

James Renton, Ben Gidley (Eds.), *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe. A Shared Story?*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 311.

by Arturo Marzano

The main aim of this edited volume is to shed light on the relationship between antisemitism and Islamophobia, by highlighting similarities and differences in the ways in which Jews and Muslims have been feared, perceived as enemies, and persecuted for more than a thousand years in Europe. The book is composed of ten chapters, each of which concentrates on a particular element connecting these two phenomena; together, the collected essays fan out diachronically to trace the evolution of European conceptions of Jews and Muslims from the 11th to the 21st century, thus posing the question, to what extent a “shared story” (p. 15) may have taken shape during this period.

Two chapters deal with the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. In the first, Andrew Jotischky addresses the treatment of Jews and Muslims in the Crusader states. Both groups were objects of violence during the First Crusade: Jews were attacked within Europe, and Muslims outside Europe’s borders. Based on his study of pilgrimage accounts from the Holy Land, beginning with the writing of Jacques de Vitry, Bishop of Acre, in the early 1220s, Jotischky argues that Jews and Muslims were both conceptualized within a single ethnographic framework which derived religious beliefs and practices from ethnic origins: both groups were thought of in the same way, as “occupying a marginal territory between the fully realised humanity of the Church and animals” (p. 37). According to Jotischky, this conceptual scheme signifies an important stage in the elaboration of more systematic and clearly defined antisemitism and Islamophobia.

In the second essay concerned with the same period, François Soyer analyzes the conspiracy theory of medical murder in the early modern Iberian Peninsula. The same notion continued to be fostered well into the 20th century, with the Nazi weekly *Der Stürmer* accusing Jewish doctors of experimenting – with fatal outcomes – on their Christian patients in Germany, while the infamous “Doctors’ Plot” of 1952-53 in the USSR led to a wave of arrests which stopped only with Stalin’s death. Soyer highlights the shared elements in the history of Jewish and Muslim forced converts to Catholicism (referred to as *judeoconversos* and *moriscos*, respectively), emphasizing at the same time that their experiences were not “identical” (p. 67). His detailed analysis of two forged letters, allegedly written by the Jews of Toledo to the Jews of Constantinople at the end of the 15th century,

allows Soyer to reconstruct some conspiracy charges current at the time, according to which *judeoconversos* who had maintained their faith in secret tried to kill Christians while pretending to be serving as their doctors. Claims of a medical cabal by *moriscos* were also current, but much less widespread or nuanced: they were coined using formulas borrowed from the anti-Jewish tradition as models, and were never as pervasively circulated as the allegations of a Jewish conspiracy.

Two chapters should be singled out from among the ones dealing with the 19th and 20th centuries. In one, James Renton focuses on the development of the notion of “Semites” (p. 99); the term had become the leading Western expression for the traditional Christian view of Judaism and Islam as in some way linked together. Singling out Ernest Renan’s part in developing the notion of the Semite as a racialized category defined in opposition to the Aryan, Renton elaborates on the way this label was deployed to Orientalize European Jews and thus enable a view of them as a body alien and foreign to the European whole. While the term encompasses both Jews and Arabs, Renton explains, only Jews were subject to political antisemitism: this was due to their location within Europe, on the one hand, and to the image associated with them in Christian European politico-theology, which did not target Muslims in the same way, on the other. Renton is very convincing in demonstrating that at the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of the Semite moved from an intellectual field to a political one, since the British government believed that Semites could be a significant political player in shaping the Middle East after the end of the First World War. It was Mark Sykes in particular, the Middle East adviser who had negotiated the famous Sykes-Picot Agreements with the former French consul-general in Beirut, François Picot, who thought that a revival of the Jewish and Arab nations and of a Semitic bond between them might serve the British Empire’s interests in the Middle East. Renton discusses attempts made by the Zionist and Arab leadership to satisfy London by adopting the political notion of Semite during 1918-1919 – the best known of these was the January 1919 agreement between Prince Faysal, who would later become Emir of Iraq, and Chaim Weizmann, who would eventually serve as the first President of the State of Israel – but that arrangement could not survive the reality on the ground in post-Ottoman Palestine. The “End of the Semites,” as Renton titles his essay, was evident in the mid-1930s, when a Commission sent by London to study the causes of the outbreak of the Arab Palestinian uprising suggested partitioning Palestine as there was “no common ground” between Jews and Arabs (p. 125).

In the second chapter devoted to the 19-20th centuries, Marko Attila Hoare focuses on the Balkans: he analyzes the way in which non-Christian minorities, i.e., Muslims and Jews, were perceived and depicted by the Christian majority, from the Greeks in the 1820s to the Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats in the 1920-40s, noting that in Bosnia-Hercegovina Muslims were not a minority. Hoare's excellent essay reconstructs similarities and differences in the “violence and chauvinism against Jews and Muslims” (p. 165), underlining the existence of a common framework – Jews and Muslims were treated as ethnic aliens, not simply as a religious community – that varied according to political circumstances.

Finally, two chapters deal with more contemporary events. Sander L. Gilman reconstructs the debate concerning infant male circumcision in Great Britain and Germany at the end of the 1990s and in the 2010s and states that, despite the obvious differences between Jews in the 19th century and Muslims today, the Jewish experience of the relationship between integration and identity might be a model case for Muslims. Unfortunately, Gilman only touches upon a crucial issue, the increasingly widespread perception of Muslims as “an ‘unassimilable’ minority,” while “exactly the same things have been said [...] about Jews for two hundred years” (p. 157). A deeper analysis of this ‘shift’ – nowadays Muslims, not Jews, are considered a minority incapable of being integrated – would have added value to the entire volume, as it would have enabled a better understanding of the connection between antisemitism and Islamophobia. In another chapter, Daniel Gordon deals with the “entangled histories” (p. 220) of four French anti-racist movements, specifically the *Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples*, the *Ligue des droits de l'homme*, the *Ligue internationale contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme* and *SOS racisme*. In particular, this well researched study reconstructs the controversy that arose among these groups in 2004 concerning the relevance of antisemitism and Islamophobia in connection with public demonstrations against racism. Gordon argues that both are relevant realities in modern France and are inter-connected. He underlines that the antisemitism-Islamophobia link was already evident in 1961, when the Parisian police repression of an Algerian demonstration was compared – despite obvious differences – to wartime brutality against Jews. Gordon is not merely interested in underlining the connections between the two; he also believes that the struggle against the two types of prejudice should not be “considered as zero-sum games” (p. 245), but should be united into one.

In conclusion, this is an important book, as it tackles a complex and politically sensitive issue in a serious, researched and balanced way. Its only shortcoming, to

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my mind, is the absence of a cultural chapter to address shared linguistic and iconographic stereotypes characteristic of both antisemitism and Islamophobia, along with interactions between the two and their mutual influence. Nonetheless, any scholar researching these two phenomena is certain to benefit from this informative volume and its contents.

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