

Stroumsa seems attracted by the idea proposed by Christian Robin and some others that there was a 'prophetic movement' in early seventh-century Arabia (p. 147), but his critical acumen again indicates a reluctance to accept the idea without more compelling evidence. He reminds us of our lack of knowledge of possible Christian or Jewish communities in the Ḥijāz, that there are no remaining traces of Christian communities north of Yemen or south of °Aqaba, and that we are ignorant about the nature of the Judaism of the Jews who, according to Muslim tradition, formed a substantial part of the population of Yathrib. We may conclude, on the evidence of the Qur'an, that 'the main religious trends underlying Islamic monotheism come from Jewish and Christian milieus' (p. 148), but the precise mechanisms of transmission and development remain unclear.

This is a book then which will inform and suggest ideas to scholars concerned with the relationship of Islam to the world of Late Antiquity but is likely to frustrate those eager for a concise answer to the question of how the new monotheism emerged from earlier forms. In general, Stroumsa seems more decisive and authoritative when dealing with Christianity in the period before Islam, and comparatively tentative and ambivalent when discussing ideas about the emergence of Islam. The latter sometimes results in a series of summaries of the theories of others rather than an exposition of his own, leaving the reader uncertain of the author's own evaluation of them. That is compensated by his insistence on a methodology that gives proper weight to the complexity, and sometimes sparseness, of the evidence, and a refusal to over-simplify.

Recent discussions about the validity of the concept of the Abrahamic Religions risk becoming polemical or unduly theoretical. This book confirms its value as a heuristic tool for the historian.

G.R. HAWTING
SOAS, University of London
DOI: 10.3366/jqs.2017.0287



Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean. Edited by Ryan Szpiech. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015. Pp. 329 + pp. xxiii. \$55.00. ISBN: 9780823264629.

The various essays in this volume explore the writings of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim authors residing around the Mediterranean between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. Originally, they were papers delivered at the international conference, 'Medieval Exegesis: An Interfaith Discourse', which took place at the University of Michigan in 2011. The conference was arranged by the editor of the

book, Ryan Spziech, who notes in the Introduction that the essays aim to examine and compare the function of interfaith exegesis as ‘a praxis of communal faith and a tool for demarcating the boundaries between religious communities and their rivals and neighbors’ (p. 2). As Spziech points out, ‘to read and interpret scriptures held to be authoritative only among one’s neighbors required a careful and often subtle evaluation of the boundaries between the familiar and foreign’ (p. 2). All of the medieval philosophers, theologians, commentators, and polemicists investigated in these chapters shared a common interest of entering into the world(s) of discourse they found in the scriptures, commentaries, and works of theology produced by their neighbours. Spziech notes in his Introduction that this reality provides justification for a project of this nature, despite the legitimate questions surrounding methodological issues that usually attend works of ‘comparative religion’—issues which Spziech addresses quite adequately. Given the breadth of the topics covered in each essay, I will limit this review to a brief synopsis of each chapter and add a few general comments about the volume as a whole at the end.

The three articles in Part One, ‘Strategies of Reading on the Borders of Islam’, explore several examples of how Jewish, Christian, and Muslim representatives address theological issues of overlapping concern. Sarah Stroumsa’s essay, ‘The Father of Many Nations: Abraham in al-Andalus’, sets the tone by questioning the sense in which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam can be (or should be) categorised together as ‘Abrahamic religions’. Critiquing this idea is relevant in a volume of this nature since, as Spziech himself notes in the Introduction, the currently fashionable idea of Abraham as a shared theological ancestor often ignores the fact that no writer from any of the three religions prior to the twentieth century would have assumed a common theological heritage in this regard. Moreover, the assumption itself privileges a particularly Islamic view of prophetic history (p. 4). Stroumsa seems to agree noting further that ‘the three communities hardly ever formed a contemporaneous intellectual triangle’ in al-Andalus (pp. 29–30). She then proceeds to explore the intertwined areas of continuity and discontinuity between the depictions of Abraham found in the works of two Andalusian philosophers, the Muslim Neoplatonist, Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931), and the Jewish Aristotelian, Maimonides (d. 601/1204). In her comparisons Stroumsa notes how, on the one hand, Ibn Masarra’s view of Abraham as a contemplative philosopher appears to be influenced by Jewish mystical texts, in particular *Sefer Yeẓira*. On the other hand, Maimonides’ view of Abraham as the quintessential repudiator of Sabian polytheism was clearly influenced by Muslim interpretations of Sabian religious thought and practices circulating during his time. Interestingly, both appear to interpret Abraham’s significance by relying on the extra-canonical depictions of him found in the other community’s religious literature.

