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11-15-2021

Review of "German, Jew, Muslim, Gay: The Life and Times of Hugo Marcus" By Marc David Baer.

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Original Publication Information

Asaf Angermann, German, Jew, Muslim, Gay: The Life and Times of Hugo Marcus. By Marc David Baer, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 89, Issue 4, December 2021, Pages 1475–1478

ThinkIR Citation

Angermann, Asaf, "Review of "German, Jew, Muslim, Gay: The Life and Times of Hugo Marcus" By Marc David Baer." (2021). *Faculty Scholarship*. 864.

<https://ir.library.louisville.edu/faculty/864>

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None of what I have mentioned here is particularly problematic for a historical project that aims to excavate Firishta's worldview in its own idiosyncratic context and the *Tarikh*'s promise as a genuinely insightful work of historiography. The disjuncture appears, perhaps, only in that this ambitious monograph fuses two distinct projects that may at some points appear at cross-purposes to one other. These are, namely, a historically responsible excavation of Firishta's *Tarikh* and its outsized influence on colonial-period historiography, and on the other hand, the assertion that Firishta is the ideal exemplar for un-thinking the periodization of history we have inherited from British colonialism. With regard to the latter project, Asif successfully makes the case that Firishta's perspective can allow us to begin to provincialize and denaturalize our own assumptions about Indian history and its connection with religious difference. To truly imagine our way to a decolonized model of Indian history, however, will arguably be a much more substantial undertaking, to which Asif's *The Loss of Hindustan* represents a compelling contribution.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfab085>

Advance Access publication on November 15, 2021

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German, Jew, Muslim, Gay: The Life and Times of Hugo Marcus. By Marc David Baer. Columbia University Press, 2020. 300 pages. \$95.00 (hardcover), \$30.00 (paperback), \$29.99 (e-book).

When Hugo Marcus (1880–1966), a German Jewish gay author, philosopher, and activist, converted to Islam in 1925, he “did not know yet what significance the word ‘jihad’ would one day mean to [him]. For it also signifies the duty to leave the country that is under godless rule, even if in so doing one has to give up one’s homeland. In this sense,” he wrote retrospectively in 1951, “I have been on a pilgrimage for the last twelve years” (135). In a footnote to this quotation from Marcus’s unpublished manuscript, Marc David Baer, author of this fascinating, erudite, and unusual biography, clarifies Marcus’s probable confusion between the Islamic terms *jihad* (holy war) and *hejira* (exile, migration). Driven away from his homeland in 1939, Marcus interpreted his own life in the religious vocabulary of Islam. But, ascending to become one the most prominent Muslims in pre-war Berlin, he also interpreted Islam in the light of his own experiences, worldviews, and wishes: as a German Jewish gay man. Not only was Marcus assigned with the monumentally significant project of editing and annotating the Qur’an’s translation into German, aimed at rendering it accessible to non-Arab speakers (reminiscent of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig’s project of the Hebrew Bible’s translation into German, which would be an interesting point of comparison), but he also published numerous articles discussing Islam and philosophy as well as homoerotic fiction with Islamic themes.

Alongside notable Jewish converts to Islam such as scholar Muhammad Asad (born Leopold Weiss) and author Essad Bey (born Lev Nussimbaum), Hugo—later known as Hamid—Marcus may represent a modern European romantic fascination with Islam as a meaningful alternative to both Christianity and Judaism. Marcus himself, as Baer notes, contributes his own homosexual angle on such apostatic romanticism. An activist for LGBT rights already at the turn of the century, Marcus was a close friend and accomplice of Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935), the pioneering scholar of sexuality (in particular of homosexuality and transsexuality) and founder of the probably first ever organization for LGBT rights, and of influential author and gay rights activist Kurt Hiller (1885–1972)—both Berlin-based German Jewish homosexuals. Marcus’s life, writings, and thought traverse these divergent, seemingly incommensurable worlds. As Baer boldly argues, “Hugo Marcus may have been an idiosyncratic historical character—homosexual, Jewish, and Muslim—yet the questions raised by his life are salient for understanding the interrelated issues of Muslim responses to Nazism in Germany and its persecution of Jews in a variety of ways” (113).

The book’s stakes are accordingly very high: not only does it seek to provide us with an account of this unique, intriguing, and boundary-crossing life, but it also wishes to draw the more universal conclusions about Jewish-Muslim relations (especially during the Nazi era and prior to the Palestine/Israel conflicts), interfaith, German (-Jewish) romantic fascination with religion and culture beyond the “Judeo-Christian” tradition, and the specific locus of homosexual desire and its social-political significance. Can the writings of such an intriguing, idiosyncratic author, reflecting a highly unique, particular experience, provide us with knowledge of the hidden, unknown dimensions of the relations of Judaism, Islam, and homosexual desire? Was Marcus’s wish to convert to Islam related to his homosexuality, and if so, what may this tell us about the broader question of homosexuality and religion, of queer theology? Baer’s meticulously, internationally researched and delicately written biography presents us with no less than these profound and pressing questions.

