

REVISITING PERSPECTIVES AND INSIGHTS OF PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

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Abstract

The inquiry regarding the People of the Book has long constituted a pivotal aspect of the comparative study of religion. Consequently, numerous Muslim and European scholars have devoted considerable attention to the People of the Book and their role as the custodians of sacred texts. This paper holds significance as it reassesses the nature of the People of the Book as understood within the Qur'an and Islamic religious tradition. The Quran identifies Jews and Christians as the People of the Book (Ahl al-Kitāb), acknowledged as the guardians of the Torah and the Injil. Rather than being classified as polytheists (kāfir mushrik), they are classified as misbelievers (kāfir kitāb). They are thus subject to specific Islamic regulations relating to marriage (al-nikah), poll tax (jizyah), animal slaughter (dhabīhah), dietary provisions (ta'ām), and greetings (salām). An analysis conducted by Muslim scholars provides a nuanced and intricate depiction of the People of the Book within the Quran, underscoring the necessity for further investigation into this subject. This paper incorporates both classical and contemporary Muslim scholarship to clarify this matter. The research ultimately posits that the People of the Book concept offers a valuable framework for innovative and substantial adaptation to local and regional societies.

Keyword: Muslim, People of the Book, Children of Israel, Judaism, Christianity.



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INTRODUCTION

The Quran mentions *Ahl al-Kitāb* 31 times, spread across nine chapters (Fuad, 1994). This term refers to Jews and Christians who follow the Torah and the Injil. According to the Quran,

Say: “O People of the Book come to common terms as between us and you” (*Yā ahl al-kitāb ta’ālaw ila kalimah sawā’ baynanā wa baynakum*), that we worship none but Allāh, that we associate no partners with Him, that we shall not take lords and patrons other than Allāh. If then they turn back, say ye: “Bear witness that we are Muslims” (*faqūlū ashhadū bia’nnā muslimūn*). (Āl-‘Imrān, 3:64).

Although the term *Ahl al-Kitāb*, as stated in the Quran, refers explicitly to the Jews and Christians who possess the revealed books of the Torah and Injil, Muslim scholars have developed a range of interconnected interpretations of the term.

ETHNIC

Muhammad Ibn Idris al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/819) has limited the term “People of the Book” exclusively to the Children of Israel (Banī Israel), that is, the Jews and Christians from this particular tribe. Al-Shāfi‘ī argues that individuals outside this tribe cannot be classified as People of the Book, even if they adhere to Judaism or Christianity. He bases his reasoning on that prophets Mūsā and ‘Isā were sent solely to the Children of Israel and not to other tribes. The Torah and the Injil were also explicitly revealed to them, and since the Quran identifies them as the People of the Book, this further justifies their position (al-Shāfi‘ī, n.d.). The adherents of the Shāfi‘ī school of law share this perspective with al-Shāfi‘ī. To support their stance, they present a particular passage as evidence.

(It has been given to you) lest you say, “the Book was sent down” (*innamā unzila al-kitāb*) unto “two groups of people” (*al-tāi’fataini*) before us (*min qablinā*)- and We were indeed unaware of their teachings. (*Sūrat al-An‘ām*, 6:156).

The term *al-tāi’fataini* mentioned in the verse above refers to the Jews and Christians among the Children of Israel. Therefore, it demonstrates that only these groups are acknowledged as the People of the Book (al-Shīrāzī, 1996).

The followers of the Shāfi‘ī school of thought categorize the adherents of Judaism and Christianity into two distinct ethnic groups. The first group comprises Jews and Christians who are descendants of Prophet Ya’qūb and are called the Children of Israel. According to the Shāfi‘ītes, this group is unequivocally regarded as the People of the Book.

Conversely, the second group of adherents does not belong to the Children of Israel; they practice Judaism and Christianity. This group is divided into three categories: First, those who believe in Judaism and Christianity before their alteration and falsification; second, those who believe in Judaism and Christianity after their alteration and nullification; and third, those who believe in Judaism and Christianity, but whose time of submission is unknown, leaving the status of these religions, whether altered or not, ambiguous.

