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Negative Attitudes of Jews Regarding to Islam and Muslims throughout the History*

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Abstract

The topic of this article is the Jewish world's common view regarding Islam, its Prophet and Muslims dating back from the emergence of Islam to the present day. In this sense, the study sheds light on the history of Jewish thought. Although this investigation cannot be described as a complete analysis on history of thought, the examples which I provide through this article such as negative behaviors of Jewish clergy and other members of Jewish community regarding Islam and Muslims help us to understand the process of this journey. This work investigates Jews' view on Islam and Muslims and evolution of this thought by examining the statements and texts composed by Jewish clergy against Muslims. By examining a religious group's ideology throughout the history, this study employs a comparative-historical methodology of ideological practices. The results suggest that the widespread negative attitudes and behaviors of Jewish people regarding Islam and Muslims go back to the times of prophet Mohammad and have fueled during social crises as well as gained momentum in times when social competition was intense.

Keywords: Islam, Muslim, Judaism, Jews.

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Introduction

This study actually expresses the history of Jewish thought beginning from thousands of years earlier to the current day. There has been a wide range of materials to remind us of the notorious prejudice of Jews towards Islam for many ages. The aim of the study is to outline the general framework of Jewish philosophy on Islam and Muslims. Therefore the study endeavors to ascertain opinions of some Jewish intellectuals and politicians about Islam and Muslims and to exemplify their numerous acts of negative behaviors in almost every corner of life. In order to locate the topic and its field in a proper way, in the study only matters about the negative attitude against Islam is dealt with. Accordingly, the study generally refers to polemics which Jewish writers composed against Islam and Muslims. In addition to that, it touches upon Jewish literary texts, utterances of Jewish statesmen and the contrary remarks. Needless to say that a study of this nature may deserve to be regarded significant as far as the Jewish standpoint of Islam and Muslims is concerned.

The Period of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)

The very first encounter of Muslims with the Jews ever is in the period of the Prophet Muhammad. The interrelationship between the two parties in Mecca where Islam emerged was relatively less than that of the Medinese era due to the fact that Jewish population had been much less in the former city than the latter one. Interestingly it was claimed that the number of Jews in Mecca at that time was almost next to none (Hamidullah, 1990) (Derveze, 1965), as their population had much concentrated both in Medina and Khaibar cities. Therefore the Prophet Muhammad could only contact with Jews when they travelled Mecca for trade purposes. The questions of Jews to the Prophet and answers to them through the revelation of the Surah of al-Kahf (Hamidullah, 1990) are major examples of the encounters in Mecca.

As an endeavor for the restoration of political stability in the aftermath of the Prophet's migration to Medina, the Charter of Medina ² which had much served for re-arranging the order with the Jewish tribes such as the Banu Nadir, the Banu Qaynuqa, and the Banu Qurayza who were dissatisfied with the migration proves to be exclusive in terms of interrelations between the two communities (Hamidullah, 1990). The infringement of clauses of the said agreement which is stipulating (Sırma, 1994) (Bolay, 1967) that the Jews may not to be in cooperation or collaboration with the enemies of Islam made the two parties be at loggerheads with each other. Following the revelation of the verse which prescribes change

² According to Sourdel, by resigning the Charter of Medina, Prophet Muhammad had preferred to attain the support of Jews through their inclusion to *ummah* (greater Muslim society) (Sourdel, 1995).

of *Qibla* from Quds (Jerusalem) to *Kaba*, some Jews had proposed him if he would continue to face Quds they would have pledged allegiance to him (al-Waqidi, 1984). This very proposition particularly forms an example of then-Jews' derogatory attitudes towards Muslims.

Notable figures of Jewish community such as poets Ka'b b. Al Ashraf, Abu Afak, Asma bt. Marwan had made heavy insults on Islam and Muslims by humiliating the Prophet and in the meantime had incited idolaters against Islam (al-Waqidi, 1984) (Hisham, 1971). As a striking example, the incident of a chaste Muslim lady who had been subjected to disgraceful harassment in a Jewish jewelry shop in the market indicates a gradual development of Jew's verbal or non-verbal harsh and derogatory treatment towards Muslims (Hisham, 1971). Moreover, as Ibn Hisham reported, then-Jews carried their negative attitude even to assassinate the Prophet himself (Hisham, 1971) (Sa'd, 1960).