Sidney Griffith’s essay, ‘Ibn al-Maḥrūmah’s Notes on Ibn Kammūnah’s *Examination of Three Religions*: The Issue of the Abrogation of Mosaic Law’, discusses the glosses

(*hawāshī*) made by the Jacobite Christian, Ibn al-Maḥrūma (d. 755/1354), on a thirteenth-century Jewish apologetic work by Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284). Ibn Kammūna's work offers a defence of Judaism by comparing it with Christianity and Islam; however, Ibn al-Maḥrūma's focus is solely on Judaism and Christianity, in particular, the ongoing validity (or invalidity) of a Torah-based *sharī'ca*. The glosses are significant due to the manner in which Ibn al-Maḥrūma adopts Muslim polemical arguments to frame his understanding of the Mosaic law's abrogation (*naskh*). Part of his argument in this regard entails adopting the idea that the Torah text in our possession is a post-exilic reconstruction by Ezra and not the Torah of Moses. However, this is not, in his mind, a basis for textual corruption (*tahrīf*), as maintained by Muslims, since that would involve the distortion and/or alteration of an existing text not the reconstitution of one that has passed away. Notwithstanding this rather tenuous argument, Ibn al-Maḥrūma roots his understanding of the abrogation of the Torah on the exegesis of a number of passages within the Hebrew canon (as received) that he describes as abrogating earlier laws. The significance of Ibn al-Maḥrūma's work is that it provides a clear example of theological cross-pollination. Here a Christian author writing in Arabic adopts Islamicised conceptualisations of both *sharī'ca* and *naskh* in order to pen a critique of Judaism. Griffith's analysis demonstrates the extent to which some Christians living in the world of Islam had mapped 'the structure and terms of their *kalām* on developments in Islamic thought' (p. 56).

Walid Saleh's essay, 'Al-Biqā'ī Seen through Reuchin: Reflections on the Islamic Relationship with the Bible', offers a comparison of approaches to the Hebrew Bible by the Mamlūk scholar, al-Biqā'ī (d. 1480), and the Christian Hebraist, Johannes Reuchlin (d. 1522). Saleh notes that the general indifference displayed towards Jews and the Hebrew Bible in medieval Islamic lands—compared to their precarious situation in predominantly Christian areas—is indicative of widespread Muslim avoidance of the Bible. This is due, in Saleh's estimation, to several factors. Central among them is the idea that Islam did not 'grow out of' Christianity or Judaism and thus 'the scriptures of these two religions were not envisioned as essential' (p. 64). Undergirding this distinctly Islamic posture towards the Bible was the 'nationalist' (i.e., Arabian) character of Qur'anic revelational dispensation. The Qur'an viewed itself as an equal, though distinctly Arabic, manifestation of the same message that had been conveyed to other nations. For this reason, 'there was no sense of a cumulative scriptural inheritance, and the very nationalist nature of the mission ... was a barrier that could not be traversed' (p. 65). Thus, Muslim appropriation of the Arabic Bible was impossible given their 'radical philosophy of original languages' (p. 65) and its connection to Muslim expectations regarding divine revelation. For these reasons, Saleh argues, Muslim indifference and ignorance of the Bible acted as a 'protective barrier' that ensured a level of independence for Jewish communities residing in the world of Islam.