The Shāfi'ites consider individuals in the first category as preferred People of the Book. They argue that, although non-Israelites, they follow the teachings of Prophet Mūsā and 'Isā, qualifying them as People of the Book. Those in the second and third categories who uphold ambiguous, corrupted, and nullified religions are disregarded. (al-'Ainain, 1984).

According to al-Shahrastānī, the term People of the Book includes both Israelites and non-Israelites—Jews and Christians alike (al-Shahrastānī, n.d.). Muhammad Husain al-Tabātabā'ī states that the term “al-tāi'fataini” explicitly refers to two groups, namely Jews and Christians. Implicitly, it represents a single group: the Children of Israel. Al-Tabātabā'ī argues that Jews and Christians share roots in the Children of Israel. However, due to excessive arrogance and haughtiness, they denigrate each other, dividing into two groups—Jews (those who believe in Mūsā) and Christians (those who believe in 'Isā). Accordingly, al-Tabātabā'ī asserts that these groups are referred to as the “People of the Book” in both the Quran and the Tradition (al-Tabātabā'ī, 1983).

In summary, the classification of ethnic groups recognizes the People of the Book as the Jews and Christians of the Children of Israel. Nonetheless, non-Israelites are also considered People of the Book if they have faith in Judaism and Christianity before their alteration and nullification.

Ideology

Abū Hanīfah al-Nu'mān Ibn Thābit, a renowned Islamic scholar who lived between 699 and 767 AD, offers a unique perspective on the term “People of the Book.” In his writings, he argues that the term refers not only to Jews and Christians who are descendants of the Children of Israel but also to those who have received sacred texts, such as the Prophet Ibrāhīm and Shīth, or the Kitāb al-Zabūr of the Prophet Dāwūd. Abū Hanīfah's view presents a different consideration that broadens the definition of the term and expands its applicability. (al-Jassās, 1994)

Abū Hanīfah's position on the classification of the People of the Book is supported by Abū Muhammad 'Alī Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1063), the Hanafites, and some of the Hanābilites (Ibn Hazm, 1999). Ibn Hazm also observes that the Zoroastrians (al-Majūs) and Sabians (*al-Sābiū'n*) are regarded as part of the People of the Book. Among the Companions and their successors who reported that Zoroastrians belong to the People of the Book are 'Alī Ibn Abī Tālib (d. 41/661), Sa'īd Ibn al-Musayyab (d. 93/711), Abū Qatādah Ibn Da'āmah (d. 107/725), Abū Thūr Ibrāhīm Ibn Khālīd al-Kalbī (d. 240/854), and several scholars from the Zāhirī school of Islamic Law. (Ibn Hazm, 1999; al-Razi, 1991)

Contemporary scholars such as Muhammad Abduh Khayruddin (d. 1323/1905) classify the Sabians as part of the People of the Book. This categorization is because the Sabians are mentioned alongside the Jews and Christians in the same verses. Therefore, Sabians are granted a similar status to the other two groups regarding their religious affiliation. (Abduh, n.d.)

Verily, those who have attained faith (in this divine writ) as well as “those who follow the “Jewish faith” (*alladhīna hādū*), and “the Christians” (*al-nasārā*) and “the Sabians” (*al-sābiū'n*)---”all who believe in Allāh and the Last Day and work righteousness” (*man amana billāh wa al-yaumil al-ākhir wa' amila sālihān*)---

shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve. (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:62).

Verily, as for those who have attained to faith (in this divine writ), and those “who follow the Jewish faith” (*alladhīna hādū*), and “the Sabians” (*al-sābiʿn*), and “the Christians” (*al-nasārā*), and “the Zoroastrians” (*al-majūs*), (on the one hand), and those who are bent on ascribing divinity to aught but Allāh, (on the other), verily, Allāh will decide between them on Resurrection Day, for behold, Allāh is witness unto everything. (*Sūrat al-Hajj*, 22:17).

Scholars and theologians have explored the interpretation of the term “People of the Book.” While some assert that this term refers exclusively to Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Sabians, others, such as Muhammad Rashid Rida, expand the definition to encompass Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians. Rida argues that the reason the Quran does not mention these Eastern religions is that Muslims, at the time of revelation, had not yet established close contact with the peoples of India and the Far East. This lack of interaction with followers of these religions made their inclusion in the Quran unnecessary. Consequently, the term “People of the Book” should include both Judaism, Christianity, and Eastern religions, which were not referenced due to historical circumstances (Rashīd Rida, n.d.).

