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Jews and Christians in Premodern and Early Modern Asia and Africa

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Entangled Histories and Interreligious Encounters

Jews and Christians in Premodern and Early Modern Asia and Africa

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Scholars examining pre-modern Jewish encounters with non-Jewish communities have increasingly emphasized the multiple and complex dimensions of these interactions within the same or connected cultural milieux. Ritual and legal practices, religious concepts, artistic motifs, and forms of material culture, economic and other quotidian exchanges, and of course polemical treatises, exegesis, and literary representations have all captured researchers' attention (Baumgarten, Karras, and Medler 2017; Secunda 2013; Bonfil, Irshai, and Talgam 2012; Simonsohn 2011; Shalev-Eyni 2010; Gaudette 2010; Holo 2009; Kogman-Appel and Meyer 2008; Cuffel 2007; Becker and Reed 2007; Meri 2002). With regard to the pre-modern Islamic world, scholars have regularly noted the parallel experiences and status of Jews and Christians under Islamic rule, as well as shared cultural practices between Muslims and *dhimmi* communities (Russ-Fishbane 2015; Safran 2011; Mayeur-Jaouen 2005; Meri 1999; Fenton 1995, 1997, 2000; Cohen 1994). Despite the shared social and cultural history of Jews and Christians as *dhimmis* all through the world of Islam prior to the nineteenth century, their intercommunal relations and attitudes to each other receive little attention and only in passing.

The essays in this special issue of *Entangled Religions* are based on the proceedings of the workshop *Eastern Jews and Christians in Interaction and Exchange in the Islamic World and Beyond: A Comparative View* held in Jerusalem and Ra'anana in June 2016. Accordingly, the essays address interreligious encounters in the Islamic world and beyond, examining social and religious attitudes towards religious Others in a wide range of disciplinary approaches. What binds these essays together is an attempt to shed light on a little-known history of Jewish-Christian relations in premodern Asia and Africa, a subject that stands at the heart of the research project *Jews and Christians in the East: Strategies and Interactions between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean* funded by the European Research Council and hosted by the Center for Religious Studies at Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany. In many respects, this publication is the first attempt to approach the study of Jewish-Christian relations in the premodern Muslim world and beyond it to regions where the history of these communities is largely unrecorded, such as Ethiopia, and Central and South Asia.

A word on periodization is in place. Some scholars have noted that “medieval” is a Eurocentric term that is problematic or inaccurate when applied to other civilizations, and in particular to the Islamic world and to South Asia (Hodgson 1974, 2, 3–11; Berkey 2003, 179; Veluthat 2009, 19–60). We therefore use the term “premodern” wherever further specification is not required, and not to the exclusion of the early modern period (sixteenth century) or late antiquity (eighth-tenth centuries). The term “medieval” is used wherever the period in the region under investigation parallels that which is understood by the term in the European context. The reason for this rather lax periodization is the highly diversified nature of the sources and the communities under investigation.

Indeed, the extent and character of sources attesting to Jewish-Christian relations in premodern Africa and Asia changes from region to

region. Thus, in this special issue of *Entangled Religions* dealing with a wide range of regions and languages, each article represents a different type of source material related directly or obliquely to premodern Jews and Christians imagining each other, imagined by others, or in actuality sharing a sociocultural history. The first article in this collection, by Giuseppe Cecere, deals with Christians and Jews as the Other projected in Muslim imagination and aspiration for religious subjugation. Similarly, the articles by Mordechai Dubovick and Michal Ohana deal with Christians as a constructed Other in Jewish literature, mainly of hermeneutic genres building upon historic layers of Jewish Biblical commentaries. Ofir Haim and Sophia Dege-Müller deal with a slightly different mode of Othering, where Christians and Jews, respectively, are clustered along various types of Others by labelling and stereotyping. Finally, Ophira Gamliel and Bar Kribus and Verena Krebs deal with Jewish history in South India and Jewish material culture in Ethiopia, respectively, where the relations with and to Christians can merely and obliquely be inferred against the backdrop of the actual historical consequences. To write a comprehensive history of Jewish-Christian relations in the regions where co-existence or contacts—even if only imagined—left some form of traces, a novel approach to historical sources is required. The essays presented here deal with various types of source material that is potentially useful in writing a comprehensive history of Jewish-Christian relations even in regions and periods that lack concrete historical evidence. Each of the essays demonstrates an innovative approach to sources that were not yet utilized in a comprehensive historical investigation of Eastern Jewish-Christian relations. It should be noted that the miscellaneous section appended to this collection contains an outline by Barbara Roggema of the planned publication of a three-volume survey of sources to be implemented in writing the history of Jewish-Christian relations in the Eastern Mediterranean, North and Northeast Africa, and

Central, West, and South Asia. In many respects, the papers in this online publication are based on the identification of sources and their utilization in writing parts of a history that is yet to be written.

