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An Anchor and a Vehicle:  
A Muslim’s Reflection on His Faith

This editorial was first published in Dutch in 2015 as part of a collection of reflections on faith (“Anker en voertuig,” in Geloven - Spirituele denkers uit de hele wereld getuigen, ed. Jürgen Mettepenningen (Tielt: Lannoo, 2015), 73-78. Forty-six scholars of diverse religious backgrounds around the world were sent a set of questions: “What Are the central features of your faith?” “How is your belief in praxis?” “Why do you believe (belief)?” “What is the richness of faith?” and “What has faith given to you? How can it be meaningful to others?”. As the style was “conversational,” all references were omitted. I obtained the editor’s written permission to publish the English version.

Faith of the Heart

The central features of the Islamic faith (īmān) are belief, with the heart, in the existence and oneness of Almighty God as the sole creator of the universe; confidence, in one’s mind, in God’s omnipotence; and sincere reliance, with one’s whole self, on God’s mercy and lordship in managing all that exists.

Although in Islam belief is all about God, other theological components play indispensable roles, among them belief in the existence of angels and their roles; belief in each and every messenger and prophet of God; belief in the truth of His books and scriptures; belief in the Day of Judgment; and belief in His decree (predestination), whether good or bad. These are stated in Q. 2:177, 2:285, and 4:136 and in Prophet Muhammad’s tradition. Without the theological components, belief in God, important as it is, remains utterly meaningless. Every Muslim accepts that these constitute the essence of faith.

Worship in a Broad Sense

As a Muslim, my faith in God is multi-dimensional. I believe in His oneness in terms of His lordship and sovereignty. As He is the only creator of this universe, He manages and directs all of its affairs and sustains it according to His will. Thus, as I live in this world going about my business, I believe that it is
He who ultimately makes the final decisions as to what I will or will not do, what I will or will not accomplish. God is too great and elevated to micro-manage my affairs, and yet He still controls all of my dealings through His prior decree and the agency of angels and other human beings. I am the only one, however, who is ultimately responsible for what I do.

I also believe in God’s oneness in terms of worship. As He is the only being worthy of my worship, I direct it only toward Him. This is in contrast to some traditional belief systems that feature the worship of ancestral spirits and deities. Basing myself upon this belief, I do not engage in any act toward any human being (no matter what his/her socio-political status) that could be perceived as resembling worship, such as bowing my head, kneeling down, or seeking blessings. To worship that which is not God is tantamount to disbelief and polytheism, an unforgivable act as far as Islam is concerned.

Islam views worship as transcending such prayer-related ritual acts as prostration, bowing, and supplications (which lose their spiritual significance and become unacceptable when directed toward that which is not God). Worship includes any good deed done with the intention of attracting God’s pleasure. In this scenario, what qualifies for an act of worship and an index of faith is the role of God as the motivational factor. For example, my feeding the hungry in order to please God is an act of worship and a symbol of faith, whereas rescuing an abandoned dog for the sake of impressing my father-in-law is not. While still admirable, the latter act would be considered a form of polytheism and a sign of a diminished faith in God, since it was not done only for His sake.

Another dimension is my faith in God’s unique character and form. As a Muslim, I believe that nothing resembles God in any way, shape, or form; that He cannot be perceived by the human intellect; and that His beautiful names, as presented in the Qur’an, are close representations and not actual portrayals. My belief in His unique attributes stems from the fact that He is unique in His essence and quiddity. For example, His names “the compassionate,” “the merciful,” and “the sustainer” are unlike the compassion, mercy, and sustenance possessed by humans. Therefore, Muslims invoke God’s names and attributes to praise Him and show their faith in Him. This, in a nutshell, is the nucleus of my faith.

A Faithful Professor, if God so Wills

Anything I do as a human being while relating to another part of God’s creation (animate and inanimate, Muslim or non-Muslim), or as a worshiper fulfilling my religious obligations, serves as a practical statement that validates
and solidifies my faith in God. I believe that nothing I do escapes God’s knowledge (‘ilm) or can be outside of His volition (mashi’ah) and guidance (hidāyah). Therefore, as I can do only that which He has decreed, I will also be held accountable for it. Hence I am clearly conscious of the need to always be diligent and effective, fair and just, honest and sincere. These are some of the consequences of my belief in God that, in turn, shape all aspects of my life. In other words, my faith is put into praxis every minute of my life. If such practical dimensions did not exist, my faith would be meaningless.

For example, my belief in God as omniscient motivates me to engage in positive deeds, whether they are mundane, secular, or otherwise. Thus I strive to earn His pleasure by doing good deeds as well as by having good intentions. His omniscience serves as a continuous deterrent from engaging in unacceptable deeds. So I endeavor to avoid His discontent by fully analyzing myself and my deeds before undertaking any activity.

How does my faith practically inform my teaching responsibilities? Even though I get paid as a professor, my faith in God still requires that I impart my knowledge to the students to the best of my ability; that I insist that they understand the content fully; and that I show no prejudice and/or preference when grading their exams. As a person of faith I do all of these because God wants me to do them, not just because they are the “right things” to do as regards my professional responsibilities. I do them because God knows what I should be doing and will ultimately hold me accountable for how I performed my duties. This concept is expressed as “judging one’s self before one is judged” by God. A faithless professor or a professor who has faith in something other than God may also feel and carry out his/her teaching duties as I do. The difference between us is the motivation behind our tasks. He/she may do it out of altruism or a sense of duty. For me, while not discounting other motivations (like a sense of duty, keeping my job, or being fair), my faith in God undergirds my professional and social responsibilities just as it does my religious obligations.

My belief in God’s volition is also crucial in informing the practical dimension of my faith. Being able to do only what God wills me to do gives me great confidence in whatever I end up doing. So I pray for His guidance and depend on Him as my indefatigable guide. As I can possess only what God wills me to have, I feel no sense of desperation and despair. So I seek only His blessings and bounty as my boundless sustainer. As nothing happens in my life without God’s permission, I am reassured of His protection and consoled whenever I face an ordeal. So I request His fortification and empowerment as my indestructible shield. With all of this in mind, a true believer who declares his/her intention to do anything must add “if God so wills.”
I Cannot Live without Faith

*For me, faith is indispensable, inescapable, and unavoidable.* The role God plays in my life as the principal actor makes my faith in Him central to my being. My conviction that He guides me to whatever I do, protects me, and provides me with sustenance dictates that my life is inextricably linked to my faith in God. Without my faith, I would be lost, hopeless, and vulnerable, regardless of all my social, professional, and other achievements.

This conviction may be seen from my attitude toward this particular project. Being invited to contribute to this “book of faith” is undeniably an honor that many scholars would cherish as much as I do. Although the editor was appreciably responsible for extending the invitation, it was actually God who wanted me to be part of this project in the first place. From why I was identified as a potential contributor to how I was located and contacted, from my agreement to write this piece to actually producing it – all is in accordance with my deep faith that God orchestrated everything. Therefore, if one’s life is based on this kind of conviction and faith, without such faith it inevitably becomes meaningless.

I also see the indispensability of my faith through the prism of God’s omnipotence. Thus God can do, and actually does, anything He wills, the way He wills, and to anybody He wills. Nothing or nobody is beyond His reach and control. From this perspective, *faith in God means aligning one’s self with the most powerful being, the only one whose actions truly matter and make a real difference in anyone’s life.* On the one hand, using one’s faith in God’s omnipotence as a vehicle means that no task is too great to be accomplished, no “mountain is too high” to be climbed, and no boss is too intimidating to be approached. On the other hand, using God’s omnipotence as an anchor leaves me unfazed by any failure, unhindered by any obstacle, and unmoved by any threat. I am reminded by a faithful declaration of Imam Muhammad al-Busiri (d. 1296), a medieval Egyptian scholar famous for his piety and dependence on God. In his ode *al-Burdah*, he states: “God’s protection (*wiqāyat Allāh*) is more effective than any layers of armor, or the highest of fortresses” (Muhammad ibn Sa’eed al-Busiri. *Qaṣīdah Burdah Sharīf: The Mantle Ode* (Gujranwala, Pakistan: Abbasi, 2002). Given that this is my mindset as well, any diminishment of my faith, not to mention the total loss of it, would be a total disservice to myself. Hence the indispensability of faith in my life.

Having strong faith in God has another benefit: Victory and winning are always anticipated as God’s support, and failure and losing are contextualized and put into perspective either as a test or simply a decree. This context appropriately manages, and sometimes completely eliminates, any acute anxiety.
Thus all of my activities, be they religious (e.g., attending a congregational prayer or donating to a mosque project), social (e.g., playing with my children or making friends), or professional (e.g., getting promoted by my university or being evaluated by my students) are engaged in through the prism of faith. It is impossible for me to think or analyze things in any other way.

Confidence, Stability, and Happiness

Faith can provide confidence to the faithful. Life is replete with difficulties and challenges. As a person of faith, I am always confident that I can handle whatever life throws at me. Although I may not always be successful in the manner I handle things, the confidence with which I tackle my problems either reduces my apprehension or neutralizes my anxiety. On the other hand, the sense of confidence I have as I approach positive and pleasant issues stems from the fact that God has already decreed them, and thus they will benefit me, my family, and/or my community. There is also an opportunity to be grateful to, and appreciative of, God or any human being He uses as agent of my successful endeavor.

With hard work and without a sense of complacency, I believe that whatever is meant to reach me will do so, regardless of the distance and improbability, and that whatever is destined to be mine will eventually come into my possession, irrespective of my efforts and networking. Knowing this, I feel stable rather than erratic, calm rather than panicky.

This feeling of stability comes with a sense of certainty as far as faith is concerned. Again, with strong faith and without being presumptuous as to what God will do, as a faithful person I become, nonetheless, certain that God will not abandon me. In case of misfortune, my confidence in God does not decrease. That is how rich my faith is. My faith provides me with happiness insofar as I remain confident, stable, and reasonably unconcerned about adversity in all aspects of my life. In other words, my faith makes me a happy person because it guarantees stability, confidence, and absolute dependence on God. Its richness can also be felt as I make sure to treat people nicely, respect them, give them the benefit of the doubt, and always exhibit a positive attitude. The fact that meeting any person with a “smiling” face (an effortless gesture) is considered a sign of faith in Islam shows how rich and contagious the results of faith can be. It certainly makes other people happy.

The richness of my faith is such that it serves as the anchor and vehicle in, and has a pervasive influence on, all dimensions of my life (religious, social, professional, or economic). In short, its indispensability is a sufficient indication of how rich and real faith is to me. The richness of faith may be seen in several dimensions.
This Issue

We begin the first issue of 2017 with Paul Shore’s “An Early Jesuit Encounter with the Qur’an: Ignazio Lomellini’s Animadversiones, Notae ac Disputationes in Pestilentem Alcoranum.” Shore examines Lomellini’s understanding of the cultural and religious underpinnings of Qur’anic Arabic, especially his lexical choices, along with the intended audience, the resources upon which he drew, and the manuscript’s relationship to the Jesuits’ broader literary and missionary efforts. Finally, he asks why scholars, particularly those who study the Jesuits’ history, have ignored this manuscript and its author.

Next is “Not Without My Daughter: Resurrecting the American Captivity Narrative,” by Hossein Nazari. Nazari sets out to illustrate how this “memoir” functions within the paradigm of America’s well-established captivity narrative literary tradition. He shows how the text constitutes a site wherein this tradition’s three subgenres converge and then analyzes the conceptualization of captivity as a condition that transcends the boundaries of the spatial and the physical. Nazari reveals how the book’s production and reception were conditioned by its construction within this particular parameter and by what came to be known in the West as the “Iran Hostage Crisis.”

Farhan Mujahid Chak’s “The Post-Enlightenment Moral Crisis and the Emergence of Secular Tyranny in the Middle East” explores Europe’s post-Enlightenment ethical transformation and assesses its impact upon the origins and development of secularism. He also investigates how secularism was introduced into the Middle East and explains why it achieved nothing resembling what the West had experienced, particularly as regards its purported aims of social reconciliation, industrialization, and modernization.

We close with Tauseef Ahmad Parray’s “Exploring Nejatullah Siddiqi’s Contribution to the Maqāṣid al-Shari‘ah in Urdu Literature.” Parray examines the contribution of Siddiqi, India’s renowned Islamic economist and scholar, to the maqāṣid discourse; describes and analyzes his approach and methodology, especially its understanding and applications vis-à-vis contemporary issues; and focuses on this scholar’s stance on the modern-day concerns related to, and discussed within, the context of Urdu literature.

I hope that our readers will find these papers not only thought-provoking and stimulating, but also sources of inspiration and motivation for their own research.

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An Early Jesuit Encounter with the Qur’an: Ignazio Lomellini’s
Animadversiones, Notae ac Disputationes in Pestilentem Alcoranum

Paul Shore

Abstract

The manuscript Animadversiones, Notae ac Disputationes in Pestilentem Alcoranum is an almost entirely unknown translation of the Qur’an into baroque Latin completed by the Jesuit priest Ignazio Lomellini in 1622, of which only one copy exists. It is accompanied by extensive commentaries and includes a complete text of the Qur’an in Arabic and numerous marginalia. It is, therefore, one of the earliest complete translations of the Qur’an into a western European language and a crucial document of the encounter between western Christianity and Islam in the early modern period.

This essay examines Lomellini’s understanding of Arabic and, specifically, of the cultural and religious underpinnings of Qur’anic Arabic. Special attention is given to his lexical choices. This essay also deals with the document’s intended audience, the resources upon which he drew (including the library of his patron, Cardinal Alessandro Orsini), and the manuscript’s relationship to the Jesuits’ broader literary and missionary efforts. Finally, it asks why scholars, particularly those who study the history of the Jesuits, have ignored this manuscript and its author.

Paul Shore has held teaching and research posts at Saint Louis University, Harvard Divinity School, Oxford University, the University of Wroclaw, the University of Edinburgh, Trinity College Dublin, and Charles University Prague. His publications include The Eagle and the Cross: Jesuits in Late Baroque Prague (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2002) and Narratives of Adversity: Jesuits on the Eastern Peripheries of the Habsburg Realms (1640-1773) (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012). He would like to extend his sincere thanks to the International Institute of Islamic Thought for its support of this research and to acknowledge the kind assistance of the staff of the Biblioteca Universitaria, Genova.
Introduction

Among the early translations of the Qur’an into western European languages, the one identified with the Italian Jesuit priest Ignazio Lomellini is at once both the least known and arguably the best executed, at least until that of Luigi Marracci, published in 1698.¹ It is also the first early translation into a western European language to include a complete text of the Qur’an in the original Arabic.² This essay will examine the origins of this document and explore some of its features, both as a translation and as a commentary on the Qur’an. In doing so, the few known facts regarding its author will be reviewed, after which this essay will take up some of the lexical and syntactic issues with which Lomellini, as translator and commentator, engaged. Finally, while this essay represents a report on only the first phase of the study of this document, the author will offer some more general observations on the issues raised by Lomellini’s engagement with the Qur’an.

Lomellini appears to have been born to the distinguished Lomellini al-bergo, one of the twenty-eight extended clans that dominated the Republic of Genoa for centuries and was raised to ducal status in 1538. The Lomellinis were among the noble albergi that armed war galleys at their own expense during the action against the Turks during the 1570s.³ Ignazio is probably identical with “Ignazio Lomellini priest,” son of Carlo Lomellini and Madelena Brignole, also of a noble Genovese family.⁴ He appears to have had at least two sisters who were nuns.⁵ “Nicolò” (as he was known before becoming a Jesuit) arrived in Rome on 5 April 1588 to enter the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), being already past twenty-seven years old, a somewhat advanced age for a man beginning the path to priesthood in this religious order. Among his possessions were “un annello doro co’ diaman[te] piano… tre libri scritti a mano… la vita di Santi, doi thomi [el] le prediche del Bitonte,”⁶ li discorsi del… Martyrologio Rom[ano] La Vita d[e]l padr[e] Ignazio,⁷ Vita dei[?] padri col Prato S[pirituale]e, Meditationi d[e]l padre Vinc[enza] Bruno⁹… Vanita d[e]l mondo,¹⁰ novi parti delle opere de Granata¹¹… privilegii del doctorato… ¹² These objects mark him as a literate, quite possibly devout, and privileged individual, not unlike many others who joined the Society at this time.

Lomellini died in Rome on 20 May 1645, aged about 84 or 85. During his years as a Jesuit he was the censor (i.e., official reviewer for the Church’s approval) of a Syriac grammar by Abramus Ecchellensis¹³ and of a text by Filippo Guadagnoli, Considerationes ad Mahometanos (1633), an anti-Islamic apologia.¹⁴ But remarkably, he does not appear in the standard biographies of noted Jesuits; nor is he known to have published anything. He is
credited in one seventeenth-century source as having contributed to an Arabic-language Bible, although there is no corroborating evidence for this claim. Lomellini’s relationship, if any, with the Maronite College in Rome is not known. The most important is by Levi della Vida, who is generally credited with identifying or “rediscovering” the Lomellini manuscript. A page on the website of Islamolatina, Universitat Autonòma de Barcelona prepared by Dr. Oscár de la Cruz Palma, provides a short description of the document. Several other scholars have made brief mention of it, without implying that they have examined it. Beyond the acknowledgement of its existence by Giorgio della Vida, made in 1949, nothing more is known of its “rediscovery.”

