

negative theology in medieval religion. Inevitable to such an expansive study are occasional instances of over-synthesis. For instance, Kars treats the notion of “suspension of judgement (*tawaqquf*)” as a form of negative theology. Yet this may be nuanced in that the notion of *tawaqquf* often arises where proofs on either side of a particular debate accumulate and convince to the extent that the mind cannot arbitrate between positions. The relationship between apophaticism and epistemological scepticism could perhaps be teased out. I found Kars’ translations of a small number of passages rather confusing; for instance, Hollenberg’s translation of a passage by Ja’far ibn Manşūr al-Yaman (d. 957) also translated on page 35 was to me the more understandable of the two. There are a handful of missing citations which are the exception to the general rigorousness of Kars’ referencing.

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JOHN TOLAN:

Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today.

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John Tolan has produced an important addition to the scholarly understanding of Muhammad as an historical and polemical figure in the imaginations of Western Europeans. The aim of the author was not to “compile a chronicle of hostility” towards the Prophet of Islam, but instead to explore the facets of Muhammad’s image portrayed in Europe between the twelfth and twentieth centuries. Tolan’s sensitive handling of this subject matter, informed by a close reading of the sources he cites and their relations to one another, gives a nuanced analysis of how stories and images of the Prophet were transmitted, repeated and used to serve the particular purposes of different authors. Tolan provides a well-organized synthesis of recent scholarship, in which he is a leading figure, and presents it in a lucid style, making the field of this study highly accessible.

Chapter 1 explores medieval beliefs and explanations of the origins of the “Saracens” against whom the Crusades were launched. At this point, there was an ongoing ambiguity over the origins and beliefs of the Saracens; were they the descendants of Abraham and his concubine Hagar (hence “Hagarenes”) as St Jerome believed in the fifth century? While Peter of Cluny, a contemporary of the Crusaders, was concerned with learning whether the Muslims could be considered pagans, heretics, or should be grouped together separately with Jews. The chapter then explores early (mis)understandings of the role of Muhammad within “Saracen” culture, as opposed to his true place within Islam, with portrayals including Muhammad as the chief deity of a pagan trinity, along with Apollo and “Termagent”. Tolan then tracks the use of this image through popular culture into the sixteenth century, whether on the Renaissance stage or through the ballads and hagiographies of medieval Europe. The first chapter reveals a fundamental tension between scholarly and popular depictions of the Prophet, which would perhaps have deserved greater scrutiny. Indeed, this issue is shown yet more starkly in the second and third chapters, which deal with depictions of the Prophet as an intelligent

but fundamentally immoral trickster, heresiarch, and false prophet. These fictitious depictions survive far longer in the public imagination than they do in the scholastic works with which Tolan's volume is largely concerned.

The fourth chapter shows the development, during the sixteenth century, of a new conception of Muhammad as a prophet in his own right, rather than merely a fake or charlatan who borrows from Christian and Jewish scripture. This rehabilitation, Tolan argues, occurred due to Christian rivalries during the Reformation, when Muhammad became a useful third point of polemical comparison in the writings of Catholic and Reformed theologians. In the following chapters Tolan explores increasingly positive images and attempts to understand both Muhammad as an historical figure, but also as a reformer of Abrahamic monotheism and a lawgiver. Tolan devotes an entire chapter to the portrayals of Muhammad in post-Reformation England, where he was celebrated as a political revolutionary and republican, inspired to reform both religion and society. Tolan considers how, during the Enlightenment period, Muhammad began to be seen as an historical individual, separate to his nature as a prophet. Perhaps this is best exemplified in the sympathetic translation of the Quran by George Sale, which included a "scholarly discourse on the life of Muhammad". Sale's discourse, unlike the many previous accounts of Muhammad's life, was intentionally neutral in its treatment of the Prophet as an historical, rather than religious personage. Chapter 7 examines a final stage, where Muhammad is shown to have been considered an inspirational leader, ruler, and lawgiver by Napoleon; and by Goethe, Carlyle, and Lamartine as a patriarch, hero, and Romantic "great man".

Probably the most important and innovative chapter explores the relationship between European Jewish thinkers and scholars during and after the Haskalah, and wider discourses on Islam. Tolan relates how the Jewish community, especially those committed to reforming Judaism, looked to Muhammad as a model religious reformer. Scholars like Abraham Geiger adopted and expanded earlier concepts of Muhammad as a well-meaning, but misguided Abrahamic believer, who got carried away by his own enthusiasm. Geiger's work was appreciated by his contemporaries as a paradigm shift in the study of Islam and by extension, the Prophet.

By placing Muhammad contextually within his chapters as a false idol, trickster, heresiarch, pseudoprophet, foreign prophet, republican, reformer, statesman, and then Abrahamic prophet, Tolan explores the changing European discourse about him. Tolan's exploration of these themes, sources and schools of thought represents a state of the field on the history of Islamic studies in Western Europe. One might have wished to see more consideration of the popular view of Muhammad throughout the work. Tolan's "perceptions" are largely those of a scholarly, learned, community, not those of the public watching Premierfait's plays, for example. Perhaps Tolan best sums up this problematic area himself: "This caricature [of Muhammad as a trickster] was colourful and appealing and it encountered great success among Europeans who knew nothing about the Prophet" (p. 47). The Prophet's "face" in the mind of the majority of the population of Europe therefore appears to have changed little in the centuries that Tolan has studied. Tolan's use of plays, images, sculpture and artwork throughout this monograph provides a window onto further areas of study. Future exploration of these more public depictions of the Prophet would seem the best way forward, building on the scholarship explored by Tolan in this work.

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