We start with Giuseppe Cecere's survey of the Egyptian hagiographies of Sufi saints, an excellent example of approaching the social history of Jews and Christians through the prism of Muslim attitudes. He observes the changing attitudes toward Christians and Jews in these hagiographies, in particular of the Shādhiliyya order, noting that the most common point of reference is to the miraculous power (*karāmāt*) of a Shaykh. Cecere traces patterns in the treatment of Christians and Jews in the *karāmāt* narratives, the most common being the transformation of the Other into a faithful Muslim. He devotes much of his article to references which deviate from this pattern of conversion, however. He examines in detail attitudes ranging from tolerating the Other, as in the case of the Jewish physician licensed to practice medicine by the power of al-Shādhilī, to oppressing the Other even against the will of the ruler. An example of the latter is the case of Shaykh Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl demanding the removal of the Coptic Church in Fuṣṭāṭ.

Cecere begins his article by cautioning against facile dichotomies of Sufi tolerance toward *dhimmi*s and other non-Muslims too often contrasted against Muslim legal or administrative religious intolerance. He notes at the outset the long tradition of Sufi involvement with military Jihād, including debates in Mamluk Egypt and regardless of the position of the antagonist Christians, i.e. whether they surrendered willingly to Muslims or had fought against them. These traditions and debates, along with anxiety about Coptic administrators and "Franks" (European Christians), substantively affected Sufi depictions of Christian and Jewish communities, and, according to Cecere, they are also reflected in the history of Sufi actual interactions with Christians and Jews. Cecere underscores in his article the exceptions to the most common patterns of Sufi attitudes to non-Muslims

as expressed in the *karāmāt* narratives, demonstrating that these models were not immutable. Insofar as such narratives were affected not merely by hagiographic convention, but also by an individual author's choice, the politics and anxieties of a given region and period, and the experiences of quotidian interactions between religious groups, Sufi hagiographies remain an essential source for understanding the often delicate balance between majority and minority communities in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt. Cecere thus utilizes the Sufi hagiography as a source for the historiography of interreligious relations. It is precisely this culturally sensitive approach to sources dismissed as fictional or mythical by conventional historians that enables the writing of the history of interreligious relations where documents are scarce or, at times, even non-existent.

A relatively neglected area of study in the field of interreligious relations within the Islamicate world is the relations *between* religious minorities. Broadly speaking, this would encompass Jewish-Christian relations in much of the Eastern Mediterranean as well as Zoroastrian-Christian-Jewish relations in the Abbasid, Seljuq, and Safavid Iran and surrounding territories. The concept of minorities relies on varied defining factors, not necessarily religion-oriented, and depends on the regions and their specific sociopolitical context. Studies on religious minorities in Egypt from the Fatimid through the Mamluk periods attribute this category to communities deprived of power regardless of their relative population size.¹ Most studies of religious interactions in these areas concentrate on minority groups

1 See for example the discussions on the slow process of Islamicization of Egypt, where the numerical majority remained primarily Christian during the Fatimid, Ayyubid, and possibly even the Mamluk period (Werthmuller 2010, 74-76; Brett 2005; Garcin 1987). For a systematic discussion of the discrepancy between these two meanings of "minority" and their socio-political and religious meanings, see Boisellier, Clément, and Tolan 2010. For an attempt to define minority in universal terms beyond the context of the medieval Mediterranean, see Skutsch 2005, xxiii-xxiv.

in relation to the ruling Muslims (Peacock, de Nicola, and Yildiz, 2015; Elverskog 2010; Winkler 2010; Griffith 2008; Choksy 1997). Importantly, the relations between Jews and Christians outside the European context were modelled in various ways which were not always determined by Muslim domination, as in the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. For example, in South Asia Jewish and Christian individuals and communities are hardly visible before the colonial period, though their presence in the region is attested since the ninth century (Narayanan 1972, 2004; Varier and Veluthat 2013; Gamliel 2018). In early-modern Moghul India Jews surface as a sort of curiosity to be entertained at Akbar's court whereas Christians act as missionaries (Fischel 1948-1949; Katz 2000). In the latter case Jews and Christians are marked "outsiders", as opposed to the situation on the Malabar Coast in western South India. Our main concern is with Jewish and Christian communities whose history predates the colonial period which is considered integral to the Asian or African region under investigation.

