

Antisemitism Under Crescent and Cross in the Middle Ages

Seminar on Antisemitism in Comparative Perspective

Institution for Social and Policy Studies, Yale University

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1. Antisemitism in Christendom and Islam

Antisemitism is a product of the medieval Christian world, not of the domain of Islam. Well known in medieval European history are the many instances of large-scale massacre of individuals or groups of Jews; of the torture or execution of Jews on irrational allegations of killing and exsanguinating Christian children, of poisoning wells, or stealing and “torturing” the eucharist wafer (the “host desecration libel”). In another kind of violence, Jews were exposed to measures intended to weaken the hold of Judaism and convert them to the majority faith. These acts included official limitation of Jewish occupational opportunities, the burning of the Talmud, compulsory attendance at conversionary sermons, and other violations of the age-old recognition of the right to practice Judaism without interference. Finally, there were the expulsions--from kingdoms, counties, and towns--beginning in the twelfth century--expulsions that left most of Latin Europe “judenrein” by the year 1500. While some scholars like to distinguish between “anti-Judaism” in Christianity through the eleventh century and irrational antisemitism from the twelfth century on, and others claim that irrational antisemitism had antecedents in the pre-Christian, pagan world, attempts to label classical, medieval Islam “anti-Semitic” tell us more about contemporary politics in the Middle East than about Jewish-Muslim relations in the past.

Whether measured in terms of expulsion, murder, assault on property, or forced conversion--the signature expressions of medieval antisemitism--the Jews of Islam did not experience physical violence or irrational hatred on a scale remotely approaching Jewish suffering in Western Christendom. In fact the contrast between the gloomy fate of the Jews of Christendom and the rosy image of Jewish life under Islam has been a commonplace of Jewish historiography since the sixteenth century. In our own time, Salo Baron made famous (and decried) the “lachrymose conception of Jewish history” in Europe, and his critique has gained increasing acceptance in recent years. For German Jewish historians of the nineteenth century, however, so great did the dissimilarity between Christendom and Islam seem that they exaggerated the medieval Muslim-Jewish relationship, especially in Spain, into a “Golden Age” or “myth of an interfaith utopia.” This served the political agenda of nineteenth-century European Jewish intellectuals. Though promised emancipation and full political and cultural integration into society following the French Revolution, they continued to experience discrimination and hatred. By the second half of the nineteenth century, this prejudice took the

¹ This paper is based on two prior publications of mine with some revisions and new material here: (1) Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages (Princeton, 1994), which has subsequently been translated into Turkish (Istanbul, 1997), Hebrew (Lod, 2001), and German (Munich, 2005); and (2) “Anti-Jewish Violence and the Place of the Jews in Christendom and in Islam: A Paradigm,” in Religious Violence between Christians and Jews: Medieval Roots, Modern Perspectives, ed. Anna Sapir Abulafia (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2002), 107-137.

new form of racial and political antisemitism. The “myth of an interfaith utopia” challenged supposedly enlightened Christians to live up to the promise of emancipation and grant the Jews rights and privileges that were at least as “liberal” as the “tolerant” treatment Jews enjoyed under the rule of medieval Muslims.

More recently, this “myth” has been challenged in some circles by what I call a “countermyth of Islamic persecution” or the “neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish-Arab history.” This revisionism transfers the “lachrymose conception of Jewish history” in medieval Christendom to the medieval Arab world. Like the nineteenth-century “myth of the interfaith utopia,” the “neo-lachrymose conception” is also driven by political considerations. It arose in apologetic response to Arab exploitation of the myth of the interfaith utopia as a weapon against modern Zionism, and to Arab antisemitism as it became known in Israel and the West from the late 1960s. The “countermyth of Islamic persecution” claims that Muslim-Jewish relations in the Middle Ages were much worse than previously thought, at times even as bad as the gloomy plight of the persecuted Jews of Christendom. By implication this revisionism asserts that antisemitism is endemic to Islam, a phenomenon dating from the Middle Ages, just like its Christian counterpart, and has nothing to do with the rise of modern Zionism.