This manuscript, entitled *Animadversiones... in Alcoranum*, is 323 two-sided folios long. It is housed in the library of the University of Genoa, Ms A-IV-4, bearing the date 1622. It was previously owned by the renowned orientalist Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), and has been in the university library since at least 1846. The author was kindly provided with digital images of a microfilm copy by Dr. Oscár de la Cruz Palma, of the University of Barcelona, and has also had the opportunity to inspect the original. It has never been edited, the Latin has not been translated, and it is mentioned in only a few footnotes in the secondary literature. The microfilm copy is in poor condition, with its legibility impaired by significant bleed through on many folios; however, the entire text is legible in the original. The volume’s binding appears to date from a later period. There is minor bleed through on a handful of folios and several large stains; otherwise the manuscript is legible overall.

Each verse is presented in Arabic, followed by a Latin translation. The numerous struck-out words and phrases suggest that this surviving exemplar was not a fair copy. Yet the series of struck-out Latin words and phrases provide insights into the translator’s thought process and even into his progress as a translator. The majority of the written text is made up by the Latin commentaries that follow the Latin translation of the Arabic. These commentaries take the point of view of a devout seventeenth-century Catholic and are filled with citations from Patristic Christian writers and the Vulgate edition of the Bible, and, in a few cases, with quotations from pagan classical poets. Marginalia, several of which will be described in more detail below, seem to have been written for Lomellini’s own use. Both the commentary and the marginalia contain extensive cross references to other passages of the Qur’an, intended to help assemble Lomellini’s arguments. The term *azoara* (abbreviated *azo*) is used throughout to indicate a sūrah.
The Qur’an in Latin Translation

Translations of the Qur’an did not appear in western Europe until over half a millennium after the reception of the text. Mark of Toledo, a Spanish cleric and physician, completed a Latin translation around the year 1200. Ulisse Cecini’s observations about Mark’s approach are worth quoting here:

Mark’s translation of the Qur’an is immediately distinguished by its closeness to the Arabic original. This applies to word order, sentence order, syntax and vocabulary. It is important to point out two aspects: the first is that Mark generally not only translates words consistently, i.e. using the same translations (I say “generally” because there are sometimes translation variants too), but he also tries to translate words that derive from the same Arabic root with root-related Latin words, especially when the words are located close to one another in a sentence.20

Mark’s translation was the most accurate one available for several centuries, but never gained much popularity.21 Instead, the translation undertaken by the twelfth-century cleric Robert of Ketton (Robertus Kettensis) (as revised by Theodor Bibliander)22 was, despite its flaws, widely influential.

An important recent contribution to the study of these early translations of the Qur’an into Latin is Reinhold F. Glei and Roberto Tottoli’s Ludovico Marracci at Work: The Evolution of Marracci’s Latin Translation of the Qur’ān in the Light of His Newly Discovered Manuscripts. With an Edition and a Comparative Linguistic Analysis of Sura 18 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016). Glei and Tottoli, working from these recently discovered manuscripts of Marracci, propose a new way of looking at translations such as Marracci’s, one in which the process unfolds in three phases. In the decoding phase, semantical and syntactical analysis extracts meaning. In the recording phase, this meaning is verbalized in scholarly Neo-Latin, which Glei elsewhere has called a “meta-language.” The “transcoding” phase concludes the process with a “source-language oriented, ‘documentary’ translation that provides the reader with the full-scale linguistic code of the source text.”23

Jesuits and the Qur’an

The engagement of the Society of Jesus, a Catholic religious order founded in 1540 and commonly known as “the Jesuits,” with the Arabic language began early. One of the first Jesuits to demonstrate skill in Arabic was Giovanni-Battista Eliano (1530-89). Born a Jew in Alexandria, he joined the Society in 1551, served as professor of Hebrew and Arabic at the Collegium
Romanum, and translated a catechism into Arabic in about 1580. Lomellini might have met him, as the former arrived in Rome eleven months before Eliano’s death. The rhetorical and homiletic possibilities of Arabic were recognized by a few other early Jesuits. Two Spanish Jesuit contemporaries of Lomellini, Jerónimo Mur (1525-1602) and Juan de Albotodo (1527-78), preached in Arabic. Both of them were Moriscos and presumably had knowledge of Arabic before entering the Society, making the accomplishments of Lomellini, who, as far as can be determined, lacked such a background, all the more remarkable.

Two of his Hungarian Jesuit contemporaries, Stephanus Arator (Szántó István) (1541-1612) and Peter Pázmány (1570-1637), relied on Turkish language sources and the translations of Joannes Andreas (Juan Andrés) and Robert of Ketton in their anti-Qur’anic writings. Neither appears to have known any Arabic; this is especially true for Arator, who transcribes Juan Andrés’ transliteration of Qur’anic passages with no apparent understanding of syntax. Arator also relied on hadiths for some of his interpretations of the Qur’an, something that Lomellini does not appear to have done. The ignorance of the actual text of the Qur’an displayed by Arator and Pázmány is characteristic of the level of knowledge regarding Islam possessed not merely by seventeenth-century Jesuits, but also by the overwhelming majority of their learned Christian colleagues. This is in part because theological arguments initiated by Christians who quoted the Qur’an were frequently intended to engage other Christians, rather than Muslims conversant in Arabic. These facts must be kept in mind when considering the possible audiences for Lomellini’s work.

Lomellini’s work, even if he himself was never a missionary, must also be placed in the context of Christian and, in particular, Catholic missionary activities among Muslims, which expanded rapidly after 1500. The Lomellini manuscript differs from the translation of the Qur’an attributed to Cyril Loukaris (1572-1633) as well as from Bibliander’s 1543 printing of a truncated version of Robert of Ketton’s translation, in that it contains the entire Arabic text. The presentation of a non-European language is a characteristic expression of the seventeenth-century Society of Jesus, which prided itself on its command of such languages. This Arabic text, which can tell us about the quality of Lomellini’s informants, can also be compared against manuscripts of the Qur’an then circulating in western Europe. Lomellini’s document also provides a glimpse of a Jesuit at work on a translation at a completely different stage of production than, for example, Jesuit records of the Huron language as they now appear in the near-contemporaneous Relations from
North America,\textsuperscript{32} or the efforts of Athanasius Kircher (1602-80) to decode Egyptian hieroglyphics.\textsuperscript{33} Here we not only see Lomellini’s successive revisions and “notes to himself” in the marginalia, but we also gain insight into the relationship between text and commentary that is likely to have influenced Jesuit proselytizing efforts among Muslims. Lomellini’s understanding of the Christian and Jewish texts upon which he draws is also made explicit, whereas the reader must often infer how Kircher or the writers of the \textit{Relations} understood the texts that shaped their thinking.

Writing about the translation of the Qur’an into French, Omar Sheikh Al-Shabab observes:

\begin{quote}
translation is an act of interpretation. As such, translation is bound to produce difference. The accumulative potential of producing difference, i.e., all the possible characteristics of translation corpora, has been designated a theoretical status under the umbrella term the language of translation. The creative and existential potential of a translated text is assumed to be open to empirical investigation through the recognition and practice of analytical – verifiable – procedures.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

He goes on to assert that any translation has the inherent property of being “inadequate.”

Taking a perhaps more positive view of the process of translation, George Steiner observes that the transfer between a source language and a receptor language presumes a “penetration” of a “complex aggregate of knowledge, familiarity, and creative intuition.”\textsuperscript{35} Evidence for each of these elements – knowledge, familiarity, and creative intuition – can be found in Lomellini’s translation. Clues regarding the first two will help place his work within both Jesuit institutional culture and the specific conditions obtaining during the years that he lived and worked in Rome. The third point, intuition, relates both to visualization and the more broadly understood aspects of intuition within educational settings, including Jesuit ones.\textsuperscript{36} Simultaneously, the prejudices and cultural limitations within which he worked exerted a great influence over his act of translation.

\textit{Animadversiones, Notae ac Disputationes}… is dedicated to Alexander Cardinal Orsini (1592-1626), a scion of one of the most distinguished Roman families who had close ties to the Jesuits and was a patron of Galileo.\textsuperscript{37} Orsini served as the godparent for several Muslim children resident in Italy who were baptized as Catholics,\textsuperscript{38} not a very unusual role for a high-ranking cleric, but perhaps indicative of his contacts among Italy’s Muslim and ex-Muslim populations.
Word Choice

In his lexical choice, we catch a glimpse of Lomelleni’s worldview and the scope (as well as the limits) of his literary imagination. The following examples shed light both on his (or his collaborator’s) command of Arabic and on the conceptual and linguistic tools he could bring to the task. At times he appears to be quite well informed about subtle shades of meaning; at other times he is groping toward a translation of a word or phrase while working with a text that can pose challenges even to those steeped in Qur’anic and Hadithic traditions. On this latter point, Andrew Rippin points out that there are some cases where “contextual usage of the text of the Qurān does not provide sufficient data to determine the meaning beyond something extremely general.”

A selection of Lomellini’s lexical choices, when compared with those made by other early translators, sheds light on the Jesuits’ approach to the text of the Qur’an. In Q. 17:1, either through ignorance or unwillingness to accord the titles to Allah, Lomellini renders al-samī’ (nominative singular masculine, definite), which most frequently appears in modern translations “all-hearing,” merely in its literal meaning. Likewise, al-baṣīr (nominative singular masculine, definite) is translated simply as “seeing.” Marracci also chooses not to amplify the meanings of these verbs; he prefers to translate al-baṣīr as “inspector.”

Lomellini, wavering between illud and illum, was apparently unsure at first whether hawlahu referred to what he had called the locum orationis. The final dhammah indicates a masculine antecedent, thereby implying that the antecedent is al-Aqsa. If Lomellini worked with an informant who was fluent in Arabic, this informant does not seem to have provided much practical help in the puzzle of the al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭ’ah. Nor is it clear how much importance Lomellini attached to these letters. Marracci includes them in his transcriptions and represents them in the translation as “H. M” etc. without further comment, as does Germanus de Silesia. Bibliander does not include them, which suggests that some manuscripts circulating at the time of the original Ketenensis translation likewise may not have included them.

Lomellini has a firm command of the Arabic jussive when used with the prefixed imperative particle lām. At Q. 106:3, he translates falaya’ budū (third person masculine plural imperfect, jussive) as colant (tend or serve), where Marracci has serviant (serve). Lomellini has also struck out dein (then) immediately preceding, which is an accurate translation of the prefixed conjunction fa. At Q. 94:1, the jussive nashrāh follows a negative particle prefixed with an interrogative alif; Lomellini translates the phrase as Nonne aperirimus [sic] (did we not open [?]).
The noun *shir’ata* (accusative singular) appears only once, at Q. 5:48 (incorrectly numbered by Lomellini as 5:54). Lomellini translates it as *leg[em]*, “(law) having struck out *vel traditionem* (tradition) immediately following.”45 There are only four additional instances of the triliteral root ‘-*r-sh* in the Qur’ān, making interpretation difficult, although a fundamental meaning is “to make laws.” Marracci (who numbers this Q. 5:56) also opts for *legem.*47

Qur’ān 104 is entitled “Humazah”; this word and its cognates appear only three times in the Qur’ān. This, plus the *sūrah*’s brevity, present familiar challenges to a translator. Among its proposed translations are “the gossip monger,” “he who reviles and disgraces,” and “the traducer.” Some commentators perceive a reference to mockery as well. Lane offers the rather specific “the vain suggestions of devils which they inspire into the mind of a man.”48 Lomellini proposes two possible translations: *Detractoris aut Alllicientis*,49 *Allicientis*, which he retains as an alternative title but strikes out in the translation of the text, can be translated as “he who calls attention to himself.” Marracci also has “Detractor” for the title, and in the first verse he uses *omni detractori, diffamatori* (every detractor, defamer).50 Germanus de Silesia has *De Obstrectoribus*,51 while Bibliander’s abbreviated version of the *sūrah* (which he numbers “Azoara CXIII”) begins *Rerum vilificator & obstracter.*52

Lomellini’s translation of Q. 2:120 (recte 2:116)53 grapples with *ittakhadha*, which he renders as *assumpsit aut fecit* (took up, made). Marracci has *suscepit prolem* (took an offspring). In Q. 2:273 (recte 275), *al-Shayṭānu* (nominative definite) is rendered by Lomellini as *Diabolus Satanas* (the Devil, Satan). This phrase does not occur in Bibliander, and Marracci has simply *Satanas.*56

In Q. 10:2, *qadama ṣidqin* (accusative masculine noun; genitive masculine noun) is translated as *Vestigia veritatis, [a Domino eor’] (traces or footprints of the Truth [from their Lord]),57 a phrase that occurs in Bede, but one that has no apparent Christian theological significance in the seventeenth century. The literal meaning of *qadama* is “feet”; Marracci has *praetio veritatis* (through the reward [*?] of truth).58

In Q. 3:58, *wa al-dhikri* (genitive singular masculine) is translated *et memoria* (and memory). Although the trilateral root *dh-k-r* has a basic meaning of memory, *wa al-dhikri* refers not to a human faculty, but rather to the devotional acts that promote remembrance. Marracci has *commemoratione* (by a calling to mind).59

Derivatives of the triliteral root *k-f-r* appear 289 times in the Qur’ān. At Q. 70:2 *al-kāfirīn* is translated as *abnega’tibus*, with the crossed out words *aut rebellantibus* following immediately.60 The association of this root with *rebellare*, with its connotation of a conscious choice not to accept the revelation of Muhammad, suggests a specifically Muslim point of view at odds with
the majority of sources cited by Lomellini, as well as with his presumably un-
sympathetic view of Islam’s claims.61 This translation also draws a conclusion
not immediately apparent from an analysis of the root itself, whose meaning
is simply “not to believe.” Rebellare, a term more common in Late than in
the classical Latin in which Lomellini would have been schooled, thus raises
once again the question of an Arabic-speaking informant who may have con-
verted from Islam to Catholicism. Research so far has found no conclusive
evidence of Lomellini’s use of classical commentaries.

At Q. 52:4, wa al-bayt al-ma’mūr expresses the oath “by the house which
is frequented (or venerated),” which Lomellini translates domas habitatis [?]
seu templum Mechae.”62 The “house” can refer to the Ka‘bah, which, strictly
speaking, is not regarded as a temple by Muslims.

Lomellini translated the key phrase ahl al-kitāb (people of the book) as
domesticì scripturæ, drawing on one of the root meanings of ahl, namely,
household or family. No other early translator whom this writer has yet been
able to consult uses domesticì scripturæ. Hottinger uses populus libri (people
of the book),63 and Michel Nau (1633-83), a Jesuit missionary active in the
Levant, translates it as possessores Alcorani.64 Yet despite his understanding
of etymology, Lomellini does not grasp this term’s implications for non-
Muslims.65 Elsewhere, he renders it as scriptura, and umm al-kitāb as mater
scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturæ, and mater scripturae
atā (“has come”). The choice of negotium (matter, affair) for amr (often translated as “command,” although it can also be translated as “affair”) is unusual in this context, since its cognate amīr would have been familiar to Lomellini.

The word al-akhdūd appears only twice in the Qu’ran (Q. 85:3). Lomellini leaves it untranslated, rendering it ochdudi.71 Possible translations include “chuckhole,” “furrow,” “groove,” or “aperture,” although these are not universally accepted. The referent is disputed, in the commentaries (tafāsīr), English translations, and the secondary literature. At Q. 31:18, the meaning appears to be “cheek” (in reference to turning it when confronted with hostility). A possible connection between these meanings is the idea that tears run down grooves or courses on one’s cheeks. Such instances suggest the limitations of Lomellini’s (or his informant/s’) command of Arabic.

The Qur’an has long been recognized as a document that can be experienced sonically.72 Yāayyuh ā includes a vocative particle that can be translated in English as “O,” followed by a singular vocative noun at both Q. 89:27 and 5:1. Lomellini renders this particle as eia,73 a Latin word that does not occur in the Vulgate but was used by some Latin poets, including Horace.74

Commentaries

Commentaries on individual verses take up more than two thirds of Lomellini’s manuscript and shed a great deal of light on his own understanding of the Qur’an, as well as on the unconsciously held attitudes that played a role in his vocabulary selection and creation. For example, in a commentary on Q. 1:5 he employs the word Alcoranista,75 which exists in modern Castilian, Portuguese, and Catalan and means “one who expounds on the Qur’an.” The English Catholic Biblical scholar William Rainolds (1544-94), writing in Latin, uses alcoranista in the same sense as Lomellini, namely, the composer (or receiver) of the Qur’an.76 This word does not appear in DuCange or in other major Late Latin lexicons.

An unexpected authority is cited in the commentary on Q. 2:190 [recte 2:189]: “De hac materia Cornelius Tacitus in Historica narravit: Drusi versantis in exercitu Pannonico in 1° Annalium Libro.” (Concerning this material Cornelius Tacitus relates in his History: regarding the Pannonic army of Drusus when he turned back, in the First Book of the Annales).77 The reference is to a lunar eclipse that prompted those soldiers who had mutinied to beat their shields fearfully and to sound trumpets.78 Lomellini equates the traditional Arab superstitions regarding the moon (which do not seem to be endorsed in this verse79) with the ignorance and fear of Tacitus’s mutineers. He continues: Ridicula sane periodus; indigna novo evangelista [sic] novoque
Apostolo…. (This period [verse] is ridiculous, unworthy of a new “evangelista” and new apostle).80

While critics of Muhammad have long denounced his claims to being an apostle, as rasūl is frequently translated, evangelista has a much narrower and more specifically Christian denotation: that of preaching the Good News of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to all people. Lomellini’s use of this word can be understood in three ways. First, he may simply not have grasped Muhammad’s role as recipient of the Qur’an, as understood by devout Muslims, and is applying a familiar category and terminology from the New Testament. Second, the charge that Muhammad presents himself as an evangelista may be a straw man introduced to diminish further the Prophet’s credibility. Third, Lomellini’s argument may reflect the view that Islam is a secta diverging from, yet in some ways resembling, orthodox Christianity, and thus as a secta that possesses some of the same categories as Christianity.81 This possible influence could be present together with either of the other two possibilities and is, in this writer’s view, the single most likely option.

