

Muslim Perceptions and Receptions of the Bible

Texts and Studies



Camilla Adang and Sabine Schmidtke

Resources in Arabic and Islamic Studies

MUSLIM PERCEPTIONS AND RECEPTIONS OF THE BIBLE

RESOURCES IN ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

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CAMILLA ADANG *and* SABINE SCHMIDTKE

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Series Editors' Preface

In both medieval and modern times, many Muslim scholars and laypeople alike have considered it ill-advised if not outright unlawful to consult the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament, often justifying this position through recourse to the doctrine of *tahrīf*, “corruption of the text.” Similarly, scholars such as Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) stressed the idea that one could not rely on *Isrāʿīliyyāt*, “Jewish traditions,” when attempting to understand the Biblical narratives of the Qurʾan. These and other doctrinal positions represent attempts to separate Islam more starkly from Judaism and Christianity, with which it shares an obvious affinity that is textual, scriptural as much as it is doctrinal. They represent an important post-Qurʾanic development within Islam, and arguably contradict much Qurʾanic material, even if the doctrine of *tahrīf*, for example, is attached to particular Qurʾanic prooftexts (Q Baqara 2:75; Nisāʾ 4:46; Māʾida 5:13, 41) that describe the Jews in particular as “twisting the words of God.” In context, these accusations refer to particular misrepresentations of scripture on the part of the Jews, not to the wholesale corruption of the Biblical text. To the contrary, the Qurʾan presents itself as one of God’s true scriptures, along with the Torah and the Gospel, which it regards as authentic revealed books, the contents of which are confirmed by the Qurʾan. Nevertheless, in later Islamic tradition, the accusation of *tahrīf* came to be used as one strategy to discredit the Biblical texts that were then in the hands of Jews and Christians. Such dismissals of the Bible, however, were not universally shared in the Muslim community, and they do not reflect the complex and rich history of Muslim engagement with the Biblical text, through both Jewish and Christian sources, from the first Islamic centuries until the present day.

The studies gathered in this rich collection represent a major step forward in the study of Muslim engagement with the Bible. They focus on the Sunni tradition up to the eleventh century, on Shiite and Muʿtazili traditions from the ninth through the thirteenth centuries, and on the Ottoman tradition. Some of the texts analyzed focus on polemical topics, such as Biblical predictions of the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad that Jews and Christians are supposed to have suppressed or willfully misinterpreted, or the question of whether the Hebrew Bible has been abrogated. Others, however, adopt a more ecumenical view, arguing for the sanctity of the Hebrew Bible. Together they provide evidence of a long, complex, and profound tradition of the study, interpretation, and criticism of Biblical texts, showing that many Muslim scholars, from diverse regions and periods, had access to the Bible, whether through the personal knowledge of converts or through translations from the Jewish or Christian traditions, and furthermore, that at

least some of these scholars had a profound interest in the Bible as a sacred text, and not only as a source for polemical material.

Joseph E. Lowry
Devin J. Stewart
Shawkat M. Toorawa

Preface

The articles brought together in this volume deal with Muslim perceptions and uses of the Bible in its wider sense, including the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament as well as the New Testament, albeit with an emphasis on the former scripture. While Muslims consider the earlier revelations to the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) to have been altered to some extent by the Jews and the Christians and abrogated by the Qurʾān, God’s final dispensation to humankind, the Bible is at the same time venerated in view of its divine origin, and questioning this divine origin is tantamount to unbelief (chapter 10). Muslim scholars approached and used the Bible for a variety of purposes and in different ways, often ignoring these inherent contradictions. Thus Muslim historians regularly relied on biblical materials as their primary source for the pre-Islamic period when discussing the creation as well as the history of the Israelites and the prophets preceding Muḥammad. Authors seeking to polemicize against Jews and Christians were primarily interested in the presumed biblical annunciations of Muḥammad and his religion and/or in perceived contradictions and cases of internal abrogation in the Bible. (The latter topic is addressed in chapter 8.) These various concerns resulted from and had an impact on the ways in which Muslim authors accessed the scriptures—early historians often quote or paraphrase large sections or even entire books of the Bible—in Arabic translation—while those engaged in polemics or apologetics often resorted to lists of relevant biblical passages which must have circulated widely. The different approaches to the biblical text among Muslims with their inherent contradictions are discussed in the first section of the present book which consists of three chapters surveying Muslim attitudes to the Hebrew Bible in particular, although many of the arguments used apply equally to the New Testament.

