

Jewish Islamic Studies

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Short Communication

Jewish scholars contributed significantly to the development of Oriental studies in the 19th and early 20th century and gave important impulses to Quranic studies in particular. According to Arabist Angelika Neuwirth, this began with the doctoral dissertation of Frankfurt-born Rabbi [1], entitled “Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen” (“What did Muhammad absorb from the Judaism?”), published in 1833, and ended with the exclusion of Jewish scholars from German universities by the National Socialists in 1933, so it lasted for about 100 years [2]. How can this be explained? It is of fundamental importance for a scientific treatment of Islam that the holy scriptures are not seen as sacred texts, but as other texts. This is the prerequisite for studying them with modern scientific methods, with philological, historical-critical as well as hermeneutical methods. Historically, this happened for the first time in the generation of Abraham Geiger. Not only the holy scriptures of Islam, but also those of Judaism were desacralized and scientifically researched-and the “Science of Judaism” was born. With the aim of renewing Judaism from the spirit of science, Jewish sources were opened up with the help of modern scientific methods. But why were not only these, but also Islamic texts made the object of analysis, why did Jewish scientists begin to research the Quran and the Hadith, traditions from the life of the Prophet Mohammed? How is this to be understood? The American professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, Susannah Heschel, has recently argued that Jewish Islamic Studies has been “an instrument for the de-orientalization of Judaism” [3]. Jewish scholars of Islam were not primarily concerned with Islam, or more precisely, with a scholarly understanding of its holy scriptures; rather, they engaged with Islam, “elevating” it to a rational religion, in order to contribute to the renewal of Judaism in this way.

In the background of this argumentation is the thesis of the literary scholar Edward Said that “the Orient” is an intellectual construct that emerged in the context of imperialism and colonialism and served to legitimize domination [4]. “Orientalism” is based on the assumption that there is an opposition between the Orient and the Occident. In order to assure oneself of one’s own identity and to justify domination over the Orient, the latter was constructed from the Western point of view as “the quite different“. While the West sees itself as characterized by reason, freedom and the ability to perfect itself, according to the Syrian scholar Aziz Al-Azmeh following Said, the Orient is still imagined today by the West as a place of despotism, fanaticism and the inability to perfect itself [5]. In contrast to Said, Heschel now assumes that not only Islam, but also Judaism was “orientalized“. The Jewish scholars of Islam would then have pursued the same intention as those scholars who devoted themselves to Jewish sources (and developed the science of Judaism). They, too, were concerned with renewing Judaism by purifying it of all irrationalisms. By constructing Islam as rational and enlightened, they would have offered the “model of a representation of Judaism for the European world” [3]. Does this mean that their research is only constructions that have no epistemological value? One of the Jewish scholars of Islam was Josef Horowitz. Unlike Geiger, he is not at

the beginning but at the end of the said 100 years. Horovitz was born in 1874 in Lebork (once Lauenburg in Pommern), the second son of Rabbi Markus Horovitz, who later worked in Frankfurt. He studied Oriental languages in Berlin, first became a lecturer there, then received a call to the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College of Aligarh (India), and finally became professor of Semitic languages at the Oriental Seminar of the University of Frankfurt am Main. The focus of his scholarly work was on ancient Arabic poetry, the Qur'an, and the biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Does the thesis that Jewish scholars of Islam were ultimately concerned with Judaism and its purification apply to him and his research? As an example, this question can be discussed in an article that Horovitz wrote for the Encyclopedia of Judaism on the keyword "Islam" [6]. This text, divided into 17 sections, begins with general remarks about Islam and ends with an analysis of the relationship between Islam and Judaism. How is Islam constructed here and how is the relationship between Judaism and Islam determined? First of all, the focus on the Prophet Muhammad is striking. In accordance with the hermeneutics of the humanities, the Qur'an is traced back to its author, Muhammad (who negated his authorship and claimed another author of the text). And it is noticeable that ancient Arabic traditions, which also found their way into the Quran, are not taken into account: Horovitz speaks only of "Jewish and Islamic teachings". Muhammad "reshaped" these, or more precisely, he made a selection from them, which was shaped by his "prophetic self-confidence". This explains the special nature of the Quran. It is noteworthy that in this context Horovitz implicitly opposes the claim to construct Islam as different from one's own perspective by pointing out that Muhammad himself pointed to "the correspondence of the Quranic with earlier revelations" [6].

In the second half of the article, Horovitz then explains not only what was taken over from Judaism in Islam, but also vice versa, what was borrowed from Islam in Judaism. And he speaks not only about borrowings, i.e. approximations, but also about demarcations and devaluations under the heading "polemics". Finally, he supplements his expositions with remarks about the "legal position of the Jews in Islam" as it was laid down in writing, as well as about the reality beyond these regulations. In this way, he makes clear how closely Judaism and Islam were intertwined. Without taking this mutual influence into account, it is not possible to adequately understand either Islam or Judaism. Is Islam constructed here as a model of a rational and enlightened religion and Judaism "de-orientalized"? It can be noted that what Heschel says about the first generation of Jewish scholars of Islam applies to Horovitz, namely that he too came from an Orthodox family. It can also be stated that Horovitz explored the own in the other and took up elements of the "narrative" which, according to Heschel, was developed by the first

Jewish scholars of Islam and then repeated again and again (e.g. the assumption that the newness of Islam ultimately resulted from a selection from the known, i.e. Jewish and Christian traditions). But it can also be said that Horovitz's research is characterized by the effort not to construct Islam from one's own perspective as something alien, something "quite different." This is evident not only from the fact that he repeatedly assures himself of the self-perception of the "other," but above all from the fact that he shows-without idealizing the relationship between Islam and Judaism-how the differences between one's own and the other cannot be maintained, and how the interaction that has taken place in the past ultimately makes a clear demarcation impossible [7-8]. The conclusion is that it would be inappropriate to claim that Horovitz has "orientalized" or "de-orientalized" Islam and constructed it as something it is not at all. This can be attributed, on the one hand, to the fact that his research was characterized by a solid philological approach, a partial orientation toward the hermeneutics of the humanities, and by a quest for knowledge that he pursued solely for the sake of knowledge. Secondly, it was significant that his research was based on the recognition of the dignity of religion, especially the dignity of Islam. In this respect, Heschel's thesis does not do justice to Horovitz's research; indeed, it is problematic in that it ultimately amounts to diminishing its value rather than recognizing its importance. Horovitz died of a stroke in 1931 at the age of 56. Unfortunately, he was unable to complete his research on the Quran. After being forgotten for a long time, he is now being rediscovered and becoming a role model for Quranic research [9].

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