Along with challenges to Muhammad’s claim to be a prophet, Lomellini has introduced criticism of his character in the commentaries, although these are frequently indirect. For example, the commentary to Q. 33:53 reads, in part: Tetricus autor…. a crapula depraehendi.82 This is one of the most difficult passages yet identified among the commentaries. Tetricus was a sixth-century Gaulish king who, according to Gregory of Tours (538-93), appeared in a dream to King Guntram, executing God’s judgment.83 With his infamously poor Latin, Gregory never figured in the reading lists of Jesuit schools. Although Tetricus is very clear and legible in the manuscript, it may be a mis-spelling of some as yet unidentified word. Another possible explanation is that it is an adjective meaning “gloomy.”84 Lomellini seems here to be indicting Muhammad’s alleged intemperance. The passage discusses the deportment of guests in his house: overindulgence in alcohol: alcohol (A crapula praehendi means “overcome with excessive drinking”) is alluded to, and the Qur’an reports that his guests’ conduct “troubled” Muhammad (nocuit propheta in Lomellini’s translation). The prohibition against marrying Muhammad’s wives and the requirement that guests speak to them through an intervening screen after his death may suggest some sexual subtext to the passage, a point not lost on Lomellini.

**Marginalia**

In addition to its text, translation, and commentary, Lomellini’s manuscript is distinguished by its marginalia, which appear to be in the same hand as that of...
the translations and commentaries. A few examples will illustrate the significance of these writings. The marginalia adjacent to commentary on Q. 2 reads: His est liber de quo auspicio seu dubium non est (This is a book concerning whose divine inspiration there is no doubt. It is a guide for those who fear [God]). Directio est timentibus. Alphacqui c. ii.85 Alfacqui (al-faqīḥ, literally, “the jurist”) was the pen name of Juan Andrés (active 1487-1515), a Spanish Muslim convert to Catholicism who subsequently became a harsh critic of Islam.86 The work referenced is Confusion de la secta mahomatica y del alcoran87 that, in Lomellini’s time, had been translated into Latin and Italian. Andrés filled his work with translated quotations from the Qur’an, of which this citation is one, taken directly from Q. 2:1. Again in the marginalia (perhaps added after the commentary was written) adjacent to the commentary on Q. 2:12 [recte 13]: Ipsi su’t fatui attamen non agnoscu’t. Alphacqui c. 12.

In the marginalia opposite the commentary on Q. 17, Lomellini writes of a morbo caduco or “falling sickness” from which the Prophet allegedly suffered.88 This allegation can be traced back at least as far as Abulfeda, a thirteenth-century Kurdish prince and historian, although it may also be attributed to an inaccurate translation of his work. In Christian Europe, epilepsy was long believed to be spread by the sufferer’s “evil” breath and was widely regarded as a sign of demonic possession.89 At least some of the numerous reported instances of seventeenth-century Jesuits expelling daemones (demons or evil spirits) were probably instances of this sickness.90 Here, Muhammad’s credibility is under attack not on the grounds of his social standing, knowledge, or moral inadequacy, but through an accusation regarding his sanity. Accusations that Martin Luther was either mad or possessed by demons were commonplace among Tridentine Catholics.91 Here, Muhammed seems to have been cast as just one more demonic yet human opponent of the theology articulated by the Jesuits, for such opponents were needed to construct the narrative of a Society triumphing over its rivals and adversaries.

Among the unidentified works cited multiple times by Lomellini in the marginalia is a “Tract. Orationis Arabicus in 4,” which may have been part of Cardinal Orsini’s library.92 Less ambiguous is the notation “…constat ex libello prophetat[is?] Mauritaniaco charactero formaqu’ longior’ altera parte p. 6. Ill’mi D. Alexandri Cardin’ Ursini” (This is in agreement with the book of the Prophet(?) written in Maghrebi script and form, from the second part, p. 6, owned by the most eminent Cardinal Alessandro Orsini.”).93 No catalogue for Orsini’s library has yet been located; these books may have traveled from the Iberian Peninsula to Italy after the use of Arabic in Spain was made illegal in 1567. These references raise the intriguing question of what other Arabic
texts Lomellini might have had access to through the connections of his powerful patron.

Among the Medieval Christian secondary sources cited by Lomellini in the marginalia are *In Mohammedis Haeresim* and *Mohammedis Confessio*, both by Denys the Carthusian, a fifteenth-century mystic, and which appear in a marginal note referring to *carmina… sparsa* (scattered… verses). The former work was perhaps instigated by the German humanist Nicolas of Cusa (1401-64), and its name is highly suggestive, pointing to the tension between the categorization of Islam as heresy or paganism that continued in Lomellini’s day. A work of Raimond Llull (1232-1315) is also cited: “Homerus (illegible) Saracenus” (Omar the Saracen) in a marginal note to Q. 112. Here Muhammad is called an *apostata*, which places Islam in the category of heresy, but does not contradict the assertion that the origins of the Qur’an were “satanic.” Fra Ricoldo da Monte Croce is also cited prominently. Here, Lomellini is using Ricoldus’ own vocabulary, for one of the Dominican’s dialogues is entitled *De Sarracenorum lege destruenda et sententiarum suarum stultitia confutanda* (Concerning the necessary destruction of the law of the Saracens [i.e., the Qur’an] and the confounding of their foolishness).

**Conclusion**

The Lomellini manuscript raises several important questions. First, why was it never published? The quality of the translation overall appears to be, in this ongoing study, very good (something to which Levi della Vida attests) and is arguably better than any other translation into the European languages of its day. Lomellini was not a known author, but he was very well connected, both politically and socially, and a member of a religious order that cared about aristocratic birth. He did not die prematurely, thereby leaving an incomplete work. At the time of his manuscript’s completion, the Society entertained high hopes for converting Muslims. The inclusion of the (very well copied) Arabic text suggests that this manuscript was intended to be used by missionaries who were interacting with literate Muslims. Emanuele Colombo suggests that the Qur’an’s prescribed status may have prevented the wider dissemination of this document. Declining interest among the Jesuit leadership in converting Muslims from the mid-seventeenth century onward may be another factor.

Like all Jesuits of his day, Lomellini was steeped in the literary culture of the *Ratio Studiorum of 1599* as well as in the experience of the *Spiritual Exercises*, which call upon the exercitant to visualize scenes and people at great removes from his physical location, and to engage in the examination...
of one’s conscience and prayer. Further analysis of both the translation and especially the commentary can shed light on how Latin grammar and rhetoric embedded in both of these documents, as well as the Jesuit practice of visualization, contributed to Lomellini’s understanding of the Qur’an. For example, might the sensual aspects of visualization have led him to detect sexual imagery (as in Q. 100) where none was present in the original?

The question of the intended audience relates to this point. The copious references to Christian apologists and the negative comments about the Qur’an indicate that the primary intended audience was probably fellow Jesuits, with these sources to be employed in the debates common to the Society’s schools. The painstakingly copied Arabic text might be for Jesuit study as well. In his role as pedagogue, Lomellini may have composed his work for classroom use or have drawn upon arguments he had assembled during his own interactions with Muslims (cf. the “dialogues” of Tirso Gonzalez de Santalla). Yet because the document is dedicated to Cardinal Orsini, it is likely that either its surviving copy or a planned fair copy was intended for the Cardinal’s consideration as well.

Peter Burke speculates about the motives of those Jesuits who translated Italian literary classics into the Italian dialect Bergamesk – was this done out of “playfulness or to show off the ingenuity of the translators”? Lomellini seems to have sought to impress his patron Orsini with his linguistic skill; however, the sole copy of this translation to survive, with its numerous struck-out words as well as awkward and incomplete passages, does not seem likely to impress. Nor it is even clear whether the manuscript was ever in Orsini’s possession. Possibly a revised version was planned but never carried out, or perhaps lies languishing undiscovered in some Italian archive. Yet more likely is the possibility that this unfinished work is the only surviving evidence of Lomellini’s undertaking.

Lomellini’s work suggests the tension inherent in any Jesuit engagement with Islam during the early modern period. The geopolitical importance and literary quality of the Qur’anic text commanded the attention of Jesuit scholars, while the points of seeming similarity between Christianity and Islam made its refutation an especially urgent matter. Curiosity and revulsion were combined with the challenge of understanding Arabic and connecting this knowledge to what the Jesuits already believed they understood concerning their own faith. The connection of Arabic to the other languages they had studied (e. g., Maltese) was undoubtedly another motivation for scholars like Lomellini.

Ellen Van Wolde argues that the reader (i.e., the “subject of signification”) is the “central factor in determining the meaning of a text.” While this may be an idea that was not clearly articulated until the twentieth century, baroque
Jesuits appear to have grasped its essence when they turned to exercises employing visualization. Lomellini had, to use modern parlance, an agenda when composing his translation and commentaries. And yet he seems very aware of the possible meanings that his Christian audience(s) might construct from the vocabulary he chose and the rhetoric he deployed. A harder question to answer is what knowledge he had of potential Muslim readers and their possible constructions of meaning, as well as how his reading of the Arabic text involves its own construction of meaning. The “othering” of Muslims by Europeans (including Jesuits) may have made the visualization of a Muslim audience difficult for Lomellini. Yet at the same time Muslims were never “invisible” to any Jesuit laboring in the Mediterranean region, and the Society still regarded their conversion as a high priority.

Lomellini lived and worked during a time of intense inter-confessional conflict within Christianity itself. Religious intolerance was regarded as a virtue by Jesuits and their opponents alike. A key point of Jesuit engagement with any religious tradition other than their own was to win an argument, not to find points of commonality or pathways toward mutual acceptance. Yet ironically, their Catholic contemporaries often considered the Jesuits’ engagement with non-Christian faith traditions to be far too willing to find common spiritual points of reference. Any assessment of Lomellini’s work must therefore recognize the tension between the outward characteristics of this environment and the more private (and even clandestine) act of translation undertaken over a period of time and with the potential to influence others in unexpected ways.

Ultimately a question that should be raised is “Was Lomellini’s view of Islam ‘serious’?” That is, did he understand the Qur’an and the religion to which it gave birth as meriting careful, if frequently hostile, examination in the way that his colleague Nau did? Research conducted thus far points toward an affirmative answer, since his translations and commentaries, while often inaccurate or wrongheaded, nonetheless reflect a great concentration on the text and considerable sensitivity to its language. Looming in the background of these efforts was the widespread view among Christians that the Muslim Turks were in fact an instrument of God’s scourge, punishing Christians for their faithlessness, thus making the Qur’an in some oblique fashion an instrument of God as well. Lomellini’s choice of deus to translate the possible references to the Divine in the al-ḥurūf al-muqat‘ah hints at his own struggle to locate the distance between his own faith and Islam. Future scholarship regarding this unique document may be able to determine this distance with greater precision and, in this process, situate it within the context of significant Christian-Muslim encounters during the seventeenth century.
Endnotes

1. [Luigi Marracci], Alcorani textus universus (Patavii: Ex typographia Seminarii, 1698).
2. This text may have been prepared by Lomellini himself, or by an anonymous collaborator.
6. Probably F. Cornelio Musso, O. F. M. (1511-74), bishop of Bitonte, whose sermons were frequently reprinted during the sixteenth century.
7. A likely candidate is Pedro de Ribadeneira’s Vita, translated into Italian and published in Venice in 1587.
10. This may be a work by the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic Diego (Didacus) de Estella, Libro de la vanidad del mundo. An Italian translation, Il dispreggio delle vanità del mondo, appeared in Naples in 1577.
15. Augustino Oldoino, Athenavum Ligusticvm seu Syllabus Scriptorvm Ligurvm (Perusia: Ex Typographia Episcopali, MDCXXX.), 278-79. Both Filippo Gua- dignoli and Athanasius Kircher were on the committee that oversaw the production of this work, which was intended for Maronite Christians. Mercedes García-Arenal and Fernando Rodríguez Mediano, The Orient in Spain: Converted Muslims, the Forged Gospels of Granada, and the Rise of Orientalism (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 300.
22. [Theodorus Bibliander], *Machumetis Sarracanorum Principis vita ac doctrina omnis, quae & Ismahelitarum lex, & Alcoranum dicitur* ([Basel]: [Joannes Oporinus], [1543]). This translation may also be the one that the Jesuits carried to the court of Akbar in the late sixteenth century to assist them in their disputations.
29. This translation may have been produced at Loukaris’ command, perhaps by a Maronite Christian.

30. A translation of the Qur’an into Latin, completed by Juan Gabriel and commissioned by Egidio of Viterbo, included at least part of the Arabic text with a transliteration into the Roman alphabet. The original of this MS is now lost, but two copies (one partial) survive. Katarzyna Krystyna Starczewska, “Juan Gabriel of Teurel,” in Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History: Volume 6: Western Europe 1500-1600, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 415-19; at 417. Juan of Segovia prepared an Arabic text of the Qur’an with a Castilian translation that he then translated into Latin; unfortunately, only a somewhat doubtful early seventeenth-century copy of the Castilian version survives. Ulli Roth, “Juan of Segovia’s translation of the Qur’an,” Al-Qantara 35, no. 2 (2014): 555-78; at 559-60.

31. Cf. the list of words for “God” in 32 languages in Imago primi saeculi Societatis Iesu: a prouincia Flandro-Belgica eiusdem Societatis repraesentata (Antwerpiae: ex Officina Plantiniana Balthasaris Moreti, 1640), 106.


40. Folio 213r.

41. Marracci, Textus, 407.

42. Folio 322r.

43. Marracci, Textus, 824.

44. Folio 320v. Note the (coincidental?) use of this very rare form in Mark of Toledo’s The Book of Denuding or Exposing or the Discloser, which is repro-

45. Folio 129r.


49. Folio 332r.


51. *Interpretatio*, 511. (full citation at footnote 45).


53. Folio 35r.


55. Folio 65r.


57. Folio 185r.


59. Ibid., 111.

60. Folio 311r.


62. Folio 296r.


65. Thanks to Mercedes Garcia-Arenal for calling attention to this fact.


68. Folio 23v. Western scholars had noted the relation between the Arabic and Hebrew cognates as early as 1604. Valentinus Schindler, *Lexicon pentaglotton, Hebraicum, Chaldaicum, Syriacum, Talmudico-Rabbinicum* ... (Francfurtii ad Moenvm: Typis Joannis Jacobi Hennëi, 1612), col. 1867.


70. *Machumetis*, 58.

71. Folio 318v.


73. Folio 319r.

74. For example, *Lib. I, Sat. I*, line 19.

75. Folio 9r. But at Folio 213v, “multitudinem Alcoranistor’” seems to refer to the commentators on the Qur’an.

76. *Calvino-Turcismus*: id est, *Calvinistae perfidia, cum mahumetana collatio ...authore Gvielmo Reginaldo*... (Coloniae Agrippinae: apud Antonium Hierat, sub Monocerote, Anno MDC.III.), 817.

77. Folio 50r.


79. A widely accepted English translation reads “People question you concerning the phases of the moon. Say: ‘They are signs to determine time for the sake of people and for the Pilgrimage.’”

80. Lomellini pointedly refers throughout his translation to Muhammad as the “author” of the Qur’an.


82. Folio 264r. For *crapula* cf. *crapulari* in the commentary on Q. 15:5. The accusation of overindulgence in alcohol attacks Muhammad on two counts: first, that he is morally undisciplined, and secondly, that his pronouncements are clouded by this overindulgence. Accusations of the Muslims’ misuse of alcohol are found in other Jesuit writings of the period.

84. Thanks to Martin Korenjak for pointing out this fact.
85. Folio 9v.
88. Folio 215v.
91. One Catholic polemicist even claimed that a demon was Luther’s father! David Steinmetz, Taking the Long View: Christian Theology in Historical Perspective (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55.
92. For example, folio 264r, Q. 33.
93. Folio 222v, Q. 18:84. The work mentioned here has not been identified. See also marginal notes to Q. 3:158 (folio 116r) and Q. 7:36 (folio 158v). “Mauritanico charactero” refers to the Maghribi script used in both North Africa and Spain from the tenth century onward.
94. Folio 23r.
98. Folio 323r.
99. Folio 323v; also folio 268v.
100. Folio 264r, marginal note to Q. 33. The Dominican Fra Ricoldo da Monte Croce (1243-1320) traveled widely through the Middle East, composing an Itinerarium and an Improbatio Alcorani to which Lomellini probably refers here. Kenneth Meyer Setton, “Western Hostility to Islam and Prophecies of Turkish Doom,”


104. Lomellini translated (*wa al-'aṣri*; Q. 103:1) as “per vespertin’ a meridie usque ad occasu’” (from midday through evening to the setting of the sun). The meaning of this passage is somewhat obscure. Possible translations of *wa al-'aṣri* range from “compression” to “afternoon” to “era or age.” Bibliander translates the phrase “Per diluculum usque ad crepusculum.” Lomellini adds, “Invocatio facæta, nisi juramenta, ut in Az. 100 fuit obscæna,” and then quotes from Psalm 29 to show that evening is a time of weeping. This argument seems more than a little forced.


109. For example, at the beginning of Q. 10 (folio 185v).
Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam  

*Peter Webb*  

I often tell graduate students that there are three constituent parts to cutting-edge scholarship: (1) the requisite linguistic and historical training, (2) creativity and imagination, and (3) a bold vision that desires to take inherited ideas and subject them to new and rigorous analyses. Very few can do this, but those who can end up radically transforming our understanding of a topic. I am happy to say that Peter Webb has met all three of these criteria in his wonderful and thought-provoking *Imagining the Arabs*. He has presented us with a paradigm-shifting study, and all subsequent work on the topic will have to wrestle with his monograph.

Webb’s goal is sufficiently bold: to rethink the Arabs – who they were, what they believed, where they came from, and how they were imagined by various elites in the early Islamic period. Received opinion has, like so much in early Islamic history, simply repeated what the earliest sources (paradoxically from later periods) tell us. The assumption is that such sources must be true because there is no reason why they should not be. Why, for example, should they cultivate untruths or spread ideological rumors? Instead of adopting, as so many do, a posture of gullibility, Webb prefers to see such texts as engaged in the dual processes of ethnogenesis and mythopoesis.

Tradition assumes that the Arabs were a homogenous group of Bedouins that have inhabited the Arabian Peninsula since Antiquity. This would be akin, as Webb informs us, of assuming that all of the first nations in North America were essentially the same with respect to religion, culture, and ethnicity, and something that ignores that the aforementioned terms have distinct lineages in modern political and nationalist thought. Then in the seventh century CE, so the story continues, these Arabs adopted a new faith, to wit, Islam, and rapidly conquered the Middle East and beyond. Study after study has simply assumed that these “Arabs,” while sensitive to poetry, represented a form of militarized
nomadism that characterized the *mentalité* of pre-Islamic Arabia. Since all of the inhabitants of this region shared an ethnic and cultural unity, they were easily able to engage in their conquest activities. It is this past, again so the assumption goes, that helped to unite the first generations of Muslims.

Rather than buy into this narrative, Webb subjects it all to critical analysis. He works on the hypothesis that since modern Arabs are heterogeneous and impossible to define using tidy categories, why do we continue to assume that pre-modern Arabs were any different? Why, in other words, should we base our analysis on the fact that the Arabs constituted a unified ethnic community? Even further, he asks, why should we assume that there were “Arabs” before the emergence of Islam?

The main problem with the traditional model presented above is that it posits a unified and monolithic pre-Islamic Arabian culture/ethnos that flies in the face of the available sources. Arabian populations were too fragmented to constitute a cohesive group that could be realistically treated as a single people. Moreover, these populations did not even refer to themselves as “Arabs,” but employed names such as Ma’d, Ghassan, Himyar, and Tayyi’, all of which were based on distinct regional (and even religious) differences. There are, then, very few pre-Islamic sources that mention “Arabs.” And those that do, do so less in the technical sense of a distinct ethnic group and more in the generic sense of “outsiders” (p. 121).

Our traditional assumption of the Arabs is the result, as Webb convincingly argues, of later romantic fancy and less historical reality. They “become” Arabs, on his reading, based upon a set of later retrojections made by these inchoate sets of groups struggling for identity in the midst of rapid social and political change: “the inhabitants of the geographical area now known as Arabia did not call themselves Arabs, they struggled with divisive political alignments, they neither possessed a common religious creed nor shared similar lifestyles and they did not speak one standardized language” (p. 95).

From where, then, did the term “Arabs” originate? According to Webb, the Qur’an refers to itself as *an* (not *the*) “Arabic” Qur’an (*qur’ān ‘arabī*), thereby connoting a distinct revelation as opposed to a unique people. The Qur’an thus uses *arabī* not to refer to a distinct ethnic group, but in its original meaning of that which is “clear” or possesses an intrinsic sense of “clarity.” It was only under the early Umayyads, Webb argues, that the purity of Qur’anic *‘arabī* was converted into an ethnonym to refer to a new ethnic group, *al-a’rāb*, that could make sense of itself and that would help distinguish this group from other groups in a post-conquest religious community (p. 124). Given the absence of any pre-Islamic evidence of Arab cohesion or
self-expression, early Muslim conquerors, Webb suggests, used their common worship of an ‘arabī Qur’ān and their ability to understand its ‘arabī language to promote the name ‘arabī as a focal point of their collective difference from those they conquered.

The movement from language to ethnos and from koine to kin facilitated group cohesion, what he calls ethnogenesis, which could then be neatly inserted into poetry, Hadith, and other literary genres. Since the pre-Islamic Arabs did not even refer to themselves by that name, Webb reasons that it was the earliest Muslims who invented them, to make sense of themselves and to give themselves a distinct genealogy. It was the Qur’ān, in other words, that created the Arabs as opposed to vice versa. Whereas earlier his main data consisted of pre-Islamic poetry, inscriptions, and external (e.g., Byzantine) histories, his main data now shifts to classical dictionaries in order to show the shift in semantic expression during the ninth and tenth centuries.

Under the early Abbasids, however, the paradigm began to change somewhat. As Arab interest groups became less important and as Arabia became increasingly less significant on a geopolitical scale, we witness a curious transformation. Now “the development of the pre-Islamic Jāhiliyya paradigm involved a degrading of Arab culture before Islam to highlight Islam’s supreme salvation” (p. 338). Arab “national” history was thus subsumed under Muslim “world” history. The increasingly firm line between pre-Islamic and Islamic meant that Muslim (as opposed to just Arab) writers detached Islam from the Middle East. The romantic Bedouin idea now became a way that later thinkers presented “a perfect language possessed by perfect fools in a pristine desert” (p. 358). It is this paradigm that our textbooks and other works reproduce uncritically.

In all of these discussions, Webb does a wonderful job of showing how “Arabness” – like any other ethnic identity – functions as an “intellectual construct” (p. 357) that morphed to meet changing historical circumstances. Whereas Arabness remained contested for several centuries as various Muslim groups sought to forget their diverse pasts and reframe it under the new rubric of “Arab unity,” by the tenth century it had become but a remote concept as Islam was conceived to be a universal and transnational identity as opposed to an Arab faith.

What makes Webb’s analysis so significant, at least for me, is his willingness to engage other disciplines, such as anthropology and sociology. His discussion represents a nuance lacking in many studies devoted to early Islam. Moreover, his theoretical interest in ethnogenesis means that this book will be of interest not just to specialists in early Islam, but also to those interested in social formation and identity studies. There is, in other words, a
very rich discussion here that understands that ethnicities are pliable and that
demonstrates how group membership can be expanded and restricted almost
at will to meet changing circumstances.

I will leave it to others to adjudicate his knowledge of pre-Islamic inscrip-
tions or whether a handful of entries in classical dictionaries that refer to
the locution ‘arab are sufficient. My interest in this book is in how it rethinks
the inherited and forces us to look anew at that which we assumed was self-
evident. It is in this latter sense that Webb’s book presents a rich and fascinat-
ing study, one that is destined to become a classic in the field.

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Polygyny: What It Means When African American
Muslim Women Share Their Husbands
Debra Majeed

Polygyny is titled precisely to reflect the form of plural marriage practiced by
Muslims: one husband with up to four wives, as described in Q. 4:3. Debra
Majeed employs the term living polygyny to describe the experiences of those
involved in such marriages: men with multiple wives, the first or subsequent
wives, those married both civilly and religiously, those only religiously mar-
rried in a nikāḥ (Islamic marriage contract) ceremony, publicly recognized
marriages, closeted polygynous marriages not publically recognized, and
“back door” marriages in which at least one wife is unknown to the other(s).
The participants discussed in this book presently live in or have been part of
a polygynous marriage.

Polygyny is a qualitative ethnography that utilizes womanist theoretical
approaches through dialogical performance, an approach in which interview
data are dialogues performed through “imaginary interplay” (p. 31) across
participant responses. It also constructs a rich and comprehensive presentation
of her findings in the form of the participants’ voices as well as triangulates
data by using focus groups, surveys, and interviews. However, the methods
require greater detail to specify how the surveys were used. Majeed’s para-
digm is rooted in gender justice, which acknowledges the intersectionality of
all social statuses held by women in these cases: religion, race, gender, marital
status, motherhood, age, class, and ability. She asserts that Muslim womanism
is not only a lens for seeing the world, but also a “way of knowing (episte-
mology) that positions the experience and wisdom of women at the forefront of any consideration of Muslim family life” (pp. 20-21).

The concept of community is qualified by Majeed’s examination of how the late Imam Warith Deen Mohammed (d. 2008), leader of the Muslim American Society/Mosque Cares, the largest community of African American Muslims with its historical trajectory of indigenous American Islam, viewed polygyny. Imam Mohammed asserted that while polygyny is not the norm, it can be practiced for the wellbeing of the community with a provision for justice in place, such as informing all parties involved and making the marriage public to the Muslim community. While the Qur’an legitimizes polygyny, monogamy is the norm for Muslims historically and globally. Majeed presents evidence that estimates 0.07% of African American Muslims live polygyny, a marginalized norm that warrants the attention of scholarly research, which is largely absent.

*Polygyny* explores the varied and dynamic experiences of African American Muslim women living polygyny. In a culture that fervently asserts monogamy as the norm, social stigma and legal sanction (i.e., bigamy laws) bar the legal practice of polygyny. Additionally, this work confronts the stereotypes and dispels the myths of Muslim women as victimized, without agency, and circumscribed by male authority. These assumptions are taken to task throughout this research. Majeed explains: “Two basic assumptions many Americans appear to hold of women living polygyny are that they have no authority over their lives and no agency in their homes” (p. 53).

Women share stories of both limitations of choice and coercion; however, they also share successes and the joys of healthy plural families that meet the material, emotional, and spiritual needs of all members. This book does not present a “pro or con” argument, but shares women’s experiences through storytelling. Majeed’s honesty regarding her personal reservations about polygyny as a personal choice, characteristic of standpoint theory, does not infringe upon her ability to give voice and legitimacy to it as a healthy family form in need of discussion and reform.

This work challenges patriarchy by presenting alternative interpretations to the Qur’an that privilege male authority and interpretations of Islam that subordinate women to men, as well as the patriarchal structure of American, Muslim, and African American communities. Various issues are explored, such as how to deal with men who do not meet the requirements of material maintenance and emotional equity across spouses. *Polygyny* cites the inability to protect the rights of women in *nikāḥ*-only second marriages as the primary reason for imams’ refusal to perform polygynous or *nikāḥ*-only marriages.
Importantly, this work examines the Qur’ân and the various interpretations held by Muslims on plural marriage and the place of women, schools of thought within Islamic jurisprudence (e.g., the Hanbalis allow polygyny exclusions within the nikāḥ), and American imams’ relationships with these texts. Islam did not invent polygyny; in fact, it defined and restricted this practice for a new Muslim community that was steeped in pre-Islamic traditions. Contemporary Muslims have no unanimous view on its acceptance or even how it should be regulated.

Polygyny describes Muslim interpretations of Allah’s injunction on plural marriage to include “Yes,” “No,” “Maybe,” and Majeed demonstrates that there is “fluidity” across these categories. “Yes” or Traditional Literalism (TL) interprets Sūrat al-Nisā’ s description of polygyny and Prophet Muhammad’s life as proof in support of the practice. While TL acknowledges provisions to improve fairness among those living polygyny, prohibiting it should be avoided as that would be a human imposition upon Allah’s law. The “No” Reformers for Justice (RFJ) oppose polygyny on the grounds that even by the Qur’ân’s own standard – men should have only one wife because being just to multiple wives is impossible. RFJ interprets texts through a gender justice lens that challenges patriarchal interpretations of gender roles and statuses. “Maybe” Ambiguous Pragmatism (AP) interprets the polygyny verses as situational and conditional. For instance, imams who subscribe to AP interpretations may support polygyny in Muslim-majority countries where the laws legitimate it and protect the union and its parties, but may not perform such marriages in America because the woman has no legal protection in either the Muslim community or civil law.

At the crux of this work is an exploration of the unique challenges and opportunities that polygyny presents for American Muslim women. Many African American Muslim leaders have interpreted polygyny as a way to address the “marriage squeeze” in Black communities, the phenomena whereby the number of marriageable women outnumbers the availability of marriageable men. The oppression and marginalization of African Americans has resulted in situating Black folks toward the bottom of the socio-economic class and power structure, poor health, and victimization by violence. Historical and contemporary barriers from enslavement and legal segregation to underemployment, income and wealth disparities, and mass incarceration have also minimized the number of marriage partners.

As a result, the majority of African American households today are female-headed and lack Black men as partners, supporters, and leaders in their communities. This has also resulted in disproportionate poverty and disorgan-
ized communities. Alternately, these same social phenomena have engendered varied social statuses and structures among African Americans, such as comparatively more egalitarian relationships between Black men and women and Black women’s increased visibility, activism, and leadership roles in their religious and ethnic communities.

These contrasting realities present different points at where women enter polygyny. Majeed’s research identifies three categories: polygyny as coercion, choice, or liberation. Women enter into or remain in polygynous marriages for a variety of reasons. Some participants felt inclined to remain in relationships even when hurt by husbands’ choices to take another wife either against their will or knowledge, or for these reasons may have left the marriage (coercion). Reasons for remaining in polygyny include religious devotion (marriage is half of faith), love for the husband, financial dependence, and keeping the family unit intact. In marriages of liberation, women are content with living polygyny; some were even initiators of and actively involved in identifying another wife for their husband. While these marriages are not free of problems, polygyny is their choice. A small group of participants (choice) intentionally seek out polygyny marriages and accept the Qur’anic injunction of plural marriage without conditions. Many of them prefer the independence of shared marital responsibility or see polygyny as an opportunity to provide emotional and material support for unmarried women and children in the community – a chance to “want for her sister what she wants for herself.”

Polygyny is a priceless contribution to the body of scholarship that lacks a voice from the subjects of this study. There is much to be gained in marriage and family studies, standpoint and feminist theories, African American family studies, and research on American Muslims. Importantly, such research challenges a widely held assumption regarding Muslim women’s lack of agency within their families and lives. This work is fundamental to informing social service program design and intervention within Muslim communities, as well as to imparting cultural competency from mainstream agencies working with Muslim families. The methods and data collection are invaluable in social science research on Muslim populations. This study, which offers valuable data and knowledge of research methods to use with Muslim populations, represents an important contribution in the age of Islamophobia, a time when the community is cautious about exposure to public scrutiny.

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Northern Lebanon, the mountainous terrain bordering Syria and the coastal plain centered on the city of Tripoli with its nearly 130,000 residents, has long been the heartland of the country’s Sunni Arabs, along with the old scholastic and population hub in the southern city of Sidon. The outbreak of mass popular protests and eventually armed rebellion in neighboring Syria against Bashar al-Asad’s government in the spring of 2011, and that country’s continuing descent into an increasingly violent and sectarian civil war, has had a profound effect upon Lebanon, particularly in the north, for both geographical and demographic reasons. First, northern Lebanon borders strategic areas of central-western Syria (e.g., the town of al-Qusayr) and is located just south of the major Syrian port city of Tartus. Second, the north’s population includes significant minority communities of Christians and Alawis, the latter of which are largely aligned politically with Damascus. These factors have made the border regions particularly dangerous, for while the Lebanese army attempts to maintain control of the country’s territory, Iran-aligned Hizbullah pours fighters and military supplies into Syria and militant Sunni groups (e.g., ISIS and Jabhat Fath al-Sham [JFS]) seek to establish a foothold in Lebanon from which they can pursue their anti-Asad campaign.

Bernard Rougier is uniquely placed to write about the contemporary history and complex web of politics among Lebanon’s Sunni factions and particularly the rise of jihadi militancy among some of its segments. The book under review, like *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam among Palestinians in Lebanon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), is based upon extensive in-country fieldwork and interviews beginning in the early 2000s and ending in 2014. It provides a fascinating and nuanced overview of jihadism’s rise as a viable avenue of political frustration and expression in the wider milieu of Lebanon’s intra-Sunni socio-political competition and a fast-changing regional situation.

Rougier argues that the contentious political disputes and competition among the country’s mainstream Sunni political figures (e.g., the al-Hariri family), as well as the impact of Syrian control of large parts of Lebanon between 1976 and 2005 and ensuing power vacuum after its withdrawal, enabled the emergence of jihadi militancy. Northern Lebanon also became a center of competition among regional actors through their local allies, which pitted
Damascus, Tehran, and Riyadh against each other, as well as a host of such non-state actors as Al-Qaeda Central (AQC), like-minded Sunni militants, and Hizbullah. Lebanon’s establishment Sunni political leaders, first Rafiq al-Hariri and then his son and successor Sa’ed, faced hostility not only from Hizbullah and its Christian and secular allies, but also from forces emerging within the north’s Sunni communities, such as the growing influence of indigenous Salafi preachers and militant organizations.

Fath al-Sham and other small transnational Sunni jihadi groups, also challenged the Sunni political establishment and further destabilized the country. All of these competing forces found fertile ground in the north because, Rougier asserts, the region lacked a strong and innovative intellectual hub. It thus became a “locus of hybridization” (p. x) one in which domestic and foreign competitors contested with each other for influence as well as political and military power and primacy.

Rougier’s interview subjects include a diverse array of Lebanese and Palestinian societal and political actors, including members of Palestinian parties (e.g., Fatah and HAMAS), Lebanese government officials, Salafi preachers and religious scholars, Islamist activists, representatives of the Alawi community, Hizbullah-aligned political factions, and clerical supporters of Syria’s Ba’th Party. Building upon the wide range of interviews he conducted for Everyday Jihad, he met with individuals who are influential in particular communities and local geographical areas, just as he did for his doctoral dissertation and 2007 book on Ain al-Hilweh, Burj al-Barajneh, Nahr al-Bared, and other Palestinian refugee camps located in southern Lebanon. He supplements his interviews with primary sources in print as well as the relevant secondary literature.