The following assertion posits that the People of the Book are plausible and encompass those who adhere to the religions of Judaism and Christianity, belonging to the Children of Israel, alongside individuals who profess a specific faith and acknowledge a revealed text.

Upon examining and comparing the two interpretations mentioned earlier, the scholars in question share a common belief that the Jews and Christians who belong to the Children of Israel are considered the People of the Book. The only distinguishing factor between the two interpretations is the treatment of non-Israelites. In this regard, one interpretation views non-Israelites as the People of the Book, provided they embrace Judaism and Christianity before its corruption. Conversely, the other interpretation includes all followers of a religion with a revealed book as People of the Book.

It is reasonable to regard the religious exhortations (*mawāʿiz wa mazājir*) and moral lessons (*rumūz wa amthāl*) found within the *suhuf* of Prophet Ibrāhīm and Shīth, or the *Kitāb al-Zabūr* of Prophet Dāwūd, as intended for the People of the Book. Al-Shahrastānī demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the distinction between the sacred scrolls and revealed books, recognizing the unique status of those who hold these holy scriptures and emphasizing the need to treat them accordingly from an Islamic perspective. In his writings, he uses the term “the People of a Dubious Book” to accurately describe those with sacred scrolls (al-Shahrastānī n.d.). While Abū Hanīfah classifies these individuals as People of the Book, al-Shahrastānī's categorization of them as the People of a Dubious Book is more precise.

It is controversial to assume that everyone who professes a religion and claims to accept a revealed book—such as Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Taoists, and followers of Confucius—belongs to the People of the Book. While they may claim to practice a religion and assert that they have a revealed book, this does not necessarily imply that they adhere to it or are considered part of the People of the Book. This issue is significant in academic and business contexts, as it underscores the importance of understanding the nuances of religious beliefs and

practices across various cultures. In the study of Hinduism, even Abū Rayhan Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Bīrūnī (d. 443/1051), who conducted thorough research on the subject, avoids labelling the followers of the religion as the People of the Book (al-Bīrūnī 1958; Sachau, 1992). Instead, he suggests that they are deists. Both Ibn Hazm and al-Shahrastānī hold a similar view. Ibn Hazm regards explicitly the Hindus, especially the Brahmans, as deists and perceives India's religious customs and those of the Far East in general as a corrupted form of the religion of the Sabians (Ibn Hazm, 1999).

Al-Shahrastānī asserted that both Hindus and Buddhists are deists who do not possess any fixed laws or revealed scriptures. From his perspective, these religions lack a sacred text to serve as a foundation for their beliefs and practices. Al-Shahrastānī's argument implies that the religious doctrines of Hindus and Buddhists are not grounded in divine revelation but are instead the product of human reflection and interpretation. (al-Shahrastānī n.d.; Lawrence 1976).

Sikhism, founded by Gurū Nānak in the 16th century, represents a sophisticated culture that blends elements of Islamic and Hindu theology (McLeod, 1968; Shackle, 1998). Likewise, Daoism and Confucianism are viewed as philosophical religions, with followers adhering to a polytheistic belief system (McLeod, 1968; Shackle, 1998; Wong, 2011). Interestingly, Muhammad Rashīd Rida has classified the followers of these religions as belonging to the People of the Book. However, it is somewhat perplexing to determine the basis for this classification, given the polytheistic nature of these traditions.

The preceding discussion suggests that the term “People of the Book” might solely refer to the Jews and Christians who are descendants of Israel. Those who maintain faith in the sacred texts could be classified under the “People of a Dubious Book,” a concept introduced by al-Shahrastānī in his work, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*.

METHOD

This is a qualitative study, a literature review based on content analysis. The study utilizes a descriptive method supported by library research. This library technique involves gathering data that can contribute to the paper, including books, articles, journals, and similar sources. The study focuses on interpreting the People of the Book as understood in Islamic Religious Tradition.

