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The historiography of Medieval Christian-Muslim relations (1960-2020)

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Abstract. The historiography concerning Medieval Christian Muslim-Relations over the past sixty years has been shaped by two important books: Norman Daniel's Islam and the West (1960) and Edward Said's Orientalism (1978). Each of these works made significant contributions to the field, but each also had serious methodological limitations. Both works assumed and reinforced a conceptual divide between an imagined Christian West and Muslim East. Over the past several decades, some of the most interesting and important work in the field has challenged and reconceptualized this dichotomy.
Keywords: Islam; Medieval History; Christendom; Orientalism.

[es] La historiografía de las relaciones medievales entre cristianos y musulmanes (1960-2020)

Resumen. La historiografía sobre las relaciones medievales entre cristianos y musulmanes durante los últimos sesenta años ha sido moldeada por dos libros importantes: *Islam and the West* (1960) de Norman Daniel, y *Orientalism* (1978) de Edward Said. Cada uno de estos trabajos hizo contribuciones significativas al campo, pero cada uno también tuvo serias limitaciones metodológicas. Ambas obras asumieron y reforzaron una división conceptual entre un Occidente cristiano imaginado y un Oriente musulmán. En las últimas décadas, algunos de los trabajos más interesantes e importantes en el campo han cuestionado y reconceptualizado esta dicotomía.
Palabras clave: Islam; Historia Medieval; Cristianismo; Orientalismo.

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> The existence of Islam was the most far-reaching problem in medieval Christendom. It was a problem at every level of experience. As a practical problem it called for actions and for discrimination between the competing possibilities of Crusade, conversion, coexistence, and commercial interchange. As a theological problem it called persistently for some answer to the mystery of its existence: what was its providential role in history--was it a symptom of the world's last days or a stage in the Christian development; a heresy, a schism, or a new religion; a work of man or devil; an obscene parody of Christianity, or a system of thought that deserved to be treated with respect?[2]

Richard Southern, one of the foremost medievalists of his generation, wrote this in 1962, in a brief essay on *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages.* While the brunt of Southern's research focused on the history of the Church and on medieval Latin humanism, he recognized that Latin Europe was for much of the Middle Ages a cultural and economic backwater compared to the economically thriving and intellectually vibrant civilization of Islam that stretched from the Indus to the Atlantic. He identifies Islam as a problem for Medieval Latin Christendom, both a practical problem and a theological problem.

Southern was not the first European scholar to take an interest in the history of Medieval relations between Latin Europe and the Muslim world, but he was perhaps the first to cast the confrontation with and emulation of the Muslim world as a central problem in European culture, and to see it as an overarching challenge with military, political, cultural, intellectual and religious aspects. There were already of course libraries of works on different aspects of the question, notably on the crusades: 18th-century writers such as Diderot and Voltaire portrayed European crusaders as boorish fanatics pitted against advanced, sophisticated Muslim polities. In 19th-century, some French authors mobilized and manipulated the memory of the crusade to justify France's colonial enterprises in the Arab world. The criticisms of Voltaire or Diderot were swept aside; the

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[2] R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages.* (Cambridge, Massachussetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), 3.

crusades became historical embodiments of the French civilizing mission. The principal architect of this revision was Joseph-François Michaud (1767-1839) who, like his friend François de Chateaubriand, sought to rehabilitate the crusades in the face of Enlightenment criticism; he published the seven volumes of his *Histoire des Croisades* between 1812 and 1822 and subsequently reworked them; the fifth edition was published in 1838, one year before his death.[3] Ever since, the history of the crusades has been something of a cottage industry, particularly in the UK. Scholarship has abounded as well on other aspects of the contacts between the Arab and Latin worlds: Mediterranean commerce, the transmission of knowledge through among other things the translation of key Arabic texts into Latin.