Chapter 1 opens with a discussion of the region’s modern history, from being a part of Greater Syria that France gave to the new nation-state of Lebanon during its mandate period (1923-48) to the post-civil war region that continues to suffer frequent outbreaks of inter-party and inter- and intra-communal violence. Between the mandate and the end of the Lebanese civil war (1975-90), the north moved from being dominated politically by regional Sunni notable families to an array of armed militias, which the Syrian army suppressed in the mid-1980s. This period also saw the formation of different spheres of authority among Lebanon’s Sunni government officials, street leaders, and local religious figures.

The first expression of militant Sunni Islamism, which Rougier examines in chapter 2, emerged in Tripoli following 9/11 and was initially aimed at perceived “western” influences in the area to defend the militants’ imagined and narratively constructed notion of an idealized transnational Muslim commu-
nity. According to documents obtained by Rougier, during this period AQC, through a Yemeni operative named Ibn al-Shahid who was fleeing the American invasion of Afghanistan, came into contact with Lebanese Salafi militants who wanted to attack western business interests in the country. More radical, militant, and puritan Sunni voices gained sway in part due to the establishment Sunni politicians’ weakness and failure to institutionalize their control over the country’s Sunnis as a bloc.

The withdrawal of Syrian military and intelligence forces in 2005, following Rafiq al-Hariri’s assassination and the ensuing wave of anti-Syrian demonstrations, significantly changed the region’s political dynamics and particularly those of Tripoli, which Rougier looks at in chapters 3 and four. Freed from Syrian harassment and threats, Lebanese Salafi activists built anti-Assad grassroots networks. Responding to the perceived growing threat of anti-Syrian Sunni Islamism and militancy in northern Lebanon, Damascus sought to use its intelligence services and resources to redirect some of the emerging jihadi militancy inward to Lebanon. It did this by entering into tacit informal “agreements” with jihadi groups operating in Iraq, including Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi’s organization that would eventually morph into ISIS, that they could use Syria as a sanctuary and a base from which they could fundraise, funnel recruits, and rejuvenate themselves. In return, they would not target Syrian government interests in the country. Syrian forces cracked down periodically on jihadis in the country when they suspected the latter of planning to launch attacks on American or European targets from inside Syria.

Rougier arguably provides one of the most detailed accounts of the formation of Fatah al-Islam, a small Damascus-aided militant group that managed to take over the Palestinian Nahr al-Bared refugee camp outside of Tripoli and battle the Lebanese state from late May to early September 2007. The group also allegedly plotted to assassinate dozens of anti-Syrian figures in Lebanon. Based on interviews with key figures, Rougier shows that in the early 1990s Salafi religious entrepreneurs established spheres of influence by providing far better educational alternatives to young Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Salafism achieved “normative power” (pp. 125-26) by providing disaffected Palestinian youth with an alternative identity and narrative to counter the defeatism of Palestinian nationalism: that of religious (Islamic) historical glory and primacy. Groups such as Fath al-Islam harnessed similar sentiments in their own recruitment calls. Rougier also documents Fath al-Islam’s contentious relationship with AQC due to the latter’s disapproval of a number of the former’s characteristics and strategic decisions.

Further damage to the authority claimed by Sa’d al-Hariri and his fellow Sunni politicians came during the first few years of the Syrian civil war. Initially
al-Hariri, backed by Saudi Arabia, actively supported the anti-Asad opposition and worked to keep a channel open from Lebanon into Syria, specifically the governorate of Homs, in order to support the Syrian rebel forces located there. However, this channel was cut off in 2013 by a combination of Damascus, Hizbullah, and even Lebanese army forces that weakened his standing among the country’s Sunnis. This allowed competing Sunni voices, including militant ones, to enter the fray and claim to be the true defenders and guarantors of Sunni interests and security in the Levant. The most militant Sunni voices have been aided greatly by Hizbullah’s open pro-Damascus involvement and Tehran’s increasing maneuvering in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

This book is a significant addition to the scholarship on modern Lebanon, political Islam in the Levant and the wider Middle East and Arab world, and Sunni jihadism. Combining extensive interviews with key figures among the factions operating in northern Lebanon with key secondary and primary sources, Rougier provides extensive details while maintaining a clear and readable writing style. The book includes useful appendices, including five maps and a glossary. It is slightly hampered, however, by the absence of a stand-alone bibliography, a trend that seems to be growing in even academic book publications, which makes it difficult for readers to quickly review a complete list of the sources, interviews, and primary sources used. This minor criticism aside, the book will be of interest and great use to academics, policymakers, and the interested public.

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**Shari’a in the Modern Era:**
**Muslim Minorities Jurisprudence**

_Iyad Zahalka (trans. Ohad Stadler and Cecilia Sibony)_

_Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 224 pages._

Iyad Zahalka’s commendable _Shari’a in the Modern Era: Muslim Minorities Jurisprudence_ gives researchers and legal practitioners an overview of the emerging _fiqh al-aqalliyyāt_ (the jurisprudence of minorities) discipline. In fact, at the time of its publication several other books were published on this subject, among them Uriya Shavit’s _Shari’a and Muslim Minorities: The Wasati and Salafi Approaches to Fiqh al-Aqalliyyāt al-Muslima_ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) and Said Fares Hassan’s _Fiqh al-Aqalliyyāt: History, Development, and Progress_ (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
Zahalka credits Shavit with giving him useful comments while preparing *Shari‘ah in the Modern Era*.

It is no coincidence that all of these books are from a Sunni perspective with particular focus on the works of two well-known scholars in the Sunni legal world: Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Taha Jabir al-Alwani (d. 2016). Zahalka’s book, therefore, captures the gradual creation of another – or perhaps a new – branch of *fiqh* that focuses on the socio-legal issues faced by Muslims ruled by non-Muslim sovereigns or systems that conflict with Islamic law. His objective is to examine the “*fiqh al-aqalliyyāt* of the *wasati* faction, a school of thought dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood that positions itself in the middle ground between conservative resistance to changing religious laws and the disintegration of the commitment to religious tradition” (p. 4). The author identifies this conservative resistance as coming from the Salafi school of thought, which rejects using *ijtihād* and any creative legal development to respond to modern challenges. Specifically, he concentrates “on the development of the *fiqh al-aqalliyyāt* doctrine, its major trends and influence on Muslims residing in the West, and the manner in which they deal with the public and legal ramifications” (p. 6).

The book’s context is intriguing, for Zahalka is a *qāḍī* (judge) of the Shari’a Court of Jerusalem and former director of Israel’s Shari’a Court system. He directs his attention to the legal experiences of Muslims living in Israel in terms of understanding and practicing their law, just as he did when analyzing the experiences of Muslims in the United Kingdom. This gives the book a decidedly practical tone, and it is therefore of interest to Muslim and non-Muslim legal practitioners. Chapter 1 deals with this emerging discipline’s theoretical background and evolution, chapter 2 presents its methodology and implementation in personal status law, chapter 3 deals with the Shari’a’s implementation in general and that of the jurisprudence of minorities in particular, chapter 4 explains the case of Israel in the context of this discipline, and chapter 5 provides some thoughts on its future.

After overviewing the classical jurisprudential law on Muslim minority issues according to the four Sunni *madhāhib*, the author explains what he considers to be new jurisprudential laws, via this new *fiqh*, that not only breaks from the classical *dār al-Islām* (the territory of Islam) and *dār al-harb* (the territory of war) paradigm, but also attempts to offer creative solutions for Muslim minorities. He then elaborates upon the jurisprudential methodology behind arriving at these new solutions as regards such issues as mortgage, marriage, divorce, and the appointment of Muslim and non-Muslim judges, and then uses interviews, data, and sociological analysis to assess how they are implemented by Muslims living in the West.
The book seeks to present a view of Muslim jurisprudence that can respond to the modern era’s unique social situations. At the same time, Zahalka argues that the *fiqh* of minorities does not break from the past’s legal methodology, but rather extends its scope by using principles articulated by previous jurists, such as

the objectives of the shari’a (*maqāsid al-shari’a*) ... priorities in jurisprudence (*fiqh al-awlawiyyāt*), balance in jurisprudence (*fiqh al-muwāzanāt*) ... opting for the lesser of two evils (*akhaf al-ḍararayn*) ... annulling a decree in case of necessity (*darūra*), or under certain circumstances when a need becomes a necessity, thus overruling a decree or religious law (*al-hajiyat al-munāzila manzila al-ḍarūrā*). (p. 188)

All of these jurisprudential tools are applied within Shatibi’s formulation of what he considered the Shari’a’s goals: “(1) the preservation of religion; (2) the preservation of the soul; (3) the preservation of mental capacities; (4) the preservation of the lineage; and (5) the preservation of property” (p. 64).

What Zahalka argues is that al-Qaradawi’s usage of these tools to create solutions for Muslim minorities in western countries is a sign of Muslim jurisprudential creativity. He cites numerous examples from al-Qaradawi’s own works, as well the cases received by the European Council of Fatwa and Research (ECFR) to prove this. These include al-Qaradawi’s opinions that Muslims may take out mortgages despite paying and receiving interest, serve in the army of a non-Muslim state when it faces an external threat, a female convert can remain married to her non-Muslim husband under certain conditions, and a Muslimah may marry without her guardian’s consent if the man’s piety is unquestionable (pp. 98-107).

Despite these new rulings, several of which stem from his opinions, the book has certain theoretical limitations. For example, Zahalka rarely delves into the nature of the Shari’a itself, namely, what does God intend for human beings on a philosophical and metaphysical level? How does a vision of the Shari’a transform a Muslim jurist’s legal outlook? The answers to these second-order questions would necessarily affect this discipline’s *wasaṭī* approach, which he claims to be the most effective approach in dealing with Muslim minorities in the West. He states,

I believe that the doctrine [i.e., *fiqh al-aqalliyyāt*] has developed on the principle of religious law, and constitutes more than a judicial approach designed to rule on specific cases. In my opinion, *fiqh al-aqalliyyāt* presents an innovative religious law as it is manifested in the primary sources of sharia. (p. 187)
The problem here is that he has assumed an understanding of religious law that is fused with past jurists’ deliberations upon it. For example, the Shari’a objectives formulated by al-Shatibi and al-Ghazali reflect a defensive approach to law: the preservation of religion, soul, mental capacities, lineage, and property. One may question why law should be framed in this way, when it could be conceived of in terms of the individual’s dignity, the rights discourse, or an existentialist view of the human being that emphasizes self-determination.

This kind of analysis requires a deeper engagement with the primary sources of the Shari’a and their conceptual meaning – a point he alludes to by mentioning the thoughts of al-Alwani, who, in contrast to al-Qaradawi, believes that we must reinterpret primary source material. Al-Alwani opposes the claim that fiqh al-aqalliyyāt is based on needs and necessities because it is not enough to accept religious tradition at face value or to amend laws in accordance with usil al-fiqh. In addition, fiqh al-aqalliyyāt should not be regarded as just another branch of fiqh, but rather as a more encompassing jurisprudential system.

Despite mentioning both scholars’ approaches, Zahalka concludes that “nevertheless, both approaches produce similar religious laws, as the disparity in the final outcome is inconsequential and only apparent on the level of principle” (p. 69). Actually, the outcome is extremely consequential because al-Alwani’s approach has major long-term implications for the Shari’a’s very nature. If it is something more than just examining the needs and necessities of individuals, then fiqh al-aqalliyyāt becomes a very different jurisprudential system altogether. Ironically, the author’s own analysis of al-Qaradawi’s stance shows the limitation of the current worldview on fiqh al-aqalliyyāt.

Like Qaradawi, Halawa believes that alleviation for Muslims in Europe stems from a similar position to that of fiqh al-da’if, religious law for the frail. In this sense, the relief does not derive from a particularised religious law for minorities but rather from a general religious law that seeks to alleviate the burdens of the weak; this may be compared to the ways in which a sick person is entitled to unique laws due to his condition. (p. 70)

This analogy reflects a core tension in how the Shari’a is conceived – those who cannot practice its already accepted notions are regarded as exceptions to be dealt with through legal remedies. If this is really the case, then Islamic law cannot be classed as “innovative” because it considers human conditions as stagnant with exceptions, rather than as evolutionary. The emerging works of Shaykh Arif Abdulhussain of the Al-Mahdi Institute in the United
Kingdom as to the nature of the Shari’a would significantly help Zahalka’s theoretical discussions about the nature of religious law itself.

It is also unfortunate that the author does not comment upon the Shi‘i experience of being a minority in comparison with the Sunni majority, as well as their own experiences of migrating to western countries. An investigation here would have revealed that over the last 30 years, Shi‘i jurists have been producing fatwas for Shi‘is who face difficulties living in the West – Ayatullah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani’s *Fiqh li al-Mughtarabīn* (*Jurisprudence for Migrants*; http://www.sistani.org/arabic/book/17/956/) and Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli’s *Buḥūth Fiqhīyah Mu‘āṣirah* (*Contemporary Jurisprudential Discussions*) (Beirut: Markaz al-Ghadir, 2014) being prime examples. Their fatwas are not without criticism, but they would broaden the scope of Zahalka’s research.

The other major omission in Zahalka’s sources are the key works by Aasaf A. Fyzee that demonstrate how Muslim law worked alongside British law in colonial India. Despite the Eurocentric and Orientalist influences present in Fyzee’s works, he has fulfilled the important task of outlining how both legal systems were able to coexist and influence each other. His four categories of Muhammadan law would be useful in conceptualizing *fiqh al-aqalliyyāt*: “Muhammadan law is the same as English law but English terms, phraseology and doctrines are employed; Muhammadan law is modified by doctrines of the common law or equity; Muhammadan law is varied by custom; Muhammadan law is abolished or modified by statutory law” (Tahir Mahmood, ed., *Cases in the Muhammadan Law of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*, 2d ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], xxv).

In summary, Zahalka’s *Shari’a in the Modern Era* is an important and useful addition to this growing discipline. He is to be commended for providing an accessible overview of the subject-matter. A legal practitioner’s view is always useful, for it allows us to become acquainted with real cases and problems. There does need to be a greater engagement with primary source material, such as the Qur’an and Hadith, English legislation as well as biographies of the scholars that Zahalka cites. However, this does not detract from his objectives. Zahalka is accurate in saying that to date, *fiqh al-aqalliyyāt* has been not treated as a discipline in its own right. He succeeds in not only raising this concern, but also in providing critical insight into the debates over the discipline.

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This book comes at a very advantageous time, for interfaith encounters have become part of a larger conversation in academic and non-academic circles. Journals and conferences have added the dimension of how to understand the “other” and create dialogue in many innovative ways. *Islamic and Jewish Legal Reasoning: Encountering Our Legal Other* is precisely the type of text and rigorous academic guide to lead us at a time when so many religious laws are misunderstood – especially between Jews and Muslims.

The authors ask some questions: “Can the traditions of Judaism and Islam be read together through a legal religious lens without always having a common ground?” and “Can dialogue precipitate a philosophical framework that can demonstrate self-critical thought and still be engaged with the ‘Other’?” More importantly, in each section ask the authors some core questions about religion and law in order to show why the modern preoccupation with religious law is so relevant. In addition, through their methodological legal analysis, they at times demonstrate why religious law is irrelevant. The scholars featured this book are meticulous, thought-provoking, and timely in terms of their significant lines of questioning.

The book is unique in its conception, for Anver M. Emon and the contributors’ organic approach makes it more accessible and, at the same time, academically rigorous. The book emerged from workshops and was “developed further when Emon went to Cambridge University to join Gibbs and others in the Scriptural Reasoning project, where scholars read the scriptural texts of multiple traditions with scholars from those different traditions” (p. xi). Scriptural reasoning allows one to read another’s scriptures in a way that allows for personal readings and reactions to one another’s sacred text, an approach that allows for “recognizing their own otherness to their own respective traditions” (p. xxiii).

*Islamic and Jewish Legal Reasoning* opens up deeply complex and glaring issues of interpretation, authority of interpretation, and the historical conditions of reading sacred text, especially for religious law. In the first chapter, “Assuming Power: Judges, Imagined Authorities, and the Quotidian,” Rumee Ahmed and Aryeh Cohen introduce us to this complex problem of authority and complex phenomenon through legal schools of thought in both traditions. The question of God as authority is crucial, as the authors ask, almost in a
Talmudic manner, the underlying questions of authority, law, and action. For example, Ahmed asserts: “When ‘law’ is fronted with ‘religious,’ we tend to think of a different kind of law than the secular, governance-oriented law to which we are used” (p. 21). He makes an indelible point as regards contemporary laws that are countering such challenges in countries like France regarding the ban on traditional attire for Muslim women.

The text encapsulates the major legal topics of the day (e.g., women, animals, virginity, war, and sovereignty) and takes them to older legal reasonings from the Mishnah and the Hadith. As a reader, one is left craving more analysis and references that enable one to explore other topics and texts in detail. In the intriguing third chapter, “The Cowering Calf and the Thirsty Dog: Narrating and Legislating Kindness to Animals in Jewish and Islamic Texts,” Beth Berkowitz and Marion Katz take on issues of compassion and legal obligations toward animals, keeping in mind the sacred and textual obligations of the individual. For example:

Both set of texts define responsibilities toward animals; the first Mishnah and Talmud passages require a person to assist in the unloading of a burdened animal, while Ibn Qudama likens animals to wives and slaves and requires house holder to care for them in a comparable way. The second set of texts, the Talmudic story about Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi and al-Nawai, both dramatize animal suffering by linking it to human suffering and promising reward to the person who attends to that suffering. (p. 108)

This rich and provocative dialogue and textual analysis relies on the scholars’ rigorous commitment to analyze reason as well as how the text is written rhetorically.

