



Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean

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To cite this article: Matthew Gabriele (2016) Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean, *Al-Masāq*, 28:1, 89-90

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09503110.2016.1152809>



Published online: 04 Apr 2016.



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never quite so bold, but, as Scott Redford demonstrates, the Seljuk *amr* Jalāl al-Dīn Qaratay used inscriptions in his *madrasa* in Konya to create space that communicated the continuum of religious practice from Christianity to its fulfilment in Islam.

There is no arguing with the central point advanced throughout this volume: inscriptions must be understood as visual productions and viewed in context, rather than merely as texts to be read and analysed in transcription. Stone, after all, was not a medium for modest expression. And it is worth pointing out that the contributors to *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World* have provided us with seventy-two images to help accomplish this goal, though all in black and white. Perhaps this raises the issue of medium in a different sense, as one wonders whether the printed book is the most effective means of presenting and discussing inscriptions. Digital media have the potential to escape the limitations of two dimensions, and even in their simplest form can embrace colour without ado. Only when research has moved from print to digital publication shall we be able to truly view and study the inscriptions of the Late Antique and medieval world from within the familiar confines of a university library. In the meantime, this volume will serve us well.

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Amsterdam University Press and ARC Humanities Press

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09503110.2016.1152808>

Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean, by Ryan Szpiech (Ed.), New York: Fordham University Press, 2015, xiii + 329 pp., \$55.00 (hardback), ISBN: 9780823264629

This collection of thirteen essays developed from papers presented at a 2011 conference on “Medieval Exegesis: An Interfaith Discourse”, which in turn benefited from a European Research Council grant on late medieval Sephardic Judaism. As Ryan Szpiech lays out in his thorough and thoughtful introduction (indeed, one of the best parts of the volume), this book is not intended to be comprehensive or chronological. Instead, these essays cluster around four distinct nodes, with each offering starting points from which emanate particularly rich moments of late medieval inter-religious debate in the form of commentaries on the sacred texts of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

The first node is Iberia. Sarah Stroumsa opens the volume by comparing the portrayal of Abraham in the thought of one Islamic and one Jewish thinker in medieval Iberia, showing the permeability of “Islamic” and “Jewish” intellectual traditions in the tenth-twelfth centuries. Sidney Griffith writes on Mosaic law in the thought of Ibn al-Mahrūma. The section closes with Walid Saleh reflecting on how the career of Johannes Reuchlin can help us understand al-Biqāī.

The second focal point of the collected essays is the Dominicans, particularly as they engaged the non-Christians of late medieval Europe. Thomas Burman sets the stage with a wonderfully rich study that demonstrates how Dominican thinkers shifted their polemical focus towards Islam across the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The next essay in this section focuses more specifically on the work of Alfonso Buenhombre, but the following article by Ursula Ragacs broadens the lens once more by reconstructing the textual echoes of the famous 1263 disputation between Nahmanides and Paul Christian and showing how those texts influenced later Dominican polemic. This nicely transitions into the third node around

which these essays revolve, as we now turn to consider other incidences of Jewish–Christian encounters in the late Middle Ages. Harvey J. Hames sees that the extant Hebrew account of an encounter in Paris in 1240 was written after, and heavily influenced by, Nahmanides’ account of the 1263 Barcelona disputation. This was, in a sense, boundary construction, which is also the focus of the following two essays (and final two in the third section), which consider in turn Pablo de Santa Maria’s *Additiones* to the work of Nicholas of Lyra and Arragel’s fifteenth-century glosses on his new translation of the Bible.

Finally, the fourth section of the volume is dedicated to questions related to gender. The masculinity of Jesus’ portrayal in the *Toledot Yeshu* merits the attention of Alexandra Cuffel. Nina Caputo then returns to Nahmanides, a subject familiar to many of the volume’s authors. Caputo sees in his exegesis of Genesis VI:1–4 an attempt to reconcile “human flesh and divine spirit in a theology that fundamentally denies to the divine any human qualities” (p. 186), but in a reading that seems to have alienated medieval Christians and Jews alike. Next, the “strange woman” of Proverbs transforms in Hebrew exegesis, revealing a rich intellectual debate occurring across several authors and shifting socio-cultural contexts. The final essay, by Steven F. Kruger on Guillaume de Bourges, takes a cue from the work of Jay Rubenstein and sees Guillaume’s exegesis as a form of autobiography, with Guillaume specifically attempting to defend his conversion from Judaism to Christianity and establish himself as a legitimate Christian reader of sacred texts.

Although it is not nearly as comprehensive as its title would suggest, and a number of the contributions read somewhat like lightly revised conference papers (specialised to the focus of the original conference), the volume itself is well produced and rewards patient reading. One might be tempted to dip into the volume, looking for a particular essay then putting the book down, but to do so would be to miss something important. The real value of the book lies in the impression it leaves of the interactions between Jews, Muslims, and Christians in the late Middle Ages. Indeed, most importantly, taken as a whole, the volume should be read as a coherent examination of how Muslims, Jews and Christians both reinforced and transgressed the boundaries of their communities during the late Middle Ages by speaking to one another through exegesis. A colleague once wondered aloud during a conference panel whether the academy was going through an “exegetical turn”. Given this present volume and other recent works, I certainly hope so; this will be a profitable path to investigate further. The richness that the study of exegesis can reveal about the intellectual life of the Middle Ages emphasises for us the very humanity of our subjects. Their intellectual debates demonstrate the contingency of the past, that decisions mattered to them (and hence to us) and that things were not necessarily destined to turn out as they ultimately have.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09503110.2016.1152809>

Sleepwalking into a New World: The Emergence of Italian City Communes in the Twelfth Century, Chris Wickham, 2015, Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 320 pp. US\$29.95/£19.95 (hardback), ISBN 9780691148281

Wickham’s core argument is simple but important: the leaders of the Italian city communes c. 1050–c.1150 were making it up as they went along: the political structures and institutions