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Christian (Re)Encounters with Jews in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean

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Abstract This essay considers how the reencounter between Christians and Jews over the course of the sixteenth century shaped the evolution of European attitudes toward Jews. It notes that, while 1492 marked an end to a long-standing era of Christian-Jewish relations in Europe, it also signaled an important shift toward new thinking about the once-familiar Jews. The combined effects of the absence of Jewish communities from most of Western Europe, the failure of Christian society effectively to integrate the Conversos of Spain and Portugal, and the expanded cultural horizons engendered by the Age of Discovery helped challenge and alter popular images of the Jews that had been inherited from the Middle Ages. The lands of the Muslim Mediterranean operated as an important stage on which the Christian reencounter with Jews played out, and travelers' accounts of the Jews in these lands came to exert a powerful influence on the way in which the image of the Jew was recast in the European imagination. The discussion here seeks to expand on recent work on sixteenth-century Christian ethnographies of the Jews and to complicate some of our notions of the nature and development of Christian attitudes toward the Jews during the transition from the medieval period to the early modern.

Keywords Mediterranean · Ethnography · Sephardic diaspora · Conversos · Anti-Judaism

A long-standing approach to assessing European attitudes toward the Jews between the medieval and the modern periods has been to trace the development of Christian theological literature. Here, the discussion surrounds the image of the Jew as an abstract other, the "hermeneutical Jew," to use Jeremy Cohen's term.[1] The assumption that abides within this scholarship is that the popular image of the Jew is fundamentally tied to theological depictions that

[1]Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999), 2–3. For Christian thinking about the Jews during the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance, see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York, 2013), chaps. 6 ("The Extinction of Spain's Jews and the Birth of the Inquisition") and 7 ("The Reformation and Its Consequences"); and Ralph Keen, "Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods," in *Anti-Semitism: A History*, ed. Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy (Oxford, 2010), 79–93. On Christian Hebraists, see also Stephen G. Burnett, "Distorted Mirrors: Antonius Margaritha, Johann Buxtorf and Christian Ethnographies of the Jews," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994): 275–87; and David Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ, 2010), chaps. 3, 5.

begin with the Gospels and the early church fathers and pass through the medieval Catholic intellectuals from Augustine to Anselm and from there to the treatment of Judaism by Christian Hebraists and the theologians of the Protestant Reformation. To be sure, such an approach offers a great many insights. Unfortunately, it elides one of the most interesting chapters in the development of European notions of the Jews and Jewishness, that of the encounters between Christians and Jews that took place in the cultural contact zones of the Mediterranean during the sixteenth century. Recent work on Jewish-Christian relations in the early modern period has begun to recognize that Christian images of Jews were influenced by evolving concepts of the other that arose from encounters with a host of new racial and ethnic groups.[2] Nonetheless, there remains a great deal to explore with regard to how these diverse influences came together as the Middle Ages gave way to modernity.

The last great expulsion of the Jews from medieval Europe—that of Spain in 1492—coincided with Columbus's first transatlantic voyage and the various cultural encounters engendered by the European maritime exploration. These encounters with new peoples forced many in Europe to develop new conceptual categories for the other, encompassing even more familiar groups like the Jews. Throughout the Middle Ages, Christian Europeans possessed and promoted various religious, economic, and social characterizations of the Jew that overlapped and conflicted with one another. And, even as these images endured, they inevitably became cast in a new and different light. In the Mediterranean basin, as in other corners of the globe, the constant expulsions, migrations, military campaigns, and mercantile ventures of the sixteenth century prompted a reconsideration of older collective identities. Scholars have noted the way in which the European encounters with new lands and peoples caused a prolonged tension between the information contained in authoritative texts and that produced by new, firsthand observations.[3] My assertion here is that European thinking about Jews during this pivotal period was shaped by these same tensions.

"A Wonderful and Almost Incredible Thing"

As Natalie Rothman notes, Europeans who traveled throughout the early modern Mediterranean were keen observers of the diverse peoples and cul-

[2]Daniel Jütte, "Interfaith Encounters between Jews and Christians in the Early Modern Period and Beyond: Toward a Framework," *American Historical Review* 118 (2013): 378–400; E. Natalie Rothman, "Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2009): 771–800.

[3]Anthony Grafton, April Shelford, and Nancy Siraisi, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA, 1992).

tures that they encountered there.[4] Their observations about the Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean formed an important part of this phenomenon, as did the more prolonged relationships they had with these Jews. Rather than locate early modern European attitudes toward Jews within the theological discourse of Hebraists and other Christian intellectuals, we can widen our view to include the observations of Europeans who encountered Jews in foreign lands. What is generally identified as the transition from the medieval period to the early modern engendered a relatively extensive reassessment of Europe's traditional worldview. The breakdown of the social and religious order of feudal, Catholic Europe and the subsequent encounter with new cultures from all over the globe combined to challenge older categories of identity. The attempt to link Native Americans to the lost biblical tribes and Ethiopians to the fabled kingdom of Prester John, together with the general surge in messianic speculation, all represent ways in which Europeans sought to use an older conceptual framework as a means of understanding new people and new phenomena in an age of cultural transformation.[5] This expansion of Europe's intellectual horizons also involved a reappraisal of the religious and cultural identities of civilizations far closer to home. The Age of Discovery, which brought Europeans into contact with the cultures of the Americas, India, and Japan, coincided with rediscovery of the societies of North Africa and the Levant, societies that had formed part of the European imagination since antiquity.

At first, Europeans tried to place these new peoples within the regnant notional categories of the Middle Ages. Thus, the Portuguese in East Africa were quick to employ Islam as the primary classification when dealing with the Swahili speakers whom they found there. This was not due to any obsession with religion. Rather, it came from the need to process new information as best they could by using terms and concepts with which they were somewhat familiar. It came, in other words, from an attempt to feel in control of their world.[6] It was wealth and material culture, not religion, that most interested the Portuguese in Africa, so terms like *Islamic* and *Caffer* (the Romance form of the Swahili word for *pagan*) must be set alongside expressions like *after our fashion* or *like in Lisbon* as terms that helped divide the

[4] Rothman, "Interpreting Dragomans," 771.

[5] Ronnie Perelis, "'These Indians Are Jews!' Lost Tribes, Crypto-Jews, and Self-Fashioning in Antonio de Montezino's *Relación* of 1644," in *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500–1800*, ed. Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan (Baltimore, 2009), 195–211.

[6] This is distinct from the medieval Christian tradition of categorizing the other on principally religious grounds, a tradition that often conflated Jews and Muslims. See Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca, NY, 2009), 16, 113.

new worlds these Europeans encountered into the familiar and the unfamiliar.[7] As Miriam Eliav-Feldon notes: "The new factual reports from around the globe did not immediately replace the figments of medieval imagination; the European world picture maintained the real alongside the fanciful for a very long time." Indeed, much of the factual information regarding new peoples and new lands was so astonishing to Europeans that it often served to blur the lines between the real and the imaginary.[8] The evolution of Christian attitudes toward the Jews between the Middle Ages and modernity is bound up with this development.

