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Cover Page Footnote

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Psalms, Islam, and Music:

Dialogues and Divergence about David in Christian–Muslim Encounters of the Seventeenth Century

David R. M. Irving

In 1602, after a fifteen-month voyage from England, James Lancaster (1554/55–1618) arrived in Aceh, Sumatra, where he was received by Sultan Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Syah al-Mukammil (r. 1589–1604). Lancaster represented the English East India Company, which had been founded in 1600; this was the company's first voyage. He secured the right to trade, bought a large stock of pepper, and brokered diplomatic and commercial agreements on behalf of Elizabeth I. He also served as an intermediary for affectionate letters between the English and Acehnese monarchs. At the end of Lancaster's sojourn, the sultan made a curious request:

And when the Generall [Lancaster] tooke his leave, the King [Sultan Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Shah al-Mukammil] said unto him: have you the Psalmes of *David* extant among you? The Generall answered: yea, and wee sing them daily. Then said the King: I, and the rest of these Nobles about me, will sing a Psalme to God for your prosperitie, and so they did very solemnly. And after it was ended, the King said: I would heare you sing another Psalme, although in your owne language. So there being in the company some twelve of us, we sung another Psalme; And after the Psalme ended, the Generall tooke his leave of the King, the King shewing him much kindnesse at his departure: desiring God to blesse us in our journey, and to guide us safely into our owne Countrey, saying, if hereafter your ships returne to this Port, you shall find as good usage as you have done.¹

A marginal note added near this part of the narrative, as published by Samuel Purchas in 1625, reads: "Psalmes of *David* knowne to the *Mahumetans*."²

What can we make of this remarkable account? No contemporaneous Malay or Acehnese sources exist to corroborate it. The anecdote lived on in European historiography, albeit with qualifications: William Marsden related the tale in his monumental *History of Sumatra* (1783), but mentioned only the singing of a psalm by Lancaster and his men, presumably discounting the notion that the sultan and his nobles sang one first.³ John Crawfurd, in his *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820), cited the episode to support his claim that the curiosity of the "Indian

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¹ Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimes* (London: Printed by William Stansby for Henrie Fetherstone, 1625), 1: part 1, book 3, 160. This encounter is also discussed in Ian Woodfield, *English Musicians in the Age of Exploration* (Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1995), 44.

² Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 1: part 1, book 3, 160. It should be remembered that Aceh was hostile to interaction and trade with the Portuguese, and the arrival of a rival European representative may have contributed to the fostering of good relations. For a brief summary of Lancaster's voyage, see Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire 1480–1630* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 263–64.

³ William Marsden, *The History of Sumatra: Containing an Account of the Government, Laws, Customs, and Manners of the Native Inhabitants, with a Description of the Natural Productions and a Relation of the Ancient Political State of that Island* (London: Printed for the Author, 1783), 355.

islanders” was “apt now and then to take an idle and ridiculous direction”; quoting Purchas verbatim, he commented that “[i]n all likelihood, the good Mussulmans, on the above occasion, chaunted [sic] a chapter of the Alcoran [Qur’ān], mistaken by the ambassador for a psalm of David.”⁴ Yet Lancaster’s interpreter in this exchange—apparently undertaken in Arabic—was an Arabic-speaking Jewish man from the Barbary Coast, who had traveled with Lancaster from England, and who is unlikely to have misinterpreted the identity of a prominent scriptural category within Judaism.⁵

We could dismiss this account as fanciful fiction, or—if allowing that it may have occurred—assume a case of mistaken identity for the “Psalme” sung by the Acehnese. Yet the story has often been taken at face value. In recent scholarship, it has been cited as an example of empathetic dialogue between religions: Peter G. Riddell uses it to illustrate how religious differences did not always result in “automatic opposition,” remarking that what the sultan and his nobles sang was “presumably a Song of Praise to God.”⁶ Literary critic Su Fang Ng reads it as a mutual recognition of a shared tradition, and implies that the sung texts were common to both parties: “The ability of both the Acehnese and the English to recite in their respective languages lyrics ascribed to a Hebrew king who ruled a small kingdom in the Middle East nearly three millennia ago points to how both traditions incorporated classical history through monotheistic religions—Christianity and Islam—that shared a common descent from Judaism.”⁷

These observations highlight the potential for representatives of the Abrahamic faiths to participate in reciprocal acts of devotional performance through the realization of shared theological contexts. Yet this episode remains a mystery: the psalm texts of Judaism and Christianity occupy an enigmatic place within Islam, and it is rare for Muslims to read or sing them. There has so far been no attempt to interrogate the nature and content of this possible “Psalme” in Aceh, how it might have arrived there, and how it might have been transformed into performance. However, there are other cases of the psalms or dialogues about David as points of interfaith convergence in the seventeenth century, and these afford conjectural yet plausible explanations for the actions of the sultan of Aceh and his nobles. This particular exchange between Muslims and Christians, mediated by a Jewish interpreter, along with other episodes from the seventeenth century, invites us to rethink the role of the Psalms in Islam and their relationship to music.

The pivotal link is the figure of David (Daud), the Hebrew king revered in the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam variously as a musician and a prophet. Within these

⁴ John Crawfurd, *History of the Indian Archipelago: Containing an Account of the Manners, Arts, Languages, Religions, Institutions, and Commerce of its Inhabitants* (Edinburgh: A. Constable and Co., 1820), 1: 48, note. Crawfurd also recounts the story (without the hypothetical comment on the possible identity of the text sung by the Acehnese) in his later publication *A Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands & Adjacent Countries* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1856), 5.

⁵ On Lancaster’s Jewish interpreter, see Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 60.

⁶ Peter G. Riddell, “Rotterdam MS 96 D 16: The Oldest Known Surviving Qur’an from the Malay World,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 30/86 (2002): 19.

⁷ Su Fang Ng, “Global Renaissance: Alexander the Great and Early Modern Classicism from the British Isles to the Malay Archipelago,” *Comparative Literature* 58/4 (2006): 305.

religions, David is the inspiration for what can be called the “Davidic tradition,” expressed in text, sound, and ideology, from Western Europe to Southeast Asia. The set of texts associated with David is an important part of this tradition: within Judaism and Christianity these are the Psalms, human praises or entreaties to God; within Islam, the Davidic text *Zabūr*, as mentioned in the Qur’ān, is considered a divine prophecy revealed to David. The idea of David as a musician is understood differently within Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, and interpreted according to divergent theological precepts of music and sound.⁸ Diverse ideas about David within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have coexisted in certain regions, especially the Middle East; they have converged in other places as a result of European trade, colonialism, and religious missions from the sixteenth century onward, as well as engagement with Muslim visitors to early modern Europe.

A number of Christian–Muslim encounters around the Indian Ocean and in parts of Europe during the seventeenth century highlight the centrality of David to the Abrahamic faiths. When Europeans traveled to the far reaches of the Islamic world, they found that local Muslim populations revered the prophet David and the idea of the text (*Zabūr*) revealed to him. Similarly, European writers mentioned David when recounting engagements across religious boundaries in Socotra and the Maldives, while Ottoman writers in eastern Europe and Spain pondered his role in Christian traditions and discussed his connection to music. These cases of convergence and the mutual recognition of a common figure occasionally provided a basis for a certain degree of dialogue between Muslims and Christians. However, this was an exchange that was fraught with the potential for cultural misunderstandings. As Muslims and Christians began to learn more about each other’s religions in the early modern period, certain points of commonality were recognized and occasionally used to mutual advantage, but other elements began gradually to contribute to the entrenchment of difference. Nevertheless, the use of music to worship the God of Abraham occupied a middle ground that could be shared, and the figure of David and his Psalms in this respect became an object of agreement, debate, or speculation.

Among the few musicologists to have looked comparatively at David across the Abrahamic faiths are Christian Poché (1938–2010) and Amnon Shiloah (1928–2014).⁹ In comparing and connecting divergent Davidic traditions, they considered his links with the Psalms, instruments, ontologies of music, and stories about the origins of music, especially in the writings of medieval Jewish and Islamic authors. Building on their work, and bringing it into dialogue with recent research by theologians about the role of the psalm texts in mediating between Abrahamic faiths, this article seeks to examine encounters around the Indian Ocean and in parts of Europe, as well

⁸ While there are some divergences between Jewish and Christian traditions (especially in the interpretation of the Psalms), they arguably share more features than the Islamic tradition. On Kabbalistic perspectives on David’s musicianship, see Don Harrán, “David’s Lyre, Kabbalah, and the Power of Music,” in *Psalms in the Early Modern World*, ed. Linda Phyllis Austern, Kari Boyd McBride, and David L. Orvis (Farnham, England, and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2011), 257–95.

⁹ Christian Poché, “David and the Ambiguity of the Mizmar According to Arab Sources,” *World of Music* 25/2 (1983): 58–73; Amnon Shiloah, “King David and the Devil, Initiators of Two Kinds of Music,” in *Across Centuries and Cultures: Musicological Studies in Honor of Joachim Braun*, ed. Kevin C. Karnes and Levi Sheptovitsky (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010), 21–28; Amnon Shiloah, “The Davidic Traditions Concerning Music,” in Amnon Shiloah, *Music and Its Virtues in Islamic and Judaic Writings* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 4: 25–32.

as in certain Islamic empires, to consider the musicological implications of dialogues and divergence about David in the seventeenth century.

