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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

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EARLY ISLAMIC EXEGESIS ON THE SO-CALLED "HAMITIC MYTH"

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Much ink has been spilled recently on claims and counter-claims associating the so-called "curse of Ham" with an ideology of racism. The ideology in question is based on what has come to be known as the "Hamitic Myth," according to which a rationalizing divine authority for the enslavement of black Africans may be found in racist interpretations of the biblical Curse of Canaan. The textual root of the discussion lies in the short but enigmatic narrative found in Genesis 9.

The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth – Ham being the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole world branched out. Noah, the tiller of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a cloth, placed it against both their backs and, walking backward, they covered their father's nakedness; their faces were turned the other way, so that they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah woke up from his wine and learned what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan; the lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers." And he said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; let Canaan be a slave to them. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be a slave to them."¹

This is indeed a baffling text, and for a number of reasons that extend beyond the scope of this discussion. For the purposes of this essay, however, four issues seem to stand out. One is Ham's guilt for seeing his father's nakedness, another is the repeated insistence of the text that Ham is the father of Canaan; the third is the fact that Canaan rather than Ham is cursed, seemingly for the guilt of his father, and the fourth is the statement, made three times in three verses, that Canaan will be a slave to his brothers (verse 25) and to the Shemites (26-27) and Japhethites (27)². A considerable amount of exegesis in Jewish and Christian tradition from ancient times to the present has been devoted to these and other issues raised by

* This essay was written and completed before the release of D. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press 1994).

¹ Genesis 9:18-27, Jewish Publication Society new translation.

² *Lamō* may simply refer back to "his brothers" of verse 25.

Bibliography: See also Government of Bombay, *An account of the Arab tribes in the vicinity of Aden*, Bombay 1909, 63-73, 205-15; R.B. Serjeant, *Yāfi', Zaydis, Al Bū Bakr b. Sālim and others: tribes and sayyids*, in *On both sides of al-Mandab. Ethiopian, South-Arabian and Islamic studies presented to Oscar Löffgren on his ninetyeth birthday 13 May 1988 by colleagues and friends*, Stockholm 1989, 83-105 (contains full references).

(G.R. SMITH)

AL-YĀFI'Ī, ABŪ 'ABD ALLĀH B. AS'AD, ABU 'L-Sa'āda 'Afif al-Dīn (b. in Yemen ca. 698/1298, d. at Mecca 768/1367), scholar and Ṣūfī. His father, impressed by his son's intellectual and spiritual precociousness, sent him to study at Aden. After his first Pilgrimage in 712/1313, he returned to Yemen, taking up life as an ascetic and anchorite and becoming a disciple of the Ṣūfī master 'Alī al-Ṭawāshī, to whom he remained close until the latter's death. In 718/1319 he moved to Mecca and completed his education in the Islamic sciences with the judge there, Raḍī al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī. Renouncing a marriage he had made, he went to live as an ascetic with the two *harams* of Mecca and Medina. In 734/1335 he travelled to Palestine and Egypt, meeting there famed local Ṣūfīs.

He himself was mainly affiliated to the Kādīriyya [*q.v.*], of which he founded a branch, the Yāfi'iyya, still existing in Yemen today (J.S. Trimmingham, *The Sufi orders*, Oxford 1971, 273). He also received initiation into the Adhamiyya (al-Zabīdī, *Ithāf al-asfiyā'*, ms. from 1329/1911, private coll., fol. 5; Massignon, *La passion de Hallāj*, Paris 1975, i, 85), but his relations with the Shādhiliyya are problematical (A. 'Amrār, *Abu 'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī*, Cairo 1952, ii, 185-7).

When he was travelling in the Near East, his fame was already great since the sources indicate that he tried to keep himself incognito in Egypt. He acquired great prestige at Mecca, where he settled on his return and remarried. He was sought out for his knowledge but above all for his spiritual direction; among his many disciples were Shāh Ni'mat Allāh (d. 834/1431) (see T. Graham, *Shāh Ni'matullāh Wali, founder of the Ni'matullāhī Sufi order*, in L. Lewisohn (ed.), *The legacy of mediaeval Persian Sufism*, London-New York 1992, 173-4; and NI'MAT-ALLĀHIYYA). Although he lived in penury, his *baraka* was sought, and he seems to have acted as an arbiter in Mecca on several occasions. He made only one brief further trip to Yemen in 738/1337 to see his master al-Ṭawāshī, and died at Mecca on 20 Djumādā II 768/22 February 1367. His aura of sanctity was such that his modest clothes were sold as relics (al-Isnawī, *Ṭabakāt al-shāfi'iyya*, Baghdād 1391/1971, ii, 582).