The various expulsions that had forced Jews out of most of Western Europe had not succeeded in banishing them from the European imagination. Images of the Jews as religious and social subversives remained popular themes in the art and literature of early modern Europe.[9] The Jew thus lived on in European culture—even in those regions where Jewish communities had ceased to exist. However, while such popular medieval concepts of the Jew lingered in the European imagination, they were now challenged and altered by the new realities of the early modern world. Descriptions of the Jews of the Levant and North Africa that filtered into Europe during the sixteenth century were thus understood by European Christians in terms of one of two narratives—an older one dominated by the cultural and religious categories of the Middle Ages and a newer one shaped by the often fantastic stories generated by the European voyages of discovery. Some European Christians active in the broader Mediterranean world of the sixteenth century continued to see echoes of a more familiar Jewish profile in the customs and rituals long associated with Judaism. Thus, Jesuit missionaries in Ethiopia condemned such local customs as the practice of circumcision and the refusal to eat pork as evidence of a kind of Judaizing that was unsuitable for a Christian people.[10] However, these older leitmotifs were also challenged by a new theme

[7] Jeremy Prestholdt, "Portuguese Conceptual Categories and the 'Other' Encounter on the Swahili Coast," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 36 (2001): 383–406, 386. Similarly, the Roma (Gypsies), who began to appear in Europe in the fifteenth century, were seen as having leaders akin to European dukes. This is another example of late medieval Christians attempting to address new groups of people by using the only terms available to them, even if doing so stretched the bounds of accuracy of those terms. David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (New Haven, CT, 2008), 15–16.

[8] Miriam Eliav-Feldon, *Renaissance Impostors and Proofs of Identity* (New York, 2012), 81.

[9] The literature here is extensive. For an introduction, see Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 217–324; Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jewish Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven, CT, 1988); Stephen Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas: The Intellectual and Social Landscape of La Celestina* (Princeton, NJ, 1972); and John Efron, "Nature, Human Nature, and Jewish Nature in Early Modern Europe," *Science in Context* 15 (2002): 29–49.

[10] Yaacov Deutsch, "Religious Rituals and Ethnographic Knowledge," in *Knowledge and Religion in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Asaph Ben-Tov, Yaacov Deutsch, and Tamar Herzig (Lei-

of compelling exoticism. In the latter, the once-familiar Jews now joined new peoples like the Aztecs and the Japanese as one of the exotic communities described in the accounts of contemporary travelers.

The advent of the printing press aided in circulating information and popularizing the act of writing travel literature, much of it in the vernacular. Remarkable though it may seem, accounts of travel in the Levant rivaled and, in some parts of Europe, greatly outnumbered similar works about the Americas.[11] The once-familiar Jews formed part of this strange cultural landscape that was now of such interest to European Christians. As in contemporary European accounts of the Caribbean or the Far East, there is a certain surprise and fascination here with regard to the Jews. The visceral reactions that echo in these travelers' accounts can be read against the more programmatic theological presentations of Jews.[12] But there is even more at play here, considering the close relationship between Jews and Christians in medieval Europe and the continued use of the Jews as a symbol in early modern Christian literature. In contrast to the more formal terrain of Christian political thought and the polemical theology that fed it, sixteenth-century travel accounts offer the reactions of European Christians who, through their travels in the Levant, were forced to negotiate between their received traditions regarding the symbolic or abstract notion of the Jew and the actual Jews they encountered.[13] As Daniel Jütte notes: "In a conspicuous number of cases, travel aroused curios-

den, 2013), 117–33, 130–31. Deutsch also cites the claim of the Ethiopian king Galawdewos that such customs were cultural, not religious.

[11] Benjamin Arbel, "Port Towns of the Levant in Sixteenth-Century Travel Literature," in *Mediterranean Urban Culture, 1400–1700*, ed. Alexander Cowan (Exeter, 2000), 151–64, 152–53.

[12] Once again, there has been much written on this subject, but see Peter Hulme, "Tales of Distinction: European Ethnography and the Caribbean," in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge, 1994), 157–97; and Nakai Ayako, "Jesuit Missionaries and the Earliest Contact between European and Japanese Cultures," in *Making Contact: Maps, Identity, and Travel*, ed. Glenn Burger, Lesley B. Cormack, Jonathan Hart, and Natalia Pylypiuk (Edmonton, AB, 2003), 87–114.

[13] Yaacov Deutsch, "'A View of the Jewish Religion': Conceptions of Jewish Practice and Ritual in Early Modern Europe," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001): 273–95, and *Judaism in Christian Eyes: Ethnographic Descriptions of Jews and Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 2012). I offer my discussion of European encounters with Jews in the broader Mediterranean world as a complement to Deutsch's work, which focuses on Christian attitudes in Europe. The ethnographic studies Deutsch treats are often of Judaism, rather than Jews per se, and generally polemical in nature. This is also the approach of Stephen G. Burnett, who notes that most early modern ethnographies sought to emphasize the decadence of contemporary Judaism compared to the purer biblical model. See Burnett, "Distorted Mirrors," 277.

ity and played a role in creating situations that might not have been common, desirable or even possible in the traveler's country or region of origin."[14]

Indeed, European travelers who visited Muslim lands during this period were almost universally struck by the sight of large and vibrant Jewish communities. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Jewish settlement in Constantinople had grown into one of the largest in the world. Its size and diversity were such that they left a lasting impression on the Christian Europeans who began to make their way to the new power center of the Mediterranean. The French diplomat Pierre Gilles was impressed by the size and activity of the Jewish population he encountered in the Turkish capital. In his description of the neighborhood of Galata, he noted: "Jews have almost thirty synagogues, which are hardly enough to hold the numerous assemblies of that populous race."[15] Nicolas de Nicolay also marveled: "The quantity of Jews living in all the Turkish and Greek cities and particularly in Constantinople is so huge, that it is a wonderful and almost incredible thing. The number of merchants and moneylenders is growing from day to day, due to the quantity of goods they attract by sea and by land."[16]

Nicolay's observation about the great power and prosperity of the Jews in "all the Turkish and Greek cities" is something of an overstatement. Although the observation appears to have been accurate for Constantinople and Salonica, few cities in the eastern Mediterranean came close to matching these two great centers in terms of the size and wealth of their Jewish populations.[17] Such hyperbole notwithstanding, this expression of awe at the number of Ottoman Jews and their general social and economic vitality reveals genuine astonishment. Nicolay also informs his readers that the Jews "have published books in various languages, such as Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, and also Hebrew, which is their natural tongue." The last, clarifying clause points to Nicolay's surprise that these "Hebrews" should so readily

[14] Jütte, "Interfaith Encounters," 389.

[15] Kimberly Byrd, ed. and trans., *Pierre Gilles' Constantinople: A Modern English Translation with Commentary* (New York, 2008), 216.

[16] Nicolas de Nicolay, *Dans l'empire de Soliman le Magnifique*, ed. Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud and Stéphane Yerasimos (Paris, 1989), 233. See also Donatella Calabi, "The Jews and the City in the Mediterranean Area," in Cowan, ed., *Mediterranean Urban Culture*, 56–68, 59. On surprise at the size of Jewish settlements, see also the comments regarding the Jews of Greece and Damascus in Pierre Belon, *Travels in the Levant: The Observations of Pierre Belon of Le Mans*, trans. James Hogarth, ed. Alexandra Merle (Kilkerran, 2012), 108, 342.