Chapter 2, “Guardianship of Women in Islamic and Jewish Legal Texts” (Rachel Adler and Ayesha S. Chaudhry) relates some deep and provocative issues of men, women, age, and economy. The dialogue and text in this chapter pushes the frame of authority through an analysis of legal reasoning from both the Jewish and Muslim feminist perspectives. Demonstrating the many loopholes in judiciary moments in both patriarchal traditions, the authors question one another’s traditions by simple questions and rhetorical conjectures at the end. For example, Chaudhry reflects on the Jewish legal text: “Q: Can a father betroth his daughter without her consent? A. It would appear so. [The text does not say so explicitly. However, it completely ignores the question of consent, treating the daughter as an object who may be betrothed, rather than as a free, independent agent who might have a say in her betrothal.]” (p. 47). This type of questioning of the text from the other tradition’s perspective between a female Jew and a female Muslim allows for a differing of questioning and understanding of one another’s tradition.
Furthermore, in chapter 5, Arye Edrei and Enver M. Emon’s “Sovereignty, Law, and the Pedagogy of Historical Fantasy: On the Halakha on the Laws of War and the Fiqh on Dhimmis,” one finds a complex but very important analysis and dialogue on sovereignty and law. The authors’ use of the phrase “Pedagogy of Historical Fantasy” is seductive, and as one reads through the chapter the subtitle becomes essential to how Jews and Muslims recall or remember one another’s historical context. This chapter reconstructs the types of fantasy – I would say nostalgia – that Jews and Muslims have exerted through theological concerns:

To (re)turn to history, or return to a particular history, is prospectively programmatic. For religious Zionists the return to history is a call to action. For conservative Muslims the return to a particular history draws upon the past to frame the path to the future, and ultimately redemption. (p. 212)

Edrei and Emon rethink for us the modern misperception between Jews and Muslims in terms of the political conflict of Israel and Palestine, a refreshing move and revival of texts that discuss more volatile threads that the authors term “Historical Fantasy.”

Chapter 6, Adam B. Seligman’s “Cross-Textual Reflections on Tradition, Reason, and Authority,” reflects upon the book in both philosophical and theoretical terms and also raises questions of legality, authority, and reason with a keen sense of illuminated dialogue. In other words, the book itself is dialogical and inherently philosophical, as Seligman points out: “What our authors have achieved here is what Buber calls ‘genuine dialogue,’ which is the real meeting of an I and a Thou and through which – and only through which – are the creative potentialities of human cultural production possible” (p. 228). In the final chapter, “The Social Life of Reason” by Robert Gibbs, the reader is left with some good questions and open-ended ways to read one another’s texts in today’s challenge of religious law and secularism. The book leaves one with a desire to do more research and dialogue with other traditions in order to fully grapple with the meanings underlying Gibbs’ conclusion: “The dialogue is constituted by the Socratic moment of learning that we don’t know” (p. 246).

This refreshing book has a powerful theme and, through its rare dialogical methodology, presents the work of conscientious scholars who are determined to open up the world of legal reasoning within Jewish and Muslim texts.

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The (Un)Substantiated in Dan Diner’s Interpretations of the Islamic World’s “Backwardness”

Enes Karić

Abstract

The author develops a dialogue with thoughts and views of Dan Diner expressed in his book *Lost in the Sacred* (originally published in German as *Versiegelte Zeit*). This essay focuses on – and disputes – Diner’s contentions that the Arab and Muslim/Islamic worlds are backward due to their resistance to such western concepts as democracy, human rights, and social and educational institutions, not to mention the Arabic alphabet and language and the Qur’an (e.g., printing the text on a printing press, variant readings, and as an obstacle to progress) themselves.

Introduction

There are several reasons why Sulejman Bosto’s excellent translation of Dan Diner’s *Sealed Time* (*Versiegelte Zeit*)¹ into Bosnian aroused the local Bosnians’ intellectual curiosity. But before we address some of them, allow us to share some technical remarks about this work.

Originally written in German (*Versiegelte Zeit, Über den Stillstand in der islamischen Welt* [Sealed Time: On the Standstill in the Islamic World])² and

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published in 2005, it was published four years later by Princeton University Press in English under quite a cynical title: Lost in the Sacred: Why the Muslim World Stood Still. The title refers to Muslims, and the subtitle aspires to encompass the overall Muslim world, as if such concepts as progress or advancement, regardless of how we understand them or of how they could be interpreted or contested in philosophical, ethical, ecological, or other terms, had somehow eluded them.

But before we begin our review, it is appropriate to introduce Diner to the readers. Diner was born in 1946 in Munich and is a professor of modern history at Israel’s leading and globally recognized Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He obtained his PhD (international law, 1973) at Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main and completed his habilitation in 1980. His academic career is as follows: professor in the Department of Modern Arab History at Denmark’s Odense University (1980-85); professor of European History at the Tel Aviv University (1988) and director of the Institute for German History (1994-99); and director of the Simon-Dubnow-Institute for Jewish History and Culture at Leipzig University (1999-present).

Diner, who lives in both Germany and Israel, has authored numerous books on twentieth-century political history as well as Middle Eastern and Jewish history. His published works include Cataclysms: A History of the Twentieth Century from Europe’s Edge (Zaprešić: 2013), Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism and the Holocaust (Berkeley: 2000) and America Conceived as the Enemy (Berlin: 2002). According to reviews, he “links the traditions of European history, history of the Middle East and Jewish history.”

Thus, he structurally analyzes “cultural differences from the perspective of the periphery – in both its spatial and cognitive sense.” His work is particularly “recognizable for its methodological questioning of the relation between history and memory,” primarily during the years of National Socialism. Therefore, as many sources claim, Diner is the architect of the “breach of civilization” concept (Zivilisationsbruch). His critics also claim that currently “two main issues dominate his research: first, the re-conceptualization of Jewish history in modern times; and second, the significance of the Jewish historical experience as a seismograph for the turmoil of modernism.”

Diner clearly wants to “theoretically explain” two main things in Sealed Time: (1) to prove that the “sacred” (das Heilige) rules the Islamic or Muslim world, Muslim nations and societies, as well as Muslim institutions; that Muslims are “captured by the sacred,” the slaves of the sacred or, as the English translation of Versiegelte Zeit clearly says, “lost in the sacred” and (2) that
Muslims and the Muslim world at large resist modernity and stubbornly refuse to become enlightened and modern. Therefore, they remain backward, a space in which all types of reactionism and obscurity exist.

The Book’s Format

As we will be dealing with several subtopics, it is appropriate here to share some technical remarks about the book itself. In addition to the “Introduction,” the book comprises six chapters: “Knowledge and Development” (Wissen und Entwicklung), “Geopolitics and the World of Religion” (Geopolitik und Glaubenswelt), “Text and Speech” (Schrift und Sprache), “Rise and Decline” (Aufstieg und Niedergang), and “Domination and Benefit” (Herrschaft und Nutzen) and “History and Law” (Geschichte und Gesetz). The title of chapter 6 in the German original, “Historical Thought and the Divine Law,” is translated into English. We note here that it differs at times from its German original. We can only assume that Diner, after reading it, “toned down” some generally very strict judgments on this asserted backwardness.

One of the important technical remarks about Versiegelte Zeit is the mention of the Arab Human Development Report, a 2002 UN document. This report, or rather its data, as well as the data from the 2003 Arab Human Development Report, directly and initially served as the basis from which Diner deduced almost all of his conclusions on the “reactionism of the Arab and Muslim world,” on its incomprehensible and “stubborn” abidance by the “sacred” in the time of science, advancement, progress, and secularism. Sealed Time represents an overview or an inventory, so typical of him, of development (or standstill) in the Muslim world (die muslimische Welt), the measure of which is always the West (der Westen). What dominates and rules in this book is Hegel’s matrix of history’s overall movement toward its purpose, as embodied in the supreme – namely, the West. It was in the West that Weltgeist was revived as the world spirit, and therefore all of the efforts that men tried or dared to undertake have served the West’s emergence.

It is, of course, legitimate to address all of the topics Diner deals with, to expose how Muslims practice their religion to intellectual exploration and analysis, and to study to what extent their societies and Muslim or Islamic countries have accepted democracy or the “democratic” values deemed acceptable by the West. It is legitimate to examine, even critically judge, how the rulers in Islamic countries exercise power, to explore the state of human rights there, and to study the speed with which the Islamic world accepted or rejected the inventions of printing presses and printing. And, finally, it is le-
gitimate to examine to what extent the Qur’an determines educational programs in the Islamic countries, to explore the role of literary Arabic in the public domain of the Arab world, even whether it prevents that world from being “secularized” or “citizen-oriented,” as Diner suggests. Indeed, these are some of this book’s “main themes.”

In this review, we intend to critically question some of the ways he used to address these themes, as well as to critically assess many of his views and opinions. We contend that it is precisely due to his treatment of these themes that he falls into several imprecise, incorrect, and at times completely untruthful generalizations – even in places where it seems that his generalizations can withstand criticism. Also, due to his selective use of themes and arguments, as well as the examples he provides to illustrate his arguments and statements, we dare say that his book often loses its academic leverage and reduces itself to a pamphlet, angry polemics, and a nervous and capricious elaboration on the centuries lived by Muslims in all spheres of human activity.

His Sources

Here we look at the literature he consulted, an effort that we deem rather important. In this regard, we note that he relies heavily upon the writings of the mostly radical western messengers and conveyors of all sorts of atavisms in relation to Islam, Arabs, Muslims, and the never fully defined “Islamic world.” The most consulted author is Bernard Lewis, whose generalized views of Islam and Muslims he most often accepted and supported uncritically. Maybe that is why his book makes scant reference to the authentic Arabic and Muslim literature that emerged at the end of eighteenth century and during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which in itself testifies that both Christian and Muslim Arabs debated about the great and important issues of modernism, secularism, civil society, tradition and its modernization, relations to Europe, and related topics.

This abundant literature, which was created in circles of both Arab and Muslim modernists and reformists, deals extensively with what Sealed Time is trying to deal with, but in a very different manner. It is precisely Diner’s avoidance of literature on contemporary trends among Muslims – the literature that emerged both in the Near and Middle East and in Western universities – that tells us a great deal about his methodological standpoint.

For instance, he does not mention (perhaps he did not even consult) Marshall G. S. Hodgson’s large three-volume The Venture of Islam or Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History, which addresses
in a highly sophisticated manner the “rise of the West” since 1800, along with the issues faced by the Arab and Muslim intellectual circles. Also absent is the landmark work *History of the Arabs* by the Arab Christian historian Philip K. Hitti. Both of these scholars devote numerous pages to, and often write critically about, Arab and Muslim pursuits of their own contemporaneity, modernity, or the contemporaneity and modernity aligned to their own needs, how they are aligned to their own needs and the extent to which they are shaped by and deliberated in the West.

Moreover, and much to the dismay of serious readership, Diner fails to consult the work of Fazlur Rahman, a University of Chicago professor who published several critically worded books on authentic Muslim pursuits of contemporaneity, reformism, modernity, and similar trends. These works were written in “secular” language, critically oriented (we could say self-critically) toward the ideological trends in the Islamic world. Diner ignores all of this scholar’s books, which fall into the top university literature on Islam in Europe and in the West, and fails to mention them, presumably because he does not approve of the author’s arguments or because he is unaware of them.

In addition, he does not mention Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s *Islam in Modern History*, which is considered the critical breviary of the main topics of modernism and contemporaneity in today’s Islam. Notably, Smith writes reasonably (at the level of the western “university mind” and discourse) about Islam and contemporaneity as well as Islam and modernity. Diner also does not reflect upon the well-regarded works of Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi (e.g., *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* and *Contemporary Arab Thought, Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*), both of which address in detail (and critically!) the intellectual, ideological, Islamist, fundamentalist, and secularist trends in the Arab world. In addition, these works clearly and reasonably show that the Arab intellectual (and the Islamic) scene is highly plural, that Arab capitals and cultural centers thoroughly discuss the encounter of the Islamic world and Europe as well as the West, and that thousands of reasonably grounded views, opinions, attitudes have been published on the topic.

In other words, there is no unison or cemented attitude either in the Arab or the Islamic worlds on Europe, the West, modernity, contemporaneity, secularism, civic state, and so on. To the contrary, the scene is covered by a multitude of answers, reflections, and views. But when one reads Diner’s book, one can get the impression that the Arab and Islamic worlds are as uniform as a massive granite block!
Nevertheless, as one of Sealed Time’s tasks is to show that the Arab and Islamic worlds are intoxicated, numbed, stupefied, and destroyed by the sacred, those sources and literature that analyze and reflect upon contemporaneity and modernity in the Near and Middle East are “unsuitable.” Thus, he does not even consult Akbar S. Ahmed’s Islam under Siege,13 which could have been quite fecund for certain sections of his own book’s argument, as Ahmed points to, although rarely, the common Muslim lamentations, rants, and wails about (or against) Europe and the West.

Other seminal works are also missing, among them Jack Goody’s Islam in Europe.14 Goody is professor emeritus at Cambridge University and the global authority on Islam in contemporaneity. His Islam in Europe deals with the issues of Islam and terrorism, even the Taliban, in a few paragraphs. Diner refers to two other works by Goody that, in essence, do not deal with the topics fundamentally addressed in Sealed Time. And where is Hans Küng’s epochal Der Islam, Geschichte, Gegenwart, Zukunft,15 which should be consulted by anyone who wants to write a serious paper on the alleged backwardness of today’s Muslims? This work critically addresses the contradictions faced by Muslim intellectuals and thinkers when discussing Islam and contemporaneity, Islam and modernity, Islam and secularism, and similar issues. Perhaps Küng’s very methodology, which exudes an understanding of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, so repels Diner that he does not want to have it, under any circumstances, on his shelves. Besides, Küng dedicated this book to his Muslim friends all over the world16 (Meinen muslimischen Freunden in aller Welt).17 Clearly, Diner does not have similar interests in mind.

It is particularly noteworthy that he did not consult Olivier Roy’s many critical works on contemporary trends in the Arab world and movements in the Islamic world. Roy wrote extensively and critically on the manifold “banalisation of Islam” for political purposes. His arguments are presented with dignity and firmly grounded, and the manner in which he presents them is most respectful. One also wonders why, when Diner discusses the Arab world’s backwardness he never refers to the works of Annemarie Schimmel or Katharine Mommsen. Notably, Mommsen wrote an extremely valuable work on Goethe’s relation with the Arab world (Goethe und die arabische Welt); he did not find it backward.

Neglecting the thousands of Arab and Muslim contemporary thinkers who have reflected boldly and seriously on the problems of modernism, secularism, and the technological era, Diner chose mainly to refer to the works of Abu al-Ala Mawdudi and Seyyed Qutb, who have been labeled the greatest arch-fundamentalists and those who most notoriously reject the West, Europe,
modernity, and so on. It would be methodologically accurate to include the Arab and Muslim critics of these two men, for there are surely thousands of them, but Diner does not do so. In general, he reduces the overall ideological and intellectual movements and discussions on the contemporary Arab and Muslim scenes to these two individuals in order to show that Muslims have, allegedly, by rejecting modernity, progress, the West, and so on, made Islam itself a backward religion, one that is anachronistic and a hindrance to the “enlightened West.”

Diner also openly ignores Arab Christians (e.g., Hitti) who have written, in such an engaged and intellectually enviable manner, about projects of modernization and secularization in the Near and Middle East. He also clashed with Edward Said from the very onset, portraying him as an Arab hurt by “Westerners dealing with Islam,” disregarding the fact that Said’s *Orientalism* is far from any hurt and is focused on criticizing the manner and methodology applied to interpreting or “inventing the Orient.”

Of the prominent Arab Christians, Diner consults Albert Habib Hourani, but relies little upon his views of contemporaneity and modernity in the Arab world. He also says nothing about Nikola Ziyadah, the famous Arab Christian who reflected on reform ideas. What else can one say but that it is a true pity that Diner underestimates the deliberations of Arab Christians about the contemporaneity and modernity of the Arab and Islamic worlds.

According to Diner’s book, there seems to be only one type of secularism – the Western one – and one type of modernism – again, the Western one. Of course, many Arab and Muslim modernists have searched for other types of secularism and modernism, as well as civic society, striving to find solutions and apply them in the context of their cultural and civilizational home. But Diner refers to very few of them. It is not enough to mention Amir Shakib Arslan, Rifā‘at at-Tahtawi, and some other radical Arab auto-critics every now and then and based on these references, conclude that, due to the omnipresence of the sacred, only a few people in the Arab and Muslim worlds have deliberated about secularism, liberalism, separation of religion and state, and similar topics. By doing so, it seems that Diner is suggesting that the majority of these intellectual circles are unable to deliberate upon the West and adequately elaborate upon such contemporary ideas of liberalism, progress, and secularism.

The various topics and subtopics that Diner tackles are all conceived of in the “Western manner,” namely, in accordance with what he considers to be the West. His generalizations are conditioned by the following prerequisite: “The Islamic world must catch up with Europe, catch up with the West!” And
yet he fails to clearly elaborate anywhere in his *Sealed Time* the exact time frame of the West. Moreover, he never lists those “unquestionable values” to which the “backward worlds” and “people lost in the sacred” should seek to acquire by joining this frantic race.

**Diner’s Methodology and Other Weaknesses**

In my opinion, *Sealed Time* is written entirely in line with what I would call “sprint methodology.” Diner does not hide this fact. In fact, he contends that the West was created more or less during the time of the Industrial Revolution and ever since then it has been imposing a competition of worlds and civilizations upon everyone. Thus, today’s Islamic world is “lost in the sacred” because it is the least successful “racer,” which can only mean that it is backward.

