Coronica*. For an introduction to Bleda, see the introductory essay in Jaime Bleda, *Coronica de los moros de España*, Edición facsímil, estudio introductorio por Bernard Vincent, Rafael Benítez Sánchez-Blanco (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2001); and Isabelle Poutrin, "Jaime Bleda," in: *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 9, Western and Southern Europe (16601700), ed. David Thomas and John Chesworth (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 273-80.

[32] *Sefer Divrei Yosef by Yosef ben Yitzhak Sambari: Eleven Hundred Years of Jewish History under Muslim Rule,* ed. Shimon Shtober (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi Publications, 1994).

[33] The oldest text to present this story is the 10th century Judeo-Arabic *Quiṣṣat aṣḥāb Muḥammad*; see J. Leveen, "Mohammed and his Jewish Companions," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 16 (1925/6): 399-406; idem., "Additions and Corrections to JQR NS 16:399-406," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 17 (1926/7), 237; and more recently Reuven

Firestone, "Muhammad, the Jews, and the Composition of the Qurʾan: Sacred History and Counter-History," *Religions* 10 (2019): 63.

[34] On the various versions of this hadith see Michael Lecker, "The Jewish Reaction to the Islamic Conquests," in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe,* ed. Volhard Krech and Marian Steinicke (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 177-195, here 178 n. 4 and 5.

[35] See Firestone, *Muhammad.*

[36] See Firestone, *Muhammad*, 36 and Leveen, *Mohammed,* who discussed this Geniza fragment first.

[37] Peter the Venerable, *Summa totius haeresis Saracenorum* 12, ed. Reinhold Glei (Corpus Islamico-Christianum Series Latina 1, Altenberge: Oros, 1985), 2-23.

[38] East Syriac Legend 5 (ed. Roggema, *The Legend,* 266/7). The relation between the Baḥīrā tradition and iconoclasm is discussed in Stephen Gero, "The legend of the monk Baḥīrā, the cult of the cross, and iconoclasm," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe-VIIIe siècles: actes du colloque international Lyon - Maison de l'Orient méditerranéen*, ed. Pierre Canivet and Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (Paris: Institut du monde arabe, 1992), 47-58; cf. Roggema, *The Legend*, 95-104.

[39] Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. Charles de Boor (Leipzig: Akademieverlag, 1883-85), I, 405[14]; and *Acts of the Council of Nicaea 787* (ed. Erich Lamberz, Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum 2,3,3, Berlin: Akademieverlag, 2008-2016). On iconoclasm as a response to Islam see Patricia Crone, *Islam, Judeao-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,* in *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī. Religion, Law and Politivcal Thought in the Near East, c.600-c.1100* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1980), 59-96.

[40] For the information site see https://docplayer.org/65325028-Bahira-beratungsstelle-beratung-aufklaerung-praevention.html. We will not link to "Innocence of the Muslims."

[41] Marshall Hodgson, "The Historian as Theologian," (unpublished), in Hodgson, Marshall G. S. Papers, Box 1, Folder 18, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, pp. 20 and 30-31. See further David Nirenberg, "The Historian as Theologian: A Conflict of the Faculties?," in *Claiming History in Religious Conflicts,* ed. Adrian Brändli and Katharina Heyden (Basel: Schwabe, 2021), 335-351.

[42] Hodgson made a similar point on Islam specifically in *The Venture of Islam. Conscience and History in a World Religion*, vol. 1: *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 362.

[43] An early account of chosen seed and the propagation of divine favor can be found in Farouk Al-Rawi and Jeremy Black, "A balbale of Ninurta, god of fertility," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 90/1 (2000): 31 (transliteration of the Sumerian, 33).

[44] Biography of Muḥammad Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/768), in the recension of `Abdu'l Malik Ibn Hisham (died ca. 218 AH), transl. A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: a Translation of Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Karachi: Oxford UP, 2000), here 239-242. For the story of Medinan rabbis recruited by Muhammad's Meccan enemies see Guillaume, 136f. A similar story is related in the *Tafsīr* attributed to Muqatil b. Sulayman (d. 150 AH /767 CE), regarding Q: 18:9. See John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 122-127.

[45] See Anthony Grafton, "Juden und Griechen bei Friedrich August Wolf," in *Friedrich August Wolf: Studien, Dokumente, Bibliographie*, ed. Reinhard Markner and Giuseppe Veltri (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999), 9-31.

[46] Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 1,1,8, ed. Günther Christian Hansen (Fontes Christiani 73/1, Freiburg and Basel: Herder, 2007), 100-102.

[47] Thus Ephrem the Syrian was open to polyvalence in his Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 1:18 and 7:22, trans. Carmel McCarthy, JSSSup 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), but he was also perfectly capable of strong anti-Judaism, as Christine Shephardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-century Syria* (Patristic Monograph Series, Washington: CUP, 2008), has shown.