[17] Another European traveler who visited the Egyptian port city of Damietta in the 1530s claimed that most of its inhabitants were Christians and Jews and that the Jews there had more power than Jews did in any other city in the Ottoman Empire. The assessment of Jewish power at Damietta was most likely due to the presence of a Jewish tax farmer who governed much of the city's business. *Relation de Terre Sainte* (1533–1534) *par Greffin Affagart*, ed. Jules Chavanon (Paris, 1902), 210–11.

print works in languages that he clearly considers to be foreign to them.[18] In his discussion of the Jews' technical expertise, Nicolay simultaneously disparages the native abilities of the Turks and the policies of Spain for having expelled the Jews. Of the Jews of the Levant, he notes: "There are among them, good artisans and manufacturers, who have taught various inventions, products, war machines, artillery, cannon, gunpowder and arms to the Turks."[19] Yet even this self-serving critique of France's rivals remains, at its core, a confirmation of Nicolay's surprise at finding Jews who were so capable—so "European"—in the field of military technology. The Venetian Benedetto Ramberti echoed Nicolay's assertion that the Sephardic Jews brought useful knowledge to the Turks as well as his general surprise at the size of the Jewish population of Constantinople: "There are in the city besides the Turks, countless Jews, or Marrani expelled from Spain; these are they who have taught and who are teaching every useful art to the Turks. . . . There is a place which is called *Bezestan*, where they sell and buy all sorts of cloth and Turkish wares, silks, stuffs, linens, silver, wrought gold, bows, slaves, and horses; and in short all the things that are to be found in Constantinople are brought there to market; this, except for Friday, is open every day."[20]

Amazement at the size and diversity of urban populations in the early modern Levant was a regular motif of European travel accounts. Daniel Vitkus suggests that, although not all European merchants, sailors, and other travelers produced narratives of such encounters, they surely must have "shared the wonder and awe that these men felt when they came into contact with the cultural complexity of the Mediterranean, especially the Levant."[21] Jews formed an integral part of this Levantine cultural landscape, a fact that began to cast them as exotic novelties in the European imagination. Early modern European travelers who visited Mediterranean cities that possessed large Jewish settlements also saw these Jews as foreign curiosities

[18]This comment functions as something of a corrective to the opposite observation made by Hans Dernschwam, who, while noting the many vernacular languages spoken by the Jews of Istanbul, states that the Jews are not true physicians since they possess no knowledge of Greek and Latin. Hans Dernschwam, *Hans Dernschwams Tagebuch einer Reise nach Konstantinopel und Kleinasiaen* (1553/55), ed. Franz Babinger (Berlin, 1986), 113.

[19]Nicolay, *Dans l'empire de Soliman le Magnifique*, 233.

[20]Albert Howe Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent* (Cambridge, MA, 1913), app. 1 ("The Second Book of the Affairs of the Turks, Written in 1534, Supposedly by Benedetto Ramberti, Translated from the Italian"), 239–61, 241. Note that Ramberti also identifies all Sephardim as "Marrani."

[21]Daniel Vitkus, "Adventuring Heroes in the Mediterranean: Mapping the Boundaries of Anglo-Islamic Exchange on the Early Modern Stage," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 47 (2007): 75–95, 77–78.

that challenged the well-known archetypes of Christian lore. Both Michel de Montaigne and Thomas Coryate wrote about witnessing circumcision rituals in Rome and Istanbul, respectively. Their records of these visits read like anthropologists' field notes rather than medieval religious polemics or denunciations of Jewish cultural difference. For Coryate, an English traveler who also observed a celebration of the Jewish festival of Simhat Torah, these Jewish rites appear to have been every bit as exotic and fascinating as any religious custom he might have encountered among the peoples of the Americas or the Far East.[22]

Some Christian travelers took the time to dispel certain negative myths about the Jews whom they had encountered in the East. Regarding a popular Christian legend that Jews lose some of their blood on Good Friday, Pierre Belon plays the role of seasoned ethnographer, noting that the rumor must be false since he and his party were with Jews on Good Friday and saw nothing out of the ordinary.[23] Thomas Coryate also took pains to correct popular images of the Jews that had taken root in his native England, whose professing Jews were among the first to be expelled from Western Europe in 1290. Concerning the Jews he met in Venice, he noted: "I observed some fewe of those Jewes especially some of the Levantines to bee such goodly and proper men, that then I said to my selfe our English proverb: To look like a Jew (whereby is meant sometimes a weather beaten warp-faced fellow, sometimes a phrenticke and lunaticke person, sometimes one discontented) is not true. For indeed I noted some of them to be most elegant and sweet featured persons."[24] Elsewhere, Coryate notes that the Jews he met possessed "an invincible patience" despite suffering abuses of all sorts. "Never saw I Jewe with an angry countenance," he writes, adding: "In general they are worldly wise, and thrive wheresoever they set footing."[25]

Even those European travelers who took a less sanguine view of the Jewish populations they encountered could not conceal their amazement at the sight of such large and dynamic communities. For them, the Jews they encountered in Muslim lands were simultaneously fantastic and familiar. It was as if they were being confronted with ghosts or storybook characters brought to life that somehow refused to conform to the neat two-dimensional descriptions for which the Jews had become known.

[22] Donald Murdoch Frame, trans., *Montaigne's Travel Journal* (San Francisco, 1983), 123–24; Michael Strachan, *The Life and Adventures of Thomas Coryate* (London, 1962), 190.

[23] Belon, *Travels in the Levant*, 331.

[24] Strachan, *The Life and Adventures of Thomas Coryate*, 52.

[25] Myriam Yardeni, *Anti-Jewish Mentalities in Early Modern Europe* (Lanham, MD, 1990), 90 n. 69.

Perhaps the best-known European description of Ottoman-Jewish society from this era is that of Hans Dernschwam, a factor of the Fuggers' merchant-banking cartel who traveled throughout the eastern Mediterranean during the mid-sixteenth century. Dernschwam was both shocked and disturbed by the size of Istanbul's Jewish community, noting that they were as "thick as ants," and he disparaged the practice of Conversos returning to Judaism as a financially motivated choice of last resort. Yet, even as he denigrates many aspects of Jewish society, the principal theme of his account remains his amazement at the robust diversity of Jewish life in the Levant.

> You will find in every town innumerable Jews of all countries and languages. And every Jewish group sticks together in accordance with its language. And wherever Jews have been expelled in any land they all come together in Turkey as thick as vermin; speak German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Czech, Turkish, Syriac, Chaldean, and Other languages besides these.
>
> The Jews of Constantinople also have a printing press and print many rare books. They have goldsmiths, lapidaries, painters, tailors, butchers, druggists, physicians, surgeons, cloth weavers, wound surgeons, barbers, mirror makers, dyers, silk workers, gold washers, refiners of ores, assayers, engravers.[26]

Such accounts were bolstered by the continued references to legendary tales of thriving Jewish communities in the East. Even Marino Sanudo, the Venetian chronicler who was well acquainted with actual Jews, nonetheless embraced and perpetuated the more romanticized stories of mythic Jewish communities in the East. Sanudo wrote of a kingdom on the edge of the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula that was filled with "a multitude of Jews, about three hundred thousand souls," whose origins dated back to the conquest of Jerusalem by Titus.[27]

The association of Jews with the East was also strengthened by two notorious forgeries that circulated widely in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain: the "Carta de los Iudios d'Espagna a los de Constantinopla" and the "Respuesta de los Iudios de Constantinopla a los Iudios d'Espagna."[28] These

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[26] Dernschwam, *Hans Dernschwams Tagebuch*, 106, 112–13.

[27] Sanudo's account is reproduced in A. Z. Aescoly, *Sippur David ha-Re'uveni: 'Al-pi ketav-yad Oksford: Be-tseruf ketavim ve-'eduyot mi-bene ha-dor 'im mavo ve-he'arot* (1940; Jerusalem, 1993), 183–84.