To be sure, anti-Judaism and anti-Jewish violence were not absent from the Islamic world. Indeed they existed to a greater extent than Arab/Muslim apologists writing in Arabic or in western languages are willing to concede. But medieval Muslim anti-Judaism was much less violent and occurred much less frequently than the victimization of the Jews in Christian lands. And it was not irrational. Most episodes of oppression consisted in efforts to enforce the restrictive laws of the so-called Pact of ‘Umar (see below), a document ascribed to the second caliph but more reasonably representing the cumulative practice of the first century or so following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. There was little in Islamic attitudes toward the Jews that could be called antisemitism--irrational Jew hatred--in the European sense of the term.

2. Constructing a paradigm

Employing a comparative approach, I think one can construct a paradigm that explains, comparatively, why anti-Jewish hatred and anti-Jewish violence were so much less severe in Islam than in Christendom. We shall see that while religious hatred, channeled against the Jews by certain elements of the clergy, constituted a major cause of anti-Jewish violence in Christendom, other forces, especially economic, legal, and social ones, could either exacerbate or moderate the innate religious intolerance of both societies in which the Jews lived. We shall see that exacerbating forces dominated in Christendom while moderating forces prevailed in Islam. The paradigm makes sense even within the context of Christendom, however, for where moderating forces were present, there, too, anti-Jewish violence decreased. The Byzantine Empire, southern France, Italy, Christian Spain before the end of the fourteenth century, and medieval Poland, demonstrate this quite clearly.

In constructing the paradigm I speak only of northern, Latin Europe, the so-called Ashkenazic lands of Germany, France, and England, for there antisemitism was worst, there Jews suffered most from Christian hatred. There, too, the contrasts with Islam are the most vivid. In this comparison, the heuristic choice of northern Europe enables us to understand the reasons for the rise or absence of medieval antisemitism best.

a. Religious attitudes toward the Jewish minority²

Religious attitudes stood at the foundation of hostility toward the Jews in both Christianity and Islam. But theological factors, as well as historical context, contributed to anti-Jewish violence much more profoundly in Christendom, particularly northern Christendom, than in Islam. Why?

Christianity originated as a rebellious sect within Judaism, committed to the belief that Jesus was the Messiah spoken of in the Hebrew Bible, and for some, the son of God. Jesus was crucified, and his crucifixion, though carried out by Roman soldiers, was blamed by Christians on the Jews. Despite the positive redemptive interpretation assigned by Christ's disciples to his death in the concept of the vicarious atonement, the act of killing Jesus continued to be considered unforgivable, to be remembered in perpetuity.

In the early centuries, while Rome denied Christians the legal recognition long conferred upon the Jews, and periodically persecuted devotees of the suspect new sect, Christianity grew apart from Judaism. Christians, beginning with Paul, depicted Jewish law as worthless, at least for Gentile converts.³ Subsequently, Christianity replaced Jewish law with a new nomism, the nomism of Christ. In this scheme, Mosaic law appeared as but a transient stage on the way to the final, spiritual, messianic perfection in the incarnation. Christians also constructed the notion that they formed a New Israel, replacing Old Israel, which, rejected by God, now lay defeated, frozen in time. This doctrine aimed at answering Jewish and Roman charges that Christianity represented a revolutionary innovation. In defense of their beliefs, Christian thinkers asserted that they were not innovations at all. Everything had been anticipated in the Old Testament, which needed simply to be understood in a spiritual or allegorical sense. This argument could theoretically appeal to Romans, who, in the Greek tradition, admired allegory. The church's claim to represent the New (and True) Israel, fulfilling God's word in the Old through a New Testament, introduced a bold credo that eventually undermined Judaism's place in the divine scheme of history.

The extirpation of the Jews was retarded by a doctrine elaborated by Saint Augustine (354-430), who articulated a positive role for the Jews in Christian salvation history. This was his doctrine of "witness," which served over the following centuries to justify the preservation of the Jews within Christendom. God wanted the Jews to be preserved because, in their defeated state, the Jews bore witness to the triumph of Christianity. In addition, by preserving the Old Testament, the Jews bore witness to the authenticity of its Hebrew text, the sacred repository of prophecies of Christ's life and death. The Hebrew original, alongside the Jewish Greek translation, the Septuagint, provided a ready answer to the Gentiles when they accused the Christians of making these prophecies up. The final act of witness, already enunciated by Paul, would ensue when, at the Second coming of Christ, the Jews converted to Christianity.