Psalms and the Davidic Tradition in the Abrahamic Faiths

The Psalms occupy a central place in the liturgy and devotional practices of Judaism and Christianity; they are revered as the title of revealed scriptures, but not read, within Islam. Muslims believe that three sacred texts preceded the revelation of the Qur'ān to the prophet Muhammad: the *Tawrāt* (Torah), revealed to the prophet Musa (Moses); the *Zabūr* (Psalms), revealed to the prophet Daud (David); and the *Injīl* (Gospels), revealed to the prophet 'Īsā (Jesus). The Qur'ān is considered the final and most important prophecy, which supplanted earlier revelations.¹⁰ The texts of the other three books, as preserved by Jews and Christians, are believed by Muslims to have been corrupted over time; this Islamic doctrine, leading ultimately to the perceived incommensurability of Islamic scriptures with those of Judaism and Christianity, is known as *tahrīf* (literally, “distortion”).¹¹ Although Islamic law acknowledges the *Ahl al-Kitāb* (“the People of the Book”) in territories brought under Islamic rule, Jewish and Christian scriptures provided the basis for relatively limited interreligious dialogue.¹² Thus, the extant Jewish and Christian texts of the Torah, Psalms, and Gospels play almost no role in Islamic theology, apart from frequent references being made to their names. However, there have been some significant exceptions in several early modern Islamic societies, as discussed below. Islam has its own traditions and stories of many prophets from the Old and New Testaments, recounted in a corpus of literature known as *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (Stories of the Prophets), which exist in multiple versions.¹³ The Muslim exegete al-Tha'labī (d. 1035), who compiled a famous collection of “Lives of the Prophets,” describes the number of suras (chapters) of the *Zabūr* in his account of the prophet David, which conforms to the 150 Psalms known in Jewish and Christian traditions.¹⁴ The traditional number of psalms in Jewish and

¹⁰ Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (London: Hurst; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 13, 61.

¹¹ Walid Saleh, “Sublime in Its Style, Exquisite in Its Tenderness’: The Hebrew Bible Quotations in Al-Biqā’r’s Qur’ān Commentary,” in *Adaptations and Innovations: Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the Late Twentieth Century, Dedicated to Professor Joel L. Kraemer*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann and Josef Stern (Paris: Peeters, 2007), 332. On *tahrīf*, see Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 223–24.

¹² Saleh writes: “Muslims, constrained as they were by the doctrine of *tahrīf*, the notion that the Bible has been falsified, ceased to use the Bible as scripture in their religious tradition after an initially close, albeit uncertain, relationship with it. The fruitful first century of Islam, in which its relation with Judaism was symbiotic and the Bible was a source of Islamic religious knowledge rather than just the scripture of another religion, came to an abrupt end. . . . Soon Muslims were discouraged from either studying [the Bible] or using it unless to defend their faith, notwithstanding the survival of early traditions that urged Muslims to relate material from the Jews.” Saleh, “Sublime in Its Style,” 332. On “the People of the Book,” see Haim Z’ew Hirschberg, “Ahl al-Kitāb,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum ([Farmington Hills, Mich.]: Thomson Gale; Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 1: 546.

¹³ On Jewish and Christian figures within Islam, see Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur’ān and Muslim Literature*, trans. Michael Robertson (Richmond, England: Curzon, 2002).

¹⁴ “[God] revealed to him [David] the Psalms in Hebrew, comprising one hundred and fifty *sūrahs*, in fifty of which He mentioned what would happen to Nebuchadnezzar and the people of Babylon. In fifty of them, He

Christian traditions (150) was evidently recognized by certain Islamic writers, even if their content was considered different.

The Book of Psalms is known as *Tehillim* in Hebrew; the term “psalm” derives (via Latin) from the Greek word *psalms*, which in turn is probably a translation of the Hebrew *mizmōr*. Found in the headings of 57 individual texts within the Book of Psalms, *mizmōr* is thought to refer generically to a song accompanied by a plucked string instrument.¹⁵ This Hebrew term is related to the Arabic words *mizmār* (pipe or wind instrument, plural *mazāmīr*) and *mazmūr*, the Arabic title given to the genre of the Psalms. Cognates of this word also exist in Syriac (*mazmōrā*) and Ethiopic (*mazmūr*).¹⁶ The Arabic terms *mizmār* and *mazmūr* are related through their common triconsonantal root *z-m-r*, which refers to a “windpipe” or “playing a flute.”¹⁷ Prior to the birth of Islam, the Psalms of David were known in Arabic translation, probably entitled *Mazmūr*, and circulated in the Arab world.¹⁸ There is one exact quotation from the Psalms in the Qur’ān: “We wrote in the Psalms [*Zabūr*], as We did in [earlier] Scripture: ‘My righteous servants shall inherit the earth’” (Qur’ān 21:105).¹⁹ This echoes a short phrase from Psalm 37:29.²⁰ Significantly, though, the title of the scripture revealed to the prophet David, as mentioned several times in the Qur’ān, is not *Mazmūr* but *Zabūr* (often translated into English as “Psalms”).²¹ In sura 4:163, God states that “to David We gave the book [*Zabūr*],” and similarly in sura 17:55: “We gave some prophets more than others: We gave David a book [*Zabūr*].”²² Unlike *Mazmūr*, however, *Zabūr* cannot be said to come from the root *z-m-r*, as a number of scholars have pointed out; *Zabūr* is a word whose root *z-b-r* reflects associations with stone or a written record.²³ The beginnings of difference in the Jewish-Christian and

mentioned what they would encounter from the Byzantines, from the people of Ayrūn. In fifty of them are admonitions and wisdom, but there is nothing of the permissible or forbidden in them. And that is His word ‘*And We gave to David Psalms.*’” Ahmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tha’labī, *‘Arā’is al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’ or Lives of the Prophets as Recounted by Abū Ishāq Ahmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha’labī*, translated and annotated by William M. Brinner (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 462–63.

¹⁵ See John Arthur Smith et al., “Psalm,” *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/48161> (accessed Jan. 25, 2012); Avigdor Herzog, “Psalms, Book of,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 16: 663–83; Arie Schippers, “Psalms,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=q3_SIM-00346 (accessed Nov. 9, 2011); Jeremy Montagu, *Musical Instruments of the Bible* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 72. See also John Arthur Smith, *Music in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Farnham, England, and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2011), 40–42.

¹⁶ J. Horowitz and Reuben Firestone, “Zabūr,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2009), 11: 372.

¹⁷ Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic–English Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 403.

¹⁸ Schippers, “Psalms.”

¹⁹ Qur’ān 21:105; from *The Qur’ān*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 208.

²⁰ Angelika Neuwirth, “Qur’anic Readings of the Psalms,” in *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 735.

²¹ Qur’ān 4:163, 17:55.

²² *The Qur’ān*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, 65, 178. In both verses, Abdel Haleem translates *Zabūr* as “book [of Psalms].”

²³ Badawi and Abdel Haleem point out that only one word from the *z-m-r* root, *zumar* (“groups of people,” and appearing in the title of sura 39), appears in the Qur’ān. See Badawi and Abdel Haleem, *Arabic–English Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage*, 403. On the *z-b-r* root, see *ibid.*, 393, and Horowitz and Firestone, “Zabūr.” See also Neuwirth, “Qur’anic Readings of the Psalms,” 735, n. 4.

Islamic views of the scriptures associated with David are embodied in the terminology of the Qur'ān. However, Shiloah has noted that the fourteenth-century Muslim mystic 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (1365–1406), in his book *The Perfect Man*, described the term *Zabūr* as “a Syrian term [for psalter] adopted by the Arabs already before the advent of Islam.”²⁴

The psalm texts from Jewish and Christian traditions were known to some Muslims in the centuries following the rise of Islam. Medieval writers in parts of the Islamic world made prose and versified translations of the biblical Psalms—one version from al-Andalus (Andalusia) was possibly from the fourth-century Latin version by Jerome²⁵—and their textual content was clearly known within certain scholarly circles. Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Kindī (ca. 801–ca. 866) quoted from Psalm 33 (verses 2 and 4) in discussing the ten-string lyre (the *nebel 'asor* of the Bible), whose invention he attributes to David.²⁶ The *Ta'rikh al-Ya'qūbi* by Aḥmad ibn abī Ya'qūb ibn Ja'far ibn Wāḍiḥ al-'Abbāsī (d. 897), known as al-Ya'qūbi, includes an account of Israelite prophets and kings; in his telling of the story of David—which, interestingly, refers to David playing the harp before Saul²⁷—several texts presenting clear parallels with the biblical Psalms are quoted: Psalms 1, 18, 148–50, and the apocryphal Psalm 151.²⁸ An early-eleventh-century text by Ibn al-Murajjā, which recommends holy sites in Jerusalem at which Muslim pilgrims should pray, contains prayers that seem to paraphrase some biblical verses, particularly from the Psalms.²⁹ Recent research has revealed rare cases of deep engagement with the Bible by Islamic theologians; for instance, Walid Saleh has shown how the fifteenth-century scholar al-Biqā'ī quoted numerous biblical psalms in his commentary on the Qur'ān.³⁰ Focusing on the Qur'ān itself, Angelika Neuwirth has highlighted numerous parallels, structural correspondences, and forms of intertextuality between the Psalms and the text of the Qur'ān's Meccan suras.³¹

Jewish and Christian understandings of the Psalms approach these texts as poems, prayers, supplications, and hymns of praise rendered by humankind to God; Christian interpretations also locate Messianic prophecy within them.³² Yet these views were considered incompatible

²⁴ Amnon Shiloah, *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (c. 900–1900): Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in Libraries of Egypt, Israel, Morocco, Russia, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, and Supplement to B X* (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2003), 118; see also Amnon Shiloah, “King David and the Devil,” 23, n. 11.