Clearly, the study of inter-minority relations is more readily approachable within the framework of the history of the majority or dominant group and requires a nuanced reexamination of sources with the intent of deciphering the implications of majority-minority interactions on relations between minorities. Thus, for example, when Uriel Simonsohn (2011) investigates the legal boundaries between religious communities during the Early Islamic period, his work points at social similarities between Jewish and Christian minorities even if it does not directly address the relations between Jews and Christians. Intra-minority relations between groups belonging to a broad confessional division have garnered slightly more attention, such as the relations between Rabbanite and Karaite Jews (Zinger 2017; Bohak 2013; Rustow 2011; Frank 2008) or interactions between different Christian communities (Pogossian 2016; Farag 2011; Weltecke 2003).

There are important exceptions to these general remarks. Focusing on Jewish-Christian interactions under Islamic rule or influenced by it, scholars have increasingly remarked upon evidence from the Cairo Geniza that Jews collected Christian literature and seem to have been familiar with and interested in Christian languages and alphabets (Russell 2013; Szilágyi 2005; Brock 1984, 1990). Other types of cross-fertilization between Jewish and Christian communities have also captured sporadic scholarly attention, producing excellent studies on individual examples of this phenomenon in polemical, philosophical, and apocalyptic literatures.² Despite these efforts, detailed, systematic studies of the history of Jewish-Christian connections—whether friendly or hostile—in the Eastern Mediterranean from the rise of Islam through the sixteenth century and in the relevant Asian and African regions have remained few in comparison to the level of scholarship for Western Europe and Byzantium. The aim of this special volume and of the joint workshop from which it sprang is to rectify this imbalance in the scholarship.

Three of the articles in this special edition of *Entangled Religions* explore textual evidence for Jewish-Christian encounters in the Eastern Mediterranean (Dubovick), North Africa (Ohana), and Central Asia (Haim). These three articles deal directly with the attitudes of Jews toward Christians, providing a glance into sociocultural overlaps unmitigated by the Muslim majority and its political dominance. The intertextual connections between Jews and Christians in eleventh-century Baghdad are explicated by Mordechai Yosaif Dubovick in his discussion of the arguments posed by R. Hayya Ga'on, head of the Pumbedithan Academy, to ward off the reluctance of the Sicilian R. Maşliaḥ in consulting the Patriarch of the Church of the East

2 For apocalyptic texts, see Pogossian forthcoming; Greisiger 2014, 2008. For polemic texts, see Roggema 2009; Pines 1967. For philosophical material, see Schwarb 2014; Stroumsa 1991.

(Nestorian) in Baghdad on the definition of a word in Psalms 141:5. Using different accounts of the same event, Dubovick examines the attitude of the Sicilian rabbi to sharing textual traditions with Christian authorities and contrasts it with that of the Rabbi of Baghdad as reflecting two different contexts of co-existence, or of inter-religious relations. Regarding the two contrasted “contact zones”, so to speak (Pratt 1991), Dubovick suggests that relations between Jews and Christians, specifically those of the Church of the East in Baghdad were closer, perhaps even warmer, than those extant in Sicily, where a largely Byzantine Orthodox population and the proximity to Catholic Rome prevented the cosmopolitan atmosphere that was typical of Baghdad at the time. This observation is an important one, for it highlights the context-bound nature of religious encounters between Christian and Jewish communities. Dubovick demonstrates that Jewish and Christian communities were not monolithic across regions and unconditioned by sociopolitical context; various Christian and Jewish communities may have had strikingly different attitudes toward and relations with each other. Clearly, the nature of Jewish-Christian relations is not interchangeable from one context to another.

