CHAPTER TWENTY

ORIENTALIST MOTIVATIONS:
A STUDY OF SUBJECTIVITY

Despite all its tendencies against Islamic tradition, Orientalism insists that it is performing a service for Muslims by providing them with pure, impartial, objective research. The implication is that a Muslim scholar, blinded by faith, cannot know right from wrong when analyzing his own beliefs. If there is truth to this then we must be willing to inspect Orientalism in relation to its beliefs and overriding principles, for branding one group as biased does not automatically justify the other group’s claim to objectivity. Exploring the roots of Orientalism necessitates delving into politics, past and present, to gain some insight into its motivations that the reader may better weigh its research on the Qur’an accordingly.

1. The Jewish Analogue

Before discussing Orientalism I will raise an analogous question: in Jewish opinion, can an anti-Semitic scholar be deemed impartial when examining Jewish documents such as the OT or the Dead Sea Scrolls? Whichever verdict we receive, affirmative or negative, we must then apply to the question of Orientalism and its supposed objectivity in dissecting Islam.

i. The Validity of an Anti-Semitic Work

Friedrich Delitzsch, a Christian scholar and one of the founding fathers of Assyriology, hailed from a tradition of eminent OT scholarship and was himself of partly Jewish origin. His view on the OT was, however, singularly unsympathetic:

The Old Testament is full of all kinds of deceptions: a veritable hodgepodge of erroneous, incredible, undeniable figures, including those

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1 I was informed by a colleague that Dr. Wadad al-Qasmi (University of Chicago) has declared Muslim scholars unfit to engage in any research on the Qur’an, because of their faith. This is hardly surprising; a few years ago she presented a paper in Cairo which stated that Muslim scholars must admit to the ‘authority’ of Western research on Islam. In her eyes their lack of faith was a definite plus to their credentials.

of Biblical chronology; a veritable maze of false portrayals, misleading reworkings, revisions and transpositions, together with anachronisms; a never-ending jumble of contradictory details and entire narratives, unhistorical inventions, legends and folktales, in short a book full of intentional and unintentional deceptions, in part self-deceptions, a very dangerous book, in the use of which the greatest care is necessary.5

Repeatedly denounced as anti-Semitic, Delitzsch just as repeatedly denied it.

But in view of certain of his remarks (e.g. . . . where he calls the Jews 'a fearful danger of which the German people must be warned'), the accusation seems justified.6

Of Delitzsch's work on the OT, Die Große Täuschung, John Bright concludes,

'Seldom has the Old Testament been subjected to more vicious abuse than in this book. It is really a very bad book (I should say a 'sick book')."7

Bearing open hostility towards the OT and desiring strongly to dissociate Christianity from it, Delitzsch wrote in a vein which now disqualifies his work and casts him into disrepute.

ii. Can an Anti-Judaic Scholar be Impartial When Dealing with a Jewish Theme?

John Strugnell, a Harvard professor, ascended to the post of chief editor of the official Dead Sea Scroll editorial team in 1987 but received a highly publicized dismissal three years later. His problems began with an interview he gave to Israeli journalist Avi Katzman (published in Ha'aretz, 9 November 1990), in which, suffering from manic-depression, he expressed certain anti-Judaic sentiments. Among these was a reference to Judaism as "a horrible religion", statements to the effect that the Jewish problem was best solved through mass conversion to Christianity, and that Judaism was initially racist. Though he pointed out at the interview's start that he did not intend his comments to be taken as anti-Semitic, Katzman ignored the request and criticized them in no uncertain terms. Strugnell suspects that,


7 ibid, p. 43. One interesting claim he makes is that the "Cardinal Archbishop of Datis is a Jew and he gets on perfectly well with his archdiocese, which is not Jewish" (p. 43).
twenty-five years later in search of this concordance, only for the director to
assure him that he had no knowledge of it.8 Meanwhile academic circles
pressing for a facsimile edition of the unpublished texts met only an airy,
unyielding resolve from the scroll editors to maintain exclusive control of all
findings.9

Buckling under incessant criticism General Amir Drori, director of the
IAD, issued a reluctant press release in September 1991 that pledged freer
access to photographs of the Scrolls.10

General Drori announced that making the text available to anyone
would put the possibility of a ‘definitive interpretation’ at risk. . . . It
is worthwhile to recount the cartel's earlier tooth-and-nail efforts
to maintain the secrecy of the unpublished texts. These efforts
were accompanied by a remarkable disdain for anyone who dared
question the wisdom of the cartel.11

Eugene Ulrich of Notre Dame, among the senior team editors, protested
that "the editing of the scrolls has in fact suffered not from foot-dragging
but from undue haste,"12 Average university professors were in no position
to competently assess the team's efforts he insisted, echoing the team’s
repeated sentiment that only the official editors, and their students, were
adequate to the task.