[28] José Alberto da Silva Tavim, "The *Grão Turco* and the Jews: Translation to the West of Two Oriental 'Powers' (XVI–XVII Centuries)," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 28 (2014): 167–90, 173–74.

letters, written by unknown authors, conjure the image of a powerful, well-organized settlement of Sephardic Jews living in the Ottoman Empire and engaged in advising their "Jewish" (i.e., Converso) brethren in Spain how best to subvert Christian authority. Such texts, regardless of whether they are considered real or fictitious today, formed part of a complex matrix of motivations that included fear of New Christian power in Spain and Portugal and of Spanish and Portuguese power in England and France.[29] The effects of these observations of and attacks on the Jews were equally multifaceted. Not only did they extend and expand the medieval image of the Jews as inveterate outsiders to Europe's normative religious and social order; they also reintroduced the Jews as a foreign people whose characteristics and, indeed, very existence provoked a certain fascination among European Christians. In so doing, these sixteenth-century reports and observations reflect a morbid fascination among Christians with regard to large populations of powerful Jews that lay somewhere to the East.[30]

The European concept of the Jews as a people that existed somewhere between the older religious categories of the Middle Ages and the new peoples brought to light during the Age of Discovery is also illustrated by the strange career of the Jewish adventurer David Reubeni. Reubeni first appeared in European society in Italy in early 1524. A Jew who apparently came from a land somewhere to the east of the Mediterranean, he presented himself to Pope Clement VII as a prince and messenger from a far-off Jewish kingdom that lay "in the wilderness of Habor," a land said to be the home of the ten lost tribes.[31] The facts pertaining to his background are, perhaps, less compelling than the rumors that he was a prince from a mighty nation of Jews whose king stood ready to make common cause with Europe's Christian rulers. Even in the post-1492 world, in which the borders of European

[29] On the conflation of European fears of religious and cultural enemies and the belief in far-off utopian lands, see Miriam Eliav-Feldon, "Invented Identities: Credulity in the Age of Prophecy and Exploration," *Journal of Early Modern History* 3 (1999): 203–32, 220; and Benjamin Braude, "How Significant Was the Iberian Jewish Contribution to Technology and Economic Life in the Ottoman Empire?" *Espacio, tiempo y forma* 6 (1993): 73–84.

[30] European fascination with Middle Eastern Jewry endured well into the seventeenth century and helped lay the foundations for the discourse that came to be known as Orientalism. Daniel Schroeter, "Orientalism and the Jews of the Mediterranean," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 4 (1994): 183–96, 190, 193.

[31] Aescoly's *Sippur David ha-Re'uveni* is an edited version of a text that purports to be Reubeni's diary along with an appendix of letters referring to Reubeni. For an English translation of the diary, see Elkan N. Adler, ed., *Jewish Travellers* (London, 1930), 250–328. It is unclear whether "Habor" (or "Khorgbar") should be identified with the province of "Khaybar" in the Arabian Peninsula, with a province in Afghanistan, or, alternately, with Ethiopia or Cranganore on India's Malabar Coast. Whatever his actual provenance, it is certain that Reubeni was not the scion of a royal Jewish dynasty that possessed great military might.

maps were undergoing constant revision, such claims tested the boundaries of European credulity. Nonetheless, the possibility of a remote Jewish kingdom that possessed a massive army ready to be sent against the Turks was too tempting to dismiss out of hand.[32]

Reubeni's tale soon attracted the interest of Portugal's João III, who quickly sent for the Jewish "prince."[33] Fantastic as his story seemed, it overlapped (perhaps not coincidentally) with other tales of new kingdoms in the East that might serve as potential military and economic allies for Portugal. Indeed, when Reubeni arrived at the Portuguese royal court, the king was still awaiting news from a diplomatic expedition he had sent to the king of Ethiopia, the genesis for which came from a figure every bit as mysterious as Reubeni. Much like the self-styled messenger from Habor, the would-be royal envoy named Mateus seemed to appear out of nowhere claiming to represent a distant and powerful kingdom. This Mateus surfaced in India a decade prior to the first mention of Reubeni, declaring that he was in possession of a royal letter from Queen Helena of Ethiopia along with a crucifix fashioned from wood of the True Cross. In addition to the similarities of his mission, the muddled nature of Mateus's religious identity—he was either an Armenian or a Coptic Christian and perhaps a recent convert from Islam—also resembled Reubeni's.[34] In both cases, the Portuguese crown seems to have been less interested in the precise confessional nature of these messengers than in their possible political connections.

Reubeni arrived in Lisbon amid great excitement and anticipation among the city's Converso community, for whom the story of a Jewish prince aroused hopes of political and messianic redemption. Diogo Pires, a young Converso at the Portuguese court, was so inspired by Reubeni that he returned openly to Judaism, taking the name Solomon Molcho, and embarked on his own quixotic and ill-fated journey as a messianic pretender.[35] But Dom João was unable to substantiate Reubeni's claims. Unsure what to make of this enigmatic figure, and perhaps unwilling to fully abandon the hopes of a potential alliance, the king decided to turn him away rather than subject him to harsher punishments. Reubeni, too, held fast to his story. He traveled to southern France, where his imprisonment by the Duke of Clermont did

[32]For British attitudes toward the Jews as potential allies against the Catholics and the Turks, see Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain*: 1558–1685 (Cambridge, 1998), 167–83.

[33]Aescoly, *Sippur David ha-Re'uveni*, 65–70, 178–80. See also Elias Lipiner, introduction to ibid., xlv–xlviii.

[34]On Mateus, see the account of Francisco Alvares (ca. 1540) published in English as *The Prester John of the Indies*, trans. Lord Stanley Alderley (1881), rev. ed., ed. C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1961), 1:42–92.

[35]Joseph Ha-Kohen, *Sefer 'Emeq ha-Bakha: The Vale of Tears*, ed. and trans. Karin Almbladh (Uppsala, 1981), 71.

little to deter him from his pursuit of patronage. He eventually gained his release and traveled to Mantua, where he sought out Jewish scribes who could "reproduce" his documents from Habor. There, he found two Iberian exiles whom he convinced to falsify the letters, forging the name of Habor's Jewish elders, and tinting them in a special manner so as to make them look older. A Jewish goldsmith was also hired to make a seal bearing the name "King Joseph, son of Solomon, ruler of the Desert of Habor," to lend the letters authenticity. At some point, however, the scribes seem to have begun to question whether their commission was worth risking the recriminations of the authorities. Though they completed the task, they purposefully botched the forgeries so as to alert the authorities to the ruse. The false documents did, indeed, catch the attention of the local Jewish officials, who brought them before the Marquis of Mantua.[36] The loss of support from the local Jewish leaders marked the final downturn in Reubeni's fortunes. He was eventually sent to Spain, where he was remanded to the custody of the Inquisition at Llerena. It is here that his story comes to an end.[37]

At the Edges of Empire

David Nirenberg has recently noted that, in the period 1400–1600, "Western Europe achieved what the Middle Ages had at most dreamed of: a world free of Jews."[38] To be sure, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and the subsequent conversion of the Jews of Portugal in 1497 are rightly regarded as a watershed for both European and Jewish history. These events were the culmination of a series of expulsions that began in the thirteenth century and pushed the majority of the medieval Jewish populations out of Western Europe. Yet the division between medieval and early modern relations between Christians and Jews represents more of a paradigm shift than a clean break. Just as the opportunities for daily contact with Jews began to dwindle throughout much of Europe, European economic and political expansion into the Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Levant created something of a European Age of (Re)Discovery of the Jews. A key distinction here was that the bulk of these encounters now took place in lands beyond or at the very edges of Christian political and cultural dominance. Thus, as Christians from throughout Europe became increasingly engaged with the

[36] Shlomo Simonsohn, "David Reubeni's Second Mission in Italy" [in Hebrew], *Zion* 26 (1961): 198–207, esp. 205–6; Eliav-Feldon, "Invented Identities," 227–28.