The second part of the book, 'Dominicans and Their Disputations', contains three essays that look at Dominican analyses of Jewish and Muslim texts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In 'Two Dominicans, a Lost Manuscript, and Medieval Christian Thought on Islam', Thomas Burman analyses the way in which two Dominican friars, Ramon Martí (d. 1284) and Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (d. 1320), made use of a manuscript that brought together three texts: (1) Mark of Toledo's Latin translation of the Qur'an, (2) a Latin refutation of Islam authored by Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue Against the Jews*, and (3) a Latin translation of an eleventh-century Arabic polemic against Islam, *Book of Denuding or Exposing, or the Discloser*. Burman notes that even though Mark of Toledo and the author of the *Book of Denuding* were clearly familiar with a broad range of extra-Qur'anic Islamic religious literature (i.e., *ḥadīth*, *sīra*, *tafsīr*, etc.), they conceal this from their readers and prefer instead to present their refutations of Islam in distinctly *sola-scriptura* (Qur'an-only) forms. This is important because it helps us understand and contrast the two models we find in the works of Martí and Riccoldo. For instance, Martí, in concert with Mark of Toledo and the author of the *Book of Denuding*, read the Qur'an in the company of Islamic religious literature. But unlike them he projected Islam as a religion of numerous books. In contrast, Riccoldo reduces his refutation of Islam to a refutation of the Qur'an, giving his readers the impression that 'to eviscerate that book ... was to invalidate the whole phenomenon of Islam' (p. 74). Riccoldo's *sola-scriptura* approach would come to exemplify later approaches to Islam adopted by Latin-speaking Christians.

In the next essay, 'The Anti-Muslim Discourse of Alfonso Buenhombre', Antoni Biosca i Bas investigates a forged polemic against Islam, the *Disputation of Abu Talib*, purportedly translated into Latin from an Arabic original by the Dominican Alfonso Buenhombre (d. 1353). While Buenhombre makes wide use of the Qur'an and other Muslim literature, close investigation of the sources he uses to construct his polemic reveal that, on the whole, it is a collage based on earlier Christian works authored in Latin, including those by Ramon Martí, Nicholas de Lyra, Alfonso X of Castile, and the Spanish historian Lucas de Tuy. Biosca i Bas argues that Buenhombre's strategy 'attests to the loss of confidence in the tactic of studying theological texts as a weapon against Muslims, betraying a loss of confidence in the original strategy of the Dominicans' (p. 100).

Ursula Ragacs's essay, 'Reconstructing Medieval Jewish-Christian Disputations', explores the connection between Ramon Martí's works, in particular his *Muzzle of the Jews*, which was completed in 1267, and two accounts of the Disputation of Barcelona. The disputation took place in 1263 between Nahmanides (d. 1270) and the Dominican convert Pau Cristià (Friar Paul). Ragacs's research uncovers exegetical arguments about the veracity of the Christian faith based on Jewish literature that were probably used during the debate by Friar Paul but are absent from the two

primary sources describing the disputation—a Hebrew account by Nahmanides and a Latin Christian account that was probably commissioned by James I of Aragon. Her analysis demonstrates ‘clearly that neither description [of the disputation] mentions everything that was discussed in Barcelona’ (p. 111). However, when the disputation is reconstructed in light of Martí’s work, Ragacs concludes that Friar Paul’s attitude toward the Jews must have been a negative one.

In the third part of the book, ‘Authority and Scripture between Jewish and Christian Readers’, we encounter three essays that explore issues of interconfessional exegesis, polemic, and the role of converts in advancing the aims of their adopted religious community among their former co-religionists. Harvey Hames begins this section with ‘Reconstructing Thirteenth-Century Jewish-Christian Polemic: From Paris 1240 to Barcelona 1263 and Back Again’. Hames examines the textual relationship between two accounts of the ‘Talmud trial’ that purportedly took place in Paris in 1240 and their relationship with the Barcelona disputation of 1263. The author of these accounts was Joseph ben Nathan Official, whose polemic work, *Sefer Yosef ha-Meqanne*, is included in the manuscripts Hames investigates. According to the accounts, the Paris disputation was a public affair that pitted Rabbi Yeḥiel against the convert Nicholas Donin. The account seems to be ‘evidence of the first public encounter between Jews and Christians over the Talmud and is seen as the precursor of both Barcelona 1263 and the Disputation of Tortosa in the early fifteenth century’ (p. 115). But, as Hames notes, Christian sources recounting the events in Paris do not mention a public disputation, though there is evidence of some type of inquisitorial process and the subsequent public burning of the Talmud around 1241. Other evidence points to the fact that after Barcelona Friar Paul was active in France promoting his apologetic approach—using the Talmud to prove Christianity. Moreover, his presence there seems to have prompted a response by the Jewish community. After examining and comparing the various accounts of Paris 1240 with Barcelona 1263, Hames concludes that the Hebrew account of the former is most likely a fictitious reconstruction of the latter and reflects the precarious situation of Parisian Jewry in the late 1260s and early 1270s. Hames argues that Joseph’s goal in creating this account was to provide his community ‘a text which showed how the Christian use of the Jewish postbiblical texts could be undermined’ (p. 125).