In an interview in Scientific American, [the chief editor] asserted
that Oxford don Gera Verres was not ‘competent’ to examine
an unpublished scroll because Verres had not done serious work.
Verres is the author of several highly acclaimed books on the
Dead Sea Scrolls, including the widely used Penguin edition, The
Dead Sea Scrolls in English, now in its third edition. The Scientific
American interviewer was incredulous: ‘A full professor at Oxford,
incompetent?’ So were we all.13

The incredulity is well placed, for the real issue here is not competence
but rather the willingness to tow the line on a ‘definitive interpretation’.
Following this scheme from the outset and fiercely guarding the Scrolls

from general academia, the team has shown no regard or recognition for
any sort of scholarship—Jewish or otherwise—except that which furthers a
specific intent. What clearer example of subjectivity can there be?14

These three examples, and in fact dozens of others from post-war
Europe and America alone, illustrate a recurring theme of unseating all
scholars (if alive, physically, and if dead, academically) who happen to
display ideological rivalry in the course of working on sensitive Jewish
issues. Whether the scholars in question are renowned or outstanding bears
no relevance; ideological incompatibility alone disqualifies them. To what
extent does this thinking hold true for Muslim studies?

2. The Muslim Counterpoint

i. Israeli Suppression of Palestinian History

Keith Whitelam, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of
Stirling (Scotland), is author of a paper which stirred great controversy in
many Bible circles, asserting in an article by biblical scholars and
archaeologists, particularly Zionists, to shape Jewish history into a mold that
denies the history of those who settled the land long before the Israelis,
i.e. the ancient Palestinians.15 Since 1948 the stance of Israeli scholarship
(he declares) has been one of establishing a past which, while glorifying
ancient Israel’s claim to the land, simultaneously devalues and disposes all
indigenous histories and cultures. As such, biblical scholars and Muslims of their land at present by depriving
them of it in the past.

Biblical studies has formed part of the complex arrangement of
scholarly, cultural, and military power by which Palestinians have
been denied a contemporary presence or history.16

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8 Hershel Shanks, "Scholars, Scrolls, Secrecy and 'Crimes'," New York Times, 7 Sep-
9 November 1991. This appeared as figure 18 in Eisenman and Robinson, A Facsimile
10 Edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Publisher's Foreward, first printing, 1991, p. xii. Note
11 that in the second (and perhaps subsequent) printings all these have been omitted.
12 A Facsimile Edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Publisher's Foreward, p. xxi.
13 ibid. p. xii.
14 ibid. p. xiii. Italics added.
15 ibid. p. xiv.
16 ibid. p. xvi.
17 ibid. p. xvi, quoting Keith Whitelam.
Refusing his views, Herzfel Shanks cites at length the numerous non-Israelite cultures in the area which have recently seen a scholarly revival: Philistines, Edomites, Moabites, Arameans, Hurrians, Canaanites. He accuses Whitelam of politicizing history.18

In perusing Shanks’ rebuttal I was struck that nowhere does he refer to Islamic history, or to any associated scholarly revival. Is this casual disregard not “part of the complex arrangement” through which Whitelam sees Palestinians being denied their rightful authority and land? Which culture—Canaanite and Edomite and Moabite, or Muslim—best defines Palestinian self-identity? And why is it being wholly neglected? Though finally prepared to acknowledge the Palestinians’ ancient customs and cultures, there is still a refusal to accord their current religion its rightful place in the history of the land. It is as though Israeli and biblical scholars view fourteen centuries of Muslim culture as so much rubbish which they must shove through before arriving at the good stuff.

ii. An Orientalist Pioneer and Deceiver of Muslims

Returning to Orientalism, let us take one quick case study. In his Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence Schacht writes,

I feel myself under a deep obligation to the masters of Islamic studies in the last generation. The name of Snouck Hurgronje appears seldom in this book; yet if we now understand the character of Muhammadan Law, it is due to him.19

