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“Sectarianism in Islam and Muslim Communities”

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**ABSTRACT**

“Sects That Feign Forgetting: Anti-Sunnism and  
Anti-Judaism in Early Shii Propaganda”

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In his recent *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, David Nirenberg trenchantly observes that Christian polemicists perennially attacked their opponents for Judaizing, specifically claiming that heretics and others who strayed from the “orthodox” path were led to do so by misreading the Bible in a “Jewish” manner. Similarly, different sects in Islamic history have claimed that their opponents Judaized by adopting an incorrect approach to scripture. Thus, the Kharijites were both the first sect in Islam and the first group within the Muslim fold to be accused of Judaizing because of their perfectionist reading of the Qur’an. Likewise, throughout the centuries, Sunnis have claimed the Shia to be a Jewish heresy (“the Shia are the Jews of our community” as one tradition has it), a claim grounded in analogous accusations of misinterpretation of scripture. In a unique Fatimid propaganda text I am preparing for publication, this polemical frame is reversed – Sunnis are condemned as Judaizing for their failure to follow the Imams of the family of Ali as the Prophet commanded them, and also for refusing to fight against injustice within the community. This presentation examines these different cases specifically in the light of the exegetical acrobatics that are frequently involved to justify these claims on a Qur’anic basis, focusing in particular on early Shii polemicists’ attack on Sunni quietists – a polemic recently revived in the propaganda of the so-called “Islamic State.”