Attitudes toward homosexuality in the monotheistic religions were notoriously complex and problematic, from its denunciation as sin to excommunication and the death penalty. Yet, in contrast to religious laws concerning homosexuality in the “Judeo-Christian” tradition, same-sex love, even sodomy, is not explicitly prohibited in the Qur’an. Severe punishment of homosexuality in Muslim countries seems rather a result of Western colonial criminalization of sex between men. For Marcus, who, like Hirschfeld and Hiller, was active against Paragraph 175 of the Prussian Penal Code, which criminalized homosexuality (introduced in 1871, strengthened and brutally executed by the Nazis, and only abolished in 1989 [in East Germany] and 1994 [in West Germany]), Islam might have presented the possibility of sustaining religiosity without denying or suppressing one’s desires. However, and perhaps precisely because of this, Marcus’s understanding of Islam, and specifically his reading of the Qur’an, was remarkably idiosyncratic. In his

emphatic and non-judgmental, sensible, and sensitive portrayal of the man, Baer lays out a complex network of romantic desires, literary inspirations, and religious passions, the combination of which makes possible an insight into Marcus's unusual choices. Baer shows that it was none other than Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the great German poet, novelist, scholar, and statesman, who inspired Marcus's queer interpretation of Islam: like several of his contemporaries, Marcus presumed Goethe's homosexuality and read his writings on Islam, in particular the poetry volume *West-East Divan* (SUNY Press, 2010 [originally 1819]), in this light. Goethe, Islam, and homosexuality were for Marcus peculiarly interrelated. As Baer suggests, "Marcus's attraction to Islam and insistence that Goethe was Muslim may also have been rooted in his own homosexuality and in his perception that Goethe was a homosexual too" (84).

But it was not only on this personal, experiential level of queer religiosity that Marcus's conception of Islam was rather unusual. His affiliation with the Berlin Muslim community was centered in the Ahmadi (also called Ahmadiya) movement for the Propagation of Islam. Originating in Punjab, British India (today's Pakistan) in the late nineteenth century, the Ahmadi represented a messianic, revivalist, and progressive Islamic tradition. As Baer notes, the Ahmadi "believed that Muslim reformer Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839–1908) ... was Jesus Christ incarnate" (63). Although the Ahmadi Mosque in Berlin, completed in 1927, was the first mosque built by Muslims in Germany (4), the Ahmadi community might not be as representative of the Muslim tradition as its predominant Sunni or Shia branches. Yet, precisely due to this fact, the Ahmadi may be important for understanding the religious minority experience in Islam. Whereas the Ahmadi movement "was given the responsibility for the religious education of all Muslim students in all of Berlin" (136), internationally, in the Muslim world, they are mostly considered heretics and idolaters, leading to their marginalization, discrimination, and oppression, often violently, and often by the state. Only in the book's penultimate chapter 4 do we learn about the persecution of the Ahmadi in Pakistan, which continues until today. This complicates the thesis viewing Marcus's affiliation with the Ahmadi as instructive about Muslim-Jewish relations overall; but it may also reveal another dimension of the question: the possibility of affinity and solidarity among oppressed minorities—Jews, homosexuals, and Ahmadi. The heretical messianic dimension of the Ahmadi might have also proven compatible with comparable theological tendencies among German Jews at that time (and, to some extent, in queer theology). As Baer conscientiously illustrates, it was Marcus's affiliation with the Ahmadi that essentially saved his life, allowed him to escape to Switzerland, and provided him with the material needs to overwinter the war years.

These unique factors allow us to consider whether Marcus's life, writings, and conception of Islam—as queer, homoerotic, Goethe-inspired, and indebted to the Ahmadi messianic proselytism—reveal to us new truths of the theological affinities of Islam and Judaism, the historical relations between them, including

the issue of Muslims' responses to Jews' persecution, or the place of homosexuality in any of these questions. Yet, beyond these questions, it is indubitable that any reader of this extraordinary biography will be rewarded with a profound insight into the nature of religious passion and its intersection with sexual desire, in particular among marginalized, oppressed, persecuted, and exiled individuals such as Marcus. The author wishes to make the case for viewing Marcus as representative for gay Jewish or Muslim life, or the intersection between them, and for Jewish-Muslim relations before, during, or after the Holocaust and the Israel/Palestine question. This is a difficult case to make for the life of a rare individual such as Marcus, but precisely here lies the book's strength and its beauty. Perhaps somewhat against the author's intention to explore these broad and important questions, Marcus's liminal life experience and queer religiosity seem to defy any generalization, resisting to shed light on any phenomena other than his own idiosyncratic jihad for love. Precisely such idiosyncrasy seems to be at the core of queer—incommensurable, ungeneralizable, and often inexpressible—religious experience and at the intersection of homosexuality and religion. Perhaps further answers could be found in the half-dozen philosophical works Marcus has published, with titles such as *Metaphysics of Justice* and *Philosophy of Monopluralism*, briefly addressed in the study. These intricate issues only add to this wonderful book's importance in raising these valuable questions and calling for further examination of Marcus's legacy. After all, his confusion of *jihad* and *hejira* might have not been a confusion at all, but suggestive of his own—particular and peculiar—queer Jewish philosophical reappropriation of the Qur'an.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfab081>

Advance Access publication on November 15, 2021

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Christian Sorcerers on Trial: Records of the 1827 Osaka Incident. Translated and with an introduction by Fumiko Miyazaki, Kate Wildman Nakai, and Mark Teeuwen. Columbia University Press, 2020. 408 pages. \$35.00 (paperback), \$140.00 (hardcover), \$34.99 (e-book).

In 1827, a practitioner of divination and healing named Sano was brought into the magistrates' offices in Osaka. She was accused of assuming a false identity to swindle people out of money and goods. The investigators quickly uncovered much more than they had bargained for, however. Under duress, Sano admitted to being a practitioner of "Kirishitan [Christian] sorcery." This was particularly shocking to the investigators because Christianity had been banned in Japan for more than 200 years by this point. Sano's confession sent investigators on a wide-ranging hunt through Osaka and Kyoto for co-conspirators, witnesses,