In the next essay, ‘A Christianized Sephardic Critique of Rahsi’s *Peshaṭ* in Pablo de Santa María’s *Additiones ad Postillam Nicolai de Lyra*’, Yosi Yisraeli examines the Judeo-Christian hermeneutical horizons of the Jewish convert to Christianity, Pablo de Santa María (d. 1435). While criticised by historians as an instigator of anti-Jewish activities, Pablo is best known for his *Additiones* to the commentaries of Nicholas de Lyra (d. 1349). Yisraeli notes that whereas Nicholas was ‘the champion of literal interpretation of the Bible in the Middle Ages’ (p. 130), Pablo’s goal in the *Additiones* was to challenge Nicholas’s reliance upon the exegetical practices of

the French rabbi and commentator Rashi (d. 1105). Pablo accomplished this by drawing from his background in rabbinics and his familiarity with the internecine Sephardic critiques of Rashi's use of midrashic fables in his so-called *peshaṭ* exegesis, especially those by Ibn Ezra (d. 1164) and Nahmanides (d. 1270). In Pablo's opinion, Nicholas's work 'presented an entirely distorted picture of Jewish scholarship' (p. 134). Yisraeli argues that the Jewish convert's critical attitude towards Rashi 'was not driven by anti-rabbinic zeal' (p. 138), but rather was a reaction to Nicholas's reliance upon poor Jewish scholarship that itself was guided by 'Talmudic fables that Christians repeatedly condemned as fictional and superstitious' (p. 141).

In 1422, Rabbi Moses Arragel was commissioned to make a new translation of the Bible that would offer side-by-side commentary containing the views of Jewish and Christian interpreters. The late Ángel Sáenz-Badillos tells the story of this cooperative effort in his essay, 'Jewish and Christian Interpretations in Arragel's Biblical Glosses'. Arragel's glosses on the Biblical text were generally based on Rashi and other Jewish interpreters along with some midrashim, but he also quoted Christian interpreters. And, as Sáenz-Badillos points out, when it came to difficult passages, Arragel 'maintained an irenic disposition, without polemics or apologetic discourse' (p. 143). While the project opened a new approach to the Jews by some Christians, Sáenz-Badillos notes that those who later revised Arragel's work 'substantially modified the glosses of some books and passages, in many ways changing the meaning of Arragel's work' (p. 151).

In the final part of the book, 'Exegesis and Gender: Vocabularies of Difference', four articles look at a divergent group of texts and authors to examine the role gender issues play in medieval exegesis and polemic. Alexandra Cuffel's essay, 'Between Epic Entertainment and Polemical Exegesis: Jesus as Antihero in *Toledot Yeshu*', offers some preliminary reflections on the significance of the Judeo-Arabic corpus of the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition. Cuffel makes three arguments in her essay. First, she argues that the anti-Jesus *Toledot* is in the form of an oral epic meant to challenge Christian sacred history as presented in the Gospels by offering a counternarrative, or a counterexegesis, parallel to the Baḥīrā legends used by Christians in their polemics against Muslims. Additionally, Cuffel shows that the *Toledot* cycle was designed to counter legends surrounding Helene's finding of the true cross that were initially developed by Syriac-speaking Christian communities in Mesopotamia. Finally, she demonstrates that the portrayal of Jesus as 'the result of an illicit, impure sexual relationship' would have 'rendered him the very opposite of a holy man' among adherents of all three religious traditions (p. 169).

In 'Sons of God, Daughters of Man, and the Formation of Human Society in Nahmanides's Exegesis', Nina Caputo traces the history of Jewish and Christian

theological interpretations of Gen 6:1–4 and the meaning of the phrase *benei ha-elohim*. In particular, she argues that while Nahmanides's rather controversial literal reading of the passage 'risks providing precedent and legitimacy to Christian claims about Jesus's divine parentage', in point of fact, Nahmanides offered a 'powerful polemic' by countering the Christian tendency to universalise human sin and depravity with a reading that universalises the divine attributes and their 'gradual eclipse due to the weaknesses of individual human beings' (p. 185).