Dubovick’s main focus is on the competing textual layers of Biblical exegesis and translations of the verse in both Jewish and Christian traditions. He suggests that it was not the religious authority *per se* which prompted the Ga’on to seek the advice of the Patriarch, but rather the fact that he attributed the Patriarch with access to the Peshitta’s Syriac during a time when many Christians were gradually losing their command of Syriac in favor of Arabic. In one version of the events, the Patriarch’s reply closely resembles the Masoretic reading, which Dubovick attributes to a connection between Christian-Syriac and Jewish-Aramaic early reading traditions and interpretations of the Biblical text. This intertextual analysis of the hermeneutic history of Psalms 141:5 and the anecdotal incident

of R. Maşliaḥ's scholarly embassy are depictive of intra-Jewish debates concerning the shared textual history with Syriac Christians and reveal the different attitudes of Jewish communities toward Christian scholarly authority.

That real-life encounters were shaped into religious and scholarly discourse is demonstrated by Michal Ohana in her examination of anti-Christian Jewish polemics in R. Shaul Serero's sermons against the backdrop of developments in the history of the community in Fes. Of the three sermons discussed in her article, one is suggested by Ohana to be based on an actual debate, whereas the other two are based on theoretical and theological anti-Christian polemic. Ohana traces Serero's religious position to two historical events that shaped Serero's anti-Christian arguments; one is the expulsion of his ancestors from Spain a century earlier, and the other is the defeat of King Sebastian of Portugal in Morocco in 1578, resulting in the capture of Portuguese soldiers. The Portuguese captives were placed in the Jewish quarter for care. This latter event left a local legacy of interfaith contacts and at least one actual debate, which was recorded in a Portuguese account and which shaped Serero's sermons two decades later. According to Ohana, Serero's arguments in his first sermon (1603) were aimed at a Jewish apostate he claimed to have met, although the debate drew from a long tradition of Jewish-Christian polemics.

Serero lived in a region hosting diverse ethnic and religious groups in times of change affecting intra-communal tensions among religious groups—Moroccan Jews and Sephardim, Christians and New Christians, Muslim rulers and warriors. Right at the outset Ohana notes that although Jews in Islamic countries were not as threatened by Christian dominance as in Europe, their cosmopolitan environment exposed them to missionary activities which in turn engaged them in anti-Christian polemical discourse. Serero, while relying on a long tradition of Jewish polemics, shaped his anti-

Christian arguments to fit his own time and place and to address the need to confront missionizing activities in his own community. Ohana's article, like that of Dubovick, shows that under Islamic hegemony Jewish-Christian encounters—whether historical or discursive—acquire a more sporadic character in comparison with Latin Europe, where polemic literature became a fully-fledged genre of Jewish literature.

Further into the Persianate World, Ofir Haim examines Biblical exegesis for its interreligious references, though in this case the references to the Other are generic rather than interpersonal or scholarly. Looking at a corpus of early Judeo-Persian Biblical commentaries, Haim notes that this corpus generally lacks polemical references, except in sections dealing with the prophetess Ḥannah. In the commentaries on Ḥannah's story (1 Samuel, 1:11–2:10), Christians and Muslims appear under the prototypical designations 'Edom and Iṣma'el, respectively, as entities that affiliate, albeit erring in their understanding, with the Biblical prophets. These are contrasted with “philosophers and astronomers”, or those who reject prophecy altogether in favor of rationality. Whereas the former are presented as resorting to false prophets (Jesus and Muhammad respectively), the latter are presented as the radical Other in their adherence to “foreign sciences”. The Jewish authors reject the intellectual inquiry of the “astronomers and philosophers” as unthinkable heresy, while discussing the fate of Christians and Muslims at the moment of salvation.

Haim unravels this commentary's intersections with both Rabbanite and Karaite hermeneutic traditions, although the degree to which the Judeo-Persian author was directly familiar with Judeo-Arabic exegetical traditions remains uncertain. He points out that a closer examination of the corpus as a whole and its intersecting Rabbanite and Karaite references would reveal much about the literary and religious world of the Judeo-Persian audience of the texts. The commentary about Ḥannah calls for a

deeper analysis of intra-religious relations between communities of Jews in the Islamicate world. The generic references which Haim traces therein are comparable to rhetorical devices in Christian texts, where Jews are clustered with other religious “undesirables” such as heretics, Muslims, and Pagans (Lipton 1999, 30-53, 82-111; Dege-Müller, this volume). Tactical commonalities across geographical and cultural distances raise questions about the portability of polemical strategies, or alternately about their ubiquity, not necessarily as an outcome of historical contacts.