DISCUSSION

The Nature of the People of the Book

The Quran consistently encourages the People of the Book to abandon their faith and embrace Islam, thus becoming Muslims. These calls for religious conversion are evident throughout the Quran and aim to persuade followers of Judaism and Christianity to accept the principles of Islam.

Say: “O People of the Book come to common terms as between us and you” (*Yā ahl al-kitāb ta’ālaw ila kalimah sawā’ baynanā wa baynakum*), that we worship

none but Allāh, that we associate no partners with Him, that we shall not take lords and patrons other than Allāh. If then they turn back, say ye: “Bear witness that we are Muslims (bowing to Allāh's Will)” (*faqūlū ashhadū bia'nnā muslimūn*). (*Sūrat Āl-‘Imrān*, 3:64).

Individuals belonging to the People of the Book may place their faith in the Quran and willingly submit to the Prophet Muhammad. It is important to note that this act of submission does not require a change in their religion. Instead, it is an essential aspect of their faith to believe in the Prophet Muhammad and follow the laws he was sent to deliver. Through this submission, they become true Muslims, as Allah emphasized repeatedly in the Quran. This concept has been discussed and elaborated upon by various scholars, including al-Tabari (2001), al-Razi (1991), and al-Attas (1993):

“But they are not all alike, among the People of the Book there are upright people who recite Allāh's messages throughout the night and prostrate themselves (before Him)” (*Laisū sawā' min Ahl al-Kitāb ummatun qāi'matun yatlūna āyāt Allāh anāa' al-lail wa hum yasjudūn*). They believe in Allāh and the Last Day and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and vie with one another in doing good works, and these are among the righteous. And whatever good they do, they shall never be denied the reward thereof, for Allāh has full knowledge of those who are conscious of Him. (*Sūrat Āl-‘Imrān*, 3:113-115).

According to the passage, they are considered devout Muslims who are mindful of the Almighty (*muttaqīn*) and follow divine and prophetic guidance (Badron, 2013; McAuliffe, 1991).

After the appointment of Prophet Muhammad, the People of the Book who remained steadfast in their religious beliefs were classified into three distinct factions, as noted by Abū Hamid Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Ghazālī (d.505/1111).

The First Division

Al-Ghazālī posits that individuals belonging to the People of the Book who lack knowledge about the final Prophet, Muhammad, fall into two categories. The first category includes those who have never heard of Prophet Muhammad, while the second category consists of those who have a vague idea about him but lack sufficient knowledge. Al-Ghazālī asserts that these individuals are forgiven and excused (*ma'dhūrūn*) for their ignorance regarding Prophet Muhammad despite the continued practice of their religion (Al-Ghazālī, 1986).

The Second Division.

The second division involves the followers of the People of the Book who recognize the Prophet Muhammad. However, their leaders have misled them by suppressing the truth about the Prophet and hiding the integrity of Islam. These individuals have wrongly accused the Prophet

of being a deceiver. Al-Ghazālī believes that the People of the Book in this division are akin to the first division and should be excused and forgiven (*ma'dhūrūn*) since they are unaware of the truth about the Prophet Muhammad (al-Ghazālī, 1986). Conversely, Ibn' Arabī argues that they will not be excused and are deemed negligent misbelievers if they persist in their confusion and reject the Prophet's clear proofs. (Badron, 2013).

The Third Division

According to al-Ghazālī, the third division refers to the People of the Book, who recognize the integrity of Prophet Muhammad's teachings with a conviction similar to that of their children. Their recognition of his teachings is so profound that denying it would be impossible for them. Privately, they affirm the authenticity of Prophet Muhammad's teachings. However, rather than publicly acknowledging it, they hide and repress the truth about him, thus confusing their community by spreading falsehoods about Allāh and Muhammad. In this respect, al-Ghazālī considers them to be genuine misbelievers (*al-kuffār al-mulhidūn*) who have strayed from the true path (al-Ghazālī, 1986).