²⁵ Schippers, “Psalms.”

²⁶ Amnon Shiloah, *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (c. 900–1900): Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in Libraries of Europe and the U.S.A.* (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1979), 174.

²⁷ R. Y. Ebied and L. R. Wickham, “Al-Ya'qūbi's Account of the Israelite Prophets and Kings,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29/2 (1970): 86.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 89–90.

²⁹ In Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage*, 2nd ed. (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1999), 69.

³⁰ Saleh, “Sublime in Its Style,” 336.

³¹ Neuwirth, “Qur'anic Readings of the Psalms.” See also an appraisal of Neuwirth's pioneering research in Walid A. Saleh, “The Psalms in the Qur'an and in the Islamic Religious Imagination,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 285–86.

³² The Old Testament scholar Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932) proposed an influential set of five genres or forms within the biblical Psalms: 1. Hymns or songs of praise; 2. The People's Songs of Lament; 3. Royal Psalms; 4. The Individual's Songs of Lament; and 5. The Individual's Songs of Thanks. See J. H. Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and*

with the Islamic notion of the *Zabūr* as a scripture revealed by God through David.³³ Consequently, the circulation of psalms in Arabic involved the composition of new Islamic texts based on the tradition of the Psalms. Theologian David R. Vishanoff has recently described and analysed these “Islamic Psalms,” whose titles include the term *Zabūr*. He has shown that Muslim writers began to recompose the Psalms in the twelfth century, possibly in response to acts of Christian aggression such as the crusades; according to Vishanoff, “[t]hese Psalms stem from two principal source collections, which were rearranged and rewritten and expanded by medieval authors to produce at least four distinct texts that are extant today in at least seven different recensions.”³⁴ He states that these texts “are more like rewritten Qur’an than rewritten Bible” and they “are not widely known”; manuscripts of these texts, many yet unstudied, are emerging from multiple libraries in Europe and the Middle East.³⁵ However, they must be approached with caution, since the title *Zabūr* could refer either to medieval Islamic texts or to Arabic translations of the biblical Psalms.³⁶

Divergence about David: Musical Concepts and Terminology

In considering the role of David and his musical prowess between the Abrahamic faiths, the differences between the Arabic terms *Mazmūr* and *Zabūr*, the different understanding of these texts’ identity and content, and the equivocal nature of the word *mizmār* need to be considered in more depth. In a seminal article of 1983, Poché showed how the term *mizmār* is deeply ambiguous in Arabic sources that refer to the prophet David.³⁷ There is mention of the *mizmār*, a flute or pipe, in connection with David within the *ḥadīth*—the sayings and traditions of the prophet Muhammad. For example, within the *Riyadh as-Saaliheen*, a collection of *ḥadīth* and commentaries by Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī (1233–77), the “Book of Virtues” includes a chapter on “The Merits of Recitation of the Noble Qur’an in a Pleasant Voice”; it quotes Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī, one of the seventh-century companions of Muhammad, who reported that the prophet said to him: “In truth you have been accorded a *mizmar* worthy of the *mazamir* of al Dawud.”³⁸ Comparisons with the *mizmār* of David were among the highest praise that could be

Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2003), 18–19. Eaton (p. 8) also points out the likelihood of women’s contribution to the creation of the Psalms.

³³ David R. Vishanoff, “Why Do the Nations Rage? Boundaries of Canon and Community in a Muslim’s Rewriting of Psalm 2,” *Comparative Islamic Studies* 6 (2010): 175–76. Vishanoff notes that “for the most part, Muslims considering the literary forms of biblical Psalms or Gospels have found them incompatible with their definition of scripture as divine speech, resulting in a long history of criticism of the Christian canon.” *Ibid.*, 176.

³⁴ David R. Vishanoff, “Islamic ‘Psalms of David,’” in *Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallett (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 3: 725. See also David R. Vishanoff, “An Imagined Book Gets a New Text: Psalms of the Muslim David,” *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 22/1 (2011): 85–99.

³⁵ Vishanoff, “Islamic ‘Psalms of David,’” 727; a list of manuscripts and the institutions in which they are housed is given on pp. 727–29.

³⁶ Vishanoff, giving an extensive list of the Islamic “Psalms of David,” observes that “[t]here are doubtless many other manuscripts and perhaps other texts and recensions in existence, but they cannot always be identified from manuscript catalogues because they are often listed in the same way as ordinary Arabic translations of the biblical Psalms.” Vishanoff, “Islamic ‘Psalms of David,’” 729.

³⁷ Poché, “David and the Ambiguity of the Mizmar.”

³⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 62.

rendered to a musician. Yet this Arabic word (*mizmār*, plural *mazāmīr*) has often been interpreted not as “pipe,” but as “voice”; that is, referring to the throat of David.³⁹ Another *ḥadīth* associates the *mizmār* with Satan: it states that Abu Bakr, a companion of Muhammad, referred to a vocal performance by two young girls in the house of ‘Ā’isha (Muhammad’s wife) as “*mizmār al-shaytān* (reed-pipe of the satan).”⁴⁰ In this sense, the voice was considered to evoke the instrument. Shiloah points out that one tradition refers to Muhammad blocking his ears to shut out the sound of a *mizmār* (reed-pipe).⁴¹ There are clearly divergent interpretations about the role of the *mizmār* in Islamic musical practices: that is, whether it is voice or instrument, and whether it is legitimate or illegitimate.⁴²

While Jewish and Christian traditions see David as a musician-king who sang his Psalms to the accompaniment of a plucked string instrument, the view of David within Islam is usually of a prophet who recited divine revelation in a beautiful voice—a voice that in time became a paragon for Qur’ānic recitation.⁴³ This simple contrast already reveals differences between ontologies and genealogies of music within the Abrahamic faiths. It also raises the question of whether David was an instrumentalist at all in Islamic contexts, and whether the *mizmār* of David means a reed-pipe instrument or his voice. Significantly, the Qur’ān itself does not indicate that David played any instrument, although there are three verses that refer to him praising God and being joined or echoed by the mountains and the birds. In sura 21:79, God states: “We made the mountains and the birds celebrate Our praises with David”; similar texts can be found in sura 34:10 (“We graced David with Our favour. We said, ‘You mountains, echo God’s praises together with him, and you birds, too’”) and sura 38:17–19 (“Remember Our servant David, a man of strength who always turned to Us: We made the mountains join him in glorifying Us at sunset and sunrise; and the birds, too, in flocks, all echoed his praise”).⁴⁴ These references to the birds and the landscape echoing David’s praises to God seem to imply vocalization or heightened voice, resounding in nature, rather than any particular instrument. They also highlight the fact that the relationship between birdsong and the definition of music—as well as the origins of music—is as complex an issue within Islamic philosophy as it is within Western.⁴⁵ Another link between birdsong and David can be found in the twelfth-century Persian poem *The Conference of the Birds* by Sufī Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār (ca. 1142–ca.

³⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁰ Amnon Shiloah, *Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-Cultural Study* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 32.

⁴¹ Shiloah, *Music in the World of Islam*, 32.

⁴² See Poché, “David and the Ambiguity of the Mizmar”; and Shiloah, “King David and the Devil,” 25.

⁴³ For a compilation of the various Islamic perspectives of David, see Jean-Louis Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans* (Paris: Cerf, 1999).

⁴⁴ *The Qur’ān*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, 206, 273, 291.

⁴⁵ On the Western philosophical debates over birdsong and music’s origins, see Matthew Head, “Birdsong and the Origins of Music,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 122/1 (1997): 1–23, and Elizabeth Eva Leach, *Sung Birds: Music, Nature, and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 2007). Amnon Shiloah quotes a 1996 story from the French newspaper *Le Monde*, which reported that the Taliban—following their conquest of Afghanistan—reputedly decreed that all caged birds should be freed, citing Islamic prohibitions of listening to music. Shiloah, however, questioned the reliability of the news source and the interpretation of the story. See Shiloah, “Music and Religion in Islam,” *Acta Musicologica* 69/2 (1997): 143.

1220): the nightingale is connected to David, with the request that it sing like him.⁴⁶ The mimetic process is thereby reversed: the Qurʾān implies that the birds imitate David, rather than humans taking inspiration from the birds for their musical art (a popular trope in early modern European writings on music).

The Jewish and Christian traditions stress David's connection to string instruments, and he is frequently depicted with plucked string instruments and—in some Baroque paintings—with bowed string instruments. Still, an Islamic tradition of David refers to him as a player of the *ʿūd* (lute); according to this tradition, the instrument was “invented by Lamekh, Jubal's father, thereafter destroyed by the Flood, and eventually reinvented by David, who hung it in the Temple, where it remained until Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem.”⁴⁷ Poché notes that “contemporary Arab musicology considers the *ʿūd* to be the legitimate instrument of King David without raising the slightest critique.”⁴⁸ There are other early Islamic references to David playing a string instrument. The Andalusian Arab writer Ibn ʿAbd al-Rabbīh (860–940), based in Córdoba, wrote a treatise on the effects of music and the Islamic debates over its permissibility, mentioning the *miʿzafa* (an Arab harp of the ninth and tenth centuries) in connection with David.⁴⁹ In a section on “The Disagreement of People About [the propriety of] Singing,” he refers to David's use of this instrument when reciting the Psalms:

And ʿUbaid ibn Umair [Abu ʿĀsim] al-Laiṭhī [a contemporary of the prophet Muhammad], relates that David the Prophet (Upon him be peace) had a cithara (*miʿzafa*) on which he would play when he read the psalms, in order that the *jinn*, and men, and birds might gather to him. Then he wept, and those around him wept also. And the People of the Book . . . find this in their books.⁵⁰

The *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* (Stories of the Prophets) make reference to other instruments that had a connection to David, but which were used in opposition to him. In his story of David, al-Thaʿlabī discusses David's musical abilities in detail, citing his beautiful voice, used in reciting the Psalms. David used “seventy melodies” and recited his Psalms in the desert, surrounded by “the scholars of the Children of Israel . . . the people would stand behind the scholars, the *jinn* [supernatural creatures] behind the people, and the demons behind the *jinn*.”⁵¹ David possessed the powers of entrancing wild animals with his song: “Wild beasts and beasts of prey would draw near and be seized by the neck, while birds shielded him from the sun's rays, the flowing water stood still, the wind died down, and the heavenly pipes, lutes, and cymbals did not make

⁴⁶ “Welcome, dear nightingale—from your sweet throat / Pour out the pain of lovers note by note. / Like David in love's garden gently sigh; / There sing the songs that make men long to die, / O, sing as David did, and with your song / Guide home man's suffering and deluded throng.” Farid Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 30.