In later times, the disputes have flared up over the new conquests of Jewish territories. It stems from the Jewish supposition of that a person called 'Malachi' would have been sent as the last Messenger in the fifth century B.C. (Hasanov, *Yahudilikte Peygamberlik ve Peygamberler*, 2014) and the fact that several beliefs in their holy books totally contradict what Islam has introduced. So this situation generally has caused uneasiness and bewilderment among the Jews. They have felt themselves obliged to defend their religions and deprecate newly-introduced rules by Islam. The most widespread conviction among the Jewish masses against Islam is denial and otherization fuelled by the perception of superiority over non-Jewish people who are called as 'goy' or 'nohri' (Aslantaş, 30 April-1 May 2011) (Hasanoğlu, 2015).

Traditional Jewish philosophy assumes that only the Arabs are Muslims. The roots of the animosity between the Jews and the Arabs date back to Prophet Ismail (Adam, 1997), the son of Prophet Abraham. Prophet Isaac has been praised in their holy book whereas Prophet Ishmael, has been alienated and further humiliated by comparing him to a wild-ass. (Genesis 16/12.) Having similar sagas, the said Jewish passages would in the future constitute the essence of Jewish literature.

In many texts in Zohar, a fundamental Jewish source, it is said that 'Muslims are throughout the history tormented the Jews the most so they are well deserved to be despised' (Zohar, Şemot II: 17a.). Islam and its Prophet have been dealt with by Jewish literature with a hostile view (Yaman, 2016). Therefore Jewish historians, clerics or philosophers have transmitted false knowledge about Islam with a sarcastic and despising manner.

Maimonides (Ibn Maymun), one of the prominent Jewish cleric asserts that Islam and all other religions have originated from Judaism and Muhammad is not actually a prophet but a defective character who had grown up under the influence of Jewish culture (Qirqisani, 1939). Jewish clerics or authors like Bernard Lewis (Lewis, 1960), Claude Cahen (Cahen, 1990), J. Wellhausen (Julius Wellhausen, 1963), Robert Mantran (Mantran, 1981) following the footsteps of Maimonides, have designated some of Prophet Muhammad's implementations such as changing Qibla from Quds to Mecca³, fasting, day of Jumu'a (Friday) as imitation of some Jewish rituals or concepts like Quds of Jews, Yom Kippur and day of Sabbath respectively (Rosenberg, 1990).⁴ Jewish scriptures generally treat Prophet Muhammad's personality and the divinity of Quran with humiliation and derogation and assert that most of matters in Quran have been taken from the remarks of Jewish clerics (Özen, 2000).

After the Prophet Muhammad

After the period beginning with Prophet Abraham's Covenant (Hasanov, Nuh Kanunları ve Nuhilik, 2015), Jews had moved to Egypt with Prophet Joseph and with Prophet Moses who had to run off Egypt to avoid prosecution of pharaoh (Jewish Exodus) and eventually had resided in the holy lands where they established a great state during the reign of Prophet David (1200-1000 BC) which was divided into two after the death of Solomon (1020-920 BC). Following the destruction of Kingdom of Israel by Assyrians and the termination of Kingdom of Judah by Babylonians (588-587 BC) Jews had begun searching new locations where they would be able to survive (Yiğitoğlu, Babil Esaretinden Miladi İlk Yıllara Yahudiler, 2011). The ideal locations where they would settle were conquered by Muslims after the emergence of Islam, where Jews had been allowed to perform the commandments of their religion and culture. Thus they had felt themselves closer to Islam than other religions (Adam, 1997). Maimonides and his followers who lived in the territories ruled by Muslims had uttered sarcastic words and composed writings about Islam and Prophet Muhammad. It should be noted that although refutations to the said writings had been written, they (i.e. Maimonides and his followers) had enjoyed freedom to express their thoughts under the Muslim administrations.

Particularly, the texts written by middle age Jewish clerics are important due to fact that they reflect Jewish views about Islam and Prophet Muhammad in that times. Like Western Christianity in the Western Europe of Middle Age, these writings also display Prophet

³According to T. Arnold, when Prophet Muhammad had realized that he could not gain the support of Jews and he was not in good terms with them, he had faced the direction of Kabah. This is the beginning of formation of Ummah in Islam. See (Arnold, 1982).

⁴Also see. The Prophet had perfect relations with Jews in the first years of migration to Medina and determined the some prayings and rituals by imitating Jews. He had given an Arabic form to the religion which has traces of Judaism. (Brockelmann, 1992).

Muhammad as a person with mental disease and epilepsy, and Islam as an apocryphal religion (Yiğitoğlu, Sarcastic View of Islam in Western Christianity, 2012). It is quite interesting that Jewish clerics of this period had not mentioned the name Muhammad directly and openly. In order to despise him, they had used names like Mahmit, Mahomat or Mahomati instead of Muhammad (Aslantaş, 30 April-1 May 2011). Two of the most famous despising words about Prophet Muhammad are ‘pasul’, meaning turbulent or troubled and ‘meşuga’ meaning pervert or mad (Maghribi, 1964). In addition to the abovementioned words, one may find some other despising imputations like shepherd, crazy, evil, imposter or cursed (Meral, Ortaçağ Yahudi Dünyasında İslam Algısı, 2013) (Nuh Aslantaş, 2011).

It is possible to observe the similar attitude which is noticed in Middle Age Jewish clerics' writings in that of Christian orientalist. They had claimed that Prophet Muhammad had learned the religion and the prophecy from Bahira (i.e. Sergius the Monk) and believed in trinity (Vaux, 1898) (Draper, 1313) because he was trained by Jewish rabbis. Moreover, some of the anecdotes in Quran, they had alleged, was transmitted to Prophet Muhammad by Jews (Leveen, 1926) (Guillaume, 1928) and the Prophet had even committed plagiarism from former holy books during dictation of Quran, therefore Quran cannot be divine revelation (Karaite, 1889). They had also alleged that the Prophet Muhammad had gone a trip to Damascus to gather some information about Judaism and obtain knowledge disguising his intention under the cloak of business (Maghribi, 1964). Some works of poetry mentions some people advising Prophet Muhammad pretending to be companions (*sahaba*) but they had actually been Jews. These Jewish rabbis had prevented Muhammad from harming their Jewish communities by influencing and deceiving him. He had been eventually poisoned by his wife and killed in the deathbed by these Jewish rabbis surrounding him. Then his dead body was cut into pieces and his flesh was eaten by dogs and what has been actually put in a bier was the bones of dead donkey (Meral & Melammed, Hz. Muhammed'e Dair Bir Yahudi Efsanesi: Maa'se Mahmat Adlı Riselenin Yeniden Tahkik ve Tercümesi, 2012). Another narrative mentions in The Song of Roland which is written in the 12th century is also so offensive that Prophet Muhammad was put in a well and dogs and pigs ate his flesh (Crosland, 1989) (O'Hagan, 1998).

For European Medieval Christianity, Islam is regarded a deviant religion and Prophet Muhammad is a deceiver (Kalin, 2003) and whereas Eastern Christians perceive Islam as separatist communion within the Christianity against their religion (Yiğitoğlu, Türkiye’de II. Vatikan Sonrası Müslüman-Hıristiyan İlişkileri,, 2006). It is important to note that Jews similarly perceive Prophet Muhammad as Cardinal of Papacy or a man of Rome as mentioned in the former passages in parallel with Christians (Aslantaş, 30 April-1 May 2011). Although

there are numerous Jewish scholars or scientists studying Islam advocate that Christianity has influenced Islam, a considerable number of others disagree with them. These scientists and scholars argue that Islam is a religion stemming from Judaism. Thinkers perpetuating this argument like Hartwig, Hirschfeld, Horowitz, Funkel, and Shapiro assert that what Quran consists of are components of Jewish faith or ideas (Akdemir, 1989). However there are very few thinkers like J. Fueck who believe that Islam is an exclusive religion which has never been influenced by Judaism at all (Atçeken, 2014).

As Jews have had more interaction with Muslims throughout the time, they had known more about Islam and its believers had thus realized that they had encountered a very different religion from what they had thought of. However, instead of conceiving what actually Islam is and how its followers believe in and practice in their lives, they (Jews) had always defended their faith and have been hostile against other religions. Instead of interaction with other people, Jewish minorities living in different countries in the world had preferred creating ghettos and have become closed communities. When anyone from these communities had tried to mingle with the society in which they live, he or she had been forced to give up that idea of mingling. In order to keep members of Jewish communities away from Islam and Muslims, Islam have been always defamed with sarcastic words and a derogatory attitude.

In the 11th and 12th centuries, when crusades took place, views of European thinkers and authors were different from their predecessors. Prominent thinkers of this period such as Robertus Ketenensis, Petrus Venerabilis had described Quran as a sinister book and Prophet Muhammad as a miserable and intractable person. During the course of crusades Christians had imagined Muslims, especially Turks as a people equipped satanic power (Cohn, 1962). Jewish historians of this period had never refrained from using sarcastic, hostile and despising words about Islam through transmitting what they learned from Christian writers who had participated in crusades.

Recent Time

Search for new territories to reside in beginning with destruction of Kingdom of Israel and Judah had continued in the Middle Age with immigration to Western countries such as UK, Italy, France and Germany. It is evident that Jews living in various parts of the world have kept themselves away from religious, economic or social integration to societies where they lived. The underlying reason for this kind of isolation relies on the characteristics of a personality created by Torah and Talmud (Sayar, 2014). It is because the Jewish nation lives its life and behaves in all aspects of life in accordance with the requirements of the religion. Hence, their efforts and endeavors for acquiring economic and political power may be

regarded a reason for dislike and mistreatment towards them by the other members of societies.

In addition according to holy book, Jews are the only nation to control and rule the world and selected as the inheritors of all the other nations (Deuteronomy, 7/6; 10/5, 14/21, 26/19; Exodus, 19/5-6.) thus other peoples are doomed to be servants of them (Leviticus, 25/44-46.). Obviously Jews have always maintained the idea of having superiority over the others, therefore they disdained them. They keep their ancient views that they had in the past (Freud, *Musa ve Tektanrıcılık*, 1976). Thus, it would be pretty naive to expect any change in their views and perceptions about Islam and Muslims. On the other hand, since some Jewish people do not reveal any statement against Islam, it would be unfair to say that all Jews are hostile to Islam and Muslims.

Jews, who had been disliked in the western countries where they have been living, have developed Zionism as a reaction to "anti-semitism" (M. Şemseddin, 1987).⁵ After living in various countries under pressure and isolation, they have attained a state that they had been dreaming for centuries after the fall of Ottoman Empire owing to the efforts of Theodor Herzl and the support of Great Britain (Bozkurt, 2012). Although Jewish population in the Western countries is declining, it seems that they have almost overcome problems caused by diaspora and moreover they are influential in economy, politics and media sector in some developed countries like UK and France (Şenay, 2002). It is significant to note that the change of the view in the West towards Jews and as a result the decline of anti-Semitism have provided them with better conditions. Though, the perception of Judaism in the West, from the Middle Age to Second World War has not been different from Monk Sessa's views⁶ It is pretty interesting that Western perception of Judaism and Jewish people has dramatically differed from the past and Jews have forgotten or at least pretend to forget grudge, hatred and animosity which the previous generations had experienced in spite of Western mindset voiced by Freud as follows "Jews are the same as what they were in the past" (Freud, *Musa ve Tektanrıcılık*, 1976). Moreover, Western Christianity has changed its thought that Judaism is deviant and the emancipation can only be attained under the Church discipline, and eventually in the Second Vatican Council, which took place in 1965 it was declared that Jews have been included in the emancipation circle. This is a clear indicator of the change of mindset against Jews (Aydın, 2002). Besides the common history of these two religions, other underlying reasons for this convergence are economic, political and many other factors. British complaisance for Israelis between 1919 and 1933, (Ben-Haim, 2008) Vatican's political

⁵ There are also movements opposing the state of Israel. One of them, Agudat Yisrael was founded in Kattowitz, Germany, (now Katowice, Poland) in 1912, with the purpose of providing an umbrella organization for observant Jews who opposed the Zionist movement. Also see (Kurt, 2012).

⁶ According to Priest Sesa, "Jews are disgusting, jealous and greedy people who smell stinky." See. (İlhan, 2009).

support to Israel during Israeli Arab War in 1948 (Yiğitoğlu, Türkiye’de II. Vatikan Sonrası Müslüman-Hıristiyan İlişkileri,, 2006) and backing of Western powers on all of Israeli actions are some striking examples for the said convergence.

According to documental resources Jews describe their lives in Andalucía (İlhan, 2009) as golden age and the Ottoman period was the time that Jews enjoyed a lot of freedom and prosperity (Yazıcı, 2009). Jewish genocide by Christians in Spain 1492 after the fall of the last Islamic state in Andalusia and the NAZI genocide in Germany (Holocaust) are turning points in the World's history and in the Jewish history in particular.⁷ In that time period, no state had provided Jews with asylum but they were rather isolated and insulted by many societies. Both the rescue of Jews from Spain in 1492 and Turkish hospitality to Jewish people escaping from NAZI prosecution and genocide are major evidence of Muslim tolerance. It may not be deemed comprehensible what Jews has been doing against Muslims who had saved their lives in tough times they had suffered much.