In alignment with al-Ghazālī, al-Shahrastānī states that these are the People of the Book whom Allāh has severely criticized on numerous occasions throughout the Quran:

And, behold, “there are indeed some among them who distort the Book with their tongues” (*Wa anna minhum lafarīqān yalwūna alsinatahum bi al-kitāb*) so as to make you think that (what they say) is from the Book, while it is not from the Book, “and who say This is from Allāh” (*wa yaqūlūna huwa min 'indi Allāh*), while it is not from Allāh, and thus “do they tell a lie about Allāh, being well aware (that it is a lie)” (*wa yaqūlūna 'ala Allāh al-kadhib wa hum ya'lamūn*). (*Sūrat Āl- 'Imrān*, 3:78).

In response to the verse mentioned above, Ibn Arabi shares his view that these People of the Book should be considered as the Rejecters (*Jāhidūn*), the Obstinate ones (*Mu'ānidūn*), or the Spreaders of Corruption (*Mufsidūn*) (Badron, 2013).

The Position of the People of the Book

The Quran identifies the sins of *tahrīf*, *tabdīl*, and *talbīs* for the People of the Book who knowingly suppress the truth. *Tahrīf* refers to tampering with content (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:75), *tabdīl* denotes adulteration in context (*Sūrat al-A'raf*, 7:162), and *talbīs* signifies the alteration of truth with falsehood through interpolation and extrapolation (*Sūrat Āl- 'Imrān*, 3:71). While it is widely understood that the People of the Book are the misbelievers (*kāfirun*) (Ibn Hazm, 1999; al-Ghazālī, 1986), there are differing opinions among Muslim scholars regarding whether they can be charged with Polytheism. Consequently, some Muslim scholars categorize the People of the Book into two groups:

Polytheists

Abd Allāh Ibn 'Umar (d. 73/693) argues that individuals belonging to the People of the Book are regarded as polytheists. He refers to various Qur'ānic passages that illustrate their polytheistic nature to support this view.

“Do not marry unbelieving women until they believe” (*Wa lā tankihū al-Mushrikāt hatta yu'minna*); a slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman even though she allures you. “Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe” (*Wa lā tankihū al-Mushrikīn hatta yu'minū*); a slave man who believes is better than an unbeliever even though he allures you. Unbelievers do (but) beckon you to the Fire. But Allāh beckons by His Grace to the garden (of bliss) and forgiveness and makes His Signs clear to mankind that they may receive admonition. (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:221).

In his interpretation of the passage above, 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Umar posits that the term *mushrikāt* or *mushrikīn* (polytheists) also includes the People of the Book due to their worship of entities other than Allāh. Consequently, the Quran explicitly prohibits Muslims from marrying members of this group because of their polytheistic practices. 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Umar further contends that he has not seen a polytheism more significant than a woman from the People of the Book who has taken 'Īsā or other figures as her deity (al-Bayrak, 2008).

According to 'Abd Allāh Ibn Umar, Muslims are permitted to marry the People of the Book only after they have embraced Islam. Abū' Alī al-Fadl Ibn Hasan al-Tabarsī, who lived from 502 to 1108, supported this view and added that the People of the Book are regarded as common polytheists until they accept Islam. Al-Tabarsī cited *Sūrat al-Mā'idah*, 5:5, as evidence to support his argument.

Today all the good things of life have been made lawful to you. “And the food of the People of the Book is lawful to you and your food is lawful to them” (*wa ta'ām alladhīna ūtū al-Kitāb hillu lakum wa ta'āmakum hillu lahum*). “And (lawful to you are), in wedlock, “women who are believers” (*wa al-Muhsanāt min al-Mū'mināt*) and “women from the People of the Book before your time” (*wa al-Muhsanāt min alladhīna ūtū al-Kitāb min qablikum*)---provided that you give them their dowers, taking them in honest wedlock, neither in fornication nor as secret love companion. But as for him who rejects belief (in Allāh)---in vain will be all his works for in the life to come he shall be among the lost. (*Sūrat al-Mā'idah*, 5:5).

Scholars have interpreted the term *al-Muhsanāt* differently, referring to chaste women. According to al-Tabarsī, this term denotes women who initially belonged to the People of the Book but later converted to Islam. In Islamic law, marrying non-Muslims, particularly polytheists, is prohibited. However, if they convert to Islam, it is permissible (al-Tabarsī, 1986). Therefore, al-Tabarsī's interpretation offers a legal framework for Muslim men to marry women from the People of the Book who embrace Islam.