⁴⁷ Shiloah, “King David and the Devil,” 22.

⁴⁸ Poché, “David and the Ambiguity of the Mizmar,” 71.

⁴⁹ On the *miʿzafa*, see Christian Poché, “Miʿzafa,” in *The Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, 2nd ed., ed. Laurence Libin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁰ Henry George Farmer, “Music: The Priceless Jewel [part 2],” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1941): 131. In the translation, Farmer qualifies “the People of the Book” as “[i.e. the Jews],” but this term refers broadly to Jews, Christians, and Sabeans. See Hirschberg, “Ahl al-Kitāb.”

⁵¹ Al-Thaʿlabī, *Arāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ or Lives of the Prophets*, 463.

a sound.”⁵² However, the devil Iblīs was intent on distracting listeners from David’s voice; so he and his demons “arranged pipes and lutes and strings and instruments of kinds like David’s sounds. The foolish among the people heard them and inclined toward them and were deceived by them.”⁵³ In other words, the voice of David provided an opening to a transcendent and sacred world, but unconscious listeners were distracted by worldly sounds of instruments. The eleventh-century Persian Sufi mystic Abū al-Hasan ‘Ali al-Hujwīrī (d. ca. 1077) discussed this story in *The Uncovering of the Veiled for People of Heart*, in a chapter on audition. Two types of music emerged: the music of David’s voice (*mizmār*) and the music of Iblīs (the lute and the reed-pipe *mizmār*), corresponding to two types of listener: “those who hear the spiritual meaning and those who hear the material sound.”⁵⁴

The Jewish and Christian traditions of David as a king and a musician include a diverse array of instruments, including harp, psaltery, organ, lyre, and bowed instruments, as shown in a rich iconographic repertory. Although graven images of prophets are rare within Islam, they exist in certain fields of art, especially Persian and Mughal, but it is rare to find any that shed light on Islamic thought about David’s instrumental practices. Illustrated editions of the *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* (Lives of the Prophets), if they showed David at all, most commonly displayed him as a warrior, emphasizing his slaying of Goliath (Jalut).⁵⁵ Within Islamic iconography, Solomon (Sulaiman) appears to be depicted more often than David, usually as an ideal monarch.⁵⁶ Yet there are two Islamic depictions of David as an instrumentalist recently discussed by art historians, both from Mughal traditions, which have significance for musicology. One, dating from between 1610 and 1640, clearly shows European influence, with David playing a European harp; this is attributed to Manohar, a painter in the service of Jahangir (Fig. 1).⁵⁷

According to the David Collection in Copenhagen, which houses this artwork, the painter was inspired by a Flemish engraving but removed the background and presented David within a painted Mughal border.⁵⁸ Another seventeenth-century Mughal painting, from Bijapur (Vijayapur, Karnataka), is in the Islamic tradition and shows David charming the birds, goats, and a lamb with his *mizmār* (Fig. 2).⁵⁹

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid. See also Shiloah, *Music in the World of Islam*, 33.

⁵⁴ Shiloah, “King David and the Devil,” 27–28; Shiloah, “The Davidic Traditions Concerning Music,” 31–32; Shiloah, *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (c. 900–1900): Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in Libraries of Egypt, Israel, Morocco, Russia, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, and Supplement to B X*, 87–88.

⁵⁵ See Rachel Milstein, Karin Rührdanz, and Barbara Schmitz, *Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1999).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ The David Collection, “Miniature Pasted on an Album Leaf from the Period of Shah Jahan. ‘King David Playing the Harp’: India, Mughal, 1610–20 (miniature) and ca. 1640 (leaf),” <http://www.davidmus.dk/en/collections/islamic/dynasties/mughal-india/art/31-2001> (accessed Aug. 28, 2015). See also Stuart Cary Welch, *The Emperors’ Album: Images of Mughal India* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 65.

⁵⁸ The David Collection, “Miniature.”

⁵⁹ Smithsonian Institution (Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery), “King David Charming Birds and Beasts,” <http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/singleObject.cfm?ObjectNumber=F1907.194> (accessed Aug. 31, 2015).



Figure 1. “King David Playing the Harp,” India, Mughal; 1610–20 (miniature) and c. 1640 (leaf). Reproduced by kind permission of The David Collection, Copenhagen. Inventory number 31/2001; photograph by Pernille Klemp.

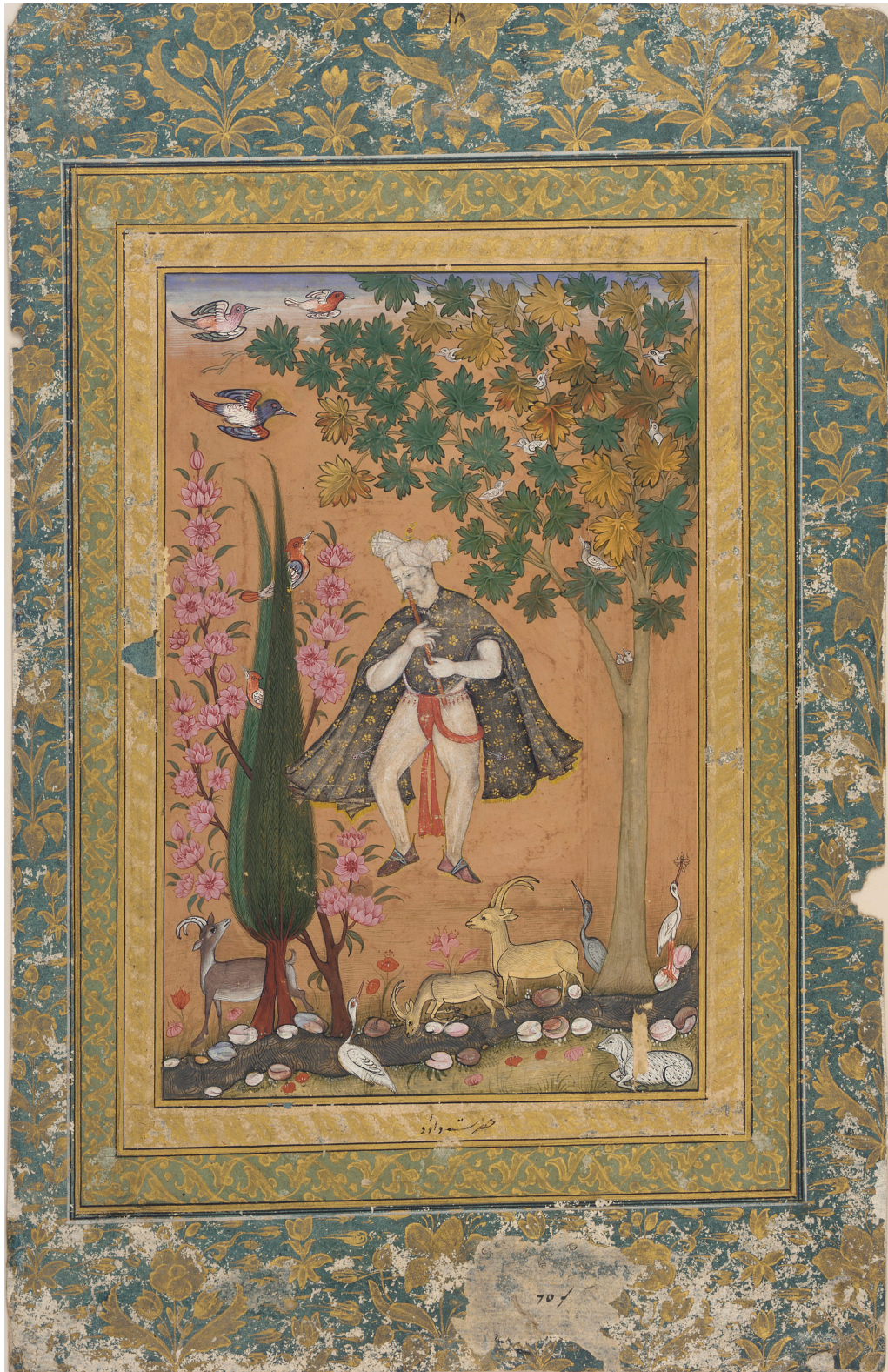


Figure 2. “King David Charming Birds and Beasts,” Bijapur, Karnataka, Deccan, India. Mughal, seventeenth century. Reproduced by kind permission of the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1907.194.

