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► To cite this version:

John Tolan. The Prophet Muhammad: A Model of Monotheistic Reform for Nineteenth-Century Ashkenaz. *Common Knowledge*, 2018, 24 (2), pp.256-279. 10.1215/0961754X-4362457 . hal-03019501

HAL Id: hal-03019501

<https://hal.science/hal-03019501>

Submitted on 19 Jan 2021

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The prophet Muhammad: a model of monotheistic reform for 19th-century Ashkenaz?

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Published in *Common Knowledge* 24 (2018), 256-279.

On 21 January 1821, Heinrich Heine, in a letter to his friend Moses Moser, proclaimed that no poet has ever surpassed Muhammad: “I must admit that you, great prophet of Mecca, are the greatest poet and that your Quran ... will not easily escape my memory”.¹ Heine was one of many romantic poets to admire Muhammad both as a prophet and a poet: indeed, for Heine as for Goethe, the prophet of Islam showed how thin the line was between prophet and poet. Heine admired the toleration that Muhammad showed towards those of other religions, in particular to Jews. For a number of nineteenth century Jewish writers, Muhammad, and medieval Islam more generally, became something of a foil for Christian Europe: various Jewish scholars, particularly those associated with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement, took a particular interest in Muhammad and the early history of Islam, often portraying the prophet as a reformer close to the true spirit of Judaism.

Jews were not the only Europeans who expressed their admiration for the prophet of Islam: on the contrary, one finds Muhammad portrayed as a religious reformer, lawgiver, mystic and poet in many European writings, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.² This facet of European “orientalism” is less known than the more negative portrayals, the indeed-common denigration of Islam and its prophet. For some scholars in religious studies, such as Tomoko Masuzawa, “The European idea of Islam was curiously monolithic and, for the most part, consistently negative”.³ Yet in fact, European images of Islam and its prophet Muhammad are anything but monolithic, and are far from being invariably hostile. Part of the problem, as far as recent scholarship (particularly in English), has been the influence of the pathbreaking book by Edward Said, *Orientalism*, published in 1978. Said chronicles the representations of the Orient in nineteenth- and twentieth-century

¹ Heine and Hirth, *Briefe : Bd. 1: Die Briefe 1815-1856*, 136. Translation in Reeves and Stewart, *Muhammad in Europe : A Thousand Years of Western Myth-Making*, 228.

² See John Tolan, *Muhammad the European: Western Portrayals of the Prophet of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming, 2018).

³ See Tomoko Masuzawa, *The invention of world religions, or, How European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 121.

British and French culture and brings to light their ideological implications. “Orientalism,” for Said, is “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”⁴ Orientalism as discourse, for Said, is the ideological counterpart to the political and military realities of British and French Empires in the Near East: Orientalism provides justification for empire. Said has had a profound impact on the field, not least because he emphasized how scholarship is not immune to the political and social pressures of the surrounding society, and how through deliberate distortion or unconscious bias scholarship can support or reinforce the colonial project.

Yet many have criticized Said for his lack of nuance, accusing him of creating a monolithic “Occident” as caricatural as the mythic Orient of some orientalists.⁵ This prevented him from seeing the ambivalence and nuance in European perceptions of Islam. For Humberto Garcia, Said’s schema is based on a “Whig fallacy” according to which, for example, radical Protestant writers and Deists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are little more than precursors to the secular reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶ As a result, Said and others ignore the religious nature of much of their work, or they reduce it to as a kind of code for the political. Hence Said assumes that these early modern authors’ vision of Islam can only be negative, either a vestige of medieval prejudice or a forerunner of hegemonic imperialist ideologies. For Said, Orientalism defined Islam as religious and hence atavistic, enforcing Western conceptions of superiority and justifying Western domination. This makes Said incapable of appreciating the complexity of European responses to Islam, in particular, for Garcia, what he calls “Islamic Republicanism”: using primitive Islam, the community that Muhammad founded in Medina, as a model for a rightly-ordered society and for proper relations between Church and State. It also makes him incapable of understanding the frank admiration that many European romantics had for Muslim spirituality and for the prophet Muhammad.

Said saw Orientalism as essentially a French and British (and subsequently American) phenomenon. Yet a large part of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Orientalist scholarship was published in German, by scholars who had no involvement or interest in carving out colonial empires in the Muslim world. Moreover, a number of prominent scholars of Arabic

⁴Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3.

⁵ See in particular Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism : Said and the unsaid* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007); Robert Irwin, *Dangerous knowledge : orientalism and its discontents* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2006).

⁶ Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English enlightenment, 1670-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 13-17.

and of Islam were Jews, whose perspective on the Arabic language and the early history of Islam is not the Christian, Eurocentric bias that Said sees as the hallmark of Orientalism. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English writers that Garcia studied used an idealized Islam in order to criticize the Anglican Church and the English Monarchy; Ziad Elmarsafy shows how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors used Muhammad and the Quran to rethink the proper relations between God and the faithful, between Church and State. Islam, as Elmarsafy says, was “good to think with”.⁷

So it was also to prove for some of the most prominent 19th-century scholars on Islam, who were central-European Jews. What these scholars write about Islam and Muhammad is inevitably linked to social and intellectual upheavals in Europe around them, notably in their own Jewish communities. Throughout Europe, from revolutionary France to the Holy Roman Empire, states and princes passed laws emancipating Jews from their previous, inferior legal status. Yet putting these principles into practice was often another matter, as there was considerable resistance from both Jews and non-Jews.⁸

Indeed, European Jews reacted in diverse ways to their own “emancipation”. Some welcomed it with open arms, seeing it as a path to social equality and full access to European society; others saw it as a threat to their traditional ways of life. This led to a profound split between Orthodox traditionalists and proponents of integration and assimilation; the latter often called for a reform of Judaism to make its practice and doctrines more compatible with modern European life and scientific truth. To this disagreement (and often strife) within European Jewry, were to be added, as the century progressed, debates about the emerging movements of communism and Zionism. For a handful of Jewish scholars, studying the early history of Islam became a way of thinking through the history of Judaism and its relations with both Christianity and Islam.

Abraham Geiger: the prophet as monotheistic reformer

Abraham Geiger (1810-74) was a leader, in many ways one of the founders, of the reform movement in Judaism. He sought to usher in innovations in the practice of Judaism, including the use of the vernacular and the revision of traditional rabbinic regulations, in order to make life as a Jew more appealing and compatible to an increasingly secular European

⁷ Ziad Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an : the politics of translation and the construction of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), pp. 6, 82, 122.