But who was Snouck Hurgronje? An Orientalist whose agenda was to deceive the Muslim masses of Indonesia into accepting the Dutch government’s colonialist exploitation: ”Islam is the religion of peace,” he preached, “and the duty of the Muslims according to the Shah’i is to follow the order of the [Dutch] rulers – and not to disobey and commit violence”.20 Traveling to Makkah to further this mantra, he alleged himself a Muslim to win broader popularity without sacrificing the full scope of his ambitions. Edward Said notes the “close cooperation between scholarship and direct military colonial conquest” inherent in “the case of the revered Dutch Orientalist C. Snouck Hurgronje, who used the confidence he had won from Muslims to plan and execute the brutal Dutch war against the Arjeyhne people of Sumatra”.21

And after all this he is considered a Western pioneer of Islamic Law. The point is clear. The selfsame members of Jewish intelligentsia who attack Strugnell’s biases, who roundly denounce and dismiss those accused of being hostile towards Judaism, are at the same time utterly indifferent to Israeli prejudice against Muslim culture and history. Meanwhile the far greater bigotry of Hurgronje and a host of other colonialist agents and clergymen – manifesting itself not simply in words, but in deception and direct military subjugation – is casually overlooked, and their status in Western spheres as ‘Orientalist pioneers’ remains untouched.

3. Searching for Impartiality

i. A Historical Perspective: Jews, Christians and Romans

All Orientalist scholarship is built on the premise of the more enlightened outsider being free of biases. But has Western or Judeo-Christian tradition ever witnessed this supposed objectivity? Where are the jewels of wise discourse in the subjective and vulgar catalogue of historic Western writings? Vulgar, I say, because anyone can compare the reverence with which Muslim scholars treated Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Moses, Aaron, Isaac, Abraham, David, Solomon, Lot etc. to the crude and wrathful ranting of Jews against Christians, of Christians against Jews, of Catholics and Protestants against each other, and of ancient Romans against everyone. Here I will quote at length Adrian Reeland, Professor of the Oriental Tongues at the University of Utrecht, who in 1705 composed a unique work in Latin, subsequently translated and published in London under the title, Four Treatises Concerning the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Mahometans (1712).

The Jewish People, tho they had the holiest Institutes and Laws that ever were ... could not escape the Spite of wicked Men, who charg’d many things upon them which were absolutely false. Tacitus himself, who wanted not Opportunity of consulting the Jew in their own Affairs, writes that they ... were expel’d Egypt for the Scab; and that they consecrated the Image of an Ass, which had taught them to expel their Thirst, and cease from their Wanderings. Plutarch relates ... that the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated in Honour of Bacchus; nay, that the very Sabbath was consecrated to that Divinity.... Rutilius [called] the Jewish Sabbath, Cold Sabbath, and said their Hearts were colder than their Religion; for this reason, that many of the Jews ... did not kindle Fire upon the Sabbath-day.22

18 ibid, p. 69.
22 H. Reland, Four Treatises Concerning the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Mahometans, London, 1712, pp. 5-6.
Orientalist Motivations: A Study of Subjectivity

To a good measure this last sentiment holds true to this day, the revisionist school insisting that no Muslim document bears any semblance of truth unless other, non-Muslim accounts provide verification.25 Given how maliciously Christian and Jewish writers have lashed out against Muslims from the very dawn of Islam, what hope have we of Medieval priests and rabbis verifying these Muslim accounts, attesting to the accomplishments of their bitterest rivals with honesty? Under no condition do Western scholars endorse the inordinate abuse that, across the centuries, Jews and Christians hurled against each other, each group barricaded by its own ignorance and superstition.26 So then on what grounds is their inordinate abuse against Muslims, hatched of the very same ignorance and superstition, to be accepted now as truth?27

ii. Impartiality in Modern Studies

In his dense and enlightening book Covering Islam, Edward Said exposes the political and media-driven sensationalism that feeds Western masses with a distinctly perverted view of Islam. Packaged as an imminent threat to Western civilization, Islam has attained a singularly menacing reputation which no other religious or cultural group can approach.28 It serves as a ready scapegoat for any socio-political or economic phenomenon that the West finds disagreeable, the political consensus being that even though little enough is known about this religion, there is not much there to be regarded favorably.29 Tackling the roots of this antagonism Said notes the historic Christian tendency to view Islam as an encroachment, a