Al-Rāzī is a scholar who shares a similar view with others concerning the People of the Book. However, his approach differs in that he solely criticizes their act of polytheism

instead of arguing that it is forbidden to marry their women. In his treatment of the People of the Book, al-Rāzī asserts that they are not only misbelievers (*kāfirūn*) but also polytheists (*mushrikūn*). To support this viewpoint, he cites two Qur’ānic passages:

“Indeed, the truth denies they who say, Behold Allāh is al-Masīh, son of Maryam” (*Laqad kafara alladhīna qālū inna Allāh huwa al-Masīh ibn Maryam*)---seeing that al-Masīh (himself) said, O Children of Israel! Worship Allāh (alone), who is my Sustainer and your Sustainer. Behold whoever ascribes divinity to any being beside Allāh, unto him shall be the fire and such evildoers will have none to succor him. “Indeed, the truth denies they who say, Behold Allāh is the third of a trinity” (*Laqad kafara alladhīna qālū inna Allāh thālith thalāthah*)---seeing that there is no deity whatever save the One God. And unless they desist from this their assertion, grievous suffering is bound to befall them as they are bent on denying the truth. (*Sūrat al-Mā'idah*, 5:72-73).

“And the Jews say, ‘Uzair is Allāh’s son, while the Christians say, al-Masīh is Allāh’s son” (*Wa qālat al-Yahūd ‘Uzair ibn Allāh wa qālat al-Nasāra al-Masīh ibn Allāh*). Such are the sayings, which they utter with their mouths following in spirit assertions made in earlier times by people who denied the truth. (They deserve the imprecation): May Allāh destroys them. (*Sūrat al-Tawbah*, 9:30).

In his criticism of the People of the Book, al-Rāzī attributes a severe penalty to them, viewing them as extreme polytheists who exceed ordinary polytheists. The scholar explains that ascribing egregious statements to Allāh, such as associating Him with a son or depicting Him as a man, represents the greatest folly of polytheism. While typical polytheists understand that their god is not the creator but rather an intermediary linking them to the Ultimate God, the People of the Book have committed the grave sin of associating Allāh Himself with sons. This act cannot be tolerated or compromised (al-Rāzī, 1991).

In his writings, al-Rāzī posits that the People of the Book—followers of the Torah and the Injil—are both disbelievers (*kāfirūn*) and polytheists (*mushrikūn*), like those who have committed polytheism before Allāh. However, despite this, it is permissible to collect a poll tax (*jizyah*) from them as a form of honouring (*ta'zīm*) their prophets, sacred texts, and the ancestors who once followed the teachings of Mūsā and 'Īsā. Allāh has granted them the status of poll-tax holders by honoring the prophets, texts, and ancestors. Nevertheless, al-Rāzī maintains that they are fundamentally familiar polytheists condemned in the Quran. (al-Rāzī, 1991).

Non-Polytheists

According to earlier scholars like al-Ghazālī, the People of the Book are not regarded as polytheists. This is because they are originally monotheistic and do not follow the primary teaching of polytheists, which is the worship of idols from the beginning. Furthermore, they share a common belief that their respective revealed books are the Word of Allāh, transmitted to them through prophets who received them either verbatim or through some form of divine inspiration. It is based on this widely accepted belief that al-Ghazālī categorizes them as true

misbelievers (*al-kuffār al-mulhidūn*) rather than polytheists (*mushrikūn*) (al-Ghazālī, 1986).

Al-Shahrastānī and Ibn Arabī argue that the People of the Book are seen as misbelievers only because they reject the truth of the Prophet Muhammad and consciously disbelieve some of their revealed texts. Despite these flaws, both scholars maintain that the People of the Book are not polytheists, as they possess revealed books with monotheistic teachings from the beginning. (al-Shahrastānī, n.d.). Ahmad Ibn Abd al-Halīm Ibn Taymiyya (d. 717/1317) explains in his writings that although the People of the Book may exhibit explicit polytheistic behaviour, they do not possess implicit polytheistic beliefs. Ibn Taymiyya supports his argument by referencing a specific verse from the Qur'ān.