Other studies focus on two of the earliest Muslim compilations of presumed biblical predictions of the Prophet Muḥammad: *Aḳlām* (or *Dalāʾil*) *al-Nubuwwa* by Ibn Qutayba and *Kitāb al-Dīn wa-l-Dawla* by Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī, both of which were frequently consulted by later Muslim scholars. The authenticity of Ibn Rabban’s work was long disputed among Western scholars. Chapter 12, which discusses the lengthy quotations from this work by the Twelver Šīʿī author al-Ḥimmašī al-Rāzī, puts the controversy to rest. This study in turn was the basis for several articles that shed additional light on the use of Ibn Rabban’s *al-Dīn wa-l-dawla* among well-known medieval Muslim scholars, such as al-Māwardī, Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and the Zaydī al-ʿAnsī (chapters 7, 9, and 15). Ibn Qutayba’s influential *Aḳlām al-Nubuwwa* was considered for a long time to be lost, until its recent

rediscovery. A critical edition and study of the biblical passages of the work are given in chapter 4. The impact of both Ibn Rabban and Ibn Qutayba on various Sunnī, Muʿtazilī and Zaydī scholars is studied in a number of additional chapters (chapters 5, 13, 14, 15). The use of biblical passages for polemical purposes is the primary concern also of the studies brought together in the final section of this book (chapters 17–21) which focusses on the polemical works of a number of Ottoman scholars, who also adduced material from the later Jewish exegetical tradition. That Muslim polemics against the Bible elicited reactions on the part of the People of the Book is shown by the example of Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret, who wrote a refutation of Ibn Ḥazm (chapter 6).

Focusing on the long-neglected Šiʿī tradition also proved fruitful in the case of Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn Ṭāwūs whose library included a copy of the Pentateuch, which is analyzed in chapter 16. The use of biblical material in the chronography of Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, who was in all likelihood a Shiʿī, is studied in chapter 11.

The chapters of this book are revised and updated versions of the following articles:

Chapter 1: “Torah,” in: Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾan*, vol. 5. Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 300–311 (C. Adang);

Chapter 2: “Medieval Muslim Polemics against the Jewish Scriptures,” in: Jacques Waardenburg (ed.), *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 143–159 (C. Adang);

Chapter 3: “Polemics (Muslim-Jewish),” in: Norman Stillman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, vol. 4. Leiden: Brill, 2010, pp. 82–90 (C. Adang & S. Schmidtke);

Chapter 4: “The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials: Ibn Qutayba and his *Aʿlām al-nubuwwa*,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22 (2011), pp. 249–274 (S. Schmidtke);

Chapter 5: “Some Hitherto Neglected Biblical Material in the Work of Ibn Hazm,” *Al-Masaq. Studia Arabo-Islamica Mediterranea* 5 (1992), pp. 17–28 (C. Adang);

Chapter 6: “A Jewish Reply to Ibn Ḥazm: Solomon b. Adret’s Polemic against Islam,” in: Maribel Fierro (ed.), *Judíos y musulmanes en al-Andalus y el Magreb: Contactos intelectuales*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2002, pp. 179–209 (C. Adang);

Chapter 7: “Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī and His Transmission of Biblical Materials from *Kitāb al-dīn wa-al-dawla* by Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī: The Evidence from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20 (2009), pp. 105–118 (S. Schmidtke);

Chapter 8: “Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī on the Torah and Its Abrogation,” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint Joseph* 61 (2008), pp. 559–580 (S. Schmidtke);

Chapter 9: “The Muslim Reception of the Bible: al-Māwardī and His *Kitāb Aʿlām al-Nubuwwa*,” in: Carmela Baffioni, Rosa Bianca Finazzi, Anna Passoni Dell’Acqua, Emidio Vergani (eds.), *Le Sacre Scrittura e le loro interpretazioni*. Milan: Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana; Rome: Bulzoni, 2015, pp. 71–97 (S. Schmidtke);

Chapter 10: “A Fourth/Tenth Century Tunisian Muftī on the Sanctity of the Torah of Moses,” in: Nahem Ilan (ed.), *The Intertwined Worlds of Islam: Essays in Memory of Hava Lazarus-Yafeh*. Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2002, pp. vii–xxxiv. Reprinted in Maribel Fierro (ed.), *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Islam* [Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies], 4 vols., London, New York: Routledge, 2014, vol. 4, pp. 35–54 (C. Adang);

Chapter 11: “The Chronology of the Israelites according to Ḥamza al-İşfahānī,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 32 (2006), pp. 286–310 (C. Adang);

Chapter 12: “A Rare Case of Biblical ‘Testimonies’ to the Prophet Muḥammad in Mu‘tazilī Literature: Quotations from Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabari’s *Kitāb al-Dīn wa-l-Dawla* in Abu l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī’s *Ghurur al-Adilla*, as Preserved in a Work by al-Ḥimmaṣī al-Rāzī,” in: Camilla Adang, Sabine Schmidtke and David Sklare (eds.), *A Common Rationality: Mu‘tazilism in Islam and Judaism*. Würzburg: Ergon (2007), pp. 297–330 (C. Adang);

Chapter 13: “Mu‘tazilī Discussions of the Abrogation of the Torah: Ibn Ḥallād (4th/10th Century) and His Commentators,” *Arabica* 60 (2013), pp. 701–742 (C. Adang & S. Schmidtke);

Chapter 14: “Biblical Predictions of the Prophet Muḥammad among the Zaydīs of Iran,” *The Neglected Šī‘ites: Studies in the Legal and Intellectual History of the Zaydīs = Arabica. Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 59 iii–iv (2012), pp. 218–266 (S. Schmidtke);

Chapter 15: “Biblical Predictions of the Prophet Muḥammad among the Zaydīs of Yemen (6th/12th and 7th/13th centuries),” *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 293 (2013), pp. 221–240 (S. Schmidtke);

Chapter 16: “Notes on an Arabic translation of the Pentateuch in the Library of the Twelver Shī‘ī Scholar Raḍī al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Mūsā Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266),” *Shii Studies Review* 1 (2017), pp. 72–129 (S. Schmidtke);

Chapter 17: “The *Rightly Guiding Epistle* (*al-Risāla al-Hādiya*) by ‘Abd al-Salām al-Muhtadī al-Muḥammadī: A Critical Edition,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 36 (2009), pp. 439–470 (S. Schmidtke);

Chapter 18: “Guided to Islam by the Torah: The *Risāla al-Hādiya* by ‘Abd al-Salām al-Muhtadī al-Muḥammadī,” in: Camilla Adang and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.), *Contacts and Controversies between Muslims, Jews and Christians in the Ottoman Empire and Pre-Modern Iran*, Würzburg: Ergon, 2010, pp. 57–71 (C. Adang);

Chapter 19: “Aḥmad b. Muṣṭafā Ṭāshkubrīzāde’s (d. 968/1561) Polemical Tract against Judaism,” *Al-Qanṭara. Revista de Estudios Arabes* 29 (2008), pp. 79–113, 537–538 (C. Adang and S. Schmidtke);

Chapter 20: “A Polemic against Judaism by a Convert to Islam from the Ottoman Period: *Risālat Ilzām al-Yahūd fīmā za‘amū fī l-Tawrāt min qibal ‘ilm al-kalām*,” *Journal Asiatique* 297 (2009), pp. 131–151 (C. Adang);

Chapter 21: “Epistle Forcing the Jews [to Admit Their Error] with Regard to What They Contend about the Torah, by Dialectic Reasoning (*Risālat ilzām al-yahūd fimā za‘amū fi l-tawrāt min qibal ‘ilm al-kalām*) by al-Salām ‘Abd al-‘Allām: A Critical Edition,” in Camilla Adang and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.), *Contacts and Controversies between Muslims, Jews and Christians in the Ottoman Empire and Pre-Modern Iran*. Würzburg: Ergon, 2010, pp. 73–82 (S. Schmidtke).

Since several of the articles included in the present volume deal with the same themes and often even with the same authors, a certain amount of overlap was inevitable. We have chosen not to rewrite the contributions, but where necessary to update references. All references have been brought together in a unified bibliography at the end of this volume, and a single system of transliteration and annotation has been used throughout. No attempt has been made to provide a comprehensive account of Muslim perceptions and receptions of the Bible.

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