25 ibid, p. 12. Emphasis (last sentence) added.
26 See Yehuda Nevo’s definition of revisionism in this work, Chapter 1.
27 See for example the apologist attitude inherent in the articles of both Joseph Ble -
28 Here are a few of the charges leveled against Muslims by 17th and 18th century Christian scholars writing in Latin: (1) That Muslims worship Venus; (2) And worship all created beings; (3) And deny the existence of Hell; (4) And believe sins are taken away by frequent washing of the body; (5) And believe the devil to be the friends of God and of the Prophet Muhammad; (6) And believe that all the devils will be saved; (7) And believe that women shall not enter Paradise; (8) And believe Mary conceived Jesus by eating dates; (9) And believe Moses is amongst the damned. [See Recland’s Four Treaties, pp. 47-102.]
29 Edward Said, Covering Islam, p. xii.
30 ibid, p. xv.
late-coming challenge to its authority, a formidable foe which throughout the Middle Ages,

was believed to be a demonic religion of apostasy, blasphemy, and obscenity. It did not seem to matter that Muslims considered Muhammad a prophet and not a god; what mattered to Christians was that Muhammad was a false prophet, a sower of discord. ... an agent of the devil.31

Even as Christian Europe witnessed its ascent at the expense of Muslim rule, this volatile brew of fear and hatred persisted; its very proximity to Europe made 'Mohammedanism' a latent threat which could never be fully and satisfactorily mastered. India, China and other Eastern cultures, once made to submit, were distant and no longer elicited the constant apprehension of European governments and theologians. Only Islam appeared to hold its own, tenaciously independent and defying complete submission to the West.32 He argues convincingly that, at no time in European or American history has Islam been "generally discussed or thought about outside a framework created by passion, prejudice, and political interests".33 While Peter the Venerable, Barthélemy d’Herbelot, and other early writers were undoubtedly Christian polemicists hurling abuse at this rival faith, our age blindly assumes that modernism has purged Orientalism of its prejudices, has set it free like the chemist who now analyses molecular structure with precision instead of pursuing alchemy.

Wann’s it true that Silvère de Sacy, Edward Lane, Ernest Renan, Hamilton Gibb, and Louis Massignon were learned, objective scholars, and isn’t it true that following upon all sorts of advances in twentieth-century sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and history, American scholars who teach the Middle East and Islam in places like Princeton, Harvard, and Chicago are therefore unbiased and free of special pleading, in what they do? The answer is no.34

Everything about the study of Islam today remains drenched in political expediency and pressure. Articles, reviews and books drip with political import even while their authors bury their ill feelings beneath a gargen of ‘scientific impartiality’ and use their university titles to dismiss any ulterior motives.35

4. Pressure and Purpose

Orientalist theories are born not in a vacuum, but in a world of pressing political needs which shape and color everything about them. Let us inspect how these needs have shifted over time.

i. Colonialism and the Demoralization of Muslims

Grasping Western motives necessitates that we draw a line through 1948. Prior to that the main thrust was to expose Muhammad as a false prophet, the Qur’an as an amoral and dreadful counterfeit, the hadith as spurious, and Islamic Law as a poor salad burgled from other cultures. In short, findings that sought to demoralize Muslims (particularly the ruling classes, which were the likeliest to fall victims), and to assist the colonial powers in producing a crop of loyal subjects by crushing any notions of a regal Islamic past or a distinguished Muslim identity.

With almost all Muslim territories ravaged by some form of colonialism, the Ottoman Caliphate included, the time was ripe for an onslaught on people’s everyday affairs. The legitimate Muslim scholars (‘ulama’) were placed under extreme political constraints; most endowments, a rich source of support for Islamic scholarship, were abolished or confiscated.36 Islamic Law was phased out and abolished. Colonial language and colonial script gained precedence over all else, a decree which effectivelythur entire nations into institutional illiteracy. Their lack of proficiency in European languages further marginalized the ‘ulama’; the retorts they issued were mostly in their vernacular and went unheeded. Orientalism was not interested in debating with the ‘ulama’ in any case, much less noting their criticisms. Its sole aim was to use colonial resources in partnership with foreign ministries to influence the new breed of Western-educated Muslim elites.37 By casting the elites into a secularist mold, by assuring