[37] Lipiner, introduction, xlv–lxvi. For a similar fraud in Istanbul, see Benjamin Arbel, "Nur Banu (c. 1530–1583): A Venetian Sultana?" *Turcica* 24 (1992): 242–59.

[38] Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 218.

Muslim world of North Africa and the Middle East, their relationship to the Jewish world also entered a new phase. Throughout the sixteenth century, Europeans who had little to no contact with living Jews in their native communities came to encounter Jews in Mediterranean lands. If, as noted above, their initial observations of these people were tinged with expressions of astonishment, prolonged interaction between the two groups revived the sort of pragmatic interdependence that had governed much of their relationship throughout the Middle Ages. The European encounter with the Jews in the lands of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean suggests that the transition from the medieval period to the early modern represents more of a realignment of Jewish-Christian relations than a rupture.[39]

A major factor contributing to this changing relationship was the migration of Jews and Conversos out of Spain, Sicily, and Portugal in the late fifteenth century and the early sixteenth. In particular, the expulsion of 1492 unleashed a sizable group of lordless Jews into the Mediterranean world. It was this status as a people without a lord and protector that represented both the fount of their suffering and the source of their salvation. Those rulers who offered the exiled Jews safe haven did not necessarily view them as superior traders since the business activities of Jewish merchants and bankers could not match those of their Christian and Muslim counterparts in size or scope of activity. Rather, they granted settlement rights to Jewish refugees because they saw them as a source of taxes that would be wholly dependent on their new lords and thus a worthwhile investment.[40]

In Naples, the fiscally minded Chamber of Accounts refrained from punishing a local Jew for fear that the action might discourage the immigration of Jewish refugees from Sicily who represented great potential income: "Sir, a while ago, we wrote asking you to beat or give four stripes [*strappados*] to the Jew that you denounced for criticizing the Christian faith. With this we order you to postpone the punishment until you are ordered to do differently. You know, in fact, that many Jews are coming from Sicily to the province of

[39] The Italian Peninsula represents something of an exception in this regard. In many cities there, the presence of Jews and thus Christian-Jewish relations continued from the fifteenth century to the sixteenth. These relations were, however, further complicated by the increased migration throughout Italy of Jews and Conversos from Naples and Sicily, Spain, Provence, and beyond.

[40] For all their famed religious zeal, even the Catholic monarchs took into consideration the tax revenue of both Jews and Conversos. See Nadia Zeldes, "Spanish Attitudes toward Converso Emigration to the Levant in the Reign of the Catholic Monarchs," *Journal for Balkan, Eastern Mediterranean, Anatolian, Middle Eastern, Iranian and Central Asian Studies* 2 (2003): 251–71. Similarly, Renata Segre argues that the extensive inventory of Converso goods confiscated by the papacy at Ancona suggests an economic motive to this action. Renata Segre, "Nuovi documenti sui marrani d'Ancona (1555–1559)," *Michael* 9 (1985): 130–233.

Calabria and could be frightened away by such punishment."[41] Other Italian rulers showed a similar concern that popular religious zeal might dissuade Jews from settling in their domains. When, just prior to the arrival of the Jewish refugees from Spain, the charismatic missionary Bernardo da Feltre began to agitate against the Jews in northern Italy, Francesco Gonzaga of Mantua ordered that he be sent to a monastery in order to preserve the peace. Da Feltre provoked a similar reaction from the Venetian authorities, who ordered him not to preach to the Jews there in 1492 and forbade the towns in their territories to take action against the Jews as a result of his sermons.[42] Venetian policies toward the Jewish settlers provoked the disapproval of Marino Sanudo, who complained that acceptance of the Jews was an unfortunate necessity that came as a result of economic and political motives: "I do not wish to ignore a depraved custom that has developed from the continuous commerce that people have with these Jews, who inhabit this city in great numbers at San Cassan, Santo Agustin, San Paolo, Santa Maria Mater Domini. It used to be that from before Palm Sunday to after Easter they were not to be seen. This year, they were out and about until yesterday [Holy Thursday], and this is a very bad thing. No one says anything to them because, with these wars, they need them; thus they do what they want."[43]

There was also a notable difference between the attitudes of Christians toward the Jews at home and their attitudes toward the Jews they encountered at the edges of their colonial empires or in Muslim lands. Indeed, Jews seeking to settle in the overseas territories controlled by Venice, the so-called *stato da mar*,[44] benefited from a somewhat more liberal policy than was experienced by those who lived on the mainland. Whereas in Venice itself the

[41] Cited in Cesare Colafemmina, "The Jews of Reggio Calabria from the End of the XVth Century to the Beginning of the XVIth Century," in *Les Juifs au regard de l'histoire: Mélanges en l'honneur de Bernhard Blumenkranz*, ed. Gilbert Dahan (Paris, 1985), 255–62, 258. Nadia Zeldes has suggested that the impoverished refugees did not represent tax revenue so much as they did the economic benefits of skilled merchants and artisans. Nadia Zeldes, "Sefardi and Sicilian Exiles in the Kingdom of Naples: Settlement, Community Formation and Crisis," *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 6 (2008): 237–65, 243. Yet it is also possible that the present pecuniary state of the Jews was understood to be temporary and that it was expected that they would eventually be able to provide taxes for the royal chamber. Either way, the acceptance of the refugees appears to have been motivated by the attitude that they represented a long-term investment worth pursuing.

[42] Vittorino Meneghin, *Documenti vari intorno al B. Bernardino Tomitano da Feltre* (Rome, 1966), 51–52, 207–9, 233–34.

[43] See *Venice, cità excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme and Laura Sanguineti White, trans. Linda L. Carroll (Baltimore, 2008), 337–38.

[44] Eric Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, 2006), 17, 52.

Jews were forced to renew their settlement charter regularly, those who lived in Venetian colonies were not restricted by any particular time limit.

A similar situation existed in North Africa. The expulsions and mass conversions of Jews in the 1490s were paralleled by the expansion of Iberian states into the Muslim territories where these exiles sought refuge. Indeed, Spanish and Portuguese imperial ambitions led their soldiers, diplomats, merchants, and missionaries into the Maghreb and ensured that the destinies of Iberian Catholics and Jews would remain entangled for many years.[45] However, the political ambitions of these empire builders ran counter to the religious ideologies governing attitudes toward the Jews and Conversos. Those monarchs who expelled, converted, and pressured the Jews and New Christians on the Iberian mainland were forced to temper such policies in their colonial possessions. Though they were separated from the Spanish and Portuguese mainland by only a narrow stretch of water, in terms of governing the newly established Christian strongholds of the Maghreb were nonetheless a distant frontier. Neither Spain nor Portugal had sufficient men, supplies, and perhaps even will to extend their presence in North Africa beyond a few fortresses from which they were in constant danger of being dislodged. Nor could their meager presence in the region blunt the ferocity of Muslim corsairs who raided the Iberian coastline with impunity. In Iberia proper, the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions waged a broad, costly, and methodical campaign to root out any vestige of Jewish ideology or practice among the New Christians. In their North African colonies, however, the pressing dangers of attack from Arab and Turkish forces made such concerns seem almost ludicrous, the pastime of zealots and idle bureaucrats. If there were Spaniards or Portuguese who could be convinced to risk their lives to fight Muslim attackers, there were few in this hostile territory that were willing to give more than a passing thought to their religious backgrounds or beliefs.