⁸ See Rita Hermon-Belot, *L'Emancipation des juifs en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999); Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, *Paths of Emancipation Jews, States, and Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

society. A reformed, modernized Judaism, Geiger and others hoped, would also diminish Anti-Semitism by presenting a more attractive face to gentile society. Geiger's scholarship on the history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam was closely related to his reform project, as it was for the other scholars embarked in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement.⁹ Geiger was inspired in part by the work of German Protestant biblical scholars who had submitted the Bible to critical study, seeing it not as the product of divine revelation but of human composition. Careful textual critique could place scripture in its historical context and reveal the formation and development of religious communities.¹⁰

Part of Geiger's project was to show the priority and superiority of Judaism to Christianity and Islam, which he saw as derivative versions of Judaism. In 1833, as student in Bonn, he wrote a prize essay *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen?* (*What has Muhammad taken from Judaism?*, published in English under the rather innocuous title *Judaism and Islam*).¹¹ As the title indicates, Geiger, like Jewish and Christian polemicists before him, saw Mohammed as the author of the Qur'ān who used Jewish and Christian sources. But whereas earlier authors had used this idea to discredit both prophet and book, for Geiger Mohammed's dependence on, and relative faithfulness to, many of the fundamental texts and doctrines of Judaism is for the most part positive. Far from being an imposter, Mohammed was convinced of his mission as a reformer who, inspired by Jewish teachers, transmitted to the Arabs versions (sometimes modified) of Biblical narratives and laws.

Geiger sought to show that the Qur'ān is largely derived from Rabbinical Judaism, that it reflects what Mohammed had learned from his Jewish teachers faithful to Torah, Mishna and Talmud. Christian polemicists as early as the eighth century had situated the rise of Islam

⁹ Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Susannah Heschel, "German Jewish Scholarship on Islam as a Tool for De-Orientalizing Judaism," *New German Critique*, no. 117 (2012); Jacob Lassner, "Abraham Geiger: A Nineteenth-Century Jewish Reformer on the Origins of Islam," in *The Jewish discovery of Islam : studies in honor of Bernard Lewis*, ed. Martin Kramer (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1999); Dirk Hartwig, "Die „Wissenschaft des Judentums“ und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung: Perspektiven einer modernen Koranhermeneutik," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 61, (2009).

¹⁰ L.I. Conrad, "Ignaz Goldziher on Ernest Renan: From Orientalist Philology to the Study of Islam," in *The Jewish discovery of Islam : studies in honor of Bernard Lewis*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Martin Kramer (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1999), 143.

¹¹ Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen?* (Bonn: Gedruckt auf Kosten des Verfassers bei F. Baaden, 1833); Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islam* (Edinburgh: Williams & Norgate, 1896); Susannah Heschel, "Abraham Geiger and the Emergence of Jewish Philoislamism," in *"Im vollen Licht der Geschichte" : die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung*, ed. Dirk Hartwig et al. (Würzburg: Ergon, 2008); Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*.

<https://archive.org/details/cu31924029170236>. The English translation was commissioned by the Cambridge Mission in Dehli, in the hopes of showing Muslims the Jewish roots of Islam in order to make them more favorable to Christianity: this aim (very far indeed from those of Geiger) explains the innocuous title; see Lassner, 107-8.

in the context of Christian heresy: “Mahomet” had been taught by heretics and it is their doctrine that he infused into his Alcoran. Some of them, for good measure, added bad Jews to the bad Christians who had taught Mahomet. For a number of Enlightenment writers, Mahomet was essentially a deist, proffering a pure monotheism stripped of needless laws and rituals, purified of pagan accretions, Trinity, saints.¹²

Geiger has something else in mind. Through a rich and well-documented comparative study of Talmud and Qur’ān, he sought to show that Islam is essentially derivative of Judaism, indeed, that it is a form of Judaism, truer to the spirit and Law of Moses than was Christianity. Yet it was an inferior form of Judaism, as the Qur’ān imperfectly transmitted biblical teachings. Why? In part because the Jews that Mohammed frequented were ignorant, as the compilers of the Talmud attest.¹³ Mohammed “desired no peculiarity, no new religion which should oppose all that had gone before; he sought rather to establish one founded on the ancient creeds purified from later changes and additions”.¹⁴ Mohammed was not an imposter. He “seems rather to have been a genuine enthusiast [*schwärmer*], who was himself convinced of his divine mission, and to whom the union of all religions appeared necessary to the welfare of mankind. He so fully worked himself into this idea in thought, in feeling and in action, that every event seemed to him a divine inspiration.”¹⁵

Geiger’s essay won acclaim from other specialists of Islam; indeed, it heralded new directions in the study of the Qur’ān, and more generally in comparative religion. He was 23 when he published his essay and he would then leave aside scholarship on Islam, devoting much of his academic work to the relations between Judaism and Christianity. Geiger followed with interest the recent developments in Protestant biblical exegesis, particularly the work of the Tübingen School, which critically analyzed biblical texts as entirely human creations and sources for understanding the history of the emergence and development of Christianity. David Strauss, in his *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (*The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, 1835), interpreted Jesus’ miracles and resurrection as mythical elements created by the New Testament authors to lend a divine aura to Jesus’ teaching. Geiger hailed Strauss’ work as “epoch-making”¹⁶ and sought to carry his methodology further by submitting rabbinical sources to the same critical methods and using them to complement and significantly modify Strauss’ and the Tübingen School’s vision of the emergence of

¹² See Tolan, op cit., ch. 6.

¹³ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 18.

¹⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶ Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 108.

Christianity from Biblical Judaism. As early as 1836, Geiger wrote excitedly to Joseph Derenbourg that Talmud and Bible should no longer be seen as divinely-authored texts, but as human creations.¹⁷

Geiger's scholarship, and his command of a wide range of texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Arabic, are impressive. His academic work was inseparable from his engagement for reform within German Judaism. In 1840, he was elected chief rabbi of Breslau, despite fierce opposition from more conservative members of the community, who subsequently attempted to have the Prussian authorities invalidate his election. In 1841, Geiger expressed his frustration in a letter to Leopold Zunz, confiding that efforts for compromise were unlikely to succeed and that the result would be a schism between Orthodox and Liberal factions. Tellingly, he likened the Orthodox Jews to the Catholics, clinging superstitiously to arcane rites, whereas the reformers were Jewish Protestants, attempting to purify their religion of superstition and return to a spiritual life consistent with rational science. Orthodox Jewry and the Catholic Church would both eventually wither and die.¹⁸ Among Geiger's prescriptions for the reform of Jewish practice were the abolishment of phylacteries and the easing of dietary restrictions.

In 1863, Geiger published his *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte (Judaism and its history)*: his analysis of rabbinical texts alongside New Testament texts allowed him to present Jewish Palestine in Jesus' time as sharply divided between the priestly class, the Sadducees, who clung to ritual and were obsessed by purity, and the reforming Pharisees, whose interpretation of Judaism was more spiritual. Geiger's innovation is above all to make Jesus a Pharisee, engaged alongside the most dynamic and reforming tendencies of Judaism at the time against a sclerotic priestly oligarchy. The negative portrayal of Pharisees in various passages of the New Testament reflects not Jesus' own perspective, but that of later (Pauline and post-Pauline) authors. Paul is truly the first Christian: he modifies Jesus' teachings, creating a new religion by mixing in elements of Greek philosophy, in order to attract Gentile converts.

Geiger's Jesus is a reforming Jew: he bases his vision of the Pharisee/Sadducee split is both on a deep familiarity with the biblical and post-biblical sources and a projection onto the first centuries of the current era of the nineteenth-century conflicts within German Jewry. Orthodox Jews reacted negatively, some accusing him of hostility to Judaism; Gershom

¹⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁸ Ibid., 35-6.