31 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
32 Ibid., p. 5.
33 Ibid., p. 23.
34 Ibid., p. 23.
35 Ibid., pp. xvii, 23.
36 A practice which continues to this day.
37 One quick example of this is an 1805 article in Asiatic Annual Register by J. Galbraith entitled, "Observation on the policy of forming an oriental establishment, for the purpose of furnishing a regular supply of properly qualified diplomatic agents, interpreters, &c., for facilitating and improving the direct intercourse between Great Britain and the nations of Asia, in imitation of a similar institution in France". (See W. H. Behn, Index Orientis: 1665-1905, Adygox, Millville PA, 1987, p. 1.)
38 Orientalist efforts to eliminate the invincibility of the Qur’an garnered support from Turkey’s former President Demirel, who went on record [Daily at-Riyad, issue 27.8.1420 H./5.11.1999] with the contradictory statement that modern Islam is fully compatible with secularization. He added that roughly 330 verses from the Qur’an “are no longer practicable” and should be excised. The 76 year-old president
of the Qur’an. And so at his hands, the Qur’an’s status in early Islamic history was even further marginalised, its eminence within the dealings of the early Muslim community nearly snuffed out. The few remaining cases that could be used as evidence of derivation from the Qur’an were casually dismissed: “It may be added that those few exceptions...are not necessarily proof of the earlier existence of the scriptural source.” He provides a reference for this sweeping idea. One wonders what pioneering work has established this blanket statement about the Qur’an, and finds instead: Strack, H., Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash. Which implies that if anything is true of the Talmud and Midrash, it must be even more true of the Qur’an.

ii. The Jewish Question and the Fabrication of a New History

Since 1948 a fresh impetus has been added to the Orientalist cause: the need to secure Israel’s boundaries and regional ambitions. To study this new motive requires us to first examine the ‘Jewish Question’. The brutality of the Spanish Inquisition, perpetrated by a nation claiming to embrace a God of love, resulted in the peninsula’s ‘cleansing’ from all Muslim presence in addition to the dispersal of Jewry. Of these Jews some took shelter in Turkey, under Ottoman protection, while others settled elsewhere in Europe and bore an uncertain fate. Jews residing in early 19th century Germany for instance were not even legally human: they existed as the king’s personal property.

Like other serfs, Jews could not move from one town to another, marry, or have more than one child without permission. Because of their international connections, however, Jews were officially encouraged to settle in Germany with a view to facilitating trade. To Germans, the Jewish question manifested itself as the bewilderment of a Christian nation “as to how to treat an entire people who [were unfit] to be free.” Of the various theorists who came forth with solutions none exceeded Karl Marx’s influence; his scheme for liberating his fellow Jews was to free them from their religious identity, even while lending his support to a petition for Jewish rights. Dennis Fishman writes,

44 Wansbrough, Quranic Studies, p. 44.
45 Ibid., p. 44.
47 Ibid., p. 28.
48 Ibid., pp. 7, 15.
Indeed, "in the final analysis, the emancipation of the Jews is the emancipation of mankind from Judaism." Jews, Marx seems to be saying, can only become free when, as Jews, they no longer exist.59

The term 'Jew' has two connotations: (1) Jews as a nation, and (2) Jews as the followers of Judaism. Marx desires to free Jews from what he sees as the shackling influence of both. Clearly the most foolproof approach is to sever all people from their nationalities, tangible belongings and religions. Socialism as a working concept may have largely collapsed, but the idea of abolishing national identity and faith to create a level playing field is very much alive. This idea was lucidly communicated in an interview given by former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to Sir David Frost. Faced with the question of where anti-Semitism comes from, Peres answered that the same question had plagued the Jewish masses for at least the last two hundred years, yielding two disparate views.

One answer was, "Because the world is wrong, so we have to change the world." And the other was, "We are wrong, so we have to change ourselves." The Jewish people, for example, who became communists, that changed the world, the world of hatred. "Let's build a world without nations, without classes, without religion, a world without a Lord, that calls for the hatred of other people."60

Jean-Paul Sartre, the existentialist author who was Jewish from his mother's side, argued along these same lines: reason had to replace religion as the core solution to life's concerns. For Sartre the continuation of religion meant a chronic persecution of Jewry, and its elimination became the key to curtailing anti-Semitism.61