Ebba Koch points out the connections with Orpheus and his powers to enchant through music; many characteristics of Orpheus were applied to David in early Islamic understandings of the prophet.⁶⁰ On the level of external features, David has a turban and a moustache, rather than the crown and beard usually seen in Christian illustrations. This kind of depiction of the prophet David—that is, as an instrumentalist, and specifically a player of the *mizmār*—is rare in Islamic artwork; no other has emerged to date. The strictures against graven images within Islam and the controversy over David’s instrumental practice could have discouraged representations of this kind.

Of course, the legitimacy of the use of instruments and the definition of music are both complex issues within Islamic philosophy and theology. As illustrated by Lois Ibsen al-Farūqī, there is a broad spectrum of sound-art practices in the Islamic world, ranging from the use of heightened voice to recite religious texts (such as the call to prayer and Qur’ānic recitation, which are not considered *mūsīqā*) to controversial forms of *mūsīqā* such as instrumental and vocal improvisational practices, metered songs and instrumental music, pre-Islamic traditions, and forbidden genres such as sensuous music.⁶¹ The question of David’s instrumental practice presents a contrast between the Islamic tradition and the traditions of Judaism and Christianity, although all acknowledge him as being endowed with the Platonic power to affect the emotions of listeners.

To sum up the context: the shared heritage of the idea of King David or the prophet Daud between the Abrahamic faiths—as well as the divergences in the Davidic tradition of devotional musical practice—have had a significant impact on the way in which music is viewed within Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religious practices. The Psalms provide musical foundations for Judaism and Christianity, but within Islam the divine text revealed to the prophet David, which he recited or cantillated in a “beautiful voice,” is generally considered lost. The Arabic terms *Mazmūr* and *Zabūr* are both used to refer to writings associated with David, but only *Zabūr* refers to the prophetic text that was divinely revealed to David, as stated in the Qur’ān. According to the traditions of all three Abrahamic faiths, David was a great singer, but from the Islamic perspective he was not customarily associated with a string instrument (if any), although he is connected with the (re)invention of the *ūd*. Rather, he is accorded the *mizmār*, which is sometimes understood as the reed instrument of the same name, but most often interpreted as “beautiful voice.” These variations in views about David underpinned and inspired interesting questions when representatives of different cultures came into contact with one another.

⁶⁰ Ebba Koch, “The Mughal Emperor as Solomon, Majnun, and Orpheus, or the Album as a Think Tank for Allegory,” *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World* 27 (2010): 286–87. This is true of Jewish depictions of late antiquity too; a sixth-century mosaic in Gaza (rediscovered in the 1960s) depicts David as Orpheus. See Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements: Themes, Issues, and Trends: Selected Studies* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 72–74.

⁶¹ Lois Ibsen al-Farūqī, “Music, Musicians and Muslim Law,” *Asian Music* 17/1 (1985): 7–11; see especially the discussion and table on pp. 7–8 of the “hierarchy of sound-art expression” or “*handasah al sawt* (artistic engineering of sound).”

David and Instruments at the Interface of Cultures

In Christian Europe, David was revered as a king, musician, and ancestor of Jesus Christ. Several seventeenth-century Arab travel accounts report on the Jewish and Christian tradition of David being a player of a string instrument, but question the authenticity of psalm texts sung by Christians. For example, Mohammad bin abd al-Wahab al-Ghassani, a Moroccan who visited Spain in 1690–91 on a diplomatic mission, described several musical encounters that referenced the figure of David, observing in Utrera:

[T]hat evening they brought to our residence some of the friars who sing in their churches. They brought with them their musical instruments, one of which they call the harp, which is coarsely shaped and with many strings. They reported that it was the instrument of the Prophet David, on him and on our Prophet be God's prayer and peace. I saw one like it in one of the statues they have in their houses and residences which they *claim* is of the Prophet David, peace be upon him.⁶² [emphasis added]

His comment that the friars told him explicitly that the harp was “the instrument of the Prophet David” is striking; perhaps the friars were deliberately highlighting a shared prophet, and it is possible, if not likely, that they knew of David's role in Islam. Later in his account, al-Ghassani described seeing a statue of King David by the sculptor Juan Bautista Monegro at El Escorial (Fig. 3), adding that “David held in his hand an instrument that he invented, and that they *claim* [emphasis added] he used when he recited his psalms. They called it a harp [*irba*]. This harp is a big instrument of wood, as tall as a man. It has around forty-six strings and produces beautiful melodies in the hands of a good player.”⁶³ While al-Ghassani evidently disapproved of graven images, he did not dispute David's invention of a string instrument; nevertheless, he appears unconvinced of its use to accompany psalms. He goes on to say that the harp was frequently used in domestic contexts, especially by women and girls, and especially in noble houses; he then points out its use in sacred spaces: “They also use it in their chapels, churches, and other places of their infidelity. It is the most commonly used instrument for musical pleasure [*tarab*].”⁶⁴ The boundaries between pleasure and worship in Christian Spain must have appeared blurred to al-Ghassani.

Al-Ghassani entered the basilica of El Escorial and described the organ, although again he remained skeptical about the nature of what was sung to its accompaniment:

It is a huge instrument with big bellows and pipes of plated lead, producing strange sounds. In this and other locations of the church, and in accompaniment to this instrument, they chant what they *claim* to be the psalms of David, peace be upon him, and the Torah, which was revealed to Moses, on him and on our Prophet, peace and prayer.⁶⁵ [emphasis added]

⁶² Nabil Matar, ed. and trans., *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 126.

⁶³ Matar, *In the Lands of the Christians*, 183.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.



Figure 3. Juan Bautista Monegro (1545–1621), Statue of King David, façade of the Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Spain. Photo by Jebulon, dedicated to Universal Public Domain (Creative Commons CC0 1.0). Internet: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1f/Statue_king_David_San_Lorenzo_del_Escorial_Spain.jpg> (accessed Sept. 1, 2015).

The Moroccan ambassador thus revealed his skepticism on three points: first, that a statue could represent David; second, that David used the harp in reciting psalms; and third, that the texts recited by Christians in Spain were the Psalms of David. Yet he was evidently sufficiently intrigued by points of convergence—the recognition of a prophet common to the religions of himself and his hosts—and divergence in traditions to make such observations in his travelogue.

While al-Ghassani described the organ as an instrument used to accompany the singing of Davidic psalms by Christians, another seventeenth-century Muslim observer wrote about it as an instrument with direct links to David. The Ottoman writer and traveler Evliya Çelebi (1611–82) visited the Hungarian town of Érsekújvár (now Nové Zámky, in modern-day Slovakia) following the successful Ottoman siege in 1668. He visited the Protestant church and observed:

Inside there were no statues or idols. The walls were all pearly white, with crucifixes here and there. Over a sort of pavilion there was an organ of David. The grand vizier had his captive priest play it so he could hear it: it had such a soulful and mournful sound that it dumbfounded the listener. Afterward the Muslim ghazis [warriors] broke it to pieces and the organ-loft was made into a *müezzins'* gallery.⁶⁶

Evliya Çelebi appears to have admired the organ and to have associated David directly with it, as a player and even as its inventor. In another part of his writings, which gives an extensive description of many types of instruments known to him (mostly Turkish instruments), he offers the following details:

The *urghanun* [organ]. An old invention. It is said that formerly David (Dāwud) accompanied his psalms with it. It is generally found in European countries. There you will find at every convent and church a large organ with three hundred pipes and two pairs of bellows, each moved by ten monks. . . . They are in the habit of castrating young boys in order to preserve the purity of their voices. These boys are made to stand upon the upper part of the bellows with which they rise and descend, singing the verses of the psalter to a mournful melody (*maqām*) called *rahāwī*. . . . This melody is so called from the town of al-Ruhā (Edessa), where David invented this instrument, which absolutely must be heard to have an adequate idea of it.⁶⁷

Evliya Çelebi also wrote in glowing terms of the organ in St. Stephen's Cathedral, Vienna, giving a detailed technical description and calling it “the miracle of David.”⁶⁸ Following this description, he muses on the issue of the psalm texts sung by the Austrians, stating that the Austrian Christians have a false belief that David “accompanied himself on the organ while reciting the Psalms in a sad voice.”⁶⁹ He disputes this, saying that David recited the Psalms in a melodious voice; while the organ is a marvelous instrument, and “the miracle of David, . . . one now knows across the entire world that David recited the Psalms in a high voice.”⁷⁰ Although David has been depicted with an organ in many European artworks, from the Middle Ages onwards, the instrument is more commonly associated with St. Cecilia in the Christian

⁶⁶ In Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 65.

⁶⁷ Henry George Farmer, “Turkish Instruments of Music in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (1936): 26.

⁶⁸ See Mahmoud Raghīb, “Descriptions d’orgues données par quelques anciens auteurs turcs,” *Revue de musicologie* 10/30 (1929): 102–04.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

tradition.⁷¹ The origins of the Muslim tradition connecting David and the organ are worthy of further investigation.⁷²

While certain aspects of the Islamic views of David, his revealed scripture (*Zabūr*), and the complex relationship with instruments can be glimpsed through the writings of Muslim travelers to Europe, they can also be discerned, occasionally, within the archival record of interactions between Europeans and Muslims throughout the Islamic world. Once Europeans had insinuated themselves into the trade networks of the Indian Ocean, convergences of Davidic traditions were sometimes recognized and discussed. Ian Woodfield has identified a fascinating episode of mutual recognition at Socotra, at the mouth of the Gulf of Aden, when Sir Thomas Roe's ship, en route to India, stopped there in 1615. A small boat carrying William Keeling and a wind band went to shore, where they were received by Amr-bin-Said, sultan of Socotra. Roe reported the following:

Hearing our hoy-boyes [shawms] in the Generals boat, hee [the sultan] asked if they were the *Psalmes* of *David*? and being answered yes: hee replied, it was the invention of the Devill, who did invent it: for King *David*, who before prayed God with his lips and heart in devotion, but after it was left to sencelesse Instruments [sic].⁷³

This dialogue, as published by Samuel Purchas, might well be taken at face value. This ruler had had several previous encounters with English visitors, had heard English music, and had even engaged in theological debate with them.⁷⁴ In light of the discussion of etymological ambiguity above, however, it may be possible that the sultan's question referred not to the Psalms (*Mazmūr*) but in fact to the "hoy-boyes" (shawms, which as double-reed instruments may have resembled the *mizmār* in their shape and sound), querying whether they were the *mizmār* (reed-pipes) of David. It seems more likely that the sultan would have said "*mizmār*" (or the plural *mazāmīr*), as he, like other Islamic rulers, would have referred to the sacred text revealed to the prophet David as *Zabūr*. Perhaps Roe's interpreter misunderstood *mizmār* or *mazāmīr* as the related term *Mazmūr*, a term used by Arabic-speaking Christians to refer to biblical psalms.

This was apparently an episode of some note, since a year later, Roe's chaplain, Edward Terry, repeated the story and elaborated on it:

The immediate yeere before our English fleet touching at this Iland [sic], learned this Apothegme from the petie King thereof, who comming [sic] to the water side, and hearing some of our winde Instruments, asked if they played Davids Psalmes (of which, being a Mahometan, he had heard.) Hee was answered by one that stood by, they did; He replied thus, That it was an ill invention of him that first mingled Musicke with Religion; for before (said he) God was worshipped in heart, but by this in sound. I insert not this relation to

⁷¹ See John A. Rice, "Beyond the Saint Cecilia Legend and Liturgy: The Organ as Emblem," chap. 2 of a projected monograph, *Saint Cecilia in the Renaissance: The Emergence of a Musical Icon*; this version posted on Academia.edu on St. Cecilia's Day, Nov. 22, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/11794958/Beyond_the_Saint_Cecilia_Legend_and_Liturgy_The_Organ_as_Emblem (accessed Jan. 31, 2016). See also Henry George Farmer, *The Organ of the Ancients from Eastern Sources (Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic)* (London: W. Reeves, 1931), 8.

⁷² It is interesting to note that the Arabic term *mizmār* was applied to "organ pipe" in a twelfth-century Arabic treatise on the building of organs; this text alternates between the terms *mizmār* and *surṅāy* to refer to "organ pipe." Farmer, *The Organ of the Ancients*, 94, 98.

⁷³ In Woodfield, *English Musicians*, 166 (original in Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 1: part 1, book 4, 540).

⁷⁴ See *ibid.*, 165.

condemne musick in Churches, Let him that bids us prayse the Lord with stringed Instruments and Organs, plead the Cause.⁷⁵

This anecdote is inserted in a passage that relates how Roe's ship was aiming for Socotra, but was blown off course and missed landing there altogether. One wonders why he chose to repeat it: Terry had been told about this incident and it clearly interested him. His parenthetical comment that the sultan had heard of the Psalms because he was a Muslim suggests that such an observation was becoming commonplace, at least in seventeenth-century travel literature.

The key elements of this story are that David served as a point of intersection between Christianity and Islam, and that the sultan's own theological concerns over the acceptability of music (especially instrumental music) in worship resonated with similar debates within Christianity.⁷⁶ The use of instruments in worship was as controversial in some forms of Protestant Christianity (e.g., Calvinism) as in Islam.⁷⁷ Terry does not condemn instruments (possibly to reinforce to the reader his own theological standpoint); his authority supporting the use of instruments in worship is the psalmist David, to whom he appeals as an advocate, and he quotes almost word for word from the King James Bible's text of Psalm 150:4. Nevertheless, for his eclectic European readership, undoubtedly representing a range of confessional backgrounds, Terry adds an extra dimension to the debate over appropriate forms of music in Christian worship by referring to the perspective of a Muslim.

Translations of the Biblical Psalms in Islamic Empires

Even if the sultan of Socotra was referring to an instrument (*mizmār*) rather than the psalm texts (*Mazmūr*, or *Zabūr*), it is evident that other early modern Islamic rulers knew the biblical texts themselves, at least to some extent. Translations of the biblical Psalms circulated in the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires in this era, and while they appear to have been limited to elite and circumscribed readerships, they illustrate the reception of these texts among the scholarly circles of major Islamic cultures. From the mid-sixteenth century onward, with the burgeoning of Christian missions throughout the world, the abundance of printed religious books flowing out from the presses of Europe and the production of scriptural translations had already sparked the interest of certain rulers and intellectuals in South Asia. On April 14, 1582, the Mughal emperor Akbar wrote in a letter to Philip II of Spain:

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 166–67 (original in Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 2: part 1, book 9, 1467).

⁷⁶ While this version of the incident seems to refer to "Musicke" in a broad sense rather than instruments, it should be noted that at this time the term "the Music" in ecclesiastical contexts often referred to the band of instrumentalists and singers.

⁷⁷ For an overview of Psalms in the Calvinist context, see Daniel Trocmé-Latter, "The Psalms as a Mark of Protestantism: The Introduction of Liturgical Psalm-singing in Geneva," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 20/2 (2011): 145–63.

It has reached our august ear that divine books like the Torah, the Gospel (*Injil*) and the Psalms (*Zabur*) have been rendered into the Arabic and Persian languages; if these books, so translated or not, from which general benefit would follow, are available in that country, these may be sent to us.⁷⁸

Akbar was known widely for his theological curiosity, and Woodfield has described him as being “essentially a free-thinker in matters of belief”; this interest was continued by his successor Jahangir, who in 1610 even asked for three of his nephews to be baptized (although they remained Christians for just three years).⁷⁹ In 1580 three Jesuits presented a copy of Plantin’s polyglot Bible to Akbar (printed in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, and Syriac); perhaps this gift contributed to his request for translations into Arabic and Persian.

In the Safavid Empire, Shah ‘Abbās I ordered a translation of the Psalms into Persian in 1616; this was undertaken by the Portuguese Catholic (Carmelite) bishop of Isfahan, with the assistance of three Islamic mullahs and a Jewish rabbi, and completed in 1618.⁸⁰ Copies of several different translations of the Psalms survive; some are held in the Bodleian Library and St. John’s College, Oxford.⁸¹ More than a century later, Nadir Shah, ruler of the Safavid Empire, initiated an interfaith translation project that aimed to produce Persian texts of the Torah, Psalms, Gospels, and even the Qur’ān itself (probably an interlinear translation). This project was undertaken by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars, and was completed in 1741 at Isfahan.⁸²

Selections of the biblical Psalms were translated into Turkish for a Muslim readership in around 1550 by the Sufi scholar Ahmed bin Mustafa, also known as Le’ālī (d. 1563).⁸³ Although it is not known whether translations of biblical texts were recited in heightened voice by Muslims in Mughal India or Persia, archival evidence suggests that this may have happened in Turkey. The psalm settings of ‘Alī Ufkī (1610–ca. 1675), a prominent musician in the seventeenth-century Ottoman court, are now widely known. This man, born Wojciech Bobowski (latinized as Albertus Bobovius) in Lvov, Poland, was captured by Ottoman forces at an early age and taken to Istanbul, where he converted to Islam. He became one of the most important interpreters and musicians at the seventeenth-century Ottoman court, and produced several music scores in Western staff notation, written from right to left.⁸⁴ One of these is an important collection of court music (held in the British Library); another is a manuscript (now in the

⁷⁸ Quoted in M. Athar Ali, “Muslims’ Perception of Judaism and Christianity in Medieval India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 33/1 (1999): 247; this source is also discussed in Walter J. Fischel, “The Bible in Persian Translation: A Contribution to the History of Bible Translations in Persia and India,” *Harvard Theological Review* 45/1 (1952): 19.

⁷⁹ Woodfield, *English Musicians*, 199, 202.

⁸⁰ See Kenneth J. Thomas and Fereyduun Vahman, “BIBLE vii. Persian Translations,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1989), 4: 209–13.

⁸¹ See Emilie Savage-Smith, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts at St John’s College, Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 95–97.

⁸² David Yeroushalmi, *The Jews of Iran in the Nineteenth Century: Aspects of History, Community, and Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), xxxvi.

⁸³ See Bruce G. Privratsky, “A History of Turkish Bible Translations: Annotated Chronology with Historical Notes and Suggestions for Further Research,” Version S (April 2014), <https://historyofturkishbible.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/turkish-bible-history-version-s-in-preparation.pdf> (accessed Aug. 31, 2015), 2, 8–9. Privratsky (p. 8, n. 30) cites the draft of a forthcoming article by Sadik Yazar, “Osmanlı Döneminde Zebur Tercümeleri ve Le’ālī (Ahmed b. Mustafa)’nin Tercümesi.”

⁸⁴ For the biography of ‘Alī Ufkī, see Owen Wright, “Ufkī, ‘Alī,” *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51142> (accessed Jan. 28, 2012).

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris) containing musical settings of the first 14 biblical Psalms, translated into Turkish verse.⁸⁵ Another text of ‘Alī Ufķī’s psalm translations appears to have come to England: the orientalist Thomas Hyde (1636–1703), in charge of the Bodleian Library from 1665 to 1701, noted that “*I have the Psalms of David in Turkish, writ with his own Hand.*”⁸⁶ (However, the text’s location is yet to be confirmed, and also the question of whether or not it contained music notation.) Some of ‘Alī Ufķī’s writings were also taken to the Netherlands—and perhaps knowledge of his musical settings of Turkish verse translations of some of the Psalms—which may account for an interesting comment by Adriaan Reeland (or Reelant, 1676–1718) in the preface to his treatise *Of the Mahometan Religion*: “The Mahometans also sing the Psalms of David, as we Christians do.”⁸⁷

An examination of the notated melodies reveals that they are adapted practically note for note from the Genevan Psalter, to which ‘Alī Ufķī must have had access. The Genevan Psalter likely reached ‘Alī Ufķī in printed form; alternatively, he may have transcribed the melodies from memory.⁸⁸ It seems likely that ‘Alī Ufķī would have performed these pieces with local musicians. The psalms of ‘Alī Ufķī have recently featured in a number of performance projects that seek to combine elements of musical devotions from the Abrahamic faiths. For example, an imaginative reconstruction of such a performance, involving singers, Turkish instruments, and whirling dervishes, was recently made by the German ensemble Sarband, directed by Vladimir Ivanoff.⁸⁹ The same group has collaborated with the British ensemble the King’s Singers to record the program *Sacred Bridges*, featuring the music of psalm traditions from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, the ensemble Dūnya has released an album entitled *The Psalms of Ali Ufki*, and the Pera Ensemble has released the CD *Trialog: Music for the One God* and a book/CD entitled *One God: Psalms and Hymns from Orient & Occident*.⁹¹ An underlying motive of these productions appears to be a desire to combat and contest Islamophobia within the Western world by pointing out spiritual connections and affinities between the Abrahamic faiths,

⁸⁵ The manuscript is held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Suppl. turc 472. For a study of this source, see Cem Behar, *Ali Ufki ve Mezmurlar* (Istanbul: Pan, 1990), and Judith I. Haug, *Der Genfer Psalter in den Niederlanden, Deutschland, England und dem Osmanischen Reich (16.–18. Jahrhundert)* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 2010), 481–578. Jacob Spon and George Wheler saw a manuscript of these psalms in the possession of Galland in Istanbul in the late seventeenth century: “M. Galland . . . a plusieurs choses écrites de la main de cēt Haly-beg, & entre autres une bonne partie des Pseaumes, qu’il a mis en vers Turcs & notez en Musique.” Jacob Spon and George Wheler, *Voyage d’Italie, de Dalmatie, de GRECE et du Levant, fait aux années 1675. & 1676* (Amsterdam: Henry & Theodore Boom, 1679), 1: 197.

⁸⁶ In Adriaan Reeland, *Four Treatises Concerning the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Mahometans* (London: Printed by J. Darby for B. Lintott, 1712), 106.

⁸⁷ Ibid., in “The Author’s Preface” to “Of the Mahometan Religion, Two Books,” 11. Original text: “Cantant etiam Mahometistae Psalmos David, sicut nos Christiani.” Adriaani Reeland, *De Religione Mohammedica libri duo* (Utrecht: Broedelet, 1705), “Praefatio,” n.p., section VI.

⁸⁸ Bruce Privratsky, “A History of Turkish Bible Translations,” 27.

⁸⁹ See “Sarband & Chorakademie Dortmund: Sacred Bridges,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feNjNHEqq8> (accessed Jan. 15, 2012).

⁹⁰ The King’s Singers and Sarband, *Sacred Bridges*, Signum Records SIGCD065, 2005.

⁹¹ Dūnya, *The Psalms of Ali Ufki*, CD (no catalogue number), 2006. See further details about this album at <http://dunya.bandcamp.com/album/the-psalms-of-ali-ufki>, and information about the ensemble at <http://www.dunyainc.org/> (accessed Sept. 1, 2015); Pera Ensemble, *Trialog: Music for the One God*, Berlin Classics 0300532BC, 2013; Pera Ensemble, *One God: Psalms and Hymns from Orient & Occident*, Ludi Musici LM 003, 2009.

and highlighting to Western audiences the strong focus on music (including many types of instruments) as part of Sufi devotions.

Besides these concert and recorded productions of performing psalms between Christianity and Islam, which emphasize the historical dimension of cross-cultural bridges in the ostensibly neutral and relatively secular environment of a Western concert setting, some Christians in Pakistan today are using psalms to engage with Sufi communities in their own spaces. In 2012, Eric Sarwar, a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, led a group of Christian singers and instrumentalists in singing psalms in Sindhi translation at the Sufi shrine of Shah Latif Bhattai, at the invitation of the Sufi guardians, an event that has led to further devotional-musical interactions between these Christian and Sufi communities.⁹² Such forms of exchange appear to echo the seventeenth-century encounters discussed here, with theological affinities being noticed by Christians and Muslims alike through the medium of the biblical Psalms, with reference to the shared tradition of David as a key symbol for the practice of devotional music.

The Mystery of the Acehnese “Psalmes”

The discussions of contexts and concepts of the role of psalms in Islam bring us full circle to reconsider the mystery of the Acehnese “Psalmes” sung by the sultan and his nobles. How did the sultan come to know a psalm, and what might this have been, given the multiplicity of terms, meanings, and interpretations that surround the Davidic traditions? It is impossible to know exactly what the sultan and his nobles recited to Lancaster and his men. However, there appear to be three distinct possibilities: first, that the sultan and his nobles had learnt a Genevan psalm from Dutch Calvinist traders or navigators who preceded Lancaster; second, that it was a cantillation of one of the medieval *Zabūr* texts (“Islamic Psalms”), as identified by David Vishanoff; third, that it was the devotional practice of *zikir* (*dhikr*), as still practiced today in Aceh (known as *dikir* or *diki*). Let us briefly consider each of these in turn.

A few years before Lancaster’s visit to Aceh, the Dutch admiral Frederick de Houtman (1571–1627) was held captive there for two years (1599–1601). De Houtman learnt the Malay language and published the first Malay wordbook in Europe in 1603 (although the word “psalm” does not appear in it).⁹³ In his account of his captivity, he gave an extensive report on theological discussions he had with his captors, and mentioned that Acehnese theologians referred to the name of the prophet David, among others, when attempting to convert him to Islam.⁹⁴ As a Dutch Protestant, he must have known the Genevan Psalter—the primary music book of the

⁹² Eric Sarwar, “Psalms and Sufis: Biblical Psalms in an Islamic Context,” *Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith* 2/1 (2014), <http://www.artsandchristianfaith.org/index.php/journal/article/view/10/7> (accessed Aug. 31, 2015). See also Joan Huyser-Honig, “Singing the Psalms Creates Christian–Muslim Bonds,” *Calvin Institute of Christian Worship*, Jan. 7, 2013, <http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/singing-the-psalms-creates-christian-muslim-bonds/> (accessed Sept. 1, 2015).

⁹³ Frederick de Houtman, *Spraeck ende woord-boeck inde Maleysche ende Madagaskarsche talen, met vele Arabische ende Turcsche woorden* (Amsterdam: Jan Evertsz. Cloppenburch, 1603).

⁹⁴ In Anthony Reid, *Witnesses to Sumatra: A Traveller’s Anthology* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), 45. On the other hand, the French traveler François Martin, who was in Aceh in 1602, wrote that “the Muhammadans believe that there is one God who made Heaven and earth, and that there have been three great prophets in the world: Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad,” omitting David. Reid, *Witnesses to Sumatra*, 61.

Calvinist Church in the Netherlands—especially in its standard Dutch-language version by Petrus Dathenus (Pieter Datheen, ca. 1531–88).⁹⁵ It seems likely that he would have sung psalms to comfort and sustain himself, and plausible that he may have taught some to his captors, or at least raised local interest in these texts.⁹⁶

Second, it is not impossible that religious texts such as the medieval *Zabūr*—or, less likely, Arabic translations of the biblical Psalms—were transmitted either from Istanbul to Aceh, or directly from Arabia via traders, religious teachers, or pilgrims returning from the Hajj. Evidence from the late-sixteenth-century writings of Hamzah al-Fansuri, a Sufi mystic from northern Sumatra who is known to have made the pilgrimage to Mecca, supports the hypothesis of the transmission of a *Zabūr* text from Arabia.⁹⁷ In one of Hamzah’s prose works, his treatise *Asrār al-‘arifīn* (The Secrets of the Gnostics), Hamzah makes a direct quotation in Arabic from a text he calls *Zabūr*.⁹⁸ Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, in his study of this work, translates the Arabic verse as follows: “I am the Existent One, seek Me and you will find Me; If you seek other than Me, you will not find me.” However, he notes that he has been unable to trace the origin of this text.⁹⁹ It does not appear to have been quoted from the biblical Psalms. Another text, the *Bustan al-Salatin* (The Garden of Kings), composed in Aceh between 1638 and 1641 by Nur al-Din Muhammad, also seems to contain a direct quotation from the *Zabūr*, at least in one early-manuscript, dated 1816.¹⁰⁰ Thus it seems possible that an Arabic text entitled *Zabūr* was known in Aceh, at least in scholarly circles, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This text may have been recited in a heightened voice (i.e., cantillated): the English account of the sultan of Aceh clearly refers to a “Psalme” being “sung.”