² This section summarizes the argument of chapter two in Under Crescent and Cross.

³ See John Gager, The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity (New York, 1983), 193ff. Regardless of Paul's true convictions in this matter, what is important for our present purpose is that subsequent Christian thinkers understood him to have preached that the coming of Christ had abrogated the Law, and this became salient in the Jewish-Christian conflict.

Augustine's doctrine was adopted as Papal policy for protecting the practice of Judaism and helped safeguard the Jewish community from physical destruction during the early Middle Ages, up to the eleventh century. Thereafter, anti-Jewish violence erupted with regularity. Before examining this change, it is useful to compare Christianity with Islam, where similar foundations for anti-Jewish violence were not laid and no theological rationalization had to be created to protect the Jews from physical extirpation.

First, the founder of Islam claimed neither messiahship nor divinity. While the Jews of Medina ridiculed him in his lifetime, Muhammad died a natural death. Thus, unlike Christians, Muslims had no grounds for holding the Jews culpable for the demise of their progenitor. Without a "propheticide," and lacking an iconographic tradition like Christianity's that might have provided the illiterate Muslim masses with a graphic representation of Jewish enmity toward Muhammad in Medina, the Islamic-Jewish conflict could not generate the kind of tension and hatred that so inflamed the conflict between Christianity and the Jews.

The Qur'ān itself approaches the Jews from a slightly different angle than early Christian texts. The New Testament contains the roots of Jew-hatred. For its part, Augustine's theory of witness foresees a fossilized Judaism, rejected by God. God's choice of the Christian community embodies a total denial of a creative future for the Jews. The Qur'ān, too, contains negative verses about the Jews, condemning the rebellious biblical Israelites and their successors, perfidious Jews, who rejected and ridiculed the Prophet in Medina. And there are downright nasty statements about the Jews and their behavior. But the Qur'ān also expresses the nucleus of kind of religious pluralism. It does not envision forcefully converting these non-believers—as opposed to the pagans—to Islam. A famous verse states: "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256). And another proclaims: "To you your religion and to me, mine" (109:6) Jews, like Oriental Christians, "People of the Book," were allowed to live in their communities and develop. They were not fossils proving the triumph of Islam.

Early Islam, in contrast to early Christianity, did not have to struggle for centuries to gain recognition from a hostile and powerful enemy like Rome. The confidence instilled by early victories over the pagan Arabs in Arabia propelled the new religion to great triumphs as it went on relatively quickly to overcome the two huge but weakened empires of Byzantium and Persia. One result was that Islam never needed to portray itself as a "New Israel" or "New Christendom." Nor did it need a doctrine of witness to justify the continued existence of Judaism or Christianity in its midst and the protection of these communities from violence. Furthermore, Islam did not stake a claim to the Scriptures of the Jews and Christians. It did not need these books to prove its own claims to truth. Shared claim to Scripture laid the foundation for continual tension between Christianity and Judaism over the interpretation of the message of Jewish holy writ and promoted centuries of interreligious polemics seeking to weaken Judaism's grip on its adherents. Islam, by contrast, did not claim possession of either the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament. In fact, it dismissed the existing texts of these Scriptures as corruptions of their original, divinely inspired teaching, which was restored in the Qur'ān. The fortellings of Muhammad in the Old and New Testament that form one of the themes of Islamic polemical literature are but a pale imitation of the much more indispensable Christian method of Old Testament exegesis. In its interreligious polemics, Islam was if anything more hostile towards Christianity than towards Judaism, because Christianity, with the apparent polytheism of its Trinity, was more repugnant to strictly monotheist Islam. In brief, the religious character of

Islam and the historical circumstances of its origins with respect to Judaism attenuated violent anti-Jewish feelings and illuminate, by contrast, the religious causes of Christian violence against the Jews in the Middle Ages.