The first serious attempt to explain medieval Latin Christian visions of Islam as a religion was perhaps that of Alessandro D'Ancona who, in an article published in 1889, studied hostile legends which ridiculed the prophet Muhammad.[4] In 1944, Ugo Monneret de Villard published a survey of Latin studies of Islam in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: he sought to show that scholars and translators in 12th-century Spain, followed by Franciscan and Dominican missionary-scholars in the thirteenth century, laid the groundwork for what would subsequently become European Orientalist scholarship on Islam.[5] Between 1948 and 1990, Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny published a number of articles on 12th-century Latin translations of the Qur'an and other texts about Islam and on 12th-century Latin anti-Muslim polemics.[6]

But the most important and substantial study of Medieval Latin Christian representations of Islam was provided by Norman Daniel's *Islam and the West: The Making of An Image* (1960, republished in a slightly revised version in 1993).[7] Daniel's is a work of considerable erudition; he searched out and documented medieval Latin texts, in print or in manuscript, cataloguing what many medieval Christians wrote about Muhammad, the Qur'ān, and Muslim ritual. He was also a Catholic intent on finding new, less adversarial strategies for creating dialogue with Muslims in hopes of their eventual conversion to Christianity; indeed, his attitude was not so far removed from that of the more irenic of the thirteenth-century authors he discussed.[8] Daniel was shocked by the inaccuracy and hostility of what he found in many of the medieval texts he analyzed. Medieval Christian writings about Islam contain crude insults to the Prophet, gross caricatures of Muslim ritual, deliberate deformation of passages of the Qur'ān, degrading portrayals of "Saracens" as libidinous, gluttonous, semi-human barbarians. Daniel's reaction to his own catalogue of such hostile caricature was to shake his head in sad consternation. Yet there is little in his book to suggest *why* Christian writers presented Islam in this way, or what ideological interests these portrayals might have served. This is all the more unfortunate because Daniel's work became *the* reference in its field, indeed Edward Said, in his *Orientalism*, bases most of his short passage about the middle ages on Daniel's book. Daniel's approach to his sources, for all its erudition, lacks contextualization and nuance. He made little effort to understand, much less explain, the varying contexts of the medieval authors he critiqued or the great variety of their texts, which range from of world histories to religious apologetics or polemics to travel narratives to *chansons de geste.*

Richard Southern mentions Daniel's recently-published work in the preface to *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages,* acknowledging its importance and erudition at the same time implicitly noting its limits, affirming that in his own book he has "tried to set Islam against the changing Western scene throughout the Middle Ages, and to revive the hopes and fears which it inspired. The experience is not irrelevant to us today."[9] While Southern's brief survey discussed only a small number of sources compared to Daniel's study, he did a much better job of showing why Islam was a theological problem for Latin Christians, and how a series of intellectuals over the course of the Middle Ages grappled with that problem. He broadly characterized Latin intellectual responses to Islam into three chronological sequences: an "age of ignorance" (8th-12th centuries), which produced a variety of caricatures of Muhammad, variously portrayed as a scheming heresiarch or as an idol worshipped by the "Saracens"; a "century of reason and hope" (a long 13th century), in which Latin intellectuals, particularly Dominicans and Franciscans, strove through study of Muslim texts and through preaching to rationally refute the rival religion; and a "moment of vision" focused on four fifteenth-century scholars who debated about how to defend and promote Christianity in the aftermath of the 1453 Ottoman conquest of Constantinople.

In 1978, Edward Said, professor of English at Columbia University, published *Orientalism,* which fundamentally changed the perspectives of those who study how Europeans have portrayed Muslims and Islam. Said defined three different varieties of orientalism. First, the academic study of the "Orient" (ranging from Japanese poetry to Moroccan archaeology): a series of academic disciplines, encompassing all that is not "Western", that is to say European. Second, an overarching discourse of seeing the "Oriental" as "Other" (exotic, backward,

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3 Joseph-François Michaud, *Histoire des croisades*, 7 vol. (Paris: A. André, Ducollet, Ponthieu, Levavasseur, 1812).

4 Alessandro D'Ancona, « La leggenda di Maometto in Occidente », *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 13 (1889): 199.

5 Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Lo studio dell'Islām in Europa : nel XII e nel XIII secolo* (Vatican: Bibl. Apostolica Vaticana, 1944).

6 Marie-Thérèse D'Alverny and Charles Burnett, *La connaissance de l'Islam dans l'occident médiéval ;* Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, « Deux traductions latines du Coran au Moyen Âge », *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 16 (1948): 69-131; Marie-Thérèse D'Alverny, « Marc de Tolede, traducteur d'Ibn Tumart », *Al-Andalus* 16, nº 1 (1951): 99-140.

7 Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960); Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, Rev. ed (Oxford: Oneworld, 1993).

8 See David Blanks, "Western Views of Islam in the Premodern Period: A Brief History of Past Approaches," in Michael Frasetto and David Blanks, eds., *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of the Other* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 11-54, esp. 24-29.