Jews has encountered with adamant reaction of Muslim Communities all around the world following the establishment of State of Israel on the 14th of May in 1948. Soon after the establishment Arab-Israeli wars has taken place (Kızıloğlu, 2012). Both parties have taken more tough actions against each other as a result of the escalating tension day by day (Ateş, 2012). Meanwhile, Jews, who had received support of powerful states, had behaved recklessly in a threatening manner. Sarcastic attitude of Jewish administration and soldiers especially towards the Palestinian Muslims have been always watched by the world. Having no mercy, Israeli soldiers have directed their guns at even young children and arrested them. The most recent sarcastic action is the Israeli raid on the freedom flotilla, namely Mavi Marmara which carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza Strip. The said attack which has infringed international law as well took place on 31st of May in 2010 and resulted in death of 9 Turkish volunteer and later death of another one in May, 2014 who stayed in coma for four years. Not only outside Israel stands up against the Israeli oppression but also some people from inside Israel are brave enough to show solidarity with the Palestinians. As an example of Israeli voices against Israeli politics, a famous jazz singer says in an interview that "Israel desires Palestinians to leave this territory. State of Israel is system of ethnic cleansing. In other word it is not different from NAZI Germany at all" (İsraili Şarkıcıdan Gezi Olayları ve Ukrayna İtirafı <http://www.haber7.com/ortadogu/haber/1151279-israilli-sarkicidan-gezi-olaylari-ve-ukrayna-itirafi>, 2014).

⁷Holokost see for. (Ben-Haim, 2008)

Conclusion

Muslim-Jewish interaction beginning with the era of Prophet Muhammad has continued through the lives of Jews living under the Muslim administration as Islamic territories which had enlarged during first four Caliphs, Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. Since Jews had lived in prosperity in the Muslim countries, they describe these periods of time as golden age. They have even developed their own intellectual literature in this age. We observe the influence of Muslim scholars over such as al Farabi and Avicenna over the Jewish intellectuals.

In spite of the noticeable influence of the Muslim philosophers over the Jewish intellectuals in addition to the relations between Muslim and Jewish communities, Jews had not refrained from vilifying Islam in their writings. However, the writings of Jews in the early periods opt for denigrating Prophet Muhammad. Neither had they mentioned the name of the Prophet openly nor had they targeted him directly. Instead, they talked about Prophet in a sarcastic manner by describing him as ill, mentally retarded and so on. Works of Jews have been in parallel with Christians'. The allegation of Jews that Prophet Muhammad was trained by Jewish rabbis which is similar to Christian's distortion that he had learned the religion from Bahira (i.e. Sergius the Monk) is just one of the examples that they had rejected Islam as a religion. Another parallelism between Judaism and Christianity about Islam in the early period of Islam was that Christians thought Islam was a separatist communion within their religion and Jewish people believed that Islam emerged as a religion which had copied itself rather than being an exclusive and independent religion. Of course it is interesting that Christian clerics and thinkers had similar ideas with Jews whom they assume as killers of Jesus.

The most peaceful and the most prosperous period in the history of Jewish people are the ones that they lived in under the Muslim administration either the early periods of Israel or its later periods. Whenever Jews have been oppressed, Muslims have been there to rescue them such as the cases that Ottoman state had saved Jewish people from Spain in 15th Century and Turkish Republic had also saved Jewish people who escape from Germany to avoid the NAZI genocide.

Despite the Muslim tolerance and hospitality towards Jews during tough times, sarcastic views of Jews have never been changed for centuries. This negative and derogatory attitude which has begun since emergence of Islam has continued even until today. Obviously, early Jewish sarcastic views and attitude towards Islam, Prophet Muhammad and Muslim are identical with their views and attitude of today. However, Islam forbids the followers from mockery of the religion or the faith of the others or yet anything sacred to someone. It also gives everybody freedom of choosing the religion and recognizes the people's choices

although it is never pleased with any belief or religion except Islam. Despite the unpleasant interaction between Muslims and Jews for centuries, Jews had lived their lives under the tolerance and hospitality in the Islamic territories and countries. The tolerance of Muslims towards other religions and their followers such as Judaism and Jews indicates a society of peaceful coexistence which Islam envisages.

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