Scholem subsequently called him “diabolical”.¹⁹ Many Protestant scholars also were hostile to his portrayal of Jesus as a Pharisee: Pharisaic Judaism had been classically a foil for Jesus, the sclerotic traditional Judaism against which he was rebelling. Geiger’s Jesus, on the contrary, was a Jewish reformer, and it is hence Jewish reformers like Geiger himself who are closest to following the real teachings of Jesus: they better understand and better live out what Jesus had promoted.

This vision was anathema to many traditional Jews and Christians. His arguments were all the more galling to them in that few of them could match his scholarly acumen and his impressive command of a huge arsenal of sources. Susannah Heschel has noted how both Paul and Mohammed represent paradoxical figures for Geiger, what she calls “strong misreaders”: inspired by Jewish tradition, they produced their own (mis-)readings of it, tapping into the rich legal and spiritual fount of Judaism to produce new faiths more or less faithful to Judaism—less, in the case of Paul’s Christianity, more, in the case of Mohammed’s Islam. Yet Geiger himself produced new “strong misreadings” of the very texts produced by Paul, Mohammed and their followers, in order to promote an agenda of religious renewal in which Judaism is recognized as the fount of Abrahamic spirituality rather than its despised offshoot. True Judaism is not hide-bound orthodox/Sadducee ritual, but the spiritual renewal taught by Jesus and Mohammed. Geiger became increasingly anti-Christian as he saw persistent anti-Semitism around him and was frustrated that Protestant scholars did not seriously engage with his work on the early history of Christianity. Christianity, cursed by a “lust for destruction” (*Zerstörungs-wuth*), “smashed and destroyed everything humane, beautiful and noble that earlier times had produced”. This is in stark contrast to Islam: Judaism, he says “developed its own fullest potential in closest union with Arab civilization”.²⁰ If for many authors of the Enlightenment Mahomet was a better Christian than 18th-century European Christians, Geiger’s Mohammed is a better Jew than hide-bound Orthodox European Jews.

Gustav Weil’s reforming enthusiast

Gustav Weil was a fellow student with Geiger at Heidelberg. Weil’s grandfather was rabbi at Metz, engaged in the movement of reform, and his family envisaged for him a career

¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

²⁰ Abraham Geiger, *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte* (Breslau: Schletter, 1865), 1:142; Abraham Geiger, *Abraham Geiger's Nachgelassene Schriften* (Berlin: L. Gerschel, 1875), 2:40. Citations and translations from John M. Efron, *German Jewry and the allure of the Sephardic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 198-9.

as a rabbi and theologian. Yet unlike Geiger, Weil decided he did not wish to become a rabbi and to join the intellectual and political struggle for reformed Judaism. He instead preferred to follow his love for Arabic. From Heidelberg, he went to Paris, to study under Silvestre de Sacy; he then went to Algeria with the French forces in 1830 (as a correspondent for a German newspaper) and, over the next five years went on to Cairo and Istanbul: writing for German newspapers, teaching French, studying Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.²¹ One of the publications he wrote for was the *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände*, whose contributors included Goethe, Heine and Humboldt. It is to this audience, and with the situation of German Jews in mind, that he wrote his observations of Egyptian Muslims, whose religious beliefs and practices he often compares to those of European Jews, frequently to criticize both. He derides the rituals of Jewish kosher and Muslim hallal butchers; mocks Jews' and Muslims' superstitious use of amulets and fear of the evil eye. Yet there is hope for both, and here Weil presents reform Judaism as a model for Muslim reform:²²

the Muslim religion is also capable of improvement and spiritualization and one does not understand why Islam cannot be friendly with Christianity like enlightened Judaism. Like the civilized part of European Israelites who become enemies of orthodox 'rabbinism' the more they take part in universal culture, so also will Muslims soon, once they have rejected their crass ignorance, differentiate the elements of their Koran which come from specific circumstances from those that are eternally true and are not subject to change.²³

Weil returned to Germany in 1837; the following year he became librarian at Heidelberg, where he was finally appointed professor in 1861. He published works on Arabic poetry and German translations of Arabic texts, in particular the 1001 Nights. He also embarked on a series of studies of the early history of Islam: a biography of Muhammad (1843), a *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran* (*Historical-Critical Introduction to the Koran*, 1844), a *Biblische Legenden der Muselmänner : aus arabischen Quellen zusammengetragen und mit jüdischen Sagen verglichen* (1845, published in English the following year as *The Bible, the Koran, and the Talmud*) and a history of the caliphate (in several volumes between 1846 and 1862).

Weil shared Geiger's methods of applying the tools of biblical criticism to the text of the Qur'ān; and he shared his concerns for the renewal of Judaism, though unlike Geiger he

²¹ Ruchama Johnston-Bloom, "Jews, Muslims and Bildung: the German-Jewish Orientalist Gustav Weil in Egypt: Jews, Muslims and Bildung," *Religion Compass* 8(2014); "Oriental studies and Jewish questions: German-Jewish encounters with Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islamic modernities" (Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2013); "Gustav Weil's Koranförschung and the Transnational Circulation of Ideas: The Shaping of Muhammad as Reformer," in *Beyond the Myth of "Golden Spain": Patterns of Islamization in Modern Jewish Scholarship on Islam*, ed. Ottfried Fraisse and Christian Wiese (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

²² Ruchama Johnston-Bloom, "Jews, Muslims and Bildung: the German-Jewish Orientalist Gustav Weil in Egypt: Jews, Muslims and Bildung," *Religion Compass* 8, (2014): 54-5.

²³ Cited by *ibid.*, 55.

never became a rabbi. But while Geiger moved on to focus on Jewish-Christian relations after publishing *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen* at the age of 23, Weil devoted his life and career to the study of Arabic literature and history and to Islam. His approach to these texts showed more sympathy and more maturity than that of the 23-year-old Geiger to the Qur'ān. Geiger used the Muslim holy text to show that Muhammad derived his teachings from Jewish sources, whereas Weil, without ignoring the context of rabbinic Judaism, placed the Qur'ān in a broader context of Jewish, Christian, and pre-Islamic Arab textual history. Like Geiger, Weil sees Mohammed as a reformer; unlike him, he does not portray Islam as an inferior form of Jewish monotheism. And of course Geiger never left Europe: his knowledge of Arabic and of Islam was acquired through books, whereas Weil had spent five years studying in the Near East. The result was a profound knowledge of the language and foundational texts of Islam and a detachment from the earlier European polemics about the prophet.

Let us take the example of Mohammed's alleged epilepsy, which Weil tackles in a short article published in 1842.²⁴ He notes that seventeenth-century orientalist Johann Heinrich Hottinger and Ludovico Maracci affirmed that "Mahomet" was indeed epileptic and that they cited Byzantine historians and several ambiguous passages in the Qur'ān. Others (Simon Ockley, Jean Gagnier and George Sale) rejected these accusations, judging that little trust could be put in the testimony of hostile Christian authors. In other words, those seeking to denigrate Islam and its prophet were ready to believe anything nasty they read, whereas those who defended him rejected anything negative. Weil is the first non-Muslim author to take a close look at Muslim traditions to see what they say on this issue. He cites passages from two 16th-century texts: al-Halabi's biography of the prophet, *Insān al-ʿuyūn* and Husayn ibn Muhammad Diyar Bakari's *Tarikh al Khamis*, both of whom refer to passage in Ibn Ishaq's *Sira* and to various hadith. These texts describe how, when the prophet received a revelation, his body was shaken with convulsions, he fell to the ground, he foamed from the mouth, his eyes closed, he moaned like a camel, his forehead was soaked in perspiration. Aisha is reported to have said that each time he was in the throes of a revelation, all feared that his soul would leave him. Weil presents each of these texts in Arabic with a French translation and a brief analysis. In conclusion he says that he no longer has the slightest doubt

²⁴ Gustav Weil, "Sur un fait relatif à Mahomet," *Journal Asiatique* 14, (1842). Weil revisits the epilepsy question in his biography of the prophet ; see Ruchama Johnston-Bloom, "Oriental studies and Jewish questions: German-Jewish encounters with Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islamic modernities" (Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2013), 106-9; Philip C. Almond, *Heretic and hero : Muhammad and the Victorians* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1989), 24-5.

that Mahomet indeed suffered from epilepsy. However, he rejects the view of Maracci and others that he pretended to be a prophet in order to hide his illness.

I believe, on the contrary, that Mahomet himself attributed his fits to the visits of an angel. Nothing is more natural than to suppose that Mahomet, always occupied with his ideas of reform (for he at first thought of destroying idolatry and purging Judaism and Christianity of their errors), and probably provoking his fits by excessively strong spiritual struggles, believed indeed in the visionary state in which the epileptics find themselves at the moment of coming to their senses, that he had learned from an angel what his reason dictated to him, which was his subject of preoccupation before his fit. والله اعلم [And God knows best] (112).

This example is illustrative of Weil's approach to texts, which he will develop over the following years. His access to the earliest sources is often indirect. He carefully sifts through them and bases his conclusions, always reasonable and well-argued, on the evidence they present. Yet there is little trace here of the healthy skepticism towards his sources that we find in the biblical scholarship of the Tübingen school or in Geiger's deconstruction of post-biblical Jewish sources. Weil presents these Hadith, which he gleaned from 16th-century compilations on the biography of the prophet, as unproblematically reporting the words of Aisha, of various of Mahomet's companions, and of the prophet himself. Like his predecessors, he seeks to explain religious phenomena through wholly human causes, and the prophet's supposed epilepsy allows him to do so while respecting Mahomet's integrity and zeal for reform. This is of course a vision which could displease pious Muslims, and as if to soften this he adds the standard Arabic "God knows best".

This same lack of critical approach to his sources appears in his biography of the prophet published the following year. He states his purpose in very positivistic, Rankean terms:

I have studied the active life of Mohammed without prejudice in any form and followed the sources, exploring and scrutinizing them step by step, and most assiduously aspired after the historical truth, free from the aura in which it is wrapped.²⁵

His life of the prophet is indeed free of the bias that is so apparent in many of the texts written about Muhammad by previous European authors: Weil does not make the prophet into a caricature or the symbol of a cause. Yet his approach to the (often rather late) Muslim sources that he uses in his biography of Mohammed consists largely in stripping them of their

²⁵ Gustav Weil, *Mohammed der Prophet, sein Leben und seine Lehre : aus handschriftlichen Quellen und dem Koran geschöpft und dargestellt* (Stuttgart: 1843), xvi. Translation Johnston-Bloom, "Oriental studies and Jewish questions: German-Jewish encounters with Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islamic modernities", 90.

obviously legendary or miraculous elements, rather than studying the history of their composition.

Weil's Mohammed is no imposter, but a sincere reformer. In accordance with Geiger and with many of the eighteenth-century authors, Weil's Mohammed seeks to renew the pure, primitive monotheism of Abraham:

He looked back to Abraham, who was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a true believer, a man devoted to God (a Muslim), who was seen not only by the Jews and Christians as a holy prophet but also worshipped by the Arabs as the father of Ishmael and the builder the Ka'ba. Abraham often expressed thoughts that the scriptures of Jews and Christians sometimes distorted, sometimes misinterpreted, and he [Mohammed] felt himself called to produce again a pure faith, as we find with Abraham even in the Old Testament.²⁶

Weil prides himself in relying on Muslim Arabic sources and not on the polemical texts of Christianity, and by and large he does so. Yet his portrait of the prophet remains framed by the work of earlier European Orientalists. We see this particularly clearly in the central role he assigns to Waraqa, Khadīja's cousin who, for most Muslim commentators of the Qur'ān, was Christian—and one of the first to recognize in Muhammad God's prophet. Whereas some Christian polemicists had made him (along with Bahīra) as a heretical Christian and one of the authors of the "heretical" text of the Qur'ān, Weil paints a very different portrait of him:

Mohamed was probably indebted for his religious education to a man who, abandoning the religion of Arabia, his native country, had sought refuge first in Judaism, and then in Christianity, though even in the latter he does not seem to have found perfect satisfaction. This man . . . urged forward by an irresistible desire after the knowledge of truth but, as his repeated apostasies would serve to show, being of a skeptical nature, may have discovered the errors that had crept into all the religious systems of his time; and having extracted from that which is purely Divine, and freed it from the inventions of men, may have propounded it to his disciple.²⁷

Waraqa is a searcher for truth who, in dissatisfaction, goes from one religion to another, and who inculcates into his young disciple a desire for a purified religion in the service of Truth. This depiction of Waraqa is an implicit condemnation of both Judaism and Christianity, and Weil's nineteenth-century preoccupations show through his (largely speculative) portrait of Waraqa as a seventh-century reformer. In later work Weil more explicitly lambasted Christianity for its abstruse doctrines whose interpretations have given

²⁶ Weil, *Mohammed der Prophet, sein Leben und seine Lehre : aus handschriftlichen Quellen und dem Koran geschöpft und dargestellt*, 41-2. Translation Johnston-Bloom, "Oriental studies and Jewish questions: German-Jewish encounters with Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islamic modernities", 109-10.

²⁷ Gustav Weil, *The Bible, the Koran, and the Talmud* (London: 1846), vii-ix. See Johnston-Bloom, "Oriental studies and Jewish questions: German-Jewish encounters with Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islamic modernities", 115-7.

rise to conflicts and divisions, for its elaborate sacraments; to this he contrasts the simplicity of Islam and its lack of priesthood.²⁸

Various European authors before Weil had contrasted the prophet and visionary of the Meccan period with the warrior, lawgiver and statesman of the Medinan period. Weil stresses and sharpens this divide, portraying favorably Mohammed's life and message in Mecca but largely negatively the developments in Medina. As Ruchama Johnston-Bloom has suggested, this corresponds with Weil's vision for Jewish reform, which should concentrate on spiritual and moral purity (as Mohammed in Mecca) and not on hair-splitting legal distinctions (which he sees in Medina).

He appears to us as a prophet only so long as he was a persecuted man in Mecca. Then seized by religious enthusiasm he might have felt the call to proclaim a new faith, and, in consequence of his bodily infirmity, may have believed God revealed himself to him by means of angels, visions and dreams. But upon his arrival at Medina self-deception ceased, and at best he could have only justified himself in deceiving others by the maxim "The end justifies the means."²⁹

At Mecca, the faithful disciple of Waraqa seeks a purified reformed monotheism very close to Weil's own vision for reformed Judaism; in Medina, he becomes someone else, no longer a pure searcher for Truth, but nevertheless one who inspires esteem:

We would pronounce him a crafty statesman who accomplished great things, partly from love for his people, partly from ambition. We can give him our approval as reformer of Judaism and Christianity, as a civilizer [*Sittenverbesserer*], and as the preacher of pure monotheism and of the doctrines of immortality and the judgment, and, considering his many misfortunes at first, we cannot withhold our admiration.³⁰

It is above all in the study of the Qur'ān that Weil made a lasting impact on scholarship. He sought to refine Geiger's method and carry his work further. It was Weil, in the 1840s, who first took up the traditional Muslim division of the Qur'ān into Meccan and Medina suras: he reassessed the dating of some of them and further tried to order them into four different chronological groups (three for the Meccan suras and one for Medina). This careful attention to the language of the suras, their formulaic elements and their structure is a first in European scholarship and in many ways represents the foundation of modern European Qur'ānic studies. Theodore Nöldeke followed up on Weil's methods and insights

²⁸See, for example, Gustav Weil, *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran* (Bielefeld: 1844), 87-8. See Johnston-Bloom, "Oriental studies and Jewish questions: German-Jewish encounters with Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islamic modernities", 119-20.

²⁹Weil, *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran*, 50. Citation and translation from Johnston-Bloom, "Oriental studies and Jewish questions: German-Jewish encounters with Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islamic modernities", 118.

³⁰Weil, *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran*. Translation Johnston-Bloom, "Oriental studies and Jewish questions: German-Jewish encounters with Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islamic modernities", 117.

in his own *Geschichte des Qorāns* (1860), which has been indispensable to Qur'ānic scholars ever since.³¹

In Weil's account, Islam was a purified version of both Judaism and Christianity. He describes it in *The Bible, the Koran, and the Talmud* as "A Judaism without the many ritual and ceremonial laws, which, according to Mohamed's declaration, even Christ had been called to abolish, or a Christianity without the Trinity, crucifixion and salvation connected therewith."³² Weil's Islam, like George Sale's or Voltaire's, is Enlightenment Deism: Judaism without law, Christianity without dogma.

Heinrich Graetz's brilliant pupil of an Arabian rabbi

Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891) was critical of the work of Geiger and many of the reformers; he set out to defend his vision of Orthodox Judaism through exegesis and through the study of Jewish history.³³ His massive 11-volume *History of the Jews* (1853-70), sweeping from biblical times to the nineteenth century, celebrates the Jews' special place in history. Graetz deals with Jesus by making him an Essene: a good, spiritual Jew perhaps, but one that was on the margins of institutional Judaism: a very different character from Geiger's reforming Pharisee. Indeed, Geiger and his ilk were anathema to Graetz: their reform was nothing less than the surreptitious Christianization of Judaism and he vowed to fight them to his "last breath".³⁴ In his *History*, Graetz chronicles Christian persecution of Jews and rails against its perpetrators, including medieval popes such as Innocent III. Islam serves as something of a foil to his Christianity, both closer to Judaism as a faith and more tolerant of Jews in society. Oriental Jews had welcomed the Muslim conquerors of the seventh century as "liberators from the yoke of Christianity"; the "Mahometans" treated Jews with respect and friendship.³⁵

In the third volume of his *History of the Jews*, he describes the Jewish communities of the Arabian Peninsula in the sixth and seventh centuries and in this context evokes the life of Muhammad.

³¹ Marco Schöller, "Post-Enlightenment Academic Study of the Qur'ān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

³² Gustav Weil, *Biblische Legenden der Muselmänner : aus arabischen Quellen zusammengetragen und mit jüdischen Sagen verglichen* (Frankfurt a. M: Literarische Anst., 1845); Weil, *The Bible, the Koran, and the Talmud*, ix; Heschel, "German Jewish Scholarship on Islam as a Tool for De-Orientalizing Judaism," 96-7.

³³ Shmuel Ettinger and Marcus Pyka, "Graetz, Heinrich," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007).

³⁴ Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 136-7.

³⁵ Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. 3 (London: Myers & co., 1904), 89.

Mahomet, the prophet of Mecca and Yathrib, was, it is true, no loyal son of Judaism, but approached to its highest aims, and was induced by it to give to the world a new faith, founded on a lofty basis and known as Islam. This religion has exercised a wonderful influence on the aspect of Jewish history and on the evolution of Judaism. In the peaceful meetings in Mecca, his birthplace, Abdallah's son heard much spoken in the temples and on his travels of the religion which acknowledges the belief in one God who rules the world. He heard much of Abraham, who devoted himself to the service of God, and of religion and morality, which gave the disciples of Judaism the advantage over infidels. Mahomet's mind, at once original and receptive, was powerfully impressed by all this. Waraka Ibn-Naufal, a celebrated Meccan, and a descendant of the noble Khoraisi race, was a cousin of Chadija, Mahomet's wife, and he had embraced Judaism and knew Hebrew well. He certainly imbued Mahomet with a love for the religion of Abraham.³⁶

Graetz's Mahomet is singularly well-disposed towards Judaism. While Muslim tradition in general presented Khadija's cousin Waraka as a Christian, Weil, as we have seen, made him first a Jew, then a Christian, but satisfied with neither; for Graetz he is simply a Jew. Thus he portrays Qur'anic doctrine as the result of the teaching that a sage Arabian Jew dispensed on a smart and dutiful pupil. One of the things Mahomet learned from Waraka was to insist on God's unity, and thus to reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. When he went to Yathrib, that city's Jews welcomed him as a learned and pious man and saw him as a potential proselyte to Judaism. Yet his haughtiness and love of women, Graetz affirms, turned them against him. This leads Mahomet to hate the Medinan Jewish and plot their destruction.

Geiger wrote scathing reviews of the *History of the Jews*, saying that Graetz "lacks totally that historical perspective, that insight, which would make constructive use of the subject matter"; he writes "stories" (*Geschichten*), but not "history" (*Geschichte*).³⁷ Graetz had none of Geiger's deep familiarity with the Arabic texts, and his naïve, positivistic view of history was starkly different from Geiger's critical approach to his sources. Yet their portraits of Muhammad are in many ways similar. The prophet's mission is on the whole positive, and it is positive precisely because he takes inspiration from Judaism, taps into its texts and traditions, and creates a society for the most part tolerant of Jews. "The best teachings of the Koran are borrowed from the bible or the Talmud", says Graetz;³⁸ Geiger had concluded largely the same. Mahomet errs where he departs from his Jewish sources and his Jewish teachers. Neither of them explicitly compares Mahomet to Jesus; Graetz compares him to Paul, suggesting that both started out preaching "the ancient religion of Abraham" but subsequently were led astray by their own ambitions.³⁹ Geiger and Graetz both compare

³⁶ Ibid., 72-3. See Ned Curthoys, "Diasporic Visions, Taboo Memories: Al-Andalus in the German Jewish Imaginary," *Arena Journal* 33, (2010).

³⁷ Cited by Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 79, 220.

³⁸ Graetz, 73.

³⁹ Ibid.