While perusing a booklet entitled Great Confrontations in Jewish History,62 I happened across a seminar called 'Modernity and Judaism' by Dr. Hertzberg, rabbi and Adjunct Professor of History at Columbia University.63 Examining the attitudes of prominent Jewish thinkers about their own religion, Hertzberg concentrates most notably on Marx and

Sigmund Freud. The young Marx, he finds, viewed the Jew in Die Judenfrage as the proto-capitalist, a victim of the myriad tensions hatched by monetary systems and the economic machinery. To solve the Jewish question was to destroy economic and class hierarchies, to emancipate Christians and Jews alike by toppling capitalism. Freud on the other hand viewed religion as an infantile obsession with authority figures, as essentially a sickness which every person had to transcend to achieve mental health and maturity.64

This iconoclastic attitude, this rebellious urge to overthrow historical norms, was by no means limited to Marx and Freud; the great 'outsiders' of Jewish thought adopted this stance routinely. Why? Hertzberg sees it as a call for liberation: that by divorcing Jews from every element of their past in Medieval Europe, they could start afresh on an equal footing with gentiles. This, he says, was the beginning of Jewish modernity. Establishing a sturdy foothold in Western culture entailed burying Europe's past, laden as it was with Christian mythology and beliefs, such that all men rising from the ashes of this charred history would work together as comrades in the new age.65

In Hertzberg's assessment this anti-nationalist, pro-universalist Reform Jew is not that different from the contemporary nationalist who prides himself on being a Zionist. Both vie for the same thing. To 19th century Reform Jews religion was the shackles they had to crush to win their equality. By comparison, contemporary Zionism asserts that religion is no longer adequate as a unifying force.

Except for religious faction, the majority of Zionists, political as well as cultural, are secularists who begin with the presumption that the Jewish religion can no longer serve as the basis for Jewish unity and that therefore Jewish survivalist policy has to be founded on some other premise... The greatest commandment is no longer to suffer martyrdom for the sanctification of the Divine Name, but rather to fight for the rebuilding of the land.66

What Peres, Hertzberg, Sartre, Marx, Freud and others are saying is that Jewish intelligentsia demands a new global society, one that is devoid of an unfavorable God, religion, philosophy and history. Their desire to integrate into a wider society entails raising the past: the era of history and the fabrication of a substitute. To this effect Wellhausen and others began the task of chipping away at the OT's integrity, opening the way for an assault on the NT and, from thence, the Qur'an.

54 Wagner and Breck (eds.), Great Confrontations in Jewish History, pp. 127-8.
55 ibid, pp. 128-9.
56 ibid, p. 131, Emphasis added.
In the bleek years of the Second World War, Jews undoubtedly bore their share of the tragedy and suffering which inflated humanity. In acknowledging their pains the victorious Allies chose to compensate them through the generous bestowment of a ‘homeland’ on territory which belonged neither to this party nor to that, in the process forcing millions of the land’s actual inhabitants to endure a desolate existence in refugee camps for the rest of their lives. By then the efforts to secularize Christianity and Judaism, to convert them into mere symbols of little import in daily life, had made considerable headway. Zionism stood apart from Judaism, the oft-heard sentiment that Jews are entitled to Palestine (based on Yahweh’s promise) less a religious conviction than a handy tune for nationalists.55 But removing God, religion and history from Muslim minds proved to be a steeper challenge: even where secularization did seep in Muslims could not tolerate Israel. Success in this field now meant proving that all references to Jews or to Palestine in Islamic texts were outright forgeries,56 and to follow the lead of the NT57 in cleansing the Qur’an of all passages which were perceived as anti-Semitic.

So long as Muslims hold fast to the Qur’an as Allah’s unalterable Word, this cleansing remains beyond their reach. In this regard Wandhrough set out to prove that the present-day Qur’an is no longer solely the ‘handwork of Muhammad’, but in fact of many communities scattered throughout the Muslim world which developed the text over the course of two hundred years.60 Quoting Humphreys:

55 To reiterate the words of Rabbi Herzberg, the majority of Zionists are secularists who now look to nationalism, and not religion, as their rallying point.

56 Shortly after Israel’s creation, Rev. Prof. Guillaume ‘proved’ that the al-Majid al-Aqsa which Muslims seemed so attached to was in fact a tiny village on the outskirts of Makkah, so very far from Jerusalem! [A. Guillaume, “Where was the al-Majid al-Aqsa”, al-Andalus, Madrid, 1953, pp. 323-330.]