Esperanza Alfonso's article, 'Late Medieval Readings of the Strange Woman in Proverbs', explores the polemical use of the feminine image, the 'strange woman' (*ishah zarah*), found in Proverbs. Alfonso explores this image in the work of four Jewish commentators: Joseph ben Joseph ibn Naḥmias, Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides), Isaac Arama, and an anonymous exegete from the second half of the fifteenth century. While there exist a diversity of interpretations among these commentators, a common thread uniting them is their tendency to interpret the image of the *ishah zarah* as an enticement to heresy and idolatry, which they understood as conversion to Christianity.

In the final essay of the book, 'Exegesis as Autobiography: The Case of Guillaume de Bourges', Steven Kruger explores the autobiographical exegesis of the thirteenth-century convert to Christianity, Guillaume de Bourges. Guillaume's writings are, in many ways, a dual response; first to the polemics against Christianity issuing from his former Jewish community and second to the challenges posed by some in his new Christian community who questioned whether a recently baptized Jew had the scholarly acumen necessary to address exegetical and theological issues. In the three works Kruger examines, he shows that Guillaume displays 'a continued affinity with Jewishness that is both repudiated and acknowledged, and a Christianness that is both different from that of the "born" Christian and yet also, paradoxically, perhaps quintessentially Christian' (p. 203). Guillaume accomplishes his task by reclaiming and positively identifying himself with the woman caught in adultery in John 8 as well as other images of the ass and dog derived from the Bible and used against Guillaume by his detractors on both sides to impugn him. Kruger contends that 'Guillaume's strategy here might be thought of as *queer* in the sense that the negative epithets used to discount the voice of the convert are claimed and turned around in their meaning to construct a self-assured position of authority' (pp. 211–212).

Each of the essays in this volume offers a unique contribution towards advancing our knowledge across a multitude of interconnected fields. Rarely can a scholar turn to one volume and find within it such a selection of immensely readable essays treating a broad range of interconfessional Jewish-Christian-Muslim hermeneutical and exegetical issues. Although Szpiech's characterisation of the collection as one that

‘avoids imposing modern categories of study onto medieval ideas’ (p. 9) is naively ahistorical, scholars from a variety of fields will find the essays in this volume illuminating.

J. SCOTT BRIDGER
Criswell College
DOI: 10.3366/jqs.2017.0288



The Qur’an and its Readers Worldwide. Contemporary Commentaries and Translations. Edited by Suha Taji-Farouki. Qur’anic Studies Series, 14. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015. Pp. 634. £60.00 ISBN 978-0-19-875477-0.

Contemporary times, and the particulars of the historical evolution of the Muslim world, have served to emphasise the centrality of the Qur’an in Muslim intellectual and religious life. Arguably, this foregrounding of the Qur’an is working against the historical prominence of *ḥadīth* in Islamic thought, and could be a guarantee of renewal for Islamic thought. As Naṣr Abū Zayd (1943–2010) would put it, putting the Qur’an and the traditions on the same level, as al-Shāfi‘ī did, is a danger that must be avoided:¹

en faisant de la Sunna une espèce de doublon du Coran reproduisant sur une échelle encore plus grande les problèms posés par ce texte, Shāfi‘ī est tombé dans un cercle vicieux et s’est mis dans une situation inextricable [...] basée sur la suspicion de la raison humaine jugée incapable de produire une connaissance commune et cumulative.

Actually, this book, containing a long Introduction and ten chapters devoted to a wide range of exegetes from Bosnia, Turkey, India/Pakistan, China, Indonesia, Egypt, the USA, Tanzania, and Germany, shows the engagement of many of today’s Muslim *mufasssirs* with exploring the rules and framework for a new and renewed *tafsīr*, that is a commentary fitted for ‘contemporaneity’. Their exegetical endeavours have brought solutions to challenges and threats faced by their respective communities, especially in reaction to colonial or neo-colonial encroachments on Islamic countries. On this basis, the Qur’an and Qur’anic commentaries must be read as instruments of praxis.

For instance, the essay by Enes Karić and Suha Taji-Farouki (‘Qur’an Translation and Commentary in Early Twentieth-century Bosnia and Herzegovina’) discusses the translation and commentary of the Bosnian scholar Džemaludin Čaušević (1870–1938), one of the most distinguished reformers of his time in the Balkans. Čaušević’s work is shown to be heavily dependent on Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā’s rationalist commentary, *al-Manār*, and does not seem, to me, to be