In many ways, the Christian frontier that arose in the Maghreb during the late fifteenth century supplanted the one that was closing in southern Spain. For the Jews there, the North African frontier was perhaps more violent and more treacherous than that which had existed in Andalusia, Murcia, and Valencia during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[46] In Morocco,

[45]See Andrew C. Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth Century Ibero-African Frontier* (Chicago, 1978); and Barbara Fuchs and Yuen Gen Liang, "A Forgotten Empire: The Spanish–North African Borderlands," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 12 (2011): 261–73.

[46]Nonetheless, those Jews who found a way to survive the assorted perils of the region benefited from the lack of political and social restrictions in much the same way as their ancestors had during the central years of the Reconquista and Repoblación. On the former, see Jonathan Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia* (Ithaca, NY, 2006).

which remained a volatile borderland between Portuguese Christians and local Muslims for the first half of the sixteenth century, a handful of prominent Jews established themselves as trusted intermediaries between the warring parties. Whatever anti-Jewish sentiment may have prevailed among the rank and file of other groups, their leadership recognized the importance of these Jews who aided in political communications as well as in the continued flow of trade, even during periods of military action. In the letters sent from Portuguese colonial governors in North Africa to the royal court at Lisbon, it is the individual qualities of these Jewish notables, and not their religious identities, that appear to be of greatest interest. These governors reported back to Dom João III that both the local Muslims and their leaders preferred to entrust their business and political interests to prominent Jews, such as Solomon Benzamerro (or Ben Zamiro), because of their wealth and discretion.[47] Benzamerro and other former Conversos were well aware of their value to Portugal's fragile colonial enterprise in the region and engaged the crown with (guarded) confidence. In 1514, the Jews of Portuguese-controlled Azemmour petitioned Manuel I to allow them to remain in the city, despite the fact that they were former Conversos who had flouted both royal and ecclesiastical decrees by reverting openly to Judaism. The Jews were frank about their condition, though they may have misrepresented their numbers, and argued for their right to remain unmolested in the city owing to the many ways in which they continued to benefit the Portuguese cause. The petitioners pointed out to the king that they had all helped capture the city from the Muslims and continued to reside there and contribute to its maintenance and fiscal stability.[48]

Such attitudes reflect a political pragmatism that revealed a tendency to consider Jews as individuals and in their capacities as political and economic actors rather than as exemplars of a static and theologically constructed Judaism. This runs somewhat counter to studies that emphasize Christian theology's continuing influence on political attitudes toward the Jews.[49] In contrast to this point of view, which privileges European intellectual culture, scholars working on social history and on European colonial territories rather than Europe itself have noticed a different relationship between religious ideology and official and popular attitudes. Stuart Schwartz has argued that resistance to ecclesiastical intolerance "could flourish in the maritime world

[47] ". . . e ysto porque he rrico e descreto." *Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc*, 1st ser., *Dynastie saadienne* (1530–1600), *Archives et bibliotèques de Portugal*, ed. Henry de Castries, 5 vols. (Paris, 1939–53), 2:407.

[48] Ibid., 3:490–97. The letter contains no theological argument and treats the question of conversion and religious affiliation as subordinate to more earthly concerns.

[49] See, e.g., Robert Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997), 110–24; Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996); and Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*.

of the Iberian Empires, where authority was limited, anonymity great, and imperial religious-ethnic identities and boundaries permeable."[50] While his evidence in this regard is generally taken from the context of the Americas during the seventeenth century, I suggest that it can also be applied to the Iberian colonies in North Africa and Asia in the late fifteenth century and the sixteenth.

During this period, the Portuguese crown made increased use of professing Jews as diplomats and translators in support of its various adventures in North Africa.[51] It seemed to make little difference that these Jews who served as go-betweens and who so often visited the royal court in Portugal were clearly former Conversos who had returned to Judaism. Dom Manuel I, the engineer of the mass conversions of 1497, was pleased to receive one such diplomat with great ceremony, granting him the honor of wearing a robe similar to that worn by Maghrebi Muslim rulers.[52] It seems that royal concern for the religious fidelity of the New Christians could not easily compete with royal interest in economic expansion and the need to provide arms to support it.[53] Even Manuel's successor, João III, who was nicknamed "the Pious" and was responsible for the establishment of the Portuguese Inquisition, was known to put temporal considerations before matters of the soul when it came to the Conversos. When a priest living in the Portuguese colony at Azemmour complained that the Conversos there had taken to selecting wives from the local Muslim and Jewish communities, he was informed by the provincial governor that there was, at present, little to be done regarding the issue. The governor pointed out that he was under express orders from the crown not to take any action in the matter.[54]

Even royal attempts to curtail Converso defection to Muslim territories where they might return to Judaism was motivated less by religious concerns than by fear of losing a valuable resource in a territory where the Portuguese were badly outnumbered. The crown did not ask questions of Jews living in its North African colonies who, by their dress, language, and general demeanor, were clearly Portuguese (and thus ostensibly heretics) so long as they agreed to stay and recognize Portuguese dominion. This the Jews were happy to do, often fighting side by side with Christian troops. The crown

[50] Stuart B. Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven, CT, 2008), 114.

[51] H. Z. Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews in North Africa*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1981), 1:418–19.

[52] *Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc*, 3:609.

[53] Portugal was so keen to gain those skilled in weapons making that it charged those Spanish Jews who demonstrated knowledge in this area half the price of other refugees as they sought to enter the kingdom in 1492. Fritz Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien* (Berlin, 1936), pt. 2, p. 511.

[54] *Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc*, 3:83ff.

appointed chief rabbis over individual settlements and assigned Jewish notables to oversee their financial administration. In turn, the Jews looked to Lisbon for protection and help in the management of their affairs. When the Portuguese evacuated Azemmour in 1541, João III arranged for the orderly relocation of the city's Jews to Tangier. Two Jews were assigned the task of assessing the value of the property the Jews were forced to abandon and providing them with receipts that were to be redeemed in Lisbon.[55] Thus, we can see that, in the wake of the summary conversion of all Jews in Portugal in 1497, Portuguese royal attitudes and actions toward the Conversos remained inconsistent. When it came to an official stance on the issue, religious ideals were often muted by political considerations, particularly with regard to Converso status in Portugal's colonial territories.[56] In many ways, the former Conversos who had returned to Judaism and settled in Portuguese North Africa lived much as their ancestors had prior to 1497.

Thus, as Europeans ventured beyond the boundaries of their home countries, they were quickly confronted by new realities that challenged some of their prevailing notions of the Jews. Not only did they soon find themselves among large and diverse communities of Jews the likes of which had become unknown in their native lands; they often found themselves dependent on these Jews for economic or diplomatic aid. The vicissitudes of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean put political and religious loyalties to the test. They also rendered impossible the sort of religious exclusion and isolation that had taken root in Iberia and that was beginning to divide Catholic and Protestant communities throughout Europe. All soldiers and merchants who entered the turbulent waters of the Mediterranean were potential mercenaries and pirates as well as potential religious renegades.[57] The Jewish captives, religious refugees, or besieged townsfolk they came on were typically viewed through the same dark lens as all others. Those who could be ransomed or used as grist for the galleys were enslaved. Those who could not were usually put to the sword. Within the cruel system of forced servitude and conversion, the Jews often fared better than others. It was well known among both Christians and Muslims alike that the far-flung Jewish communities would not hesitate to ransom their coreligionists whenever possible, even if they hailed from a distant land. In any event, the rapidly shifting fortunes of both nations and individuals in the sixteenth-century Mediterranean caused those who traveled throughout the region constantly to reconsider the nature and value of their religious counterparts.