Islam to Christianity, the better to criticize the latter as irrational and intolerant. Graetz follows Weil in giving a central importance to Waraqa, but with a key distinction: Weil's Waraqa was a restless reformer who went from traditional Arabic paganism to Judaism to Christianity—ever unsatisfied, he inspired Mohammed's new teachings, which resemble nothing more than Weil's (or Geiger's) own notions of Jewish reform. Graetz's Waraqa is a good Jew who clearly is uninterested in reform, who on the contrary teaches pure Jewish tradition to his bright (but alas finally wayward) pupil.

Islam and Muhammad were important to many nineteenth-century European Jews among other things because they served as a foil to Christian Europe. They provided arguments against anti-Semites, who accused Jews of being unable to assimilate into European culture. By underlining the tolerance shown towards Jews (and Christians) by Islam, and by highlighting how Jews flourished under Islam and contributed to the development of Islamic culture, these Jewish thinkers argued (sometimes explicitly, often implicitly), that the problem was with Christianity, an intolerant and irrational faith. Writing about Islam was both a way of arguing about Jews' proper place in European society (and hence the lessons to be drawn were of course not the same for assimilationists as for traditionalists) and indulging in a fantasy world, far from the persecution and pogroms of 19th-century Europe, a land where Jews could live in harmony with their non-Jewish neighbors.

Andalus, Muslim Spain, became a particular focus of interest. This is a time when European Romantics--travelers, artists and writers—rediscovered Muslim Spain, and when historians of science and philosophy documented the crucial role that it had played in European intellectual history. Heinrich Heine's play *Almansor* (1823), set in the sixteenth-century Alhambra, dramatizes the contrast between tolerant Islam and bigoted Christianity. The protagonists are Muslims subjected to increasing persecution at the hands of their new Christian overlords. One character laments "On the tower where the muezzin called to prayer there is now the melancholy tolling of church bells. On the steps where the faithful sang the words of the Prophet, tonsured monks are acting out their lugubrious charades".⁴⁰ The protagonist Almansor reports to his friend Hassan that "Ximenes the Terrible" has burnt the Qur'ān at Granada; Hassan responds "That was only a prelude; where they burn books they will, in the end, burn human beings too."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Translation in Martin Kramer, "Introduction," in *The Jewish discovery of Islam : studies in honor of Bernard Lewis*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Martin Kramer (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1999), 5.

⁴¹ Translation in *ibid.*

Nothing speaks more eloquently of this image of Andalus as a lost paradise of flourishing Judaism within Islamic culture than the string of Moorish-style synagogues built throughout central Europe in the nineteenth century. The legal emancipation of Jews meant, among other things, that they could buy land and build synagogues to serve not only as houses of worship for growing communities, but as prominent symbols of their new place in European society. While many synagogues were built in “Christian” styles (neo-gothic, neo-classical), with only decorative elements distinguishing them from churches, a number of reformed Jewish communities chose the Moorish revival style. In Leipzig (1855), Vienna (1858), Budapest (1859), Berlin (1866) and elsewhere, sumptuous synagogues rose up, graced with domes, horseshoe arches, elaborate stucco tracery, and towers that looked like minarets.⁴² Yet Ludwig Förster, designer of the Vienna and Budapest synagogues (and one of the chief architects of Vienna’s Ringstraße), explained that the twin towers on either side of the entrance to the Vienna synagogue were based on those that graced the temple of Solomon—an ancient “Oriental” model which was adapted by Muslims.⁴³

Ignác Goldziher

Ignác Goldziher (1850-1921) revolutionized the study of Islam by Europeans.⁴⁴ Born in the central Hungarian town of Székesfehérvár, Goldziher met Geiger and was inspired by his vision of a reform of Judaism. Schooled in Hebrew and Arabic, he studied in Pest, Berlin, Leipzig, Leiden and Vienna. In two essays written in Hungarian in 1872-73, he portrays Mohammed as the bearer of a universal message of pure monotheism, who struggled to

⁴² Efron, *German Jewry and the allure of the Sephardic*; Rudolf Klein, "Ludwig Förster's Dohany Tempel in Pest: Moorish Cathedral for the 'Asiates Of Europe'"/Ludwig Forsterov Dohany Tempel u Pesti: Maurska katedrala za "Azijate Europe", *Prostor* 17, no. 2 (2009).

⁴³ Efron, 148.

⁴⁴ On Goldziher, see Ottfried Fraisse, *Ignác Goldziher's monotheistische Wissenschaft : zur Historisierung des Islam* (2014); Róbert Simon, *Ignác Goldziher : his life and scholarship as reflected in his works and correspondence* (Budapest: Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1986); *Goldziher memorial conference : June 21-22, 2000, Budapest, Oriental Collection, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences* (Budapest: Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2005); Dietrich Jung, "Islamic Studies and Religious Reform. Ignaz Goldziher – A Crossroads of Judaism, Christianity and Islam," *Der Islam* 90, (2013); Ignác Goldziher, *Ignaz Goldziher and his Oriental diary : a translation and psychological portrait*, trans., Raphael Patai (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987). Patai's rather prejudiced view of Goldziher's personality and some of the errors in his translation are noted by Lawrence I. Conrad, "The dervish's disciple: on the personality and intellectual milieu of the young Ignaz Goldziher," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 122, (1990); Lawrence I. Conrad, "The Near East study tour diary of Ignaz Goldziher," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 122, (1990); Conrad. See also Jonathan Skolnik, "Heine and Haggadah: History, Narration and Tradition in the Age of Wissenschaft des Judentums," in *Renewing the past, reconfiguring Jewish culture : from al-Andalus to the Haskalah*, ed. Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

overcome tribal divisions among Arabs.⁴⁵ In 1873-4, at the age of 23, he traveled to Istanbul, Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem and Cairo, where he became the first European enrolled in al-Azhar. He sought out Muslim thinkers, particularly those interested in reform. This sets him apart from many of his contemporary European Orientalists who were interested above all in texts: "I wanted to observe the people, their ideas and institutions, not chase after yellowed papers".⁴⁶ In Damascus he met Tāhir al-Jazā'irī, a 22-year old partisan of Islamic reform and Arab cultural renewal. Goldziher enthusiastically joined the group of young reformers around al-Jazā'irī; the deep friendship and mutual admiration is seen in the writings of both.⁴⁷ In Cairo he similarly developed a close friendship with Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, whose attempts to reform Islamic doctrine and practice, unite Muslims and resist the British and French imperialism provoked Goldziher's enthusiasm. Muslim reform could serve as a model for Jewish reform.

In those weeks, I truly entered into the spirit of Islam to such an extent that ultimately I became inwardly convinced that I myself was a Muslim, and judiciously discovered that this was the only religion which, even in its doctrinal and official formulation, can satisfy philosophic minds. My ideal was to elevate Judaism to a similar rational level. Islam, as my experience taught me, is the only religion, in which superstitious and heathen ingredients are not frowned upon by rationalism, but by orthodox doctrine.⁴⁸

Goldziher, in his own words, becomes a Muslim without ever ceasing to be a Jew. On the contrary, it is his experience of Islam that inspires him to try to reform Judaism, to bring it up to the level of Islam. As he describes his studies at al-Azhar, he says

My formal way of thinking was through and through oriented toward Islam; subjectively, my emotional empathy also drew me hither. I called my monotheism Islam, and I did not lie when I said that I believed in the prophecies of Muhammad. My copy of the Qur'ān can bear witness to how I was inwardly inclined to Islam. My teachers earnestly awaited the moment of my open profession of faith.⁴⁹

Yet that moment did not come: Goldziher preferred the ambiguous liminal position, neither inside nor outside, still a Jew and almost a Muslim, or perhaps both Jew and Muslim.

Because he had not professed Islam, he was not allowed to participate in Friday services. He describes how a Syrian friend helped him: how he visited the tomb of Shāfi'ī and then rode,

⁴⁵ L.I. Conrad, "The Pilgrim from Pest: Goldziher's Study Tour to the Near East (1873-1874)," in *Golden roads : migration, pilgrimage, and travel in mediaeval and modern Islam*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1993), 125.

⁴⁶ Ignác Goldziher, *Tagebuch* (Leiden: E. Brill, 1978), 57; Jung, "Islamic Studies and Religious Reform. Ignaz Goldziher – A Crossroads of Judaism, Christianity and Islam," 118.

⁴⁷ Conrad, "The dervish's disciple," 240-1.

⁴⁸ Goldziher, *Tagebuch*, 59. Translation Heschel, 81-2.

⁴⁹ Goldziher, *Tagebuch*, 71. Translation by Conrad, 117.

clad in turban and kaftan, to the mosque where, amidst thousands of the faithful, he prayed and rubbed his forehead against the floor of the mosque. “Never in my life was I more devout, more truly devout, than on that exalted Friday.”⁵⁰

Not that he was uncritical of what he saw: many Muslims, like Jews, clung to silly rites for which he showed contempt: the whirling of Istanbul dervishes or the scraping and bowing of Damascenes performing *salat*.⁵¹ Yet he holds up Islam, in the reformed vision of Jazā’irī, Afghānī and others, and contrasts it with the conservatism of traditional rabbinic Judaism, whose partisans are frequent targets of Goldziher’s contempt: “sniffing some mishnayot” they practice arcane rites tainted with “the most cunning power of idol worship”.⁵² “I cannot think of rabbinism without adding an *écrasez l’infâme*”, he says, taking up Voltaire’s rallying cry, denouncing the “cynical raw stuff which is called Synagogue or Church”.⁵³ We are far from Geiger’s vision of Islam as a respectable but inferior form of Judaism: on the contrary, Islam seems a model for reformed monotheism. As for Christianity, it is an “abominable religion, which invented the Christian blood libel”; it engenders “the worst degree of fanaticism”.⁵⁴ When he visits the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, he laments that, far from being a site of monotheism, it has become a place of idolatry, where the superstitious genuflect and kiss stones.⁵⁵

Goldziher returns home from his glorious “Mohammedan year” to disappointment. The chair he had been hoping for had been given to someone else. It was not to be his until 1905. In the intervening years, he toiled as secretary of the Neolog, the Reformed Jewish community of Budapest, going to work every day at the community’s Moorish synagogue. He describes the work as drudgery, and his position there was no doubt at times made more difficult for him by the frosty reception given to his ideas on Jewish reform not only among the Orthodox, but in his own community. Yet he stayed on, refusing prestigious positions at Cambridge, Heidelberg, Königsberg, Prague and Strasbourg, as well as at the new universities in Cairo and Jerusalem. He was a Hungarian who remained committed to nationalism and integration—and hostile to Zionism. In his early work, published in the 1870s, he dealt with both Islam and Judaism.⁵⁶ He was interested in the scientific study of the fundamental texts

⁵⁰ Goldziher, *Tagebuch*, 72. Translation by Conrad, 117.

⁵¹ Conrad, “The dervish’s disciple,” 239-40; Goldziher, *Ignaz Goldziher and his Oriental diary : a translation and psychological portrait*, 98, 123.

⁵² Goldziher, *Ignaz Goldziher and his Oriental diary : a translation and psychological portrait*, 92. See Heschel, 81-2; Conrad, “The dervish’s disciple,” 236-7.

⁵³ Goldziher, *Ignaz Goldziher and his Oriental diary : a translation and psychological portrait*, 99.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 148. See Heschel, 81-2; Conrad, “The dervish’s disciple,” 236-7.

⁵⁵ Conrad, 131.

⁵⁶ Bernard Heller, *Bibliographie des oeuvres de Ignace Goldziher* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1927).

of Judaism as a key both to pushing reform within European Judaism and in countering the arguments of anti-Semites. In 1876 he published his *Der Mythos bei den Hebräern und seine geschichtliche Entwicklung* (*Mythology among the Hebrews and its historical development*), a learned rebuttal to French Orientalist Ernest Renan. Renan had drawn a sharp distinction between the mindset of the Aryans, inclined to polytheism, mythology, the perception of multiple truths and possibilities (and hence also to science) and that of monotheistic Semites (Jews and Muslims), who had no mythology and no propensity for philosophical or scientific thinking. “I am the first person to recognize that the Semitic race, compared to the Indoeuropean race, really represents an inferior mix of human nature”, affirmed Renan in his *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* (*General history and comparative system of the Semitic languages*).⁵⁷ Goldziher’s work methodically, coldly and completely destroyed Renan’s arguments, which henceforward (pace Edward Said) would have little impact on future Orientalism.⁵⁸ Goldziher had no problem showing that both the Hebrew bible and the Qur’ān were full of myth, and that Jews and Muslims had shown themselves fully capable of science and philosophy. He sent his work to Renan, who responded with a graceful thank you note, showed him exquisite hospitality on a visit to Paris, and completely ignored his criticisms in his subsequent writings. Renan died in 1892, and the following year Goldziher published an essay on “Renan as Orientalist”, which was both an homage to him as a scholar and at the same time a scathing rebuttal of his pet theories on the Semitic mind.⁵⁹

Goldziher delivered a series of six lectures in Budapest in 1887-88 on “The Essence and evolution of Judaism”. He cast Judaism as a prophetic religion corrupted by rabbinic superstition: he grounded the need for reform and purification on the thought of Judaism’s outstanding historical figures. Purified Judaism, moreover, is consistent with Modern civilization and scientific truth. His Islam, and his vision of Muhammad as reformer and purifier of Abrahamic religion, clearly played a role in his conception of the reform needed for Judaism, just as it had for Geiger. These lectures were badly received by the Budapest Jewish community, who increasingly saw Goldziher as a threat to Judaism. Deeply disappointed, Goldziher abandoned his study of Judaism and henceforth devoted his

⁵⁷ Ernest Renan, *Oeuvres complètes de Ernest Renan. Tome 8* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1958). Cited in Sabine Mangold, “Ignác Goldziher et Ernest Renan,” in *Ignác Goldziher : un autre orientalisme?*, ed. Céline Trautmann-Waller (Paris: Geuthner, 2011), 80.

⁵⁸ On Said’s failure to engage with Goldziher and his overestimation of Renan’s importance, see Conrad, 143-4; Conrad, “The Near East study tour diary of Ignaz Goldziher,” 105n1. More broadly on Said’s neglect of both German orientalism and the position of Jews (as potentially both “orientals” and “orientalists”), see Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 19-21.