Verily, “those who have attained to faith” (*inna alladhīna āmanū*), as well as “those who follow the Jewish faith” (*walladhīna hādū*), and “the Christians” (*wa al-Nasārā*), and “the Sabians” (*wa al-Sabi'īn*)---all who believe in Allāh and the Last Day and do righteous deeds---shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:62).

In his scholarly work, Ibn Taymiyya argues that the People of the Book should not be classified as polytheists. This claim is grounded in their strong belief in Allah and His prophets and their steadfast faith in divine revelations. Consequently, Allah has promised them a reward in the afterlife. Additionally, Ibn Taymiyya references another passage that supports this perspective.

They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of Allāh, and (they take as their Lord), al-Masīh} 'Isā Ibn Maryam; yet they were commanded to worship but One God, There is no god but He. “Praise and glory to Him: (Far is He) from having the partners they associate (with Him)” (*Subhānahu' ammā yushrikūn*). (*Sūrat al-Tawbah*, 9:31).

In his analysis of the aforementioned passage, Ibn Taymiyya argues that the Polytheism depicted therein constitutes an act of creating Polytheism (*ibtada'ū al-shirk*). Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyya asserts that Polytheism is merely a heretical innovation (*bid'ah*) fabricated by the People of the Book due to their pride and arrogance. According to Ibn Taymiyya, the Quran does not classify the People of the Book as polytheists, and Polytheism does not form the basis of their faith. Therefore, the People of the Book should not be considered among the Polytheists. Strictly speaking, according to Ibn Taymiyya's argument, since the People of the Book initially followed a monotheistic religion and the core tenets of their faith are monotheistic, they cannot be labeled as polytheists. (Ibn Taymiyya, 1984).

Al-Tabātabā'ī discusses the concept of Polytheism, categorizing it into two types: Conspicuous Polytheism (*Shirk Jalī*) and Hidden Polytheism (*Shirk Khafī*). Conspicuous Polytheism represents the explicit form of Polytheism and is considered the gravest sin before Allāh. In contrast, Hidden Polytheism is the implicit form that primarily occurs within the heart. Al-Tabātabā'ī notes that those who fall into this category are not deemed polytheists. He continues that the People of the Book exemplify this category. Although they commit explicit Polytheism by associating Allāh with a son and taking their priests as lords, they are not classified as polytheists. Their actions are regarded instead as Hidden Polytheism because they still hold some belief in Allāh, with their deviation from the right path stemming from pride

and arrogance (al-Tabātabā'ī, 1983).

Upon reading and comparing the two analyses presented above, we strongly agree that the People of the Book do not practice polytheism. Although the Quran portrays their actions in this manner, Ibn Taymiyya clarifies that the polytheism exhibited by the People of the Book is not genuine polytheistic practice but rather an act of fabricating it (*ibtada'ū al-shirk*) (Ibn Taymiyya, 1984).

The Quran does not explicitly denounce the People of the Book as polytheists. Instead, it lists their acts of polytheism while warning of severe consequences should they reject the call of Islam. Notably, the People of the Book are viewed not as polytheists but as misbelievers, categorized as *kāfir kitāb* (misbeliever) rather than *kāfir mushrik* (polytheist). Consequently, due to this unique position, they are subject to specific Islamic laws concerning poll tax (*jizyah*), slaughtering of animals (*dhabīhah*), marriage (*al-nikah*), food (*ta'ām*), and greetings (*salām*).

The People of the Book of the Present Day

According to the argument presented, al-Shāfi'ī limits the designation of the People of the Book to the Children of Israel (*Banī Isrā'īl*), specifically Jews and Christians of Israelite descent. These individuals hold a special status under Islamic law, allowing Muslims to consume their slaughtered animals and marry their women without requiring conversion to Islam. Al-Shāfi'ī thus recognizes them as the Genuine People of the Book (*Ahl Kitāb Mutlaq*). Conversely, those who convert to Judaism or Christianity but lack Israelite ancestry are not considered actual members of the People of the Book by al-Shāfi'ī and are instead referred to as the Figurative People of the Book (*Ahl Kitāb 'ala Sabīl al-Majāz*). (Al-Shāfi'ī, n.d.).

