

Books in Review

Christian, Muslim, Jew

THE JEW AS ALLY OF THE MUSLIM: MEDIEVAL ROOTS OF ANTI-SEMITISM. By ALLAN HARRIS CUTLER and HELEN ELMQUIST CUTLER. University of Notre Dame Press. 577 pp. \$50.00.

Reviewed by DANIEL PIPES

AS THE title of this study suggests, Allan and Helen Cutler believe that the tendency of medieval Christians to see the Jew as an ally of the Muslim was the decisive fac-

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tor in the development of anti-Semitism. In making this case, the Cutlers take on conventional wisdom, which holds that anti-Semitism originated in the charge of deicide (that Jews killed Jesus) and in the Jews' anomalous socioeconomic status in Europe. Although the Cutlers' study is poorly written and far too lengthy, it offers an intriguing and even compelling argument.

The logic of their case can be reduced to a syllogism: (1) medieval Christians feared and hated Muslims; (2) medieval Christians saw Jews as the allies of Muslims; (3) therefore, medieval Christians feared and hated Jews.

On the first point, the Cutlers are correct to note the presence of a pervasive fear of Muslims among medieval Christians. That fear began with the emergence of Islam and lasted until the 19th century. In 634, just two years after Muhammad the Prophet's death, for example, the patriarch of Jerusalem referred to the Muslims as "the slime of the godless Saracens [which] threatens slaughter and destruction." This early view was later echoed many times over; for centuries, the role of arch-enemy, in myth and literature, was filled by Muslims.

This is understandable, for Muslims, who inhabited a belt of territories extending from Morocco to Egypt to Turkey to Siberia, physically surrounded medieval Christendom. Muslims were also the most constant enemy: with only one exception (the Mongols), every serious military threat against Christian Europe after the 10th century was launched by them. The Muslim danger continued to preoccupy the Christians of Europe for more than a millennium, until after the second siege of Vienna in 1683.

Muslims also differed from the other invaders—Germans, Bulgars, and Hungarians—in presenting a religious and cultural danger as well as a military one. Hungarians would eventually accept European culture and convert to Christianity, but Muslims brought with them a rival civilization which not only withstood Christianity but even seduced Christians from their faith.

For all these reasons, Muslims were the outstanding enemy of Christendom.

Second—and this is the heart of the Cutlers' study—Jews were seen as close associates of Muslims. There was some justice to this view: the Hebrew language shares much with Arabic, and Judaism shares much with Islam; on the most abstract level, both are religions of law, while Christianity is a religion of faith. More specifically, they share many features such as circumcision, dietary regulations, and similar sexual codes. Further, because the Muslims were preeminent in the medieval centuries, "Jews themselves associated Jew with Muslim." When this became known to the Christians, it much harmed the Jews' position. Most significant of all, Jews on occasion helped Muslim troops against Christians (as in the initial Arab conquest of Spain) and some Jews held prominent positions in Muslim governments at war with the Christians. Even when they did not actually take part in the fighting, "Jews usually rejoiced when Christian territory fell into Islamic hands."

The Cutlers marshal a variety of textual and pictorial proof to make their case that medieval Christians saw a deep connection between Jew and Muslim. To take one of each: an influential 12th-century Christian text includes the bizarre statement that "A Jew is not a Jew until he converts to Islam," and a woodcut in a book of religious disputation published in 1508 pictures a Jewish figure carrying a banner with the name "Machometus" (Muhammad) together with a Muslim figure carrying a banner that depicts a Jew's hat.

Third, Christian fear of Muslims affected the view of Jews. To prove this thesis, the Cutlers must show that Christian anti-Semitism varied roughly according to the state of Christian-Muslim relations: the status of Jews declined as Christian animosity toward Muslims increased, and, conversely, Jews were better off when wars against Muslims ceased. The authors do establish this point in a broad-brush sort of way, more by assertion than through a close look at the record. They argue that far fewer anti-

Semitic outbreaks occurred in Europe in 700-1000, when Muslims were still a distant concern, than in 1000-1300, when they had become the objects of intense hostility. The Cutlers date the transition to about 1010, when rumors spread through France that the Jews had helped the Fatimid rulers of Egypt destroy the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. In retaliation, the Jews of Orleans were made to pay with their lives.

When viewed in the context of the age, the Muslim role in medieval anti-Semitism is not surprising, for Muslims had a profound impact on diverse aspects of medieval European civilization. Indeed, little took place in Christendom between the 8th and 15th centuries that was not influenced by the Muslims. For instance, the Muslims achieved victory in battle through the use of stirrups which enabled them to control and maneuver their horses; the Christians were compelled to imitate them, and this led to an emphasis on fighters on horseback, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the feudal social order. Muslim domination of the Mediterranean cut off southern Europe from its traditional trading partners, leading to increased cultivation of northern Europe. The Muslim intellectuals of Spain, by bringing Greek philosophy into Europe, contributed importantly to the Renaissance. Modern European imperialism originated in the Crusades against the Muslim "infidels," while Portuguese and Spanish naval discoveries were stimulated by the desire to circumvent the Muslims. Ottoman threats diverted the Catholic states and inadvertently facilitated the rise of Protestantism.

Muslims also affected smaller developments: the Mafia began as an anti-Muslim league, the Vatican was built to withstand Muslim attacks, and the Acropolis was ruined in the course of its use as an arsenal by Ottoman forces. Muslim influence pervaded the diet, clothing, and art of many Christian cultures.

This list could be extended much further; the key point is that Muslims touched on myriad aspects of

the Christian civilization of Europe. As the historian R.W. Southern has observed, "The existence of Islam [was] the most far-reaching problem in medieval Christendom. It was a problem at every level of existence." In this light, it is hardly surprising that the Muslims also affected the way Christians viewed Jews.

The authors strongly believe that medieval Christian perceptions remain a force today, that the notion of Jewish-Muslim alliance still fuels anti-Semitism. They even go so far as to argue that "Israeli antagonism toward Arabs may in part be affected by a Jewish desire (perhaps more subconscious than conscious) to disprove the historic Christian belief that the Jews are in league with the Muslims against the West." Christian anti-Semitism, in this reading, will endure so long as Christian anti-Muslimism remains potent. To combat anti-Semitism, the Cutlers therefore propose that "American and world Jewry should be ready and willing to put much more of its community-relations time, money, energy, and imagination into urging Christians and Muslims to enter into genuine dialogue and reconciliation."

This is a radical new approach; but does it hold? In my view, the Cutlers' analysis of the medieval situation adds a new dimension to our comprehension of the way Christian-Jewish relations developed. And indeed, insofar as Christian anti-Semitism does owe something historically to the Muslim-Jewish relation, to that extent it may be a more transient phenomenon (over, admittedly, the very long run) than is sometimes supposed. To put it another way, the less we see the charge of deicide as the one and only historic core of the Christian persecution of Jews, the more clearly we may envisage an abatement of anti-Semitism.

Still, I am very skeptical about the applicability of the Cutlers' in-

sight to current circumstances. The reason is obvious: since World War I, conflict, not alliance, has dominated relations between Muslims and Jews. Indeed, the Arab-Israeli dispute has so overwhelmed earlier bonds between Muslims and Jews, such as they were, that the latter have virtually disappeared from view in the West. This change means that the old association of Muslims and Jews no longer holds.

Take the case of the Arabs' success in raising the price of oil in the 1970's. During the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Arabs emphasized their use of oil as a weapon against Israel. Each side then tried very hard to put the onus of blame for the price increases on the other. Under these conditions, it hardly seems likely that the Christian West would see Muslims and Jews as allies. To the contrary, the two parties have acquired a reputation of being even more hostile enemies than they in fact are. Only scholars recall the ties between them in centuries past.

Further, in a terrible twist of fate, Muslims have themselves become in recent years the leading international patrons of a Christian-style anti-Semitism. To take just one example among many, the Defense Minister of Syria, Mustafa Tlas, has recently published a book titled *The Matzah of Zion* in which he dredges up the classic accusation of blood libel. Tlas has adopted a blatant anti-Semitism of the sort that no prominent figure in the Christian West would still accept publicly. The notion of Muslim-Jewish alliance in the face of such Muslim anti-Semitism is preposterous.

The Jew as Ally of the Muslim is a peculiar book. The second chapter is an arcane page-by-page commentary on a recent scholarly book. The final chapter suggests that the Pope should "transform his office and mission from a more narrowly Christian into a broadly Abrahamic one . . . to create a new spiritual and institutional unity between Jews, Christians, and Muslims." But these shortcomings are compensated for by the fact that the Cutlers have a suggestive new idea, which is now available for others to build upon.