

Packaging the Jew in Egypt's Mass Media

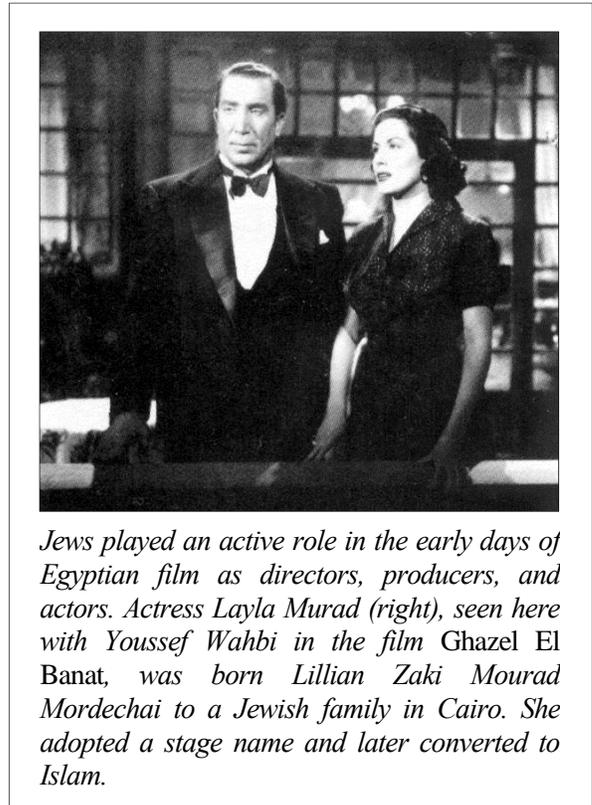
by Sariel Birnbaum

Whether depicting the birth of Islam in the seventh century or the struggle against British rule in the twentieth, Egyptian filmmakers, with mind-numbing regularity, have caricatured Jews using virulent anti-Semitic tropes, many of which were imported from Europe, repackaged in Arabic, and exported on media to the rest of the region. During the Nasserist period from 1954 to 1970, Egypt was the Hollywood of Arab cinema, and anti-Semitic portrayal of Jewish characters was the norm. While mainstream Egyptian cinema appears to have moved away from anti-Semitism in the 1990s and the 2000s, it has retained its virulence in certain segments of television, especially children's cartoons and satellite channels' Ramadan series.

Muhammad's Enemies

The first attempt to produce a film about Islam's prophet Muhammad for Egyptian audiences was thwarted by Al-Azhar circles,¹ delaying the appearance of religious films about the dawn of Islam for a quarter century. The prophet subgenre finally

1 Muhammad Salah ad-Din, *Ad-Din wa-l-Aqida fi-l-Sinema al-Masriya* (Cairo: Madbouli, 1998), pp. 14–35.



Jews played an active role in the early days of Egyptian film as directors, producers, and actors. Actress Layla Murad (right), seen here with Youssef Wahbi in the film Ghazel El Banat, was born Lillian Zaki Mourad Mordechai to a Jewish family in Cairo. She adopted a stage name and later converted to Islam.

broke through during the twilight of Egypt's monarchy when liberal intellectuals pressed for an enlightened Islam that would promote the underprivileged, especially slaves, women, and the poor. The first of these films, *Zuhur al-Islam* (The Appearance of Islam)² was based on the 1949 book *al-Wa'd al-Haq* (The True Promise)³ by prominent

2 Ibrahim Izz ad-Din, director, 1951.

3 Cairo: Dar al-Ma'aref.

Egyptian author Taha Hussein.

In the early days of the Egyptian film industry, Jews played an active role as directors, producers (Togo Mizrahi) and actors (Layla Murad and Raqiya Ibrahim), with many movies, such as *Hassan, Murcus, and Cohen*,⁴ featuring contemporary Jewish characters such as the comic protagonist Shalom.⁵ However, following the forced exile of the Jewish population during the Nasserist era, Jewish characters began to appear mainly in historical films, especially those about Muhammad. Since the religious authorities prohibited visual representations of Muhammad and his inner circle, with the taboo becoming more severe over the years, Islam was shown in cinema through the eyes of its enemies: idol-worshippers and Jews. This prohibition was likely because “visualizing” Muhammad might draw a parallel between Sunni Islam and Christianity or even Shiite Islam where visual images and the cult of Jesus and the imams respectively are central to religious life.⁶ The revolutionary Nasserist regime warmly welcomed the message of Islam as a religion of freedom and supported similar titles in what can be considered a “religious film series.”

Most of these films portray Jews as the sworn enemies of Islam and its values while ignoring Muhammad’s harsh behavior toward them: for example, the execution of the Banu

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Quraiza tribe’s men and the enslavement of its women and children.⁷ The film *Bilal*,⁸ for instance, is a biographical picture about Bilal Ibn Rabbah, a black slave

who embraced Islam and refused to renounce his new faith even after being brutally tortured by his master. He was later bought and set free by Abu-Bakr, the future first caliph, and became one of Muhammad’s companions and the first muezzin in Islam. Initially, the film follows historical events and presents Islam as an egalitarian religion that treats black-skinned slaves equitably. In a later scene, a Shylock-like usurer appears and offers Bilal an interest-free loan. If Bilal does not repay it, he will become the usurer’s slave. As in William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, the usurer describes the loan as an act of friendship and the enslavement stipulation as unrealistic.⁹ His voice is high and shrill, his behavior neurotic, his accent foreign (perhaps even imitating an Israeli accent). His wife’s name, Balaha, resembles the Hebrew name Bilha. The usurer hopes to make Bilal his slave, but at the last moment, Bilal pays off his debt. One should note that Jewish usury was a more common motif in the medieval European anti-Semitic repertoire than in the Islamic one.¹⁰

⁴ Fouad Gazayerli, director, 1954.

⁵ Viola Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation* (Cairo and New York: American University of Cairo Press, 2007), pp. 31–5.

⁶ Muhammad Salah ad-Din, *Ad-Din wa-l-Aqida fi-l-Sinima al-Masriya* (Cairo: Madbouli, 1998), pp. 14–35.

⁷ William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 213–17.

⁸ Ahmed at-Tukhi, director, 1953.

⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, act 1, sc. 3.

¹⁰ M.A. Roy Lämmel, *Zins und Wucher im Mittelalter* (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2007), pp. 14–16.

The loud, piercing voices of Jewish characters in Egyptian movies seem to have been inspired by European anti-Semitism. For instance, in the infamous anti-Jewish pamphlet *Das Judenthum in der Musik*, the nineteenth-century German composer Richard Wagner describes the voices of Jews emerging from a synagogue this way: “Who has not been seized with a feeling of the greatest revulsion, of horror mingled with ridiculousness at hearing that sense- and sound-confounding gurgle, yodel and cackle?”¹¹

Ibrahim Amara’s film *Higrat ar-Rasul* (The Prophet’s Emigration)¹² epitomizes cinematic Arab anti-Semitism. The heroes are slaves, Habiba and Fares, who embrace Islam. The villains are a Jewish father and daughter, Daoud and Sarah. The father makes a living off the money his daughter earns during nocturnal trysts with the rich leaders of Mecca. The father, disappointed with the small amount of money she brings home, asks, “Did the blood of your people escape from your veins?” She answers that she was inciting people against Muhammad.

The Jews in *Higrat ar-Rasul* are well aware that Muhammad is a true prophet and are envious that God did not choose one of their own.¹³ Daoud and Sarah wish they could kill all Muslims and prepare poison-dipped swords to murder Muhammad, albeit after first receiving an inflated price for them. They accidentally stab themselves with their own weapons and are thus destroyed by their own evil.



In Egyptian prophet films, Jewish characters often wear the distinctive pointed, cone-shaped Judenhüte hats that were common in medieval Europe, medieval European art, and the Islamic world.

Sarah’s image as a seductive Jewess echoes a common theme in European literature. She is like Susanna Moiseyevna, the Jewish protagonist of Anton Chekhov’s *Mire*, who uses her seductive skills to earn money and avoid paying her debts.¹⁴ The theme of a Jewish father and daughter scheming together against the people of their city is another common theme, notably in Christopher Marlowe’s classic play *The Jew of Malta*,¹⁵ where the arch-villain Barabas, motivated by bottomless hatred of Christians, uses his fair daughter, Abigail, to bring calamities upon them. Such European prototypes were widely used in Egyptian cinema.

11 Leipzig: Weber, 1869, p. 22.

12 1964.

13 Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), pp. 138-55, 188-91.

14 Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, *The Duel and Other Stories* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), pp. 195-226.

15 Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978).

Egypt's prophet films closely resemble each other in their portrayal of Jewish characters as a result of strict religious censorship and a wish to copy earlier successful movies. In *Shayma, Ukht ar-Rasul* (Shayma, The Prophet's Sister),¹⁶ Jews are enemies of Muhammad and attempt to convince idol worshipers that his new religion will make them equal to their slaves. They wear the distinctive pointed, cone-shaped *Judenhüte* hats that were common in medieval Europe, medieval European art, and the Islamic world.¹⁷

From the 1950s to the early 1970s, a combination of "socialist Islam" and anti-Semitism was key to depicting Islam as progressive while Jewish figures were often depicted as satanic, reflecting European anti-Semitic stereotypes rather than traditionally Islamic ones. *Uthama al-Islam* (The Greatest Men of Islam),¹⁸ for example, features a Jewish character who sells water from his well at an exorbitant price. The narrator says Muhammad is displeased that a "greedy Jew" controls the well and promises paradise to whoever buys it for the Muslims. Uthman, the future third caliph, buys the well and gives Muslims free access to it.

A salient exception to the prophet film industry was *ar-Risala* (The Message)¹⁹ by Aleppo-born director Moustapha Akkad. He shot each scene twice, once in English and

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once in Arabic. Though influenced by earlier Egyptian films, Akkad adapted the film for a Western audience. His American production portrays Jews positively,

modernizes Islamic ideas, and—as some have remarked—tells the story of Islam as if the religion has been established in Hollywood.

Distortions of History and Memory

Negative images of Jewish men, and even more so of women, also appear in films about later historical periods. In 1967, Hussam ad-Din Mustafa directed *Garima fi-l-Hay al-Hadi* (A Crime in the Quiet Neighborhood), which portrays a detective story using a false historical narrative about the 1944 assassination of Lord Moyne, the British resident minister in the Middle East. Here is the true story: The Zionist underground group Lehi, pejoratively known as the Stern Gang, assassinated Lord Moyne in Cairo during the anticolonial struggle against Britain. The two assassins were caught, tried in an Egyptian court, and sentenced to death. Demonstrations broke out in their favor throughout Egypt since many Egyptians resented the British rule of their country.²⁰ However, in 1945, the two were hanged.

But *Garima fi-l-Hay al-Hadi* completely distorts what actually happened. Portraying its Jewish characters, especially the women, the same way they were depicted in films describing seventh-century events, the assassination is depicted not only as an attempt to force Britain to capitulate to

¹⁶ Hussam ad-Din Mustafa, director, 1972.

¹⁷ Raphael Straus, "The 'Jewish Hat' as an Aspect of Social History," *Jewish Social Studies*, Jan. 1942, pp. 59-72; Françoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 135-9.

¹⁸ Niazi Mustafa, director, 1972.

¹⁹ 1976.

²⁰ Michael J. Cohen, "The Moyne Assassination, November, 1944: A Political Analysis," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15(3): 358-73.

Zionist demands but also to defy the demands of the Arab world and damage Egypt's reputation and trigger international sanctions against it. The gang is led by a woman introduced simply as Bouskila who owns a cabaret. Another member named Gina is a dancer there. According to the movie, Gina has sex with both assassins at the same time and tries to seduce the Egyptian police officer (played by the well-known actor Rushdy Abaza) in charge of the murder investigation. The gang kidnaps the officer's young daughter, but he saves her seconds before she is to be strangled by a savage-looking gang member named Levi.

Sira al-Gababra (The Giants' Struggle),²¹ which depicts the oppression of Middle Eastern and North African Jews by European Jews in Israel, is unique in Egyptian films portraying Israelis. In this movie, Ashkenazi Jews actually enslave their Mizrahi brothers upon their arrival in Israel. The Mizrahi Jews are portrayed as both victims and negative characters, such as an Egyptian-Jewish seductive dancer named Lillian, clad in extremely immodest clothing to suggest lewdness. Lillian encounters grim repression after emigrating to Israel, so she helps Egyptian prisoners break out of an Israeli jail and hands over Israeli military secrets to Egyptian soldiers but never returns to Egypt as she is killed in a battle against Israeli soldiers. The Nasserist regime, it appears, would not show its subjects an image of a "loyal Egyptian Jew" at a time when it was pointing Egyptian Jews toward the exits.

Anti-Semitic narratives generally portray Jewish men as rapists and women as seductresses. During World War II, however, the backstabbing Jewish character Süß



The Egyptian film Garima fi-l-Hay al-Hadi portrays its female characters as seductive Jewesses, echoing a common theme in European literature. In the film, a gang is led by a Jewish woman who owns a cabaret. Gina, a dancer there, tries to seduce an Egyptian police officer in charge of a murder investigation.

appeared in Veit Harlan's 1940 Nazi film *Jud Süß*. German propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels needed to justify the "cleansing" of Jews from German cities and their removal from the vicinity of Aryan women in particular.²² Therefore, the "arch villain" for the Nazi propaganda was the Jewish male and rapist Süß

In Egypt, on the other hand, since the heroic protagonist in the fight against Israel

²¹ Zoheir Bakir, director, 1962.

²² Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 171-3.

is the Egyptian soldier, the enemy is feminine, the seductive Jewish woman, tempting him away from his family and mission, demonstrating that Jews fight with conspiracies and guile.

From the early 1990s, anti-Semitic portrayal of Jews and Israelis became less common, especially in films about wars against Israel.

The Strong Enemy

While Egyptian cinema's anti-Semitic current continued here and there into the 2000s—even in films written and directed by Christians—beginning in the early 1990s, anti-Semitic portrayal of Jews and Israelis became less common, especially in films about wars against Israel. Israelis are portrayed as a strong enemy, and the anti-Semitic tropes so common in earlier years do not work so well in war movies. Some stereotyping of Israeli officers as arrogant is, in fact, well rooted in the post-1967 reality when most Israelis were mesmerized by their astounding victory, though some female Israeli soldiers and Mossad agents are portrayed as licentious and seductive. But the seductive Israeli agent is a cliché now found mainly in second-rate works like the film *Fata min Isra'il* (A Girl from Israel).²³

Yawm al-Karama (Day of Glory)²⁴ dramatizes the sinking of the Israeli destroyer *Eilat* and aims to establish for Egypt's younger generation a history of heroism in the struggle against Israel. It is largely accurate and based primarily on the memoirs of the *Eilat* commander Lt. Col. Yitzhaq Shoshan.²⁵

²³ Ihab Radi, director, 1999.

²⁴ Ali Abd al-Khaleq, director, 2004.

²⁵ Yitzhaq Shoshan, *Haqrav haaharon shel hamashhetet Eilat* (Tel-Aviv: Maariv, 1993).

The film begins with the Battle of Rumani Coast on July 11, 1967, where Israeli vessels under Shoshan's command sink two Egyptian torpedo boats, and ends with the *Eilat* sinking on October 21—depicted as a precursor to Egypt's initial victory in the October 1973 war with the hero of the movie bearing a strong physical resemblance to the young Hosni Mubarak. Israeli officers arrogantly underestimate their Egyptian counterparts, an attitude confirmed in Shoshan's memoirs. By any measure, sending a destroyer to the Egyptian coast without anti-missile equipment and without sufficient intelligence was reckless.

In the film, the commander first appears on deck smoking a cigar. He often wears sunglasses and sits in his chair with his feet on the desk. A seven-branched menorah appears on the destroyer's deck. This is obviously unrealistic—candelabra like these were used mainly in the Temple in Jerusalem—but it is not anti-Semitic. The menorah merely tells the audience that the characters in the scene are Israeli Jews. The commander's portrayal is not anti-Semitic, nor are other portrayals of Israeli deeds. In fact, *Yawm al-Karama's* historical accuracy results in a rather boring plot and a flat portrayal of the protagonists.

The 1985 *I'dam Mayyit* (Execution of a Dead Man)²⁶ is an espionage thriller set on the Sinai Peninsula, in Israeli hands in the early 1970s. An Egyptian intelligence officer is sent on an undercover mission into Israel. Upon his arrival, he sees Israeli women sunbathing topless on a yacht, though the director has them lay on their stomachs to avoid flouting Egypt's conventions on

²⁶ Ali Abd al-Khaleq, director, 1985.

modesty. Male Israeli intelligence officers are not portrayed with the anti-Semitic characteristics of earlier films. Female Israelis, however, including soldiers, are frequently depicted as licentious, perhaps because the idea of young Israeli girls serving far from home in the army is unthinkable in any Arab society (though it did enable Arab filmmakers to produce some mildly erotic scenes).

Leading film director Youssef Chahine created an autobiographical Alexandria tetralogy series named after his hometown. The first of these, *al-Iskandariyya... Leh?* (Alexandria... Why?),²⁷ depicts the director's youth during World War II. Jews were being exterminated in Europe at the time, but they lived peacefully in Alexandria. The movie recounts how a Jewish father, aware of the intended Nazi extermination of the Jews, plans to flee as Wehrmacht commander Erwin Rommel's troops bear down on Egypt—a rare sympathetic reference to the Holocaust in Egyptian cinema. The protagonist's daughter travels to Mandatory Palestine but returns to Alexandria and describes horrific violence there ignited by a “fake nationalism.” Call it the Palestinian National Covenant's denial of the Jewish right to statehood: Since Judaism is nothing more than a religion, there can be no Jewish nation or state. Jews can only be citizens of the nations they already live in, including Egypt.²⁸

The Narrative Splinters

Some non-historical films produced during the 1990s and 2000s followed the same pattern established by war movies, by

²⁷ 1978.

²⁸ Palestinian National Covenant, art. 6, 20.



In Youssef Chahine's Alexandria ... Why?, the director depicts his youth during World War II. While Jews were being exterminated in Europe, they lived peacefully in Alexandria. Chahine presents a rare, sympathetic reference in Egyptian cinema to the Holocaust.

not representing Jews and Israelis in an anti-Semitic context.

In 1993, Chahine directed an allegorical cinematic adaptation of the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers titled *al-Mohager* (The Emigrant). The protagonist Ram, who plays the role of Joseph, travels to Egypt from an unnamed arid area to study and ends up promoting his host country. He is the foreigner who brings Egypt to light and comes across like an alter ego of Chahine himself, a Christian from a Syrian family, who settled in Egypt.

As-Sifara fi-l-Imara (The Embassy in the Building)²⁹ is a comedy starring Adel Imam, a leading figure in Egyptian cinema in recent years. As a politically mobilized and popular comic genius, Imam can be likened to Charlie Chaplin. In this film, his character returns to Egypt and finds the Israeli embassy next door to his apartment. Prominent and noisy opponents of Israel's presence in Egypt are mocked as bloodthirsty and hypocritical Islamic terrorists and leftist Marxists alienated from their fellow Egyptians. Aside from a humorous suggestion of miserliness, the Israeli diplomats are not painted with anti-Semitic brushstrokes. The comedy ends tragically when a Palestinian child befriended by the protagonist is killed during the Intifada in Israel.

Rather than anti-Semitism, the Arab-Israeli conflict is at the core of most new Egyptian films dealing with Israeli Jews. Although numerous anti-Semitic books and pamphlets are sold on street corners in Cairo about ritual murders committed by Jews, in *as-Sifara fi-l-Imara*, the child dies not in a ritual sacrifice but as part of the grim reality of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

In an adaptation of Ala al-Aswani's 2002 novel *Imarat Ya'qubian* (Yacubian Building), Marwan Hamed directed a 2006 film with an all-star cast, including Adel Imam as the protagonist Zaki Dessouki. In the book, Aswani paints an unflattering portrait of Mubarak's Egypt through the eyes of the residents of a downtown Cairo building ruled by gangsters who take over the country. The film version juxtaposes contemporary Egypt's gloomy reality with the time of the old

In a 2005 film, opponents of Israel's presence in Egypt are mocked as Islamic terrorists and leftist Marxists.

Egyptian monarchy when upper-class Egyptians were still influenced by European liberal ideas. In the opening scene, a narrator tells the story of the building's "good old

days" after its construction in the 1930s when Jews still lived there before leaving during the 1956 Suez crisis. Drug dealers and displaced rural peasants replaced them. Aswani's novel and the brave film adaptation consider the expulsion of Egyptian Jewry one of the many faults of the revolutionary government that ruled until 2011, and the film seems nostalgic for the Jewish presence in Egypt. The movie's utter denunciation of the regime, and its clear preference for the monarchy, may have contributed to the government's collapse a few years later during the popular revolution.

Coptic films generally adhere to mainstream Egyptian cinema's norms. Several Christian films produced by the Coptic Church tell moralistic stories about the lives of its saints. *Sam'an al-Kharraz* (Saint Sam'an the Shoemaker)³⁰ recounts a famous medieval Coptic story³¹ about Saint Simon the Tanner in which the anti-Christian, Jewish vizier of the Fatimid Caliphate convinces the caliph to demand that Jews move a mountain with the power of prayer.³² In the movie, the fanatical vizier and his Jewish friend are obsessed with striking out against Christians, who for their

²⁹ Amr Arafa, director, 2005.

³⁰ Maged Tawfiq, director, 2000.

³¹ Maryann M. Shenoda, "Displacing DHIMMI, Maintaining Hope: Unthinkable Coptic Representations of Fatimid Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Nov. 2007, pp. 587-606.

³² Gospel of Matthew, 17:20.

part lament that “these people [i.e., the Jews] never change.” *Sam’an al-Kharraz*, like other Christian films, emphasizes unity between Christians and Muslims. The caliph is portrayed as an honest and wise man with a deep love of knowledge while the role of the villain is reserved for his Jewish vizier.

Egyptian Christian films emphasize unity between Christians and Muslims.

statue ate too much before finally recognizing the futility of paganism and converting to Islam.

Since the series includes so many episodes, it dramatizes even marginal stories in detail. The eighth and ninth episodes, for instance, tell the story of Salman al-Farisi, one of the Muhammad’s companions, and begins with his youth in a Persian village as a devoted fire-worshipper. In a belittling portrayal of Zoroastrianism, Salman zealously spends all his time adoring and caring for fire. He later converts to Christianity and learns from a priest that a true prophet will arise in the land of the Arabs. He enthusiastically joins an Arab caravan on its way to the Arabian Peninsula and is sold along the way as a slave to a Jewish usurer in exchange for a debt.

Ramadan TV

Anti-Semitism is also found on Egyptian TV, such as in the work of Muhammad Subhi, creator of the notorious 2001 TV series *A Knight without a Horse* based on the tsarist forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Prophet-era dramas also have, for the most part, moved to television and are broadcast on Arab satellite channels during Ramadan. Such dramas also abound in children’s cartoons that are influenced by local views wherever they are produced.

Portrayals of Jews in the series are tinged with anti-Semitism. The characters Pinhas and Shas, for example, spend all their time scheming against Muslims and rejoice every time they learn that a Muslim has died from a disease. Jewish characters tend to remain behind castle walls and, for some unclear reason, particularly love olive oil. Nevertheless, the anti-Semitic tropes in *Muhammad Rasul Allah* are less acrid than in earlier films, and the stories adhere more closely to actual events.

One of the first Egyptian TV series was *Muhammad Rasul Allah* (Muhammad, God’s Messenger),³³ which is characterized by monotonous filming inside tents and rooms. It uses boring dialogue and tedious monologues to tell the stories of several prophets ending with Muhammad. “Islam, the religion of truth and justice, has purified my soul from the contamination of all sinful deeds and actions” is a typical line. The series is bereft of drama, and its scenes appear as disconnected episodes.

A number of Ramadan series shown on Egyptian TV have been produced in other countries. Syrian director Muhammad Aziziya based his drama, *Khaled Ibn al-Walid*,³⁴ on the seventh-century Islamic commander, and it is typical of modern Ramadan series about the birth of Islam. The producers apparently wished to avoid an anti-Semitic scandal, so the Jewish role in the story is marginal. When Jews do appear, however, the protagonists

Muhammad Rasul Allah is replete with shallow gags at the expense of Jews and idol-worshippers. In one episode, after a father brings food and drink to his favorite idol, his Muslim son secretly eats the food and knocks down the idol. The father wonders whether the

³³ Ahmed Tantawi, director, 1980.

³⁴ 2005-6.

view them as foreigners who cannot be trusted. Nor do Jews appear in the American cartoon *Muhammad the Last Prophet*,³⁵ which rehashes the main themes of *ar-Risala*. The French-language children's cartoon film *Le Prophète Bien-aimé* (The Beloved Prophet),³⁶ made for the young generation of French Muslims, does not dwell on historical events, and the Star of David appears in a positive context.

In recent years, Saudi companies Albayina Information Technologies and Almadinasoft produced the children's cartoon series *Fityan al-Islam* (The Youngsters of Islam) that depicts episodes from Muhammad's life. Saudi cartoons, however, tell the story of Islam from a totally different perspective than cartoons produced anywhere else: through a grandfather talking to his grandchildren. One cartoon recounts the battle between Muslims and the Jewish tribe Banu Quraiza. The Jews are drawn with hooked noses, skullcaps, and sometimes Eastern European-type fur hats still worn today by ultra-Orthodox Jews. The grandfather tells the children that the Jews broke their pact with Muhammad and conspired against him. He says that, according to the Qur'an and Islamic lore, Jews are cowards and only willing to fight from behind the walls of a fortress. Young viewers are spared no details. They learn how trenches were dug in the Medina market for the execution of the Jewish tribe, and how Abu Lubaba was punished for intimating to the Jews that a bitter destiny awaited them. After telling this story, the grandfather tells the children that the struggle against the Jews continues in the present since "they kill our sons in Muslim Palestine." The children

A children's Ramadan cartoon portrays Jews with hooked noses and skullcaps.

insist on praying to God to remove them from "our" land as the "Prophet" did. Another cartoon in the series that depicts Muhammad's raid

against the Jews in the oasis of Khaybar includes similar anti-Semitic messages and boasts that Muhammad cleansed the Arabian Peninsula of Jewish impurity.

Conclusion

While the anti-Semitic current in Egyptian cinema continued into the 1990s and the 2000s, it was relegated to the margins of the industry, confined for the most part to work by second-rate filmmakers. With historical dramas and movies about Islam's prophet falling out of fashion, Israelis rather than Jews per se were presented as the strong enemy.

At the same time, the introduction of satellite technology enabled films produced anywhere in the Arabic-speaking world to be broadcast everywhere else. Egypt's position as the region's cultural hegemon eroded, enabling more varied attitudes toward Jews—some of them bigoted, others much less so—to finally appear on the screen.

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³⁵ Richard Rich, director, 2004.

³⁶ Orientica, production company, 2005.