⁵⁹ Conrad; Mangold.

scholarship almost exclusively to Islam. He produced prolifically in Hungarian and offered carefully-crafted summae of his research in German, notably in his *Muhammedanische Studien* (1889-90).⁶⁰

Goldziher did not write a biography of Muhammad. He no doubt felt that there was no need for him to do so. What he tries to do is to use the fundamental texts of Islam, Qur'ān and Hadith, to trace the emergence of the Muslim community and of Muslim religious and legal doctrine over the course of the first Muslim centuries. The Qur'ān, for Goldziher, offers a glimpse at two key moments in the emergence of the Muslim community. In the Meccan period, before the Hijra, Muhammad, a “warner and messenger,” preached asceticism and moral reform before the imminent apocalypse; he “saw himself as the last of the ancient prophets” and had not intended to found a new religion.⁶¹ The Medinese suras show a quite different picture of the prophet and his growing community; here the prophet is “further inspired by the holy spirit” but is concerned foremost with governing his fledgling Muslim community: from a warner, he was become a warrior, conqueror, statesman and organizer. It is in Medina that Islam was born as a faith community. The Hadith, for Goldziher, represent a third phase in the development of the Muslim community: they reflect the debates and struggles within the new Muslim empire, debates that were projected back on to the now mythic figure of the prophet, arguments about Islam in eighth-century Syria or ninth-century Iraq presented as sayings in the mouth of the prophet.

The result is a religion and a civilization that is both hybrid and eclectic, based on elements gleaned from Judaism, from Christianity, from Neoplatonic Philosophy, from Persian, Greek and Indian cultures. For Christian polemicists, this hybrid and derivative nature of Islam had been proof that Mahomet was an imposter. For others, it had shown that, despite its merits, the faith of Mahomet was an imperfect form of true Christianity or Judaism. Yet for Goldziher this eclectic, inclusive, integrative nature is the great strength of Islam:

Its dogmatic development betrays Hellenistic thought; its legal form shows the unmistakable influence of Roman Law; its civic organization, as it is unfolded in the Abbasid caliphate, shows the moulding of Persian civic ideas, while its mysticism illustrates the appropriation of Neoplatonic and Indian ways of thought. But in each one of these fields Islam proves its capability to assimilate and work over foreign elements, so that its foreign character is evident only through the sharp analysis of critical investigation. This receptive character stamps Islam from its very birth. Its founder, Mohammed, proclaims no new ideas. He brought no new contribution to the thoughts concerning the relation of man to the supernatural and infinite.

⁶⁰ Ignác Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1889-90); Ignác Goldziher, *Muslim studies*, trans., S. M. Stern (New Brunswick, N.J.: Aldine Transaction, 2006). On the differences between his Hungarian and German writings, see Conrad.

⁶¹ Ignác Goldziher, *Mohammed and Islam*, trans., Kate Chambers Seelye (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), 6. (see <https://archive.org/stream/mohammedislam00gold#page/n5/mode/2up>)

This fact, however, does not in the least lessen the relative worth of his religious conception. When the historian of morals wishes to decide on the effect of an historical event, the question of its originality is not uppermost in his consideration. In an historical estimate of the ethical system of Mohammed the question is not whether the content of his proclamation was original in every way, the absolute pioneer conception of his soul. The proclamation of the Arabian Prophet is an eclectic composition of religious views to which he was aroused through his contact with Jewish, Christian and other elements, by which he himself was strongly moved and which he regarded as suitable for the awakening of an earnest religious disposition among his people. His ordinances, although taken from foreign sources, he recognized as necessary for the moulding of life in accordance with the divine will. His inmost soul was so aroused that those influences which had thus awakened him became inspirations that were confirmed by outward impressions and by divine revelations, of which he sincerely felt himself to be the instrument.⁶²

Goldziher has been hailed as the founder of modern European study of Islam.⁶³ He approaches his Muslim sources with no pre-conceived notions of the superiority of Jewish or Christian sources; he carefully studies the development of these sources over time in an attempt to trace the parallel development of the Muslim community and doctrine.

The Tübingen school had demoted Bible to the production of human authors and had analyzed it as source material for the history of Judaism and Christianity. Geiger had applied the same techniques to postbiblical Jewish sources and to the Qur'ān. Goldziher's innovation was to apply these same techniques to Hadith, showing how they reflected the concerns not of the prophet himself but of Muslims who lived in a very different world from Muhammad's, the sprawling, religiously diverse, culturally heterogeneous Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. Many Hadith are little more than pious fabrications, for Goldziher, who quotes Basra traditionist 'Asim al-Nabil who affirmed "I have come to the conclusion that a pious man is never so ready to lie as in matters of the hadith".⁶⁴ Abbasid scholars created Hadith and Quranic exegesis that affirmed the legitimacy of their dynastic line; at the same time, they invalidated traditions that might be seen to legitimate Shi'i dynastic claims.⁶⁵

Goldziher devotes a long chapter of his *Muhammedanische Studien* to the "Veneration of Saints in Islam."⁶⁶ He begins by noting that "In ancient Islam an insurmountable barrier divides an infinite and unapproachable Godhead from weak and finite humanity".⁶⁷ The Qur'ān makes clear that Mohammed, like the prophets who came before him, is fully human. When asked to perform miracles, he retorts that he is only a man. Early Islamic doctrine, reflected in the earliest hadith, emphasizes Mohammed's humanity and fallibility: the one

⁶² Ibid., 2-3.

⁶³ Conrad, 137.

⁶⁴ Goldziher, *Muslim studies*, 2:55.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2:98-104.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2:255-341.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2:255.

thing that separates him from earlier prophets is that while they were sent each to a nation, Mohammed alone had a universal mission. God's choice of Mohammed as prophet is an arbitrary act of divine will: it can in no way be the result of the prophet's own merits. The Qur'ān unequivocally condemns as *shirk* the veneration of humans, however pious they be, and specifically warns Muslims against attributing anything more than human status to Mohammed.

Yet quite early, Goldziher says, no doubt even during the prophet's lifetime, some of his followers were convinced that he was graced with supernatural gifts, omniscience, and had performed various miracles. Within a century after his death, a thousand miracles had been attributed to him. Relics of the prophet, hairs, shoes or footprints, became objects of veneration. Whereas earlier writers had used stories of Muhammad's miracles or of his celestial voyage to discredit the prophet, Goldziher draws a clear distinction between the prophet whose message is faithfully transmitted in the Qur'ān and the later legendary accounts which go against the simple and pure message that Mohammed had preached.

For the authors whose work we have examined in this article, thinking and writing about Muhammad and Islam is inseparable from thinking and writing about Judaism and Christianity. Geiger, Weil and Goldziher were scholars who sought to understand the origins of Islam, but their concerns about European Jews, about the tensions between tradition and reform, assimilation and anti-Semitism, were never far from their minds. Just as contemporary European Christians looked to Muhammad as a spiritual hero whose piety could serve as a model for disenchanted European romantics, for these 19th-century Jews the Muslim prophet could serve as a heuristic model for reforming Judaism.