9 Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, iii.

childish) found in the works of countless European authors and artists, travelers and diplomats. Related to the two is the third meaning:

> Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient--dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. [10]

Said chronicles the ideological implications of representations of the Orient in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British and French culture. Orientalism as discourse, for Said, is the ideological underpinning to the political and military realities of British and French Empires in the Near East: Orientalism provides justification for empire. Said has had a profound impact on the field, not least because he emphasized how scholarship is not immune to the political and social pressures of the surrounding society, and how through deliberate distortion or unconscious bias scholarship can support or reinforce the colonial project. Said and other more recent scholars in postcolonial studies have helped us understand how institutions (including those devoted to teaching and research) can conceive and construct colonialist discourses and how the broader culture (including literature and the arts) can justify and celebrate these discourses.

Yet Said's affirmed link between colonialism and orientalism perhaps creates as many problems as it seems to solve. Is orientalism a product of the colonial enterprise, or vice versa? Said seems to say both. He opens his book with Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798, which he suggests was both a product of Orientalist fantasy and a motor for further orientalist scholarship which would in turn justify the colonial endeavor. Napoleon's ships, after all, bore to Egypt not only soldiers, but a veritable army of scholars. The French had come not only to conquer Egypt but to study it. If here Said seems to date the birth of Orientalism to the eighteenth century, at other times he posits it as an eternal, almost immutable characteristic of Western European culture, a set of cultural stereotypes that can be traced back to Aeschylus' *Persians.* Was he not inadvertently falling into a trap of "Occidentalism", caricaturing and homogenizing Western culture? Said did not have a lot to say about the middle ages, and what he did say was based primarily on Daniel's *Islam and the West.* And Said's use of Daniel was problematic, as it posited a perennial hostility of West towards East, devoid of any real historical perspective.

Indeed, many have criticized Said for his lack of nuance, accusing him of creating a monolithic "Occident" as caricatural as the mythic Orient of some orientalists.[11] This prevented him from seeing the ambivalence and nuance which is characterizes European perceptions of Islam and Muslims. For Humberto Garcia, Said's schema is based on a "Whig fallacy" according to which, for example, radical Protestant writers and Deists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are little more than precursors to the secular reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[12] As a result, Said ignores the religious nature of much of their work, or they reduce it to as a kind of code for the political. Hence Said assumes that these early modern authors' vision of Islam can only be negative, either a vestige of medieval prejudice or a forerunner of hegemonic imperialist ideologies. In fact, many of them saw Islam as superior to Christianity, since it had abolished the power of the clergy. Similarly, Kaya Şahin shows how ill-adapted Said's schema positing Western expansionism and denigration of the Orient to explain the heyday of Ottoman power, when Constantinople dominated much of Europe and provoked a complex mixture of fear, admiration and curiosity among Europeans.[13] As Justin Stearns remarks, Said's book "can only distract us from nuanced understandings of the premodern period … it confused rather than clarified the genealogies of many of the master narratives we grapple with today."[14]

In dealing with the sources that he knew best, French and English writings from the 18th to 20th centuries, Said indeed showed how academic discourse about and cultural attitudes towards "the Orient" could be mobilized to justify and celebrate the subjugation of "Orientals" to European empires. Yet even here, he failed to distinguish among the diverse and complex attitudes of European orientalists towards empire. Part of the problem was that Said, a Protestant and a specialist of English literature who wrote his dissertation on Joseph Conrad, knew far less than the orientalists he criticized about Islam or about Arabic letters (not to mention Persian and Turkish, which unlike many European orientalists, Said could not read). Said is cogent in his criticism of some of the frankly racist ideas of Ernest Renan, who affirmed "I am the first person to recognize that the Semitic race, compared to the Indo-European race, really represents an inferior mix of human nature"[15] Yet in fact Renan's assertions were widely rejected and derided by orientalists. In particular Ignaz Goldziher thoroughly refuted Renan's arguments, which hence would have little impact on future Orientalism, in spite of Said's claims to the contrary.[16] Indeed Goldziher had a far greater impact

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10 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3.

11 See in particular Thierry Hentsch, *L'orient imaginaire : la vision politique occidentale de l'est méditerranéen* (Paris: Éditions De Minuit 1987); Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism : Said and the unsaid* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007); Robert Irwin, *Dangerous knowledge : orientalism and its discontents* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2006).