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[55] Ibid., 3:352–55, 516ff.

[56] Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved*, 100–101.

[57] Godfrey Fisher, *Barbary Legend: War, Trade and Piracy, 1415–1830* (Oxford, 1957); Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500–1800* (New York, 2003).

Changes in Christians' attitudes toward the Jews are particularly notable the farther they traveled from Europe. As Christian merchants sought to penetrate deeper into the North African interior, many were relieved to come across local Jews who had retained this knowledge of European languages, money, etc. and thus could act as helpful intermediaries.[58] Thus, Christians such as the Genoese trader Antonius Malfante could write with approval and satisfaction that the Jews of the Saharan trading oasis of Tamantit included many who were not only prosperous but also trustworthy. These were people with whom the far-flung Genoese trading diaspora could do business. The Jews of North Africa who had worked as translators for Genoese merchants in the region from as early as the thirteenth century continued to be the preferred contacts to Italian traders in the region long after 1492.[59]

In addition to these merchants, European soldiers and travelers who ventured abroad also encountered Jews as diplomatic intermediaries, neighbors, and companions. Jews worked as translators for the Portuguese Christians in Goa, India, and the Jewish Quarter of Fez became the place where all foreign visitors were lodged, including Christian soldiers waiting to be ransomed.[60] Although most of the Jews living in North Africa were poor artisans and peddlers, many nonetheless employed Christians who had been captured in battle.[61] Throughout North Africa, life was often harsh and interreligious violence routine. Yet the volatility of the political situation often undercut the importance of religious differences as much as it reinforced them. The shifting winds of fortune tempered religious zeal. In the cities of the Ibero-Maghrebi frontier, Jews and Christians engaged in all manner of social and cultural interaction, from moneylending to theological debate.[62] A letter from a Christian knight living in the North African city of Azemmour in 1541 recounts one such debate that he had with a group of former Conversos who had returned to Judaism there.[63]

The attitudes of Christians toward and their relationships with the Jews they encountered at the edges of their mercantile and political empires were

[58] Such postures stand in stark contrast to, e.g., the resentment of Venetian merchants in Alexandria, who saw the powerful local Jews as an impediment. Arbel, "Port Towns of the Levant," 157.

[59] John O. Hunwick, "Al-Maghili and the Jews of Tuwat: The Demise of a Community," *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 155–83, 165; Hirschberg, *Jews in North Africa*, 1:374.

[60] On Goa, see Walter Fischel, "Leading Jews in the Service of Portuguese India," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 47 (1956–57): 37–57, 37–45. For Fez, see Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers, *A Man of Three Worlds: Samuel Pallache, a Moroccan Jew in Catholic and Protestant Europe* (Baltimore, 2007), 25–27.

[61] Even observers who were not wont to praise the Jews noted that they treated these Christians fairly. Antonio de Sosa, *Topographia e historia general de Argel* (Valladolid, 1612), pt. 2, p. 4.

[62] García-Arenal and Wiegers, *A Man of Three Worlds*, 25–26.

[63] *Les sources inédites du Maroc*, 5:119–23.

greatly shaped by the modus vivendi between Jews and Muslims in those regions. Such relationships represent a continuation of a sort of social symbiosis that had characterized Jewish-Muslim interactions for centuries. In contrast to the prevailing situation in much of Europe, the situation in North Africa and the Levant was one in which friendships bred of familiarity and mutual benefit continued to challenge the tensions and jealousies that naturally arose between members of different religious and cultural groups. In the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb, Muslims and Jews came to rely on each other in their daily lives as well as in times of extreme hardship. Jews would slaughter lambs for the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha and in turn hire their Muslim neighbors to pasture their sheep and cattle on Saturdays and to keep Jewish food warm in their ovens.[64] Jews and Muslims entrusted their valuables to one another when their cities came under siege, and Jewish patronage of Muslim courts throughout the Ottoman Empire also demonstrates the degree to which these Jews were intimately integrated into the social and economic life of the surrounding society.[65]

These sorts of bonds were forged out of self-interest, mutual need, and familiarity rather than theological polemics or the proscriptive dictates of religious law, social characteristics to which many Christian settlers in the region readily adapted. In times of war, the Jews of North Africa collaborated with Arabs, Berbers, Turks, Spaniards, and Portuguese, each against the other. When, for instance, the Spanish attempted to gain control of the Atlantic port of Safi, then under the nominal jurisdiction of the Portuguese, they devised a plan that included supporting the open rebellion of the city's Muslim governor with the aid of a Jewish intermediary.[66] And, when local Muslims attempted to retake Safi two years later, the Portuguese did not hesitate to call on Jewish support to defend the city. The Jews, who, under the leadership of Isaac and Ishmael Benzamerro, were placed in command of a particular section of the defensive wall, succeeded in repelling the Muslims.[67] This demonstration of mutual trust and interdependence between the

[64] Moses Alashkar, *Responsa* (1556), nos. 41–42; Isidore Epstein, *Studies in the Communal Life of the Jews of Spain* (New York, 1968), 444–61; Minna Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul* (Boston, 2002), doc. 19.

[65] Alashkar, *Responsa*, no. 39; Amnon Cohen, *A World Within: Jewish Life as Reflected in Muslim Court Documents from the Sijill of Jerusalem* (*XVIth Century*) (Philadelphia, 1994). Moses Basola recounts how, after taking a fall from his camel, he was aided by his Muslim guides while his Jewish traveling companions abandoned him. See Abraham David, *In Zion and Jerusalem: The Itinerary of Rabbi Moses Basola* (1521–1523) (Jerusalem, 1999), 61.

[66] Hirschberg, *Jews in North Africa*, 1:419.

[67] See Damião de Gois, *Crónica do felicíssimo rei D. Manuel*, ed. Joaquim Martins Teixera de Carvalho and David Lopes, 4 vols. (Coimbra, 1926), 3:46. A similar event seems to have taken place there nearly a half century later when Samuel Valenciano, who was descended from an

Portuguese and the Jews, many of whom were former Conversos, was repeated during the Portuguese siege of Azemmour in 1541. Although there is some disagreement as to the extent of the Jewish role in the successful siege, it is clear that the local Jews of Portuguese heritage actively welcomed and aided the Christian troops.[68] And here, as at Safi, Jews contributed financially to the maintenance and defense of the city.

During the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth, Spanish and Portuguese Christians encountered Jews of Iberian heritage in places far removed from their shared homeland. The relationship between Jews and Christians was very different in these remote lands, where the latter could not exercise power. One such example is the small island of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, the westernmost link in Portugal's newly established chain of trading colonies across southern Asia. The Portuguese merchants who used Hormuz as a gateway to the markets of the Levant and India's Malabar Coast were soon joined on the island by a small settlement of Sephardic Jews seeking to profit from the same routes. Whatever animosities existed between the two groups in Iberia at that time, a natural, easy friendship developed between them in this trading outpost. The few rabbis among the Sephardim found that they had as much to talk about with the Jesuit missionaries on the island as they did with the native Jewish population.

Contemporary Jesuit sources mention that two Castilian exiles, a certain Rabbi Solomon and Rabbi Joseph, had reached Hormuz and become particularly close with the head of the Jesuit mission there, Gaspar Barzaeus. They debated matters of theology with the Jesuit father but also befriended him, inviting him to their homes to dine. Barzaeus was originally from the Netherlands but had studied in Portugal, and the arrival of this educated and pious man who shared the language and culture of the Sephardic exiles appears to have been a welcome sight. In Barzaeus's own account of his relationship with Rabbi Solomon, he notes that the latter: "became such a friend ... that he came for no other reason than to learn and enjoy hearing divine matters," adding that Solomon, the "most intelligent among the Jews of Ormuz," "had never found himself with more learned people that those of our Company." Even allowing for the self-serving nature of these comments, it is not hard to imagine these Castilian-speaking Jews as a welcome sight to a fellow Iberian.[69]

Iberian family and had settled in Azemmour, raised arms to help defend Safi against Muslim troops.

[68]Leo Africanus considered the Jews who opened the gates to the Portuguese traitors, while official Portuguese reports mention only that the Jews provided information about the state of Muslim defenses. Hirschberg, *Jews in North Africa*, 1:422.

[69]Walter Fischel, "New Sources for the History of the Jewish Diaspora in Asia in the 16th Century," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 49 (1950): 379–99, 387–88. On the Jewish community of Hormuz, see Matt Goldish, *Jewish Questions* (Princeton, NJ, 2008), 29–31.

For their part, the Jews appear to have been relatively unconcerned regarding the missionary sermons of the Christians and did not protest when the Jesuits addressed them in their synagogues. In a Muslim country, where the Jews were under no pressure to convert, such sermons and debates had a very different cast than in inquisitorial Europe.[70] While it is impossible to ignore the iniquities that Jews were forced to suffer simply because of their religious identity, it is essential that we bear in mind that religious conflict did not preclude religious cooperation. Early modern Jews may well have faced a greater degree and a greater frequency of persecution and hardship than their Christian and Muslim counterparts did. Nonetheless, members of all three religions shared a sort of natural pragmatism with regard to their personal relationships that often surpassed (or at least deferred) their religious sensibilities. Whatever the apprehensions of their intellectual elite, most sixteenth-century Sephardim were as concerned with survival and the advancement of their personal interests as they were with the defense of Judaism.

Naturally, not all encounters between Jews and Christians were quite so amicable, even on the distant edges of European empires. They were, however, decidedly more balanced than those in Christian Europe. A Converso trader provided the following description of the situation in Senegal's Petite Côte ca. 1608:

> In this Porto de Ali there is a community with 100 *vizinhos* of Portuguese and blacks. To this port came people from Flanders who profess the Law of Moses and here they perform their rituals and ceremonies like the ones of Judea. And the Portuguese seeking to kill them and expel them from that place ran a serious risk. Because the [Muslim] King took the side of the former and he told the latter that his land was a market where all kinds of people had a right to live. And that no one would cause disorder in his land; or he would have their heads cut off. If they wanted to make war they ought to make it on the sea not on his land, which, as he already said, was a market.[71]

It is worth noting that the protection extended to the Jewish merchants came not from their position as *dhimmis* under Muslim law but rather from the long-standing Senegalese custom of welcoming merchants and ensuring their protection.[72] The Portuguese made several attempts to convince local rulers to expel Jewish merchants from the region, but without success.[73]

[70] Fischel, "Jewish Diaspora in Asia," 391.

[71] Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, "Catholics, Jews, and Muslims in Early Seventeenth-Century Guiné," in Kagan and Morgan, eds., *Atlantic Diasporas*, 170–94, 172–73.

[72] Ibid., 173.

[73] Ibid., 176.

There, on Africa's western coast, the edges of the Portuguese empire and the Sephardic diaspora had come to overlap. The economic and religious rivalry between the two groups of merchants was every bit as intense as it had been in fifteenth-century Portugal. The difference now was that, at this distance from Lisbon, the Portuguese Catholics were forced to adjust to a situation in which the power dynamic no longer favored them quite so effectively.

Despite the popular image of 1492 as an end of an era in Jewish-Christian relations, Christian attitudes toward the Jews actually remained somewhat anomalous throughout much of the following century. Many of the older, medieval ideas about Jews, both as a religious group and as a community, persisted into the sixteenth century and beyond. But the transition to the early modern period also gave rise to intriguing changes regarding the location of the Jews in the European imagination. The image of the Jews that arose in this transitional period was a complex mix of old stereotypes and new conceptual categories forged by the cultural context of the European Age of Discovery. This image was further complicated by the pursuit of overlapping and often conflicting policies. Christians chased Jews from their realms, only to conquer the lands in which the Jews came to reside. They called Jews lustful and fundamentally irreligious and then baptized them. They accused the baptized of being poor Christians and bad for society yet forced them to stay in their midst. The image of the Jews as a mercantile nation with native abilities and connections to markets in both Christian and Muslim lands made them attractive to various Mediterranean rulers even as it inflamed the anger and jealousy of the non-Jewish masses. These attitudes were also greatly shaped by context. While the presence of a large, organized, and well-connected group of Jewish merchants was viewed as a threat at home, a similar community found elsewhere could be greeted as a welcome partner. During the sixteenth century, European Christians who traveled to Muslim lands and beyond reacted in open astonishment at the relative freedom afforded the Jews they encountered and at the considerable economic success they derived from it. Some were quick to recognize the advantages that local Jewish traders afforded them. For others, Jewish economic and social achievements elicited reactions that ranged from mild bemusement to outright disgust. Whether responses to encounters with Jews were positive or negative is, I submit, not the principal question here. More important is the new thinking about the Jews that such encounters produced. European reactions to the Jews of the early modern Mediterranean all share a sense of (re)discovery of the once-familiar Jew.

Writing on the situation in early modern Germany, Ronnie Hsia has noted: "Christian interest in Jewish culture exemplified by the study of Hebrew Scriptures and Kabbala arose from a dialectic of religion and ethnography. The religious interest among Christians—whether to deny tenets of Judaism,

or to expose the evil of Jewish rites, or to convert the Jews—existed in a dialectical relationship with the new ethnographic impulse to define identities and affirm boundaries."[74] When considering the accounts of Christian travelers who encountered Jews outside Europe in the wake of 1492, I think it is possible to take Hsia's astute observation a step further. Not only did this ethnographic impulse moderate Christian inclinations toward religious polemics or conversion; it also fell short of defining identities. At times, it seems, the Christian observer has difficulty moving past a visceral shock—and sometimes delight—in the existence of living examples of Jews. This seems to be the case, at least, for some of the earliest accounts that arise from Christian reencounters with Jews at the end of the Middle Ages. I suggest that it is worth taking note of these images of Jews and Jewishness as counterweights to those produced by Christian polemical literature in the Middle Ages and the Reformation. At the very least, they interrupt the teleology of antisemitism that connects these theological accounts with the cultural construction of the Jews in the gaze of European intellectuals during the subsequent trends of Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Orientalism.

[74] Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, "Christian Ethnographies of Jews in Early Modern Germany," in *The Expulsion of the Jews, 1492 and After*, ed. Raymond Waddington and Arthur Williamson (New York, 1994), 223–35, 226.