The case studies discussed by Dubovick, Ohana and Haim do attest, however, to historical contacts between Jews hailing from distant regions. When dealing with relations between Eastern Jews and Christians it becomes clear that their communities are all located along the routes and around the nodes of the historical trade networks between the Eastern Mediterranean and East Asia, encircling the inland trade routes via Central Asia to the north and the Indian Ocean maritime trade routes to the South. Religious communities came into contact through interactions in economic activities all throughout the Mediterranean and along international trade routes through land via the so-called Silk Road and by sea via the Indian Ocean. For this reason, the interreligious relations between these minority communities can be conveniently studied under the framework of trading diasporas, or trading communities, thus calling for a transregional perspective beyond the examination of strictly-defined regional contexts (Subrahmanyam 1997; Seland 2013).

The interconnectedness of cultures over supra-regional landscapes was first modelled for the Mediterranean by Fernand Braudel (1972-1973; see also Goitein 1967-1993; Abulafia 2011; Harris 2005; Horden and Purcell 2000). A model similar to that of Braudel’s Mediterranean model was developed for the Indian Ocean Rim embracing the coastal regions connected via the seas from Southwest Asia and East Africa to South and

Southeast Asia (Alpers 2014; Sheriff and Ho 2014; Pearson 2003; Chaudhuri 1985, 1990). Both the fields of Mediterranean and Indian Ocean Studies are interdisciplinary in terms of combining disparate area studies and related subjects such as language, culture, and history. In both fields, the notions of trading networks across regions and over the *longue durée* acquired a prominent place in developing the paradigm further to also incorporate cultural and religious studies into the examination of interconnectedness and exchange on the supra-regional level. The history of Eastern Jewish-Christian relations is, to a large extent, embedded in the history of long-distance trade networks prior to the advent of European colonialism.

Trade in the Indian Ocean forms the subject matter of studies on economic and sea-faring activities that are traceable in history since the first millennium BCE, with textual and material evidence becoming more and more abundant as the Arab-Muslim networks gradually expand across the Indian Ocean Rim (Tibbetts 1971; Chaudhuri 1990; Hourani 1995; Wink 1990–2004; Gupta 2005; Gurukkal 2016). The trade networks of West Asians on the one hand and South Asians on the other hand have been the focus of studies based on textual and inscriptional evidence (Abraham 1988; Champakalakshmi 2001; Subbarayalu 2009). The history of Indian Ocean maritime trade involves immaterial types of exchange besides the exchange of commodities, finance, and travel technology. Intellectual, cultural, and religious contacts, too, were instrumental—rather than merely consequential—in the expansion of the transregional networks of maritime trade communities. Especially significant in the context of Jewish-Christian relations are those types of exchange related to religious practices and ideologies (Risso 1995; Ricci 2010; Lambourn 2008; Malekkandathil 2010; Kooria 2016).

The discovery of the Cairo Geniza revealed hundreds of documents related to Jewish maritime trade networks in the Indian Ocean from

the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. These documents constitute a historical source of unique quality which is often related to as documentary Geniza in the sense that the texts offer a glimpse into real-life events in Indian Ocean history that would have otherwise been left in the dark (Margariti 2007, 2014; Goitein and Friedman 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, with Ashur 2013). Within this body of research, the West Coast of South India has long been recognized as an important point of convergence, trade, and interreligious encounters, yet the disciplinary barriers between South Asian and Mediterranean Studies remain largely unbreachable, notwithstanding several attempts towards a holistic approach to the connected history of the western and eastern shores of the Arabian Sea (Shokoohy 2013; Lambourn 2016, forthcoming; Kooria 2016; Gamliel forthcoming).

The article by Ophira Gamliel attempts an interdisciplinary study of intermarriage as instrumental in networking between Aden and the Malabar Coast. She bases her study on Geniza documents left by the Jewish merchant Abraham Ben Yijū, whose life story as reconstructed by Geniza fragments captured the imagination of scholars (Goitein 1973; Ghosh 2002). Gamliel compares laws and customs of marriage, conversion, slavery, and inheritance in Jewish lore with the socioeconomic status of Ben Yijū's wife, Aśu, and business associates in South India. She addresses certain discrepancies in the depiction of Aśu as a slave girl in a deed of manumission on the one hand, and of one Nāyar as the brother-in-law of her husband, Ben Yijū. She argues that Ben Yijū's definition of Aśu as a convert slave girl follows the strategies laid out by Jews who married (and proselytized) Christian concubines, and compares these strategies with Muslim customs of temporary marriage. Her article outlines a complex networking strategy of adaption and negotiation between South Indian and Mediterranean kinship structures navigated by Abraham Ben Yijū. Besides attempting a balanced study of evidence from both sides of the