According to Shams al-Dīn Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Khatīb al-Sharbīnī (d. 968/1560), it is permissible for a Muslim man to marry a woman from the People of the Book if she is a member of the Children of Israel (*Banī Isrā'īl*), without requiring her to convert to Islam. However, if the woman is not a member of the Children of Israel, there is one strict requirement that the Muslim man must fulfill, which is to ascertain or trace back when her lineage embraced Judaism or Christianity.

In the context of interfaith marriage, Islamic law allows a Muslim man to marry a woman of Jewish or Christian faith, provided that her lineage embraced the respective religion before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad in the case of Christianity and prior to the advent of Prophet Isa in the case of Judaism. It is essential to note that this permission is limited to the People of the Book, i.e., the followers of Judaism and Christianity, and does not extend to women of any other faith.

However, if the man doubts the woman's lineage or encounters difficulty determining when her ancestors adopted Judaism or Christianity, he is prohibited from marrying her. Additionally, marrying a woman whose lineage converted to Judaism or Christianity after the time of the Prophet is also forbidden. Therefore, it is essential for Muslim men considering marriage to women of other faiths to ensure their lineage can be traced back to the period before the respective prophets. This guarantees that the marriage aligns with Islamic law, allowing the couple to lead a fulfilling life together without legal or religious challenges.

In strict accordance with Islamic law, Muslim men can only marry women from Judaism and Christianity if they convert to Islam. In other words, while these religions are recognized

as the Figurative People of the Book, it is deemed unlawful for Muslims to marry women from these faiths without seeking their conversion to Islam, following the perspective of al-Sharbīnī. However, this prohibition does not apply to individuals of non-Israelite descent whose lineages have been established in areas like the Middle East, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria for a considerable time. Their ancestors likely embraced Judaism and Christianity well before the Prophet's arrival.

Regarding the consumption of slaughtered animals from the People of the Book, it is permissible to eat the slaughtered meat of the Children of Israel who belong to this group. However, suppose the slaughtered meat comes from the People of the Book, who do not have Israelite origins. In that case, tracing their lineage and ascertaining when they converted to Judaism or Christianity is necessary. If their lineage cannot be traced or if they are recent converts to these religions, consuming their slaughtered meat is not allowed.

According to Al-Sharbīnī, the poll tax (*jizyah*) is imposed on the People of the Book, regardless of their connection to the Israelites. Currently, the significance of the poll tax has diminished, with greater emphasis on Muslim marriages to the People of the Book and the permissibility of consuming their slaughtered meat—challenges that many Muslims face daily. Given the typical interactions between Muslims and the People of the Book, particularly in Muslim-minority societies and within the Muslim diaspora in the West, it is essential to provide Muslims with relevant information on how to engage with them appropriately. This guidance is crucial regarding marriage and food matters.

The previous viewpoints are based solely on the works of al-Sharbīnī, a follower of al-Shāfiʿī's legal school. Nonetheless, it is vital to emphasize this perspective due to its significant impact. Indeed, with al-Sharbīnī's innovative adaptation, contemporary Muslims are offered a potential framework for revitalizing and applying the concept of Ahl al-Kitāb in various local and regional societies (Muhammad Azizan Sabjan, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion examines the Islamic perspective regarding the People of the Book, who are not considered polytheistic but misbelievers. Islamic scholars hold two general views of this group based on their origins and beliefs. The first view recognizes the Israelite People of the Book, which includes Jews and Christians of Israelite descent, as the Genuine People of the Book (*Ahl Kitāb Mutlaq*). They hold a special status in Islamic law, permitting Muslims to eat their slaughtered animals and marry their women without needing conversion to Islam. This is due to their shared ancestry and similar beliefs. However, non-Israelite People of the Book are classified as the Figurative People of the Book (*Ahl Kitāb' ala Sabīl al-Majāz*), the second category of People of the Book. Their beliefs and characteristics differ from those of Israelite origin. Consequently, Muslims are barred from applying the same laws to them as those enacted for the Genuine People of the Book, meaning they cannot marry their women or eat their slaughtered animals. This distinction is important in Islamic law and clarifies the status of the People of the Book as well as the legal implications of their beliefs and origins.

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