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

13 ºKaya Şahin, Julia Schleck, and Justin Stearns, « Orientalism revisited: a conversation across disciplines », *Exemplaria: Medieval, Early Modern, Theory* 33, nº 2 (2021): 196-207.

14 Şahin, Schleck, and Stearns, 201.

15 ºErnest Renan, *Œuvres complètes de Ernest Renan,* vol. 8 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1958), 148.

16 On Said's failure to engage with Goldziher and his overestimation of Renan's importance, see L.I. Conrad, « The Pilgrim from Pest. Godziher's Study Tour to the Near East (1873-1874) », dans Ian Richard Netton (éd.), *Golden Roads. Migration, Pilgrimage, and Travel in Mediaeval and Modern Islam*, Richmond (R.U.), Curzon Press, 1993, p. 110-159 (here 143–44); Conrad, « The Near East

on orientalist scholarship than Renan. As a Hungarian Jew who published in Hungarian and German, Goldziher does not fit into Said's schema of orientalism as a prop of empire. All the more so as Goldziher expresses his profound admiration for Islam, which he sees as far superior to Christianity.[17] It is important to bear in mind both the heuristic strengths and the significant shortcomings of Said's work, which has been evoked constantly (and often uncritically) in scholarship in the field ever since.

Historian R.I. Moore published in 1987 *The Formation of a Persecuting Society,* which had significant impact on the study of medieval Latin Christian perceptions of religious alterity.[18] Moore describes how, in Latin Europe during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a clerical elite, trained in schools in Bologna, Paris, and elsewhere, asserted its control over the Church and society, restructuring church government (in what has been called the "Gregorian reform" movement), reforming monastic life (in the Cluniac and Cistercian reform movements, and subsequently through the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century), reinvigorating the study of law, launching crusades, and manning the burgeoning bureaucracies in the entourage of popes, bishops, kings and princes. Simultaneous to these developments (and integral to them, Moore argues) is the definition of a strict orthodoxy and orthopraxy and the social and legal marginalization of those who do not adhere to that orthodoxy: Jews, Muslims, heretics, lepers, homosexuals, prostitutes. As Moore summarizes:

> It is the argument of this book that however that tremendous extension of the power and influence of the literate is described, the development of persecution in all its forms was part of it, and therefore inseparable from the great and positive achievements with which it is associated.[19]

Moore has little to say about Muslim minorities living in Latin Europe (particularly in the Christian Iberian kingdoms and in Norman Sicily) or about Latin Christian perceptions of Islam. Other historians have used his approach to address how Latin authors portrayed those they defined as heterodox, including Muslims. Dominique Iogna-Prat, in his *Ordonner et exclure: Cluny et la société chrétienne face à l'hérésie, au judaïsme et à l'islam* (1998), examines how abbot Peter of Cluny erected a "tryptic" of polemical works against Judaism, heresy and Islam.[20] During a trip to Spain in 1142, Peter commissioned Robert of Ketton to translate the Qur'ān into Latin and had Robert and other scholars translate a series of Arabic text about Islam, which together comprised what scholars have dubbed the "corpus cluniacense". Peter used these works as the base of his own two polemical works against the "Saracen heresy": the *Summa totius haeresis Saracenorum* (1143-44) and the *Contra sectam Sarracenorum* (1155-56). Iogna-Prat sees Peter's polemical tryptic as above all a learned defense of Latin Christendom and in particular of the monastic ideal embodied by Cluny. This analysis is confirmed and strengthened by recent studies such as those of Anthony Lappin, who demonstrates how Peter used the call for the fight against Islam in part to defend Cluny against the critiques of the rival Cistercians.[21] Where the research inspired by Daniel and Said can tend towards the digging up and denouncing examples of medieval Islamophobia, this more recent work, inspired in part by the approach of Moore, has deepened the insights of Southern, showing how discourse about the "Saracens" and "Mahomet" served various specific goals of Latin writers.

In the decades following the publication of Southern's essay, a great number of studies were published on various aspects of Medieval Latin authors who wrote about Islam, but no broad synthesis that took up the questions posed by Southern and challenged the positions of Daniel and Said. Hence I undertook a reassessment of the subject, which became my book *Saracens.*[22] In the middle ages, from Iraq to the Iberian peninsula, Christian authors wrote apologetical and polemical tracts designed to discourage apostasy, portraying Muhammad as a false prophet and a heresiarch, lambasting the Qur'ān, mocking Muslim ritual. To the legal discrimination and condescension that they received from their Muslim overlords, these Christian authors responded with equal and opposing scorn. It is important to bear in mind these origins of Christian polemical views of Islam. In the light of the current vogue for post-colonial studies, inspired in part by Said's work on the links between Orientalism and colonial ideologies in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain and France, students of Medieval and early modern Christian polemics against Islam tend to look for a pre-imperial Orientalism, for discourses that justify Christian or Western hegemony over Muslim subjects. Such discourse indeed exists, notably in the context of Crusade to the Levant and *Reconquista* in the Iberian Peninsula: the religious inferiority of the Muslim is supposed to legitimate his subjection to the Christian prince and his inferiority to Christian subjects. Yet most of those Christian writers of the Middle Ages who wrote anti-Muslim polemics did so from the position of *dhimmis*, subjected minorities desperately (and to a large degree unsuccessfully) seek-

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study tour diary of Ignaz Goldziher », *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 122, 1990, p. 105-126 (105n1). More broadly on Said's neglect of both German orientalism and the position of Jews (as potentially both "orientals" and "orientalists"), see *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 19–21.

17 ºJohn V. Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 225-32.

18 R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society : Power and Deviance in Western Europe : 950-1250* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

19 Moore, 153.

20 Dominique. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure : Cluny et la société chrétienne face à l'hérésie, au judaïsme et à l'islam, 1000-1150* (Paris: Aubier, 1998); Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Order & Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam, 1000-1150* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

21 Anthony Lappin, « On the genesis and Formation of the Corpus Cluniacense », in *The Latin Qur'an 1143-1500 Translation, transition, interpretation, éd. C. Ferrero Hernández and J. Tolan* (Heidelberg: De Gruyter, 2021), 27-56.

22 John V. Tolan, *Saracens. Islam in the medieval European imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

ing to instil disdain for Islam in their flock to stem the tide of apostasy.

These writers were not perpetrators of colonial discourse, but, if anything, represent what Said has called "resistance culture": they demonized the ideology of the dominant power and offered an alternative, subversive narrative of its history.[23] Said describes how the colonized define and affirm a culture that opposes that of the colonizers. They seek to sever the links between the two cultures, often through acts of violence (symbolic or real) against the manifestations of colonial power. This in turn provokes repression, creating resentment against the colonizers which ultimately reinforces the culture of resistance. In ninth-century Córdoba, a small group of Christians publicly insulted the prophet Muhammad and denounced the Qur'ān, deliberately provoking the Muslim authorities who had them put to death. These martyrs and their apologists forged a resistance culture, seeking to galvanize the Christians of al-Andalus into rejecting their infidel overlords and ceasing to collaborate with them. Theirs was a failed resistance culture, as the majority of Andalusi Christians rejected their fanaticism and sought to live peacefully under Muslim rule. This example, one among many, showed how anachronistic it was to project Said's orientalist schema onto premodern European responses to Islam.

Daniel, Said, and various historians inspired by their work are handicapped by several biases: an overly Western perspective that ignores the Eastern origins of contacts (and conflicts) between Islam and Christianity; and concerns specific to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, preoccupations with the origins of modern imperialism and racism. Norman Daniel tended to portray medieval Christian views of Islam as distortions or misunderstandings of it. My approach was different: I sought to understand the place that various medieval authors gave to Islam and Muslims a place in a Christian *Weltanschauung*. They used their (often poor) knowledge of the Muslim Other to assign him a pre-established role in Christian theology and eschatology: infidel scourge sent by God to punish wayward Christians; heretical deviant from the true faith.

In the years since the publication of *Saracens,* there has been a flurry of innovative work on the representation of Islam in Medieval Latin Europe, including the works of Suzanne Conklin Akbari, Nancy Bisaha, Thomas Burman, Ana Echevarria, Robert Gregg, Sharon Kinoshita and Margaret Meserve.[24] Since 2009, the multivolume *Christian Muslim Relations: a Bibliographical History*, containing articles Christian authors who wrote about Islam and Muslim authors who wrote about Christianity, has become the indispensable reference in the field.[25] It is impossible for me to mention all the important work that has been done in the field over the last several decades in the field of medieval relations between Muslims and Christians. I will look in the following pages at examples in three areas: Arabic geographical portrayals of Europe, the use of legal sources in the history of interreligious relations, and the questioning of the whole vocabulary of Christian west vs. Muslim Orient, as seen in recent works focusing on the confessional and cultural variety of the medieval world.

In 1982, Bernard Lewis argued that one of the "fundamental differences" between Western European and Islamic societies was a curiosity about other cultures and languages on the part of Europeans and a lack of such curiosity towards the "other" on the part of Arab intellectuals.[26] This judgment has been challenged by a number of scholars, notably Nabil Matar, in his study and translation of 17th-century Arabic travel narratives concerning Europe.[27] In positing that this lack of curiosity of other cultures would somehow be a defining characteristic of "Muslim" culture, Lewis misread the huge corpus of Arabic geography that emerged in the Abbasid period as part of *adab,* the erudition seen as key part of the culture of the Abbasid court. In the works of these geographers, northwestern Europe played a minor role, as Lewis shows, insisting on the lacunae and inaccuracies in their accounts of the "Franks" and "Slavs". Yet these same works gave extensive coverage of non-Muslim societies in India and China, expressing fascination and often admiration for these cultures, hardly a sign of a lack of cultural curiosity. Moreover, as recent work by Nizar Hermes and Daniel König has shown, a number of medieval Arabic geographers incorporated much more detailed and accurate information about Northern Europe than Lewis had given them credit for.[28]

Twentieth-century scholarship on Christian-Muslim relations largely overlooked legal sources, which yield a rich trove of information on the attempts to create and police boundaries between religious groups. Uriel Simonsohn has shown how various medieval Christian communities enjoyed considerable legal autonomy under Muslim rule, and their religious leaders (bishops, in

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[23] For the idea of "resistance culture" see Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

[24] Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560* (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance historical thought*, Harvard historical studies ; 158 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008); Ana Echevarria, « The fortress of faith : the attitude towards Muslims in fifteenth century Spain » (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Sharon Kinoshita and Siobhain Bly Calkin, « Saracens as Idolators in Medieval Vernacular Literatures », éd. par David Thomas et al., *Christian-Muslim relations a bibliographical history. Volume 4 (1200-1350)* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Sharon Kinoshita, « Medieval Boundaries. Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature » (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

[25] David Thomas and al, eds., *Christian Muslim Relations: a Bibliographical History* 48 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2009-2023).

[26] Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim discovery of Europe* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), 299-300.

[27] Nabil Matar, *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[28] Nizar Hermes, *The European Other in Medieval Arabic Literature and Culture: Ninth-Twelfth Century AD*, 1st ed, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Daniel G. König, *Arabic-Islamic Views of the Latin West: Tracing the Emergence of Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

particular) were often recognized by Muslim rulers as de facto heads of their communities, often acting as judges in disputes between members of their communities.[29] Like Jews in Muslim and Christian lands, they had to try to accommodate both the legal traditions of their own religious communities and the strictures imposed by the law of the dominant culture. While the historiography of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries tended to present the *dhimma,* the web of legal restrictions imposed on Jews and Christians in Muslim societies, as imposed by the Muslim rulers, recent research has stressed that such restrictions varied widely and that they often involved creative fusion of diverse legal systems and traditions, that Jews and Christians were very much actors in the construction of the *dhimma* legal framework. Mathieu Tillier shows how Christian and Muslim legal systems develop together, in parallel and sometimes in competition. What evolves as a recognizably "Muslim" legal system is not merely a copy of Roman or Sassanid systems, but a complex mix of elements from diverse systems. During the late Umayyad and early Abbasid periods, rulers and jurists seem to have deliberately reshaped legal systems in order to create something distinctively Islamic.[30] Lev Weitz examines a rich mine of documentation, principally in Syriac and Arabic, concerning the Western Syrian miaphysite Church (often known as "Jacobite") and the Eastern Syrian Church (Nestorian) from late antiquity until the thirteenth century. He shows how authorities from these two churches navigate the shifting legal and confessional landscape of the region, delimiting their religious communities and affirming their jurisdiction over them. The Christian authors of the legal texts and letters Weitz analyzes were not the simple perpetrators of ecclesiastical tradition, nor the passive beneficiaries of a pre-conceived *dhimma* system. They were actors and builders of the system, of a complex network of confessional communities and overlapping jurisdictions. Muslim law and theology did not spring like Athena fully grown, clothed and armed from the head of Zeus, but gradually emerged from constant interplay of pre-Christian legal traditions (Roman and Sassanid), Canon law and Christian theology, and emerging Muslim law over this period.[31] A large and complex body of legal texts, in Arabic, Greek, Latin, and European vernacular languages, attempt to regulate the relations between Muslims and Christians from the marketplace to the bathhouse to the bedroom.[32]

Another area where considerable research has been done recent years involves the questioning categories such as "Islam" and the "West". For Southern and Daniel, for all their differences, "Christendom" corresponds to Latin Europe and confronts a "Muslim" east. Yet recent work has not only stressed what specialists have long known, that for the first five or six centuries of the Muslim era, Muslims were a numerical minority in the "Muslim world", but has explored the complex web of relations between the components of this multiconfessional and multicultural civilization. This is seen, as noted, in the active role that Christians and Jews played in the invention of the *dhimma* legal system. The work of Jack Tannous, Muriel Débié, Lev Weitz and others has shown how Jews and Christians in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods sought to carve out niches in a complex multiconfessional society and to assert their rights against rivals within their own religious groups and outside them. Tannous describes the goal of his work as seeking to "decenter Islam within medieval Middle Eastern history and de-sectarianize the subject by under-mining the common understanding that the history of the medieval Middle East is synonymous with the problems and questions of Islamic history."[33]

This work calls on us to fundamentally revise our vision of a world split along an East-West divide, a vision which ironically Said and his admirers have reinforced. Richard Bulliet and Garth Fowden have both attempted in different ways to eliminate that divide by reconceptualizing pre-modern civilization.[34] Various scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries portrayed Christendom and Islam as two rival civilizations—founded on universalist ideologies and competing in their expansionist aims—that clashed with each other, brandishing the banners of crusade and jihad. Bulliet maintains, on the contrary, that these were two branches of a single

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29 Uriel Simonsohn, *A Common Justice: The Legal Allegiances of Christians and Jews under Early Islam* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania press, 2011).

30 Mathieu Tillier, *L'invention du cadi: la justice des musulmans, des Juifs et des chrétiens aux premiers siècles de l'Islam* (Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 2017).

31 Lev E. Weitz, *Between Christ and Caliph: Law, Marriage, and Christian Community in Early Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). For another good example, see Philip Wood, *The Imam of the Christians: The World of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, c. 750-850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

32 See the over 600 legal texts in the database of the European Research Council program "RELMIN: the legal status of religious minorities in the Euro-Mediterranean world, 5th-15th centuries" (http://telma.irht.cnrs.fr/outils/relmin/index/). Among the publications of this project are John V. Tolan, « The legal status of religious minorities in the Euro-Mediterranean world (RELMIN) », *medieval worlds: comparative & interdisciplinary studies* 1 (2015): 148-66; Clara Maillard, *Les papes et le Maghreb aux XIIIème et XIVème siècles: étude des lettres pontificales de 1199 à 1419* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014); Stéphane Boissellier and John V. Tolan, ed., *La Cohabitation religieuse dans les villes européennes, Xe-XVe siècles/ Religious Cohabitation in European Towns (10th-15th Centuries)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014); John Tolan et al., ed., *Religious Minorities in Christian, Jewish and Muslim Law (5th-15th centuries)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017); Ana Echevarría, Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, and John Victor Tolan, ed., *Law and Religious Minorities in Medieval Societies: Between Theory and Praxis = De La Teoría Legal a La Práctica En El Derecho de Las Minoría Religiosas En La Edad Media* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016).

33 Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 7; Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet and Muriel Debié, *Le monde syriaque: sur les routes d'un christianisme ignoré* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2017); Weitz, *Between Christ and Caliph*; Muriel Debié, *L'Écriture de l'histoire en Syriaque: transmissions interculturelles et constructions identitaires entre hellénisme et islam: avec des répertoires des textes historiographiques en annexe* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015).

34 Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Garth Fowden, *Before and after Muhammad: the First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

"Islamo-Christian" civilization, with deep roots in a common religious, cultural, and intellectual heritage: the civilization of the ancient Mediterranean and the Near East; biblical revelation; and Greek and Hellenistic science and philosophy. In Bulliet's view, that common heritage grew stronger over fifteen centuries, thanks to the uninterrupted exchange of goods, persons, and ideas. Rivalries and conflicts within Islamo-Christian society are frequent and many but in no way call into question the unity of Islamo-Christian civilization, any more than wars between Europeans call into question the common traits of European culture.