b. The legal position of the Jews⁴

A comparison of the legal position of the Jewish minority in Christendom and in Islam teaches much about the differing degrees of anti-Jewish violence and antisemitic prejudice in these two societies. In the Christian world, the Jews were affected by different, often conflicting, laws--the canon law of the church, feudal custom, the law of the developing medieval state, and the law of the emergent city. For the most part, the legal situation expressed itself in a certain arbitrariness and irksome unpredictability. Moreover, the Jews had a unique legal status: they were the only infidels living within Christian society, especially after the last pagans in eastern Europe were converted. As Jews became more vulnerable to Christian violence beginning with the crusades, secular rulers tightened their jurisdiction. Jews became monarchical "property"--"serfs of the royal chamber" as they were called in Latin--subject to a special and oppressively restrictive legal status. The unmediated legal relationship between monarch and Jew continued to provide some measure of badly needed protection in an increasingly hostile environment. But it further underscored their alien status. It gave rulers license to exploit them through heavy taxation and extraordinary exactions and permitted them to place limits on the Jews' freedom of movement. The restrictions on Jewish freedoms were supported by an old, church doctrine concerning the "perpetual servitude" of the Jews. The legal dependence of the Jews and their ultimate isolation from the law that encompassed majority Christian society ultimately led to their removal from Christendom during the widespread expulsions of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.

In the Islamic world the Jews were not subject to a unique legal status. They were not the only infidels on the scene. There were plenty of Christians, many more than there were Jews, and Persia contained a significant Zoroastrian population. All of them dhimmīs, or "protected people," they were subsumed under the same legal umbrella, subject to (not isolated from) the same unified law that governed Muslims, the sharī'a, or Islamic Holy Law. This is illustrated, for instance, by the wide-spread phenomenon of Jews (and Christians) repairing to Muslim courts, which administered sharī'a law, the qādī courts. Though rabbis objected to this—an impingement upon Jewish autonomy, it was frowned upon since pre-Christian Roman times—they came to terms with the reality. Jews normally felt comfortable before Muslim judges and witnesses and even Jewish rabbinical authorities conceded that the qādī courts treated Jews fairly.⁵ In revealing contrast, Jews were formally-speaking excluded from the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts in Europe, thus accentuating their outsider status.⁶

⁴ For the extended argument underlying the summary that follows see Under Crescent and Cross, chapters three and four.

⁵ See the recent article by Gideon Libson, "Legal Autonomy and the Recourse to Legal Proceedings by Protected Peoples, according to Muslim Sources during the Gaonic Period" (Hebrew), in *Ha-islam ve-`olamot ha-shezurimm bo* (The Intertwined world of Islam: Essays in Memory of Hava Lazarus-Yafeh), ed. Nahem Ilan (Jerusalem, 2002), 334-392, which is to be followed up by an article dealing with rabbinical responses to the phenomenon.

⁶ This is discussed, among other things, in Walter Pakter, Medieval Canon Law and the Jews (Ebelsbach, 1988).

In general, the Jews enjoyed protection by the Islamic state in return for an annual poll tax payment and adherence to restrictions of the Pact of `Umar that suited their lowly religious position vis-à-vis Islam. With the exception of the poll tax, however, the restrictive laws were often circumvented by the dhimmīs with the tacit approval of the authorities, at least before the general decline in Jewish status that began around the twelfth-thirteenth centuries.

Residing as it did in a unitary corpus, the sharī'a, Dhimmī law was essentially consistent, predictable, and not given to arbitrary interpretation and application. The relative stability over time of the basic law regarding the treatment of non-Muslims thus assured the Jews a considerable degree of security against violence.

c. The economic factor⁷

In the early Middle Ages, when Jews were mainly long-distance traders, they suffered from the stigma attached to the suspect, roving, stranger-merchant, without ties, be they familial or physical, to the places they visited on commercial journeys. This did not deter Christian ruler, however, from encouraging them to settle permanently in their domain. Motivated by the principle of utility, Carolingian kings in the 8th and especially the 9th centuries set out to induce itinerant, long-distance Jewish merchants to settle permanently in their realm by offering them generous economic and legal dispensations. This was the origin of the Jewish community of northern Europe in the Middle Ages.

The revival of urban life in the late tenth and eleventh centuries had a particularly damaging impact on the Jews. Gradually, Christian traders in northern Europe squeezed their Jewish competitors out of the market economy by excluding them from the developing commercial guilds.⁸ Already accustomed to putting out some of the surplus capital generated by their commercial transactions in the form of loans, Jews were now compelled to transfer their main energies to moneylending.

Christian debt to Jewish moneylenders had a decidedly detrimental affect on Jewish-Christian relations in northern Europe. Though important for the growth of the economy and for the relief of distress, and grudgingly tolerated by the Church for those reasons, Jewish moneylending contributed greatly to anti-Jewish feeling and even to anti-Jewish violence. From the end of the twelfth century, Jew-hatred intensified as a result of the association of usury in Christian minds with the inimical twin evils of heresy and the devil. This was one of the key factors in the evolution of irrational, medieval antisemitism. To be sure, by the thirteenth

⁷ The summary below is based on chapter five in Under Crescent and Cross.

⁸ Wilhelm Roscher, a nineteenth-century historian whose theory about the Jews' role in medieval economic life still has merit today, wrote: "In those days the Jews satisfied a great economic need, something which, for a long time, could not be done by anyone else, namely, the need for carrying on a professional trade. Mediaeval policy toward the Jews may be said to have followed a direction almost inverse to the general economic trend. As soon as peoples became mature enough to perform that function themselves, they try to emancipate themselves from such guardianship over their trade, often in bitter conflict. The persecutions of the Jews in the later Middle Ages are thus, to a great extent, a product of commercial jealousy. They are connected with the rise of a national merchant class." English translation by Guido Kisch in his tribute to Roscher, "The Jews' Function in the Evolution of Mediaeval Economic Life," in Kisch's Forschungen zur Rechts-, Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte der Juden, vol. 2, 109 (originally published in Historia Judaica 6 [1944] and later in Kisch's The Jews in Medieval Germany [1949; reprint New York, 1970], 316ff. [= Historia Judaica, p. 5]).

century Christian moneylenders abounded as well, but Christian borrowers detested Jewish creditors with special vigor, for they could not easily abide their economic dependence on creditors who were infidels and supposed Christ-killers.

If in Christendom economic attitudes and economic development worked against the Jews, and contributed to antisemitism, in Islam the ideology of the marketplace actually helped safeguard them from persecution and violence. Islam encouraged trade, and the religion appeared on the historical scene at a time when commercial exchange over considerable distances was still entrenched in the conquered areas of southwest Asia and North Africa. An urban middle class appeared in established Islamic cities centuries before similar developments in northern Europe. Thus, the long-distance trader, including the Jewish merchant, could hardly be viewed as an alien. Moreover, for the most part, and certainly until the late Middle Ages, the Jews of Islam did not fulfill economic functions that accentuated the lowly status assigned them by Islamic religion and law. Our main source, the documents of the Cairo Geniza, probably give disproportionate weight to merchants, because it is they, more than others, who wrote letters filled with or soliciting information that was needed to conduct business affairs with a minimum of uncertainty or risk. But the Geniza also proves that Jewish economic life was widely diversified over scores of skilled and unskilled professions, even in agricultural occupations.

In Europe, we may say, Jewish fortunes ran in inverse relationship to the general economic well-being of society--up when commercial economy was down (in the early Middle Ages); down when Christendom was economically on the rise (in the high Middle Ages). In the Islamic world, by way of contrast, Jewish economic rise and decline, alike, coincided with economic trends in the general society. This was one sign among many of their embeddedness in the economic and social order of their Muslim surroundings.

d. The place of the Jews in the social order⁹

Another perspective on antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence in medieval Christendom and Islam makes use of anthropology to explore the relationship between Jews and the majority society. In Homo Hierarchicus,¹⁰ the French social anthropologist Louis Dumont, studying the caste system in India, draws some important implications for the social order of premodern societies. Dumont argues that the fundamental idea unifying societies composed of a multiplicity of groups and statuses is hierarchy, that hierarchy, more than power, determines how the elements of such a society interact. Hierarchy is “the principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole, it being understood that in the majority of societies it is religion which provides the view of the whole, and that the ranking will thus be religious in nature.”¹¹ The hierarchical relationship is that “between encompassing and encompassed or between ensemble and element.”¹² Paradoxically, the elements of caste systems--and, by

⁹ See chapters six to eight in Under Crescent and Cross.

¹⁰ Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications, complete revised English edition, trans. Mark Sainsbury, Louis Dumont, and Basia Galiati (Chicago and London, 1980). The French original appeared in 1966. For a discussion of the controversial reception of the book, see Dumont’s “Preface to the Complete English Edition.”

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 66 (italics in the original).

¹² *Ibid.*, 243 [in the author’s “Postface: Toward a Theory of Hierarchy.”]

extension, the components of any stratified society--manage to coexist more or less harmoniously precisely because each knows that it and all the other subgroups of the population are part of a totality. Differences are accepted as natural in a fully formed, or "ideal-type" hierarchical society, of which the Indian caste system is the best known example.

To hierarchy must be added the element of marginality. "Marginality theory" describes a type of hierarchy in which members of a group "(1) do not ordinarily qualify for admission into another group with which, over varying lengths of time, it is more or less closely associated; (2)...differ significantly in the nature of their cultural or racial heritage; and (3) [have between them] limited cultural interchange or social interaction."¹³ In a "marginal situation"--unlike caste systems with their ideal of permanent or total group exclusiveness--there is some permeability of the "barriers" (or boundaries) separating elements in the hierarchy.¹⁴ While both marginality and exclusion engender or reflect intergroup tensions, marginality expresses a somewhat less alienated relationship between the subordinate group and the larger society.¹⁵

Medieval Christians had ways of talking about the social order and the place, if any, of the infidel or the non-conforming Christian in that order. Thinkers spoke in terms of hierarchies--who was above and who was below.¹⁶ In medieval Christendom, the Jews can be said to have started out at the bottom of the hierarchy, but in a marginal situation. As previously stated, there was considerable social and economic interchange between Jews and Christians during the centuries between the Barbarian invasions and the rise of the crusading spirit in Latin Europe.

With the rise of the crusading spirit and the deepening of Christian consciousness and piety in the population at large beginning in the eleventh century, Jews gradually began to lose the benefits of their marginal situation and came slowly but decisively to be excluded from the hierarchy of the Christian social order. By the thirteenth century, Christians had come to feel

¹³ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴ H. F. Dickie-Clark, The Marginal Situation: A Sociological Study of a Coloured Group (London, 1966), 32-33.

¹⁵ "Marginality," as used here, differs from the way in which it is employed in the work of Maurice Kriegel, who, in turn, is also influenced by the model of the caste system of India. Writing about the Jews of Mediterranean Europe at the end of the Middle Ages, Kriegel uses "marginality" more or less synonymously with "exclusion." He views the various moves to segregate Christians from Jews as acts to avoid contamination by Jewish "impurity," as in a caste system requiring strict avoidance of those considered "untouchable." Maurice Kriegel, Les Juifs à la fin du moyen âge dans l'Europe méditerranéenne (Paris, 1979), esp. chapter 2. This approach has the disadvantage of obscuring the search for a more nuanced understanding of majority-minority relations regarding the Jews, one that makes it possible to account for or partially explain the differences between Christian-Jewish and Muslim-Jewish relations in the Middle Ages and also to steer away from the polarity of "marginality-integration" that seems to underlie the critique of Kriegel by Noël Coulet in "Les Juifs en Provence au bas moyen-âge: Les limites d'une marginalité," in Minorites et marginaux en France meridionale et dans la peninsule iberique (viie-xviiiie siècles) (Paris, 1986), 203-219.

¹⁶ At the beginning of his history of the hierarchical concept of the "three orders" (those who pray, who fight, and who labor) in medieval Christendom, Georges Duby quotes words used by Pope Gregory the Great to describe the "necessary inequality" of the social order: "Providence has established various degrees and distinct ordres [ordines] so that, if the lesser show deference to the greater, and if the greater bestow love on the lesser, then true concord and conjunction will arise out of diversity. Indeed, the community could not subsist at all if the total order of disparity did not preserve it. That creation cannot be governed in equality is taught us by the example of the heavenly hosts; there are angels and there are archangels, which are clearly not equals, differing from one another in power and order." Georges Duby, The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London, 1980), 3-4.

that Jews threatened to enfeeble Christian society. The universalism of the encompassing whole, with its place, however lowly, for the Jews, had by that time, as Jacques Le Goff observes, been tempered by a “Christian particularism, the primitive solidarity of the group and the policy of apartheid with regard to outside groups.” None of the complex models of subdividing Christendom into socioprofessional “estates” which increasingly came to characterize the social order from the beginning of the thirteenth century had any place for the Jews.¹⁷ Exclusion was, so-to-speak, the “final solution” for the Jews in medieval Catholicism, and it was carried out in one of three violent ways: forced conversion, massacre, and, most effectively, the expulsion of most of western European Jewry from Christian lands by the end of the fifteenth century.

What of hierarchy and marginality in medieval Islam? It is possible to read the Pact of ‘Umar as a document imposing exclusion on the dhimmīs, since it requires that they distinguish themselves from Muslims by special garb. Non-Muslims, furthermore, could not erect new houses of worship nor repair old ones; they had to observe their religious rites indoors and quietly, so as not to insult the superiority of Islam. In reality, however, the regulations of the Pact were intended not so much to exclude as to reinforce the hierarchical distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims within a single, encompassing social order.¹⁸ In addition to paying an annual poll tax, non-Muslims were to remain “in their place,” avoiding any act, particularly any religious act, that might challenge the superior rank of Muslims or of Islam. The dhimmī, however, occupied a definite rank in Islamic society--a low rank, but a rank nevertheless. Marginal though they were, the Jewish (and Christian) dhimmīs occupied a recognized, fixed, and safeguarded niche within the hierarchy of the Islamic social order. In Bernard Lewis’ words, they held a kind of “citizenship,” though as second class citizens to be sure.¹⁹

Additional explanations for the relatively more favorable position of the Jewish minority in medieval Islam compared to their brethren in medieval northern Christendom emerge when viewing the Jewish-Muslim relationship through the lens of ethnicity. Historically, ethnic heterogeneity has been much more characteristic of the medieval Orient than the medieval Occident. Arabs, Iranians, Turks, Kurds, Berbers, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and others populated the social landscape, composing a “mosaic” that gave society a richly hued human and cultural texture. Further, as noted already, the dhimmī group exhibited heterogeneity within its own ranks, with two (in some places three) nonconforming religions coexisting in the same space.²⁰

¹⁷ Jacques Le Goff, Medieval Civilization 400-1500, trans Julia Barrow (Oxford, 1988), 152, 261-264.

¹⁸ A. Noth, “Abgrenzungsprobleme zwischen Muslimen und Nicht-Muslimen: Die ‘Bedingungen ‘Umars (āṣ-ṣurū al-‘umariyya)’ unter einem anderen Aspekt gelesen,” Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 9 (1987), 290-315; now translated into English in Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society, ed. Robert Hoyland (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT, 2004).

¹⁹ Bernard Lewis, The Jews of Islam (Princeton, 1984), 62.

²⁰ Carlton Coon paved the way for understanding the significance of ethnicity in Arab civilization: “In the old Middle Eastern culture...the ideal was to emphasize not the uniformity of the citizens of a country as a whole but a uniformity within each special segment, and the greatest possible contrast between the segments. The members of each ethnic unit feel the need to identify themselves by some configuration of symbols. If by virtue of their history they possess some racial peculiarity, this they will enhance by special haircuts and the like; in any case they will wear distinctive garments and behave in a distinctive fashion. Walking though the bazaar you have no trouble identifying everyone you meet, once you have learned the sets of symbols. These people want to be identified. If you know who they are, you will know what to expect of them and how to deal with them, and human relations will operate

Using the concepts of hierarchy and marginality, then, anthropological and sociological insights help explain what in the medieval Middle East appears to be a “tolerant” relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. By contrast, it explains the absence of tolerance and the growth of anti-Jewish violence in medieval Christendom. As of the twelfth century, Europe experienced an exclusivism growing from religious and proto-national homogeneity in medieval Catholicism. This aggravated existing anti-Jewish feeling and begot a mounting level of anti-Jewish violence and antisemitism. Christendom in northern Europe from this period on lacked the ethnic differentiation which in Islam worked, along with religious, legal, and economic factors, to preserve the Jews’ niche in the hierarchy of the social order and to nurture the social, economic, and cultural embeddedness of the Jewish minority in Arab society. These factors kept the Jews from being totally excluded from the Islamic social order, mitigated the perception of them as aliens, and safeguarded them from the type and severity of violence that plagued Jews especially in the northern Christian lands for the better part of the high and later Middle Ages.

e. Memory of persecution²¹

Not surprisingly, and in stark contrast with their brethren in Christian lands, who constructed their history as a long chain of suffering, the Jews of the Islamic Middle Ages preserved very little collective memory of Muslim acts of violence. Only one episode comes in for substantial memorialization. That is the massacres and forced conversions in North Africa and Spain in the twelfth century perpetrated against Jews, Christians and even nonconforming Muslims by the fanatic sect of the Almohads. This was the persecution that forced the Maimonides family into exile from Spain.