As an 'ālim, al-Yāfi'ī above all taught *hadīth*. As a fervent Ash'arī, he combated both Mu'tazilī rationalism and Ibn Taymiyya's anthropomorphism (his main polemical and apologetic work was *Marham al-'ilal al-mu'dila fi 'l-radd 'alā a'immāt al-mu'tazila*, Calcutta 1910). He well embodied the ideal of the scholar-Ṣūfī, so prized in mediaeval Islam, and was described by al-Shardjī as "master of the two ways" (sc. exoteric and esoteric). Like al-Suyūṭī, who often cited him, al-Yāfi'ī used his fame for mounting a defence of Ṣūfism, seen in his best-known works: *Nashr al-mahāsīn al-ghāliya fi faḍl al-mashāyikh al-ṣūfiyya* (Cairo 1961), and above all, his *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn fi hikāyāt al-sālihīn* (many eds., inc. Cairo 1989, and Cyprus n.d.), which give edifying stories of the saints whilst including the doctrinal elements belonging to Ṣūfism. The *Rawḍ* was much used by later authors writing on stories of the saints. In the field of hagiography, he wrote an *Asnā al-mafākhir fi manāqib al-shaykh 'Abd al-Kādir [al-Djilānī]*. He also

courageously upheld the sanctity of al-Hallādī and Ibn al-'Arabī (al-Suyūṭī, *Ta'yīd*, 71; Massignon, *op. cit.*, ii, 41, 46, 309-10), and it was not surprising that his disciple Shāh Ni'mat Allāh should translate into Persian and write commentaries on the works of Ibn al-'Arabī.

It would be an abuse of language to call al-Yāfi'ī an historian, since his *Mir'āt al-djānān wa-ibrat al-yak-zān* (Haydarābād 1339/1920) is mainly a compilation drawn from Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Khallikān and al-Dhahabī. He wrote many mystical poems (especially on the Prophet, whom he claimed often to see in dreams or in night vigils), but very few of these have been published.

Bibliography: The work of al-Isnawī (d. 772/1370) cited above is the essential source on al-Yāfi'ī's life; all later authors draw on it. There are, however, original items in Taḳī al-Dīn al-Fāsī, *al-Ikd al-ṭhamīn*, Cairo 1966, v, 104-15 and Ibn Ḥadjar, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, Beirut n.d., ii, 247-9. Al-Shardjī's notice of him, in *Ṭabakāt al-khawāṣṣ*, Cairo 1321/1903, 67, is hagiographical. See also Subkī, *Ṭabakāt al-shāfi'iyya al-kubrā*, Cairo 1964, x, 33; Ibn al-Mulāḳḳīn, *Ṭabakāt al-awliyā'*, Beirut 1986, 555-6; Brockelmann, ²II, 226-8, S II, 227-8.

(E. GEOFFROY)

✓ **YĀFITH**, the Japheth of the Bible.

He is not mentioned by name in the Qur'an (although he is alluded to in VII, 64, X, 73, XI, 40, XXIII, 27 and XXVI, 119), but the exegetes are familiar with all the sons of Noah [see NŪḤ]: Hām, Sām [*q.v.*] and Yāfith (the pronunciation Yāfit is mentioned as possible in al-Ṭabarī, i, 222). The Biblical story (Gen. ix. 20-7) of Hām's sin and punishment and the blessing given to Sām and Yāfith is known in Muslim legend, but it is silent about Noah's planting the vine and becoming intoxicated. Al-Kisā'ī totally transforms the story: in the Ark, Noah could not sleep from anxiety, so when he came out of the boat, he fell asleep on Sām's chest. The wind revealed his nakedness, Sām and Yāfith covered him up and Hām laughed so loudly that Nūḥ was awakened. As a result, he uttered the following curse: prophets shall be born descendants of Sām, kings and heroes of Yāfith and black slaves of Hām. However, Hām's descendants intermarried with Yāfith's family such that the Abyssinians, Hind and Sind were born to Kūsh b. Hām, and the Copts were the descendants of a union between Kūt b. Hām and a descendant of Yāfith.

Yāfith's descendants are variously given, sometimes according to the biblical tradition (al-Ṭabarī, i, 217), sometimes with variations (al-Kisā'ī, i, 101). He is usually regarded as the ancestor of Yādūdī and Mādūdī [*q.v.*] often of the Turks and the Khazars, more rarely of the Slavs [see ŞAKĀLIBA]. Persia and Rūm are sometimes traced to Sām but sometimes to Yāfith. To Yāfith is also attributed Cyrus, who killed Belshazzar, son of Evilmerodach, son of Nebuchadnezzar, and Yazdagird. In sum, Sām is the father of the Arabs, Yāfith of Rūm, and Hām of the Sūdān. Of the three, the Semitic tradition naturally prefers Sām. Yāfith is only rarely spoken of unfavourably, as he is in the case of al-Ṭabarī, i, 223, where we are told nothing good comes from Yāfith and his descendants are deformed. On the other hand, the 72 languages of the world are divided as follows: 18 to Sām, 18 to Hām and 36 to Yāfith. He is the blessed son of Noah.

Bibliography: Ṭabarī, i, 211-25, Eng. tr. W.M. Brinner, *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Prophets and patriarchs*, Albany 1987, 10-22; Tha'labī, *Kiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, Cairo 1325, 38; Kisā'ī, *Kiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg,