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Muslim–Christian Polemics in Safavid Iran*, by Alberto Tiburcio, Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2020. 272 pp. ISBN: 978 1 4744 4046 2

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1. Introduction

Muslim–Christian Polemics in Safavid Iran by Alberto Tiburcio presents a fascinating and detailed account of the life and work of ‘Ali Quli Jadid al-Islam, a Portuguese Augustinian priest who converted to Islam in Safavid Iran. The author meticulously reconstructs the context of Christian missions in Safavid Iran, highlighting the complex and often contradictory relationship between the state, the ulama, and various religious minorities. This contextualization provides a valuable backdrop for understanding the motivations and contemplative realm that led to Jadid al-Islam’s conversion.

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2. Description

The book is structured around six thematic chapters that systematically examine different aspects of Jadid al-Islam's work. It begins by examining the case of two Portuguese clerics from the Augustinian Order, who apostatized in Safavid Iran in the late 17th century. The first was Padre Manuel de Santa Maria, who became Hasan Quli Beg in 1691. The second was Padre António de Jesus, identified with the convert 'Ali Quli Jadid al-Islam, who was born in Lisbon, entered the Augustinian Order in 1681, and was sent to Iran in 1691 as part of Gaspar dos Reis's retinue. He eventually succeeded Dos Reis as the prelate of the Augustinians in Isfahan in 1696.

The author notes that the "Confessionalization" paradigm, often used to analyze religious changes in early modern Europe, is inadequate for understanding the late Safavid period in Iran. By then, Iran had already become a Shi'i-majority society, so the focus should not be on "converting" the population, as was the case during the early Safavid era. Further, neither Christians nor other non-Muslims were systematically targeted for conversion.

The chapter then provides an overview of the Safavid state's shifting attitudes towards Christian and other non-Muslim groups, highlighting the contradictions and contextual factors that shaped these policies. While Armenian Christians were initially favored for their economic role, periods of repression occurred, often scapegoating them or other minorities. The Georgians, meanwhile, were forcibly incorporated into the Safavid military system as slaves.

The discussion then shifts focus to the Catholic missionary presence in Iran, tracing its origins back to the early Safavid period.

Missionaries from various orders, such as the Jesuits, Augustinians and Carmelites, arrived in Iran with the dual goals of conversion and diplomatic alliance-building. However, they soon realized that converting the Muslim population was an almost impossible task. Instead, the missionaries focused their efforts on the local Armenian and Georgian Christian communities, seeking to bring them under the tutelage of Rome. This met with limited success, as the Gregorian Church managed to retain its independence. The missionaries also faced opposition from both Muslim authorities and the Armenian clergy. The book also highlights the internal rivalries between the different missionary orders, which reflected the geopolitical tensions between European powers like Spain, Portugal and France. These rivalries sometimes led to defections and apostasies from the missionary ranks.

Chapters 2 and 3 then conduct a thorough investigation of the *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* tradition, tracing its origins and evolution, and analyzing Jadid al-Islam's engagement with this genre. Tiburcio demonstrates the way in which Jadid al-Islam skillfully blends biblical exegesis with citations from Shi'i hadith collections, seamlessly weaving together motifs from both the inter-religious and intra-Muslim branches of the *dalā'il* literature. This allows him to infuse his polemics with a distinctly Shi'i character, going beyond the standard tropes of the genre. The chapter then provides an overview of Jadid al-Islam's known writings. These include two major works: the *Hidayat al-zallin*, which refutes Christianity and proves the principles of Islam, and the *Sayf al-mu'minin fi qital al-mushrikin*, which was written as a refutation of Filippo Guadagnoli's *Apologia pro Christiana Religione*. The origins of the polemical cycle, to which the *Sayf al-mu'minin* belongs are traced back to India at the turn of the 17th century. It began with the

Jesuit Jerome *Xavier's A'inih-i haqq-numa*, a work that sought to refute Muslim objections to Christian doctrine. This text was later brought to Iran, where it was refuted by the Shi'i scholar Ahmad al-'Alavi.

The following two chapters (4 and 5) focus on Jadid al-Islam's direct responses to the *Apologia pro christiana religione* of the Catholic scholar Filippo Guadagnoli, as well as his critiques of the Christian moral and ritual practices. Tiburcio's analysis reveals Jadid al-Islam's sophisticated ability to dismantle Christian theological arguments on their own terms, while also incorporating elements of anti-Sunni and anti-Sufi sentiment that were prevalent in the late Safavid period.

The final chapter (6) examines Jadid al-Islam's anti-Sufi treatise, the *Risalih dar radd-i jama'at-i sufiyan*, and its thematic overlap with relevant passages in the *Sayf al-mu'minin*. Tiburcio situates this aspect of Jadid al-Islam's work within the broader context of ulama's hostility towards Sufism and philosophy in the latter half of the 17th century, highlighting the way in which the author's polemics reflect the sectarian tensions and power dynamics at play within the Safavid religious establishment.

The concluding part of Tiburcio's analysis highlights several essential takeaways regarding Jadid al-Islam's polemical work and the broader *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* genre. First, the seemingly contradictory yet complementary nature of early modern polemics, which continuously resort to classical tropes, while also drawing on a wide range of intertextual references to address contemporary debates. Second, the function of classical motifs in anchoring the text within an established, authoritative tradition, while also demonstrating the genre's capacity for renewal, as seen in Jadid al-Islam's engagement with the biblical corpus. Third, the challenges

in assessing the social impact and transmission of these works, given the lack of explicit citations of earlier authors and the prevalence of active emulation over direct referencing. Finally, the historical and political significance of Jadid al-Islam's work in the context of the late Safavid period, including its relationship to the scapegoating of minorities and the weakening of state authority.

3. Analysis

Tiburcio's book focuses on the way in which Jadid al-Islam reinterpreted classical ideas and themes to address the relevant debates and controversies of his time. The author argues against simplistic views of Jadid al-Islam's work as either "original" or "stagnant." Instead, Tiburcio shows how Jadid al-Islam purposefully utilized these established polemical elements, combined with a diverse range of references, to develop a discourse rooted in historical tradition.

A pivotal aspect of Tiburcio's analysis is the examination of Jadid al-Islam's engagement with the biblical text, particularly his concept of *tahrīf* (scriptural falsification). By tracing the corruption of the *Bible* back to its translation and editing processes, Jadid al-Islam maintained the idea of a pristine, unaltered divine revelation, while condemning the final biblical text as a forgery. This sophisticated approach, according to Tiburcio, sets Jadid al-Islam's work apart from the previous binary view of the *Quran*'s validity versus the *Bible*'s corruption.

Furthermore, Tiburcio's analysis highlights the way in which Jadid al-Islam's use of complementary non-biblical sources, such

as hadith collections and Christian texts, enhanced his scholarly reputation and allowed him to communicate with diverse audiences. For instance, his integration of Shia hadith, resonated with ulama, did not solely focus on inter-religious debates; in addition, his references to intra-Christian arguments on scriptural and institutional authority enriched his critiques of Christianity, particularly Catholicism.

Tiburcio's overall argument emphasizes the adaptability of the *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* genre in the early modern period. Rather than a fixed or rigid process, the reiteration of classical polemical elements in works like *Sayf al-mu'minin* is depicted as a dynamic process of appropriation and reconfiguration, enabling authors to address contemporary issues and connect with specific groups.

Tiburcio's contextual analysis is one of the most notable strengths of the book, as it offers a deeper understanding of the interwoven relationship between intellectual creation and the power dynamics of late Safavid Iran. By situating Jadid al-Islam's anti-Sufi and anti-Sunni components within the broader sectarian conflicts and ulama authority struggles of the time, Tiburcio avoids oversimplifying these aspects as solely based on the polemicist's personal biases or idiosyncratic concerns.

4. Evaluation and Conclusion

The most prominent strengths of Tiburcio's book include its compelling narrative, which weaves together historical events, biographical details, and intellectual analyses seamlessly. The author demonstrates thorough research, drawing upon a wide range of sources including missionary correspondence, Persian

chronicles, and scholarly works in multiple languages. The focus on intertextuality is particularly effective, as the author analyzes the way in which Jadid al-Islam's work engages with both Christian and Islamic sources, highlighting the cross-fertilization of traditions that characterized this era.

The author also avoids simplistic interpretations, acknowledging the ambiguities surrounding conversion and the diversified nature of religious and political power in Safavid Iran. The book offers perceptive analyses of the established conventions of the *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* genre, showing how Jadid al-Islam both adheres to and subverts these tropes in his work.

However, the text also presents areas for further discussion. The author acknowledges the limitations of knowledge regarding Jadid al-Islam's background in Islamic sciences, and a more in-depth examination of his specific use of hadith could illuminate his intellectual training and its impact on his arguments. Additionally, while the text effectively sketches the political shifts within Safavid Iran, further explorations of how these shifts influenced Jadid al-Islam's conversion and his later work would deepen the analysis.

Given that only a few manuscripts of Jadid al-Islam's works survive, investigating the way in which his work was received by his contemporaries and later scholars would provide a clearer picture of its influence and impact. Moreover, the text primarily focuses on the *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* genre, and a broader exploration of Jadid al-Islam's other writings, particularly the *Fava'id-i izdivaj*, could offer more insights into his broader intellectual concerns and his perspectives on the other aspects of religious debate.

Overall, *Muslim-Christian Polemics in Safavid Iran* offers a comprehensive and delicate analysis of ‘Ali Quli Jadid al-Islam’s life and work, showcasing the vibrant and diverse intellectual landscape of Safavid Iran. The text provides a valuable contribution to the understanding of religious conversion, interfaith polemics, and the changing dynamics of religious discourse in early modern Persia. The author’s astute analyses and meticulous research make this a compelling and thought-provoking read for anyone interested in Islamic intellectual history, religious studies, and early modern history.