Fowden, for his part, seeks to "contribute a new angle to the debate about 'the West and the Rest.'"[35] He relates a story from Fārābī, writing in Baghdad in the middle of the tenth century, who tells how Augustus came to Alexandria after the death of Cleopatra. There he inspected the library and found original autograph manuscripts of Aristotle. He had them copied and made them the basis of the teaching of philosophy in both Alexandria and Rome. When Christianity came, this teaching ceased in Rome, as the bishops thought that philosophy could harm Christianity. With the coming of Islam, the study of philosophy was revived, transferred from Alexandria to Baghdad, where it flourished anew. The story, of course, is apocryphal, but it illustrates nicely how Fārābī and other Abbasid intellectuals conceived of their intellectual forebears. Baghdad was heir to Aristotelian Athens, Hellenistic Alexandria, and imperial Rome. And sole heir: Christendom, enthralled as it was to irrational doctrines, feared the teaching of rational philosophy and banned it. This is a quite different view of history from that which a twentieth- or twenty-first-century student might find in a textbook on the history of "Western civilization". Or, for that matter, that which a Saudi or Qatari student might read about the history of "Islam." Fārābī's polemical claim that Baghdad is the sole heir to Athens and Alexandria is as false as the claim, put forward by Italian renaissance humanists and their intellectual heirs in Europe until today, that Western European civilization somehow has exclusive rights to the heritage of Greek antiquity. This example fits nicely into Bulliet's conception of a unified Islamo-Christian civilization.

Yet Fowden prefers a different scheme. If our conceptual (Eurocentric) map for ancient and medieval civilizations encompasses at most the Mediterranean, Fowden argues that to understand this history we need a wider area, what he calls the "Eurasian hinge" corresponding roughly to Alexander's empire at its height. He presents it as a tryptic with at its center what he calls the "mountain arena" (Iraq, Syria and Arabia) in close communication with an eastern area corresponding to the Iranian plateau and, in the west, the eastern Mediterranean (in particular Egypt and Anatolia). This area saw the struggles for hegemonies of imperial states (Rome/Byzantium, Sassanid Persia, the Caliphate) and their dissolutions, but also more durable (and often overlapping) "cultural commonwealths" "human networks… that are markedly less inflexible than the vast and autocratic states from which they often derive". The "Iranian commonwealth" projects Farsi language and culture beyond the boundaries of the Sassanian Empire (and continues to thrive centuries after the collapse of that empire), just as Arabic language and Islam move far beyond the Caliphate and survive its demise. This "eastward shift" in perspective should prove heuristic for European and American students of the history of Christianity, who tend to be too narrowly focused on the Greek and Latin churches, overlooking the diverse churches of Syria, Iraq, Iran, Ethiopia, and the Caucasus. And we are ill-equipped to understand the emergence of Islam if we do not understand the milieu of Eastern Christianity and Babylonian Judaism alongside which Muslim doctrine and practice evolved (as the last several decades of Syriac studies have shown).[36]

As a historian who sees gradual transformations more often than abrupt watersheds, porous hinterlands more than sharp borders, Fowden is of course well aware of that his scheme for cutting up historical time and space is in its own way as arbitrary as other schemes he calls into question. Indeed, he calls not for the replacement of one scheme by another, but for the possibility to deploy multiple schemes. The question is not the truthfulness of one chronology but its usefulness: what does it help us understand? In a world where European and North American hegemony is increasingly contested by the emergence of new economic and political actors and by the globalization of academic research, a broad shift is underway. "The good news at the beginning of the Third Millenium," Fowden affirms, is that the traditional narrative of Western triumphalism "is no longer an option".[37]

The historiography of Medieval Christian-Muslim relations is more than of simply academic interest to a handful of scholars scattered among universities across the world. Claims about the historical relations between Christians and Muslims play a significant role in the rhetoric of Muslim fundamentalists and of nationalist politicians across Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Near East. Politicians invoke the notions of crusade and jihad, often abusively, to explain 21st-century political realities. Some speak of the supposed cultural debt of Europe to the Arab world, or vice versa. Current widespread convictions about the superiority of "Western" (or "Muslim") civilization are based on ideological conceptions of Medieval history. Our modest role as scholars is to continue to deconstruct these conceptions, first in our own work, then in that of our colleagues, then in the conceptions of the broader public.

35 Fowden, 1.

36 See, most recently, the synthesis provided in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds., *Le Coran des historiens,* 3 vol. (Paris: Le Cerf, 2019).

37 Fowden, 218.

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