58 Norman Calder later joined this bandwagon, showing that the literary works of that period - and not only the Qur’an - were authored by the Muslim community as a whole. He theorized that the very famous literary works of late 2nd and 3rd century scholars such as Musawwir’s Hārār Mālik, al-Mudawwana of Sahnun, al-Um of ash-Shafi’i, al-Kharraj by Abu Yūsuf and so on, were scholastic texts not authored by any single person [N. Calder, Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence, Oxford Univ. Press, 1993].

59 R.S. Humphreys, Islamic History, p. 84.


61 ibid, p. 102. Emphasis added.
If we accept Koren and Nevo’s assertion, that there is no proof of Jewish settlements in Hijaz during the time of the Prophet, the logical result would be the denial of all the verses relating to Jews since they could not possibly have been ‘authored’ by Muhammad. The Muslim community must therefore have appended them at a later stage and falsely claimed them as Qur’anic; restoring the Book to its ‘original’ form (as supposedly penned by Muhammad) requires the prompt removal of these fraudulent, anti-Semitic passages. And, if we believe that the pre-Islamic paganism cited in the Qur’ān and sunna is simply a fictitious back-projection of a culture that flourished in southern Palestine, then by extension the figure of Muhammad himself becomes questionable. A back-projection perhaps of the ancient remnants of rabbinical presence in Palestine, a fiction modeled on rabbinic prototype, making Koren and Nevo’s remarks a perfect fit with Wansbrough’s theories. In this way Muslims become indebted to Judaism for providing the fictitious basis of their very identity and historical origin.

Of course, there is a grand palace built of thin air and even less in the way of solid evidence. As Nevo insists on non-Muslim sources for verification, so we have surveyed the material evidence of the written word, of Syriac, Georgian, Nestorian, Armenian and Chinese writers, many of them contemporaries of the Prophet’s Companions or even of the Prophet himself. We have read the name ‘Muhammad’ in their chronicles several times, heard of stunning victories against Persia and Byzantium, observed the Persians in desperate appeal to the Chinese for help, come across the word ‘juma’, seen the names of several caliphs, and heard that the Muslim realms were “the hub of the universe.” For those who claim that Islamic history and the figure of Muhammad are nothing but fiction, what is there left to stand on?

5. Conclusion

Most Muslim countries surrounding Israel have been made to understand the urgency of changing their school curriculums, to uproot any point which arouses passions that Jews may find distasteful. But the Qur’ān remains an obstacle: a Book that frequently cites Jewish intransigence and disobedience, and whose verses wet the lips of schoolchildren, of congregations in mosques, of the penitent Muslim at night with his Muhāfah, whose cadence echoes in almost every aspect of life. Realizing what motives drive the present research on the Qur’ān is vital, that the products of such research may not catch the reader unawares.

Strugnell and Delitzsch’s research on Jewish themes is now rejected because of allegations of anti-Semitism. The Israel Antiquities Department judges qualifications based on its vision of ideological compatibility. Yet every Christian, Jew or atheist who engages in willful lies to undermine the precepts, elegance, history or future prospects of Islam is allowed to consider himself a shīfīk, to believe that Muslims are beholden to his objectivity and obliged to accept his findings. This is indefensible. Why are the academic dismissals unleashed against those accused of anti-Semitism, not applicable to those who distort Islam for ulterior gains? Why should non-Muslims be deemed authorities to the exclusion of practicing Muslims? Why should men of the Church—Mingana, Guillaume, Watt, Anderson, Lammance, and a horde of others who wish nothing more heartily than to see their religion eclipse Islam—be regarded as the standard in ‘unbiased’ Islamic research? Why should Muir be considered an authority on the Prophet’s life, when he writes that the Qur’ān is among “the most stubborn enemies of Civilization, Liberty, and the Truth which the World has yet known”?67

64 See pp. 39 - 41 and p. 206 footnote 8.
65 As a case in point — based on my information from Jordan – Israel has asked some of its neighboring Arab countries (as part of the peace process package) to eliminate all curriculum references to the Crusades, Šahbūdīn al-Ayyūbi (Saladin), and his re-conquering of Jerusalem.
66 The term ‘anti-Semite’ itself is a conscious misrepresentation for anti-Judaic, since the overwhelming majority of Senatis for the past fourteen centuries have been Muslims.