Arabian Sea, her study presents a multidisciplinary approach to the study of sources combining socioeconomic history with historical linguistics. It further signals a new direction for the exploration of medieval Jewish Indian Ocean traders in integrating the study of Cairo Geniza documents with that of South Indian social history.

The study of the Jewish maritime networks in the Indian Ocean surprisingly falls short of references to Christian merchants, who left hardly any traces in the history of medieval Indian Ocean trade despite their documented involvement in long-distance trade during the centuries preceding the rise of Islam (Seland 2012). Even though we can speculate that Malabar Christian communities emerged in a similar way to that of Muslims and Jews, namely through a gradual process of integration and assimilation of itinerant West Asian traders, the evidence for real-life encounters and contacts with Muslim and Jewish Indian Ocean merchants, let alone with South Indian communities, is close to none. This lack of evidence becomes even more striking when considering the Christian history of Ethiopia on the western shores on the Red Sea, which was the major maritime pathway leading from the Eastern Mediterranean towards the regions lying across the Indian Ocean Rim (Power 2012; Pankurst 2003).

Ethiopia's history of interreligious encounters and cross-cultural exchanges from late antiquity to the early modern period is a rich and complex one. Much of the scholarship in this area has focused on Ethiopia's involvement with interreligious politics in pre-Islamic Arabia or Rome, or on diplomatic and artistic exchanges with medieval Western Europe, although its relations with India have also been touched upon (Krebs 2014; Hatke 2011, 2013; Bowerstock 2013; Fiey 2010; Ranasignhe 2001; Beckingham 1989, 1994; Tamrat 1972; Shahid 1971; Abir, 1980). European expansion into the region has likewise generated analyses of religious encounter between European and Ethiopian Christians as well as Muslims (Knobler

2017, 30–43, 49–56; Belcher and Kleiner 2015; Pennec 2003; Shabot 2001; Aubin 1980; Lesure 1976). Most scholars working on religious history within premodern Ethiopia in detail, however, have tended to focus on a single religious community, although the historiography regarding the Beta Israel or “Fälaša” forms a significant exception to this tendency (Derat 2003; Kaplan 1984; Trimmingham 1969). Therefore the two articles by Sophia Dege-Müller and by Bar Kribus and Verena Krebs, followed by the response of Steven Kaplan, form a significant contribution to the study of interreligious relations in medieval Ethiopia.

Dege-Müller examines the attitudes and rhetorical strategies of Christian elites in Ethiopia toward Jews, contrasting the periods prior to and following the fourteenth century, when an actual, historical community, identified by itself and by outsiders as Jewish, surfaces in written sources. Her article deals also with Ethiopian relations with Greek and Arab Christian societies and contextualizes interreligious encounters in internal political developments. The translation and adaptation of Greek and Arabic anti-Jewish sources into Ge’ez reveal a history of cross-cultural exchange between Ethiopia and the Mediterranean and Arab worlds. Furthermore, the material and polemical tactics which Dege-Müller analyzes place the history of Ethiopian Jewish-Christian relations within a connected continuum of polemical discourse which existed between medieval Jews and Christians in the surrounding regions. At the same time, her article shows that despite the connected history on the supra-regional level, Ethiopia’s history of interreligious encounters has its own unique features, which Dege-Müller attributes to a pendulum movement between positive and negative representations of Jews. The former is usually associated with an imagined Israelite or Hebrew identity. She emphasizes the stark distinction between the written historical legacy of Ethiopian Christians as opposed to the oral tradition of Ethiopian Jews, a marginalized and discriminated group. The

negative portrayals of Ethiopian Jews, at times also implemented on other marginalized non-Jewish communities (such as the degraded Stephanites), are not only analyzed in her article but also presented in an appended list of translations and texts from the relevant sources, which will surely enrich future studies in the field.