One of this book’s great weaknesses, other than its methodology, is its presentation of an essentialized West. That the West was the main culprit behind the two world wars, as well as the birthplace of ideologies that led to the Holocaust and other horrors, is not mentioned. His discussions on secularism, modernity, progress, liberalism, and similar themes give us the impression that they originated from some of his lectures held in Heaven, as if secularism had never led to fascism and communism or given birth to atomic, hydrogen, and neutron bombs. Luckily, there is literature in Europe and the West that treats such ideas differently.

It is a pity that Diner only sparingly refers to Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the famous critics of progress, enlightenment, and similar themes. Had he consulted them more often, he would not resent the Arab and Islamic worlds for having many thinkers and intellectuals who have reservations about treating the idea of progress as an unquestionable deity.

In *Sealed Time’s* essentialized treatment of the West, there are probably many reasons for Diner to attack Said and his *Orientalism* in the very beginning of his book. One of these reasons is Said’s allegedly huge mistake in showing and revealing how orientalism treats Islam (and the Orient) from its own (i.e., western) “image of the Other” (*in dem eigenen Bild vom Anderen*).18 Allegedly, *Orientalism* is, as we discern from Diner’s *Sealed Time*, a proof in itself of the resentfulness that Arabs and Muslims display when anyone else studies them. As we read in *Sealed Time*: “Any concern about the Middle East and its inhabitants’ lived experience arouses suspicion” (*In der Tat gerät jede Beschäftigung mit dem Vorderen Orient, mit den Lebenswelten der Araber oder Muslime in Verdacht*).19
But the book under review proves just the contrary, for it is one of the thousands of books that have appeared, particularly from the second half of the twentieth century onward, that do not spare Muslims and the Islamic world. Moreover, literature that crucifies Islam, Arabs, and the Islamic world is conceived of in a way that made Said, a secular intellectual and Christian Arab, publish *Covering Islam* at a later date. In that book, he showed the increasingly frightful trend in many western circles, particularly the media, to unconditionally defame Muslims, Islam, and the Qur’an as the greatest conspirators against modernity and progress, as rebels against Europe and the West.

In many of his own books, Lewis is doing his best to present Muslims as people who reject everything that is not Muslim. In fact, he often portrays them as seeing themselves “surrounded on all sides by an outer darkness of barbarism and unbelief.” In other words, Muslims know nothing about communication with others, about neighborhood or friendship.

Diner’s frequent reference to the *Arab Human Development Report*, submitted in 2002 and in 2003 to the UN, is also problematic. He claims that this report provides a dismal picture of the Arab world’s economy, culture, human rights, democratic institutions, and so on. At one point, he states:

This picture of the Arab world sketched in dry statistics may serve as a stimulus to tackle historical questions from the more distant past.” (Das dort mittels trockener Statistiken gezeichnete Bild der arabischen Welt dient der Darstellung als materialer Anstoß für die historischen, in eine weitere Vergangenheit verweisenden Frage).

He neither provides the names or biographies of the “intellectual authorities” who drafted this report, nor does he mention who composed it – Arabs, secularists, liberals, fundamentalists, erudite people, or university professors? Do the Arab countries represented at the UN stand behind the report, or was it composed by Arab emigrants living in the EU and the West? When Diner mentions its claim that the Arab countries reached a GDP of US$604 billion in 2002, does this figure include the enormous flow of oil dollars to western banks via investment funds and other financial measures?

*Sealed Time* contains a great deal of imprecise data. For instance, following the report’s conclusions, Diner claims that the overall Arab world has been seized by consumption, is ruled by pure consumerism and the principle: “If you spend, you are somebody!” (Wer ausgibt – gilt). If we follow the facts on consumerism, we cannot but see that the contemporary West is pretty similar to the oil-rich Arab countries in this regard. Let’s recall how many times during the twentieth century that the various popes have criticized the consumerism...
of contemporary western societies. On the other hand, Diner’s argument about consumerism in the Arab world violates the book’s general thesis, namely, that those who spend most often spend on western goods and, therefore, participate in the trends prevalent in the global consumption and consumerism markets. This might not be as backward as some people seem to think.

Diner often presents arguments recklessly, apparently not counting on people reading his *Sealed Time* thoroughly. For instance, when he concludes that Arab governments are absolute, he forgets that the same can be said of some European (e.g., Russia under Vladimir Putin) and western governments in general. Diner says: “Rule is absolute – no matter how enlightened it might be.” (*Es gilt ein Absolutismus der Herrschaft – und gebe sie sich noch so aufgeklärt*). Of course, it would be a great thing for humanity if “ruling absolutism” characterized just the Arab regimes. But it also comes to the fore in the West – the democratic and liberal West. Remember how President George W. Bush launched a war against Iraq in 2003 despite the (ultimately futile) protests of millions of people, including Christian secularists, in the West? Besides, we see both in the West and the East the common absolutism of corporations, however “enlightened” they may be.

Such arbitrariness is abundant in Diner’s book. At one point, for instance, he claims that (in the Arab countries), allegedly: “It is not an orderly, transparent procedure in line with the norms of economic viability that brings success, but rather proximity to the ruler” (*Nicht das ordentliche und transparente Verfahren, das den Maßgaben von Wirtschaftlichkeit folgt, führt zum Erfolg, sondern die Nähe zum Herrscher*). Naturally, these things happen in the Arab world and rulers spoil their protégés with “ducats and dollars.”

But in the EU, “proximity to the ruler” also resolves everything – as we saw in the recent economic turbulence and bank failings in Greece, where billions of dollars were lost. Even Diner cannot claim that this ruin happened “in an orderly and transparent procedure,” although Greece’s proximity to the “great ruler” (viz., Germany) saved it from inevitable bankruptcy. Similar parallels can be drawn with the not-so-distant economic and bank turbulence in Italy, Spain, and elsewhere, all of which could have been saved only by their “proximity to the ruler,” as this would enable them to receive favorable loans and move toward economic recovery. Therefore, actions similar to those of “Oriental despots” occur worldwide, even within the liberal parliamentary democracies of Europe and the West.

The *Arab Human Development Report* of 2002 and 2003 serve as basis for many of Diner’s conclusions, and yet he never verifies them. We shall leave this aspect of his book to some other researcher.
Other evident weaknesses are the author’s abundant arbitrary generalizations, unsubstantiated general statements, and conclusions about the Arab and Islamic worlds. It would take too long to cite all these relevant passages, written in his overwhelming nervousness and often with open scorn bordering on atavism. But a few examples should be pointed out.

Diner claims that:

There is no department of humanities or social sciences dedicated to researching the West and its unique character – if you will, a kind of scholarly ‘Occidentalism’. (Ein geistes- oder sozialwissen-schaftliches Fach zur Erforschung des Westens und dessen, was ihn ausmacht, also eine Art von ‘Okzidentalismus’, gibt es nicht).25

This is incorrect, rudely false, and scornful, for the Arab world has universities and institutes, many of which conduct strategic research and deal with the West. Indeed, it is unnecessary to list them, for proving that they exist would be equal to proving that human beings breathe air. It is enough to google (in Arabic) the word ma’had to get a vast amount of data on these numerous Arab institutes.

Despite everything he arbitrarily presents about the Arab world, Diner does, however, allow that these Arabs could know a thing or two. He therefore says, in a manner uncommon for any serious theoretical discourse,

The abilities of educated people in the Arab world are no less than elsewhere. On the individual level, they may meet the highest standards (Die Fähigkeiten der Gebildeten in der arabischen Welt sind nicht geringer als die in anderen Gemeinwesen. Als Einzelne vermögen sie dem höchsten Standard zu entsprechen).26

We make no comment about this statement, of course, for there are hundreds of Arab professors today at western universities, be they Muslim, Christian, or secular. They achieve extraordinary results in science, and so any claim of the Arabs’ ability to learn seems highly scornful and ridiculous.

Diner remarks that the Arab world’s “lack of secular culture” is an obstacle for its scientists “to be awarded the Nobel Prize”: “But that a scientist working exclusively in an Arab country might be awarded the Nobel Prize is less likely.” (Dass ein Naturwissenschafter eines arabischen Landes mit dem Nobelpreis ausgezeichnet wird, ist weniger wahrscheinlich).27 He has a point here. Every prize, including the Nobel, comes with significant political and ideological support. This is not about “the deficit of secular culture,” but about the politics of awarding any prize, including the Nobel. Would Malala
Yousafzai have received it if a US drone had injured her? No, of course not. If we are to respect the facts, we must all ask these questions—and so should Diner.28

Another of his arbitrary judgments is: “A regulated, let alone a democratically regulated, acquisition of power in the Arab world is not evident” (Von einem regulierten, gar von einem demokratisch geregelten Machterwerb kann in der arabischen Welt kaum die Rede sein).29 This claim is fair, even true, for the Arab world often lacks a democratic culture, particularly among its pro-western ruling elites. However Diner, as an unbiased scientist, should have mentioned France’s sponsorship of the military coup that followed the FIS’ democratic victory in Algeria (1990) and was approved by other western countries. Many of Noam Chomsky’s books, essays, and interviews deal with this topic. The standards that he applies are much higher than those of Diner when it comes to assessing the western influence in preventing the emergence of democracies in Arab countries. In addition, Mohamed Morsi won the democratic elections held in Egypt several years ago, but was overthrown by protests and the western-sponsored military junta.

Diner soon touches upon “the Arab-Muslim world” (arabisch-muslimischer Raum)30 as regards globalization: “Furthermore, the opening of a broader global market in the name of freedom unchained an extraordinary economic dynamic.” (Zudem führten die im Zeichen der Freiheit sich weiter öffnenden globalisierten Märkte zu einer außerordentlichen wirtschaftlichen Dynamik).31 Do global markets most often open “in the name of freedom,” or for the sake of profit, interests, spreading corporate impact, and related factors? This has been the topic of many debates right from the onset of the various globalization projects. It is enough to mention just one of Chomsky’s discussions on globalization to expose the fact that globalization processes often pursue enslaving goals and have common destructive consequences.

He continues by claiming that globalization processes are visible everywhere except, allegedly, in this “backward Arab-Muslim world”: “The trend [of globalization] was ubiquitous – except in the Arab-Muslim world.” (Dieser Trend war allenthalben zu beobachten – außer im arabisch-muslimischen Raum).32 All of those who wish to be objective observers of the Near and Middle East will immediately notice how very strong these processes are (whether approved of or not) in Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, Turkey, Egypt, the Maghreb, and Muslim Southeast Asia.

The oil industry and everything that accompanies it globalized the Gulf countries long ago, as hundreds of global offices following the trends of automobile and all other industries were opened there. In Riyadh one can find
shiny shops and malls selling Hugo Boss, Christian Dior, and other name-
band western products. Moreover, these countries organize all of the things
 dictated by globalization, among them global sports events. Qatar, which
will host the World Cup in a few years, has hosted several tennis and other
sporting events. And the region clearly participates in telecommunications
and the media via Al Jazeera and dozens of other regional and satellite tel-
vision stations.

Naturally, both those who glorify and disapprove of globalization see its
strong traces throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds. For example, Abu-Rabi‘
said about his visit to Jeddah a few years ago: “[The people of Jeddah] are
proud of their new space, their post-modern airport, and of Saudi Airlines...
In Jeddah, I see big shopping malls, high rises, and highways. Oh my God, am
I in New York or San Francisco?” 33 Therefore, whoever wants (or cares about
the external signs of globalization) to see these or similar images can find
them in Casablanca, Tunis, Benghazi, Alexandria, Brunei, Islamabad, Lahore,
and elsewhere. Indeed, given these on-the-ground realities, one must wonder
why Diner insists upon linking the Near East, even the entire Muslim world,
with backwardness.

The criticism of globalization’s processes is, of course, a completely dif-
genent matter. Even if we approve of or support Diner’s unconditional belief
in “market globalization,” as well as his opinion that it all (allegedly) unfolds
“in the name of freedom” (Chomsky sees in globalization many signs of en-
slaving the weak and powerless), one cannot but wonder just a little about his
failure to see and understand that the Gulf countries, as well as Turkey, Malay-
sia, and Indonesia are fully involved in this undertaking.

Diner and Arabic

In this book, Diner appears and even introduces himself as a historian of and
specialist in Arabic. He therefore tries to show that Arabs are incapable of
conceiving (or developing) freedom in a secular and modern manner:

It is not that Arabic has no word for freedom, but the original meaning of
the Arabic hurriyyah is merely the opposite of slavery, not at all what is as-
associated with libertas in the Western tradition – the right to participate in
governmental affairs (Nicht, dass das Arabische kein Wort für Freiheit hätte,
aber die ursprüngliche Bedeutung des arabischen Wortes hurriyya meint
das Gegenteil von Sklaverei und nicht das, was in der westlichen Tradition
mit libertas in Verbindung gebracht wird – das Recht, an den Angelegen-
heiten des Regierens beteiligt zu sein). 34
Diner should know what any good philosophical and other dictionary underlines: Words have their history; many change their meaning over the vastness of time. Just like 700 or 500 years ago the Latin word *libertas* did not mean all of the civil rights exercised in today’s Germany or France, the Arabic word *hurrīyah* could not have denoted, for instance, modern voting rights and free elections.

When one consults André Lalande’s (1867-1963) multi-volume “Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie,” one finds his remark that *liberté* originally had the following meaning (for which Diner finds many faults in its form *hurrīyah*): ma’nā qadīm: al-insān al-hurr huwa al-insān alladhī lā yakūn ‘abdān aw sijīnān (The old meaning of the word freedom/liberté is: A free man is a man who is not a slave and is not a prisoner.) Certainly, the fact that Diner finds faults here with *hurrīyah* (humiliating the notion by claiming that it is, in a way, a premature baby not old enough to bear all of the semantic, political, democratic, and civic meanings that *libertas* allegedly carries in its contemporary western use) only serves to introduce his discussion about literary or classical Arabic (*al-fuṣḥā*). This deserves some attention.

A special dimension of this book is his assertion that what greatly inhibits the Arab-Muslim world and prevents its true development is not only the “sacredness [of Islam and the Qur’an],” but also the “sacredness of the Arabic literary language,” even the Arabic alphabet. In other words, Diner thinks that Mustafa Kemal’s introduction of the Latin alphabet in 1928 and abolishment of the Arabic alphabet was a great sacrilege in Muslim eyes.

When in 1928 the Turkish Republic did away with the Arabic alphabet and replaced it with the Latin one, the secular attack on religion seemed to have reached its zenith (Und als im Jahr 1928 die türkische Republik das arabische Alphabet mit einem Federstrich abschaffte, um es durch das lateinische zu ersetzen, schien das laizistisch unternommene Sakrileg vollkommen). This example contradicts his book’s general thesis.

A cynic could say there are Muslims who accept secularism, but that Islam survives even under that secularism (as shown by Turkey’s modern history). Besides, it is common sense that introducing the Latin alphabet could not possibly lead to the “abolishment of Islam.” To the contrary, this same alphabet became, in addition to everything else it already was, an “Islamic script” in modern Turkey and the Balkans, among the Albanians, Bosniaks, the Torbesh, Pomaks, and other indigenous Muslim communities. Many Muslims in traditional Islamic countries are now bilingual or multilingual, for in addition to their native language they often speak English, German, or French. A cynic
could also find numerous examples in the Muslim world (including the one of the Latin alphabet) to prove that many Muslims have found a *modus vivendi* with modernism, despite living in a “sealed time.” Of course, Diner fails to draw such conclusions because they would thwart, even destroy, many of his unfounded generalizations.

Furthermore, despite the raving rush of modernism in the traditional countries of Islam, millions of people in Iran and Pakistan use the Arabic alphabet, even those who are secular. But Diner does not give up on being the unchallengeable expert in linguistics. Thus, in the part about “the Arabic alphabet being difficult,” he says:

> Whereas Christian and Jewish children in foreign schools in the Ottoman Empire quickly learned the Greek or Hebrew alphabets, because of their greater simplicity, as well as the Latin alphabet, and so were soon able to use them to gain knowledge, Muslim children had to struggle much longer with the complex Arabic alphabet (*Während christlische und jüdische Kinder im Osmanischen Reich das griechische oder hebräische Alphabet seiner Einfachheit wegen in kürzester Zeit erlernten und diese früh erworben Leseleistung rasch für die Aufnahme von Wissen einzusetzen vermochten, mussten sich muslimische Kinder viel länger mit dem komplexen arabischen Alphabet abmühen*). 38

These claims deserve no comment beyond the one that contemporary linguistics long ago resolved the unacceptable and immature questions regarding “difficult” and “easy” languages or alphabets. Just to show how anachronistic this view is in terms of the field’s achievements and views, Arabic, just like Cyrillic and other non-Latin scripts, are used in computer programs and the computers running them have yet to go “crazy.”

Now that we have come to Diner’s indignation toward the “complex Arabic alphabet,” let us say that he, in an utterly ignorant manner, draws similar conclusions about literary (or classical) Arabic (*al-fuṣḥā*) in many an incompetent paragraph. Among the largest claims, supported by nothing, is that this alphabet is a dam or a wall that prevents Arabs (or Muslims even) from being “secularized.” We suppose that Diner should know, given the fact that he is a German and Israeli university professor, that Arabs – with of all their complex relationships and complicated reception of the European Enlightenment, secularism, and so on – long ago translated the masters of European literature (e.g., Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Kafka) into Arabic. Hundreds, even thousands of European “secular” literary works have been beautifully received and embodied in Arabic, which expresses – is there truly a need to provide evidence for this? – the original authors’ “secular” worldview.
The same applies to the hundreds of translations of contemporary European philosophical works translated into literary Arabic. One wonders if Diner devoted even one hour to flipping through those European philosophical works (e.g., in Cairo Library) that were translated in Beirut, or at least two hours to flipping through those translated in Cairo. Does one even need to mention that Arab intellectuals have translated, for instance, Spengler, Hegel, and Kant into literary Arabic? If Arabic is “sclerotic,” “fossilized,” and “backward,” as Diner claims for al-fusḥā, why have Arab intellectuals and scholars, as well as Arab Christian priests, spent the past 200 years and so much mental energy translating books into Arabic that nobody will read or even be able to understand?