A third possibility is that the Acehnese performance might have been a devotional genre such as *zikir* (*dhikr*), which is known to have been present in Aceh (where it was called *diki*) from the

⁹⁵ This had been published in 1566, with notation of all the Genevan melodies, under the title *De Psalmen Davids, ende ander lofsanghen, wt den Francoyschen dichte in Nederlandschen overghesett*, and remained the standard psalter in the Dutch Calvinist Church until 1773. Howard Slenk and Jan R. Luth, in Nicholas Temperley et al., “Psalms, Metrical,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), 20: 490.

⁹⁶ From the early seventeenth century, biblical psalms were translated into Malay in prose, and in rhyming verse from the late seventeenth century. In the early eighteenth century, the entire Genevan Psalter was translated into Malay and printed—with music notation—in Amsterdam in 1735. See David R. M. Irving, “The Genevan Psalter in Eighteenth-Century Indonesia and Sri Lanka,” *Eighteenth-Century Music* 11/2 (2014): 248–54. On early Malay translations into rhyming verse, see Katharine Smith Diehl, *Printers and Printing in the East Indies*, vol. 1: *Batavia* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1990), 268.

⁹⁷ For biographical details of Hamzah al-Fansuri, see Vladimir I. Braginsky, “Towards the Biography of Hamzah Fansuri. When Did Hamzah Live? Data from His Poems and Early European Accounts,” *Archipel* 57 (1999): 135–75.

⁹⁸ Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1970), 266 (Malay), 386 (English). Hamzah’s prose works, according to Peter Riddell, “articulate and systematise his framework of five grades of being, the outward self-manifestations of the divine Unity.” Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 106.

⁹⁹ Al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansūrī*, 386.

¹⁰⁰ Jelani Harun, ed., *Bustan al-Salatin (Bab Ketiga) Kisah Raja-Raja yang Adil* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2004), 557.

late sixteenth century, and from where it spread to neighboring regions.¹⁰¹ In this case, the English observers and their interpreters may have considered this *zikir* (*diki*) to be a psalm, which would be in line with Riddell's proposal that the performance was "a Song of Praise to God."¹⁰² Whatever the genre, it was clearly a form of devotional practice derived from or inspired by the Davidic tradition, at least in the context of responding in turn to the singing of a "psalm." No matter what the sultan and his nobles sang, it is evident that the sultan knew about the Christian practice of singing psalms, since he himself reportedly made the request that Lancaster and his men perform one.

The *zikir* hypothesis and its potential connection to the Davidic tradition in the context of Christian-Muslim dialogue seems tenuous, but evidence from the Maldives, from around the same time, seems to suggest it as an avenue of further inquiry. The French navigator François Pyrard de Laval (ca. 1578–ca. 1623) was wrecked in these islands in 1602 and remained there for five years, later publishing an account that included a description of many aspects of Maldivian culture, including Islamic religious practices and the ceremonies observed on the islands. One particular festival pointing to Davidic connections was *mawlid* (*maulidu*), which generally refers to the birthday of Muhammad—but which Pyrard de Laval claims was held to commemorate the death of the prophet.¹⁰³ Here *dhikr* was described to Pyrard de Laval (or at least interpreted by him as such) as "the Psalms of David":

All night long the Pandiare, Catibes, Naybes, and Moudins, with all the rest of the clergy, and other good singers, cease not to chant with all their might in alternation like a choir; nor is their chanting without rule, for some of them who know not how to sing have to take lessons from a master: so the harmony is good, and the singing far from disagreeable. They call this chanting *Zicourou* [*dhikr*], and say that they are the Psalms of David.¹⁰⁴

This intriguing last sentence might inspire speculation as to whether the tradition of the Islamic Psalms of David (*Zabūr*)—which include some aspects of *dhikr*—was introduced to the Maldives.¹⁰⁵ If so, perhaps it spread from there to Aceh.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ See Eckhard Neubauer and Veronica Doubleday, "Islamic Religious Music," *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52787> (accessed Jan. 28, 2012).

¹⁰² Riddell, "Rotterdam MS 96 D 16," 19.

¹⁰³ He writes: "Il y a encore une feste bien solennelle environ le mois d'Octobre, qui se fait la nuict, & s'appelle *Maulude*, & dissent que c'est la nuict que Mahomet leur prophete mourut." François Pyrard de Laval, *Voyage de François Pyrard de Laval, contenant sa navigation aux Indes Orientales, Maldives, Moluques, Bresil*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Samuel Thiboust, 1619), pt. 1, 163.

¹⁰⁴ English translation from François Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, trans. Albert Gray from the 3rd edition of 1619 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1887–88), 1: 147–48. Original text: "Toute la nuict le Pandiare, les Catibes, Naybes & les Moudins, & toutes sortes de gens d'Eglise & autres qui sçae[n]t chanter, ne cessent de chanter de toute leur puissance, alternatiueme[n]t & par forme de chœur: & netanmoins ce chant n'est pas sans regle, car il y en a qui ne sçauent pas le chant, & faut qu'ils l'apprennent des maistres qui l'entendent: Aussi s'accordent-ils bien, & ce chant n'est pas des-agreable; on l'appelle *Zicourou*: ils dissent que ce sont les Psalmes de Daud." Pyrard de Laval, *Voyage de François Pyrard de Laval*, pt. 1, 165–66. A nineteenth-century English translation of Pyrard de Laval already made a connection between the "Psalms" witnessed in the Maldives and the Acehnese "Psalm" performance witnessed by Lancaster. Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval*, trans. Albert Gray, 1: 148, note.

¹⁰⁵ Vishanoff writes that the writing of one author of Islamic Psalms of David, whose text he dubs "Sufi," "expresses a moderate Sūfī vision of divine love and forgiveness, of *dhikr* and night worship and tearful repentance,

Interestingly, Pyrard de Laval mentions how he made the personal acquaintance of the same Jewish interpreter who had translated the dialogue between James Lancaster and the sultan of Aceh in 1602, and who later landed in the Maldives. Pyrard de Laval confirms that this interpreter knew many languages, including “Arabic and the Indian tongues,” and describes him as “a man of Barbary, and the greatest scoundrel in the world.”¹⁰⁷ He writes that the interpreter “had learnt English well” (in England), but points to his chameleon-like religious liminality: “With the English he was of their religion; with the Mahometans, of theirs; whereas he was all the while a Jew.”¹⁰⁸ Perhaps the exchange of psalms between Lancaster and the sultan of Aceh came down to this interpreter’s knowledge of David’s importance within all three faiths; after all, while Christians and Muslims debated the nature of David, this prophet and king belonged originally to the Jewish tradition, which had also preserved the texts associated with him. The identity of the psalm in Aceh remains a mystery, but the striking account of its performance by the sultan and his nobles opens up a window onto a world of dialogue about shared connections and divergence of theological interpretations.

Conclusion

Prior to the advent of European colonialism around the Indian Ocean region, some thin threads already connected the Islamic communities with Christian European travelers through the Davidic traditions of the Abrahamic faiths, and through the circulation of texts and stories across vast distances. David and the Psalms became points of convergence in interfaith dialogue, and affinities between religions in respect to the devotional nature of psalm texts seem to have been enacted—occasionally—through performances that crossed religious boundaries. Even though some individual interlocutors pinpointed the prophet David as a common theological link, the divergence between traditions of his identity as a musician (i.e., whether he was an instrumentalist or not), and the exact nature of the psalm texts that were preserved by Jews and Christians, constituted significant intercultural gulfs. Differences between theological perspectives and the ontological positions of music and sound meant that commonalities had their limits, necessitating the coexistence of related traditions rather than their convergence. Yet the Psalms, *Mazmūr*, and *Zabūr* remain a symbolic bridge between the Abrahamic faiths, and one that has been explored successfully by several musical ensembles around the world, with a number of intercultural and interfaith programs of musical performance being devised in recent years.

The factors that complicate stories of bilateral or trilateral religious exchange through the Psalms, however, include the differing concepts and terminologies in each of the Abrahamic faiths, the legitimacy of music, the differing interpretations of David as an instrumentalist, and the Islamic doctrine of *tahrīf*, which denies the authenticity of religious texts conserved by Jews and Christians. But besides Islamic theological commentaries that cited the Bible (mostly

and of a common spirituality that is at least potentially shared by the Bible and its adherents.” Vishanoff, “Islamic ‘Psalms of David,’” 725–26.

¹⁰⁶ However, any such hypothesis remains speculative, unless further evidence emerges.

¹⁰⁷ Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval*, trans. Albert Gray, 1: 283.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 284. See also Ogborn, *Indian Ink*, 60.

sparingly) for Qur'ānic exegesis, and translations of the Bible for the use of a small number of scholars in Islamic empires, it is significant that the major other means through which Muslims have engaged with the texts of Jewish-Christian scriptures has been through the musical performance of psalms. Other musical acts, such as instrumental performance, seem also to have evoked interfaith discussion of David, or observations about him in different religious traditions.

The curious encounters discussed here seem to fade from the archival record in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; perhaps increased knowledge of each other's religions (and therefore difference) as well as growing movements of Christian mission throughout the world, and Islamic resistance, contributed to a more entrenched view of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic perspectives on David and the Psalms. And yet today's resurgence of interest in historic testimonies such as 'Alī Ufķī's psalm settings—demonstrating (or at least suggesting) a devotional practice that cut across religious boundaries—indicates the timeliness of revisiting the figure of David between the Abrahamic faiths, in dialogues that are not only about divergence, but also about convergence and a shared tradition. By examining the connected histories of seventeenth-century encounters invoking David, we can throw new light on his symbolic role between the faiths, and consider the potentially beneficial implications of these historical incidents for new intercultural understandings of music, creating more nuanced thought about the role of the Psalms, instruments, and David between the Abrahamic faiths.