As Dege-Müller shows, the perspective of Beta Israel (Ethiopian) Jews is difficult to obtain from historical sources. The efforts of Bar Kribus and Verena Krebs to unearth Beta Israel historical relations to Christians represent a novel approach of combining archaeology and ethnography in order to shed light on this issue otherwise left invisible. Kribus' research on Ethiopian Jewish monasticism as a *sui generis* phenomenon in the Jewish world is germane to the study of Jewish-Christian relations in the Ethiopian highlands, as it opens up a new set of questions related to interreligious exchange of shared perceptions of sacred spaces and holy men. Kribus' research expedition with Krebs, an art historian, is a unique quest for nearly-forgotten settlements of Jewish craftsmen and holy men that are still visible in the landscape once inhabited by Beta Israel communities. Their success in identifying Jewish monastic sites brings into clear relief the benefit of combining textual sources with oral and material sources for historical research on Jewish-Christian relations in Ethiopia.

Kribus and Krebs' treatment of material evidence is especially innovative, as it brings to the foreground the artisanal activities of the Beta Israel, an aspect hardly, if at all, visible in textual sources. The detailing of the structure and shape of the sacred spaces of the Beta Israel, left from recent times, helps understand the descriptions in written accounts but also raises questions about the extent, history, and early development of Beta Israel monasteries. Can the remaining structures and the ethnography of communal organization attest to Beta Israel social history in the late medieval period? To what extent did the monasticism of the Beta Israel

resemble Christian monasticism in Ethiopia? Can further research identify the dynamics of identity, demarcation, adaption, and rejection between the various monastic cultures in Ethiopia, whether from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or from the more distant past?³ Kribus and Krebs' findings will surely inspire the promotion of future in-depth archaeological research on Beta Israel monasteries.

The concluding section of this collection consists of a response by the eminent Ethiopianist Steven Kaplan, who surveys the field for its relevance to the study of Jewish-Christian relations in Ethiopia, past and present. Kaplan evaluates the contribution of Dege-Müller's work on the one hand and of Kribus and Krebs's research on the other in juxtaposition with previous studies. He highlights their innovative and original input to the field in general and to the study of Ethiopian Jews under Christian domination in particular. We welcome similar responses to the other articles in this collection; as this is an online publication, future contributions can be readily appended as the need arises.

The last contribution, by Barbara Roggema, was already introduced at the outset. Its importance lies in outlining the guidelines for scholars interested in contributing source entries to the *Jewish-Christian Relations between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean* (JCR-MIO) source survey designed to serve as reference tool for producing future studies such as those collected in this Entangled Religions special issue and aiming at writing a comprehensive history of Eastern Jewish-Christian relations and exchange in the premodern period.

The articles in this volume consist of diverse case studies of encounters between and expressions of very specific religious communities of Jews

3 The Beta Israel and Christians were not the only religious groups to have had or have a monastic tradition. For Muslim monasteries, see Abbink 2008.

and Christians scattered between seemingly disparate lands, each characterized by its own political and religious balance of power. The thread of interreligious encounters running through the wide variety of topoi discussed in the articles is interwoven into the connected history of the various Asian and African regions from the rise of Islam through the seventeenth century, even as the necessity to examine this material in greater depth also becomes clearer.

Horden and Purcell (2000), in their analysis of the cultures of the Mediterranean, stressed the need to address the relations between centers and hinterlands and to examine the notions of connectivity and continuity while considering the local conditions and peculiarities of a given case. One might suggest that this directive would serve well in the broader geographical scope of the historical study of interreligious relations, in particular (but not exclusively) of Jewish-Christian interactions in Asia and Africa. The studies presented here demonstrate the extent to which Jewish-Christian relations were shaped by changing circumstances depending on social and cultural contexts, even as they indicate interconnections across a vast range of regions tied by established routes of trade, travel, and migration. The interreligious exchanges and the cross-cultural contacts might have contributed to the supra-regional connections and intersections as much as they were affected by them.

Finally, much of the theoretical formulations in current scholarship about processes of “othering” and interactions between Jews and Christians is based on one geographic region, namely Western Europe, which, if viewed within the economic, political, and religious context of the medieval world, was at best but one of many centers, and indeed one which had relatively low levels of religious diversity in comparison to the ones analyzed here. We hope that this edited volume heralds a shift of focus from Europe to Asia

and Africa and a paradigm change in the historical study of interreligious contacts and conflicts between Eastern Jews and Christians.

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