Certainly, as everywhere among populous peoples, Arabs have millions of peasants, workers, and other uneducated individuals who do not know literary Arabic well or do not know it at all! They speak their native dialects (ʻammīyah). However, can German Bavarian peasants read and understand perfectly the works of Martin Heidegger written in literary German, or of Eugen Fink or of Goethe? Of course we know that the gap between German dialects on the one hand, and standard (or literary) German on the other, is much narrower than is the case with Arabic. But there is, nevertheless, a single generally understood literary Arabic language stretching from Iraq to Morocco, just as there is a “single general Arabic dialect for the educated” (ʻammīyatul-muthaqafīn) that is easily understood throughout the Arab world.

There is not enough space in this critical review to deal with Diner’s utterly unfounded opinions that contemporary Arabs do not understand literary Arabic. Why, then, do they have thousands of television and radio stations broadcasting programs in literary Arabic, not to mention the hundreds of daily and weekly science and art magazines? What is the use of all of this production if they do not understand the language used?

What lies behind Diner’s nervously presented theories about literary or classical Arabic is his utter torment over the Qur’an’s status in traditional Muslim societies, including the Arab ones. There is no need to mention that the Qur’an is the fundamental text that watches over the preservation of classical Arabic. This is exactly what Hitti emphasizes in his view of the Qur’an:

Its literary influence may be appreciated when we realize that it as due to it alone that the various dialects of the Arabic-speaking peoples have not fallen apart into distinct languages, as have the Romance languages. While today an ‘Iraqī may find it a little difficult fully to understand the speech of a Moroccan, yet he would have no difficulty in understanding his written language, since in both al-Iraq and Morocco – as well as in Syria, Arabia, Egypt – the classical language modelled by the Koran is followed closely everywhere.
We now provide one of Diner’s opinions about the Qur’an. It appears, as with many of his statements, that he is not completely aware of what he is saying:

It is one of Islam’s founding dogmas that no book can enter into rivalry with the Koran; beyond God’s word, no other scripture can be admitted. Just as there can be no God but God, so there can be no book but the Koran (Es gehört zum Gründungsdogma des Islam, neben dem Koran kein zweites Buch aufkommen zu lassen, jenseits von Gottes Wort keine weitere Verschriftlichung zulassen. So wie es außer Gott keinen Gott geben kann, darf es neben dem Koran kein anderes Buch geben).40

To the uninformed haters of Islam, these words might seem striking, might confirm his theses on the “backwardness of Muslims” and their “overall narrow-mindedness and bigotry.” But these words contradict the elementary truth that Islamic dogma proclaims the belief in “God’s books” (wa kutubihi. That is the first thing. The second thing is that anyone who ever attended as much as an evening course in Islam knows that Muslims are commanded to believe in the Tawrāt (Moses), the Zabūr (David), the Injīl (Jesus), and the Qur’an (Muhammad). Therefore, it is books, not book!

Third, Muslims have always written books, a fact easily proven by the existence of thousands of ancient Islamic and Muslim manuscripts on all kinds of topics (e.g., theology, philosophy, natural sciences, mysticism – even “rabies in dogs,” as Umberto Eco mentions in his brilliant novel The Name of the Rose) in libraries worldwide. Does that mean, following Diner’s conclusions, that Muslims committed sacrilege? Furthermore, the Abbasid caliphs founded a translation school in Baghdad, which was most productive from 813 to 833 (under Caliph Al-Ma’mun, and employed Muslims, Christians, and Jews who spoke Arabic to translate numerous works of Greek philosophy as well as Syriac, Pahlavi, and Sanskrit manuscripts into Arabic. So if we follow Diner, al-Ma’mun committed sacrilege because he allowed books other than the Qur’an, even those that were “infidel,” Greek, and pagan.

**Other Spurious Claims**

Particularly sad are his paragraphs about how modern scientific inventions rattled the Muslims’ faith in the “God’s sovereignty and the eternal character of the Koran as the book of revelation.” Let us share one of these statements in its full form:

These novelties not only changed everyday life and made it easier, but they also aroused doubts about God’s sovereignty and the eternal character of
the Koran as the book of revelation. Islamic purists saw these modern machines as works of the devil challenging God’s control over time (Diese Neuheiten veränderten und erleichterten nicht nur den Alltag, sondern ließen auch an der Souveränität Gottes und dem ewigen Charakter des Korans als dem Buch der Offenbarung zweifeln. Islamistische Puristen sahen diese Gerätschaften als Teufelszeug an, das Gottes Herrschaft über die Zeit heraustorderte).41

This excerpt is a typical example of Diner fighting tooth and nail to prove that technical inventions “scared” and “terrified” the “backward Arabs and other narrow-minded Muslims,” of how the “devil’s technical inventions” intensively shook their faith in God and the Qur’an’s divine nature. This raises a logical question: “If western technology from the end of nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century so terrified the Muslims, why did they not all become unbelievers? After all, science was going to provide all of the answers, even those related to the greatest metaphysical secrets.

How could Diner write such a book at this point in time, when Arabs and Muslims are full participants in globalization and yet continue to live their religion, go to mosques, and recite the Qur’an? In other words, why did the mighty technological West fail to turn them into atheists with its machines, to take them out of Islam and turn them against the Qur’an?

In these and similar parts of Sealed Time, one can clearly see that Lewis has influenced Diner so strongly that he should, in Islamic terms, be treated as the muqallid (the blind follower) of “shaykh” Bernard Lewis.

Various other paragraphs are so false that they seriously challenge Diner’s asserted specialization in dealing with Islam at all. For example: “For Muslims, the Azhar Koran is the authoritative text” (Der Azhar-Koran ist der einzige für Muslime verbindliche Korantext).42 This is a harsh and cruel falsehood, to say the least, for the original Qur’an is not being printed and published only in the consonant and vocalization systems characteristic of the al-Azhar edition. In fact, it has been published (and printed!) many times before in different consonant and vocalization systems all around the Arab world.

One notices that the Maghreb countries are inclined to print it according to the Warsh style (bi riwāyat Warsh), but also in other recitation systems. There have been several editions. In Syria, a number of editions of the Qur’anic original appeared in the Qalun consonant and vocalization system (bi riwāyat Qālūn). Furthermore, those Qur’anic originals whose consonant and vocalization systems are given by Khalaf tradition (bi riwāyat Khalaf) enjoy wide circulation throughout the Muslim world. In addition, Madinah’s huge King Fahd Printing Complex publishes hundreds of thousands of copies
of the original Qur’ān according to consonant and vocalization systems given in the traditions of Qalun, Warsh, Shu‘bah, Duri, and others.

In many places, Diner’s knowledge is shown to be rather lamentable, particularly because of his ignorant and naïve conclusions on the literacy status of the traditional countries of Islam. But his claims that Muslims must use only the al-Azhar edition of the Qur’ān (Der Azhar-Koran ist der einzige für Muslime verbindliche Korantext) truly devalues him as a serious scholar – especially when Germany has such competent Oriental studies scholars as Rudi Paret (1901-83), Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930), and Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003), whose books live on. Germany recently printed Nöldeke’s classical History of the Qur’ān (Tārīkh al-Qur’ān) in Arabic, which was translated from the German original (Die Geschichte des Qorans). If Diner wanted the world to learn about his opinions of the Qur’ān, why did he not get the basic information from Nöldeke’s book about these readings? We wonder why Angelika Neuwirth, well read in Qur’ān studies, and others – Germany has many living academic professionals in Arab studies and Islamic studies) – did not warn him that his “knowledge” of the alphabet is extremely inaccurate.

So much for whether Muslims can publish the original Qur’ān in non-Azhar consonant, vocalization, and punctuation systems. Moreover, one must not forget that the commentaries to the Qur’ān, especially those in Arabic, give thousands of variations of readings of the original Qur’ān. One is deemed a good commentator of Islam in Islamic culture and civilization if one is, in addition to other disciplines, particularly informed about these variant readings.

These critical comments of ours about Sealed Time should be brought to an end. There is no space to deal with Diner’s completely unfounded conclusions about the Muslims’ traditional teachers being oral teachers who allegedly prohibited the use of paper and writing. If this were the case, then how can one account for the many centuries-old and modern famous and large libraries of the Islamic world that contain hundreds of thousands of books? Moreover, the Qur’ān itself mentions books, writing, quill, leaves of paper… in such a beautiful context.

We will just mention how he addresses printing and the printing press, for he claims that here, Muslims proved to be particularly ignorant, narrow, and bigoted because, in brief, their relation to the world supposedly prevented them from embracing printing when Europe did. We beg to disagree, for even his chief authority, Bernard Lewis, states in this regard that “printing presses had been introduced to Turkey from Europe by Jewish refugees before the end of
the fifteenth century, and Jewish presses established in Istanbul, Salonika, and other cities.” In other words, the Ottoman authorities were neither backward nor of the opinion that these were “Satan’s invention.” Furthermore, according to Lewis, “the Jews were followed by the Armenians and the Greeks, who also set up presses in their own languages in Ottoman cities” and that printing presses “were, however, authorized on the strict condition that they did not print any books in Turkish or Arabic.” According to him, “this ban remained in effect until the early eighteenth century when it was abandoned...” If we are to assign the invention of printing press to Johannes Gutenberg in 1450 and it appeared in the Ottoman Empire a mere four decades later, this can hardly be considered an instance of lagging behind.

Clearly, what Diner is suggesting here is the Muslims’ overall backwardness and retrogradeness. Instead of praising the Ottoman authorities for allowing the Jews, Armenians, and Greeks to use their printing presses and spread their culture, Diner asserts that the traditional Muslim circles thought that the Qur’anic text and the Hadith text should not be stuffed into a machine, which would “disparage” their holiness. What, exactly, is wrong with this traditional Muslim view? After all, traditional Muslim environments had their own “printing presses,” as did the traditional Chinese environments. One can see in museums all over the world the dozens of tools used to write, rewrite, and then copy Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and other manuscripts. In other words, neither the Muslims nor the Chinese lagged behind in spreading books and the written word. We wonder why some people see Guttenberg’s invention as a machine, but refuse to apply this term to the hundreds of Muslim and Chinese tools used to copy manuscripts.

Conclusion

Let us say at the end that we agree with Diner every time he speaks about the need to develop a democratic culture in the Arab world and the need to comply with democracy and civil exercise of authority in the Arab and Islamic countries. However, Sealed Time represents a summary of what part of the right-wing media in Europe and in the West in general constantly write about Islam and Muslims. Its basic characteristic is generalization, which leads to erroneous speech and mistaken reporting on Islam. We have already mentioned Said’s Covering Islam, which details how the western media covers Islam. The book was translated into Croatian in Zagreb as Krivotvorenje islama (Fabricating Islam). They could not have opted for a better title.
It would be a good idea for Diner to ask whether the Muslims keep in their hearts what humanity might need at some future point in time? There is less and less hope that the atomic, hydrogen, and neutron bombs will not explode and destroy humanity. “Only a God can save us,” said Martin Heidegger (Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten). Many Muslims are “inebriated by the sacred,” but isn’t that, in addition to all other things, their way of sublimating and forestalling the catastrophe that humanity faces today, regardless of faith or the lack thereof? One would welcome more intensive pursuits to revive the relation with the sacred among Christians, particularly those in the West, as well as among other believers in other parts of the world.

The English language edition of Sealed Time differs at times from the German original, as if the English translator had sent Diner the translation before publication and the latter had seen that there were some hasty claims in his radical secularist plowing of areas sacred to and treasured by traditional Muslims. We think that this explains certain differences in chapter 6, where Diner talks about a group of “pro-Islamic Jews,” in fact colossally important European and world-class scholars who, at least at some point in their lives, benevolently studied Islam. Finding no way to avoid them, Diner says:

The evident proximity of Judaism and Islam has impelled some Jews working out their dilemmas vis à vis modernity to “discover” Islam. This can be seen in the works of certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century Jewish scholars of Muslim thought and life (Die offenkundige Nähe von Judentum und Islam hat dazu beigetragen, dass Juden ihr eigenes Dilemma in und mit der Moderne – das Dilemma von Gesetz und Geschichte – in ihrer Beschäftigung mit dem Islam abarbeiteten. Dies lässt sich an den Werken jüdischer Islamforscher im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert nachvollziehen).

Included here are Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), Leopold Weiss (a.k.a. Muhammad Asad, 1900-92), Abraham Geiger (1810-74), the famous German rabbi who warned Europe to “stop referring to Muhammad as a charlatan,” as well as Paul Kraus (1904-44), Leo Strauss (1899-1973), and others. Each of these scholars, at some points in their lives, expressed respect for the ways in which Islam “insists on man’s need for the divine enlightenment.” All of us, myself and Diner included, should take the views of these Jewish scholars seriously. May God grant that in the future we need the sacred as enlightenment, and not just as mere consolation when faced with the most diverse threats of war and bombs.
Endnotes

1. Professor Sulejman Bosto’s translation will soon be published by Šahinpašić in Sarajevo.

2. For the purpose of this critical comment, the following edition is used: Dan Diner, *Versiegelte Zeit, Über den Stillstand in der islamischen Welt* (Berlin: List Taschenbuch, 3. Auflage, 2010).


4. According to available sources, Diner has received the Ernst-Bloch-Preis of the city of Ludwigshafen am Rhein for “valuing the voice of understanding” (2006), the Capalbio Preis award (2007), and the Leipziger Wissenschaftspris award (2013). In addition, during the 2004-05 academic year, he was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. Sources state that he has worked as a visiting professor at numerous faculties and research institutes, both domestic and abroad, and also that he is a member of several scientific boards.

5. Mr. Ajdin Šahinpašić told me that Diner requested that the last chapter – *Geschichte und Gezetz* (History and Law) – not be translated from the German original (*Versiegelte Zeit*), but from the English translation (*Lost in the Sacred*). In the English translation, the last chapter is entitled “Historical Thought and the Divine Law.” This is why this paper refers to the English version.

6. I would like mention that I personally, and in present circumstances of Bosnia and Herzegovina, often write and publish critical texts on various unacceptable occurrences among certain Muslims, be they believers or not. I published an essay entitled “Mošus Hazreti Fatime, ali i mošus Hazreti Aişe” (“Musk of Hazrat Fatima, but also Musk of Hazrat Aisha”) in *Preporod*, Sarajevo (September 15, 2013), in which I criticized the contemporary inter-madhab conflicts and blood-sheds in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere. I also published the essay “Čekajući muslimanski Greenwich” (“Waiting for the Muslim Greenwich”) in *Muallim* 13, no. 52, Sarajevo (winter 2012), in which I criticized how some traditional Muslim countries determine the start of Ramadan. Also, in my essay “Ko to doista vrijeda Božijeg Poslanika Muhammeda, a.s?” (“Who Is It That Really Offends Prophet Muhammad?”) in *Preporod* 20 (October 15, 2012), I criticized the destructive demonstrations organized by some Muslims and their associations in numerous countries in the East or in certain diasporic communities in the EU. Typically, these demonstrations are organized after media provocations relating to dignity and worthiness of Muhammad (e.g., publication of cartoons). In this last-mentioned essay, I said, first of all, that many Muslims in the traditional Muslim countries in the Near and Middle East offend God’s Prophet by failing to work for ending economic exploitation in their communities and to increase living, cultural, legal, institutional, democratic and other standards in their communities.

8. Philip K. Hitti’s work was translated into Bosnian (Serbian, Croatian) by the late Petar Pejčinović. See the second phototype edition by Veselin Masleša (Sarajevo: 1988).


22. Ibid., 56 (Ibid., 33).

23. Ibid., 59 (Ibid., 35).

24. Ibid., 60 (Ibid., 36).

25. Ibid., 47 (Ibid., 27).

26. Ibid., 48 (Ibid.).

27. Ibid. (Ibid., 28).

28. I recently conducted an interview with Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a professor at George Washington University, during which I asked: “How do you see the modern western discourse on Muslim women? Is it saturated by the so-called ‘savior complex’ in which Muslim women are objectified and made a tool for achieving political gains? Let us, for example, consider the case of the brave girl Malala Yousafzai, a fighter for the education of girls in Pakistan. Would her case be known in the West if she had been wounded by a US drone?” Nasr answered: “Yes, I am sure that if Malala Yousafzai had been injured by an American drone, you would not have heard of her name.” I published this interview in Preporod, no. 12/1022, Sarajevo (June 15, 2014).

30. Ibid., 65 (Ibid., 39).
31. Ibid., 64 (Ibid.).
32. Ibid., 65 (Ibid.).
36. Ibid., 2:727.
38. Ibid., 82 (Ibid., 52).
41. Ibid., 91 (Ibid., 58).
42. Ibid., 133 (Ibid., 88).
44. Diner dares to write full passages about the Qur’an not knowing the basics of Qur’an hermeneutics and exegesis. In addition, he is not aware of the twentieth-century printed editions of the Qur’an.
45. Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery*, 50.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
53. We remind the readers here that Diner selectively uses the *Arab Human Development Report* from 2002 (as well as other AHDRs he refers to). Namely, Diner does not mention, and definitely does not elaborate on, the fact that AHDR speaks critically about the state of Israel and the problems it causes in the Near and Middle East. It would be fair, at least methodologically, for him to analyze what Arab intellectuals who draft the AHDR say about Israel’s practices and conduct.
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