While Jews in Ashkenazic lands composed myriads of poems, elegies and chronicles in the wake of persecution and martyrdom, many of which entered the liturgy and are still recited in synagogues today, by contrast, among the thousands of Hebrew poems written during the classical Islamic centuries, the only medieval Hebrew poem bemoaning persecution in an Arab land known to me is a lament on the extirpation of several Jewish communities in North Africa and Spain during the Almohad terror. (Other examples of Hebrew elegies about persecution written by poets in Muslim Spain refer to acts of violence perpetrated by Christians, not Muslims.) A favorite episode in what I call the “neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish-Arab history” took place in 1066. A Jewish vizier was assassinated in the Berber kingdom of Granada, Spain, and afterwards the entire Jewish community was wiped out by the Muslim mob. A virulent anti-Jewish Arabic poem encouraged the persecution, and it is often cited as a piece of medieval Muslim antisemitism. A Jewish writer two centuries later called attention to the sad event, but implied that the Jewish vizier, by his haughty behavior towards Muslims, had brought it on himself. Moreover, two elegies on the death of this vizier by a contemporary Hebrew poet lack the faintest allusion to the fact that he was the victim of anti-Jewish political assassination and to the pogrom that followed.

smoothly in a crowded space....This exaggeration of symbolic devices greatly facilitates business and social intercourse in a segmented society. It saves people from embarrassing questions, from ‘breaks,’ from anger, and from violence. It is an essential part of the mechanism which makes the mosaic function.” Carleton S. Coon, Caravan: The Story of the Middle East, rev. ed. (New York, 1958), 153, 167.

²¹ See chapter ten in Under Crescent and Cross.

Does this contrast in historical memory mean that the Jews of Islam did not feel oppressed, even persecuted at times, like their brethren in Christian lands? Far from it. But, I believe, they did not experience oppression as an unbreakable chain of persecution. They experienced Muslim contempt, along with their Arab-Christian neighbors. But they did not experience irrational antisemitism. They were not victims of blood libels. They did not endure accusations of being in league with the devil, of poisoning wells, of trying to undermine society with bloodsucking usury. They had substantial confidence in the dhimma system. If they kept a low profile, if they paid their annual poll tax, they expected to be protected--not to be forcefully converted to Islam, not to be massacred, and not to be expelled. When the system broke down, as it did under the Almohads and in 1066 in Granada, Jews felt the impact of the violence no less than the Ashkenazic Jews of Europe. But they recognized these as temporary failures of the dhimma arrangement. Doubtless this helps explain why Jews in Islamic lands under threat favored superficial conversion (like the Islamic taqiyya recommended for Muslims faced with persecution) over martyrdom, unlike their self-immolating Ashkenazic brethren, who had little hope of being officially allowed to return to Judaism after their baptism.

3. Summary

The paradigm that emerges from the comparative study of Christian-Jewish and Muslim-Jewish relations in the Middle Ages is complex. It claims that anti-Jewish violence is related, in the first instance, to the totalitarianism of religious exclusivity. Historically, totalitarianism of religious exclusivity characterized both Islam and Christianity. But anti-Jewish violence was more pronounced in Christendom because innate religious antagonism was combined with other erosive forces. The first of these lay in economic circumstances that excluded the Jews from the most respected walks of life. The second lay in legal status, namely, the evolution of a special law for the Jews and a system of baronial or monarchical possessory rights that could be manipulated in an arbitrary manner. Economic marginalization and a special, arbitrary legal status, combined with another adverse factor, social exclusion, to rob the Jews of their rank in the hierarchical social order. The gradual replacement of the ethnic pluralism of Germanic society of the early Middle Ages by a medieval type of “nationalism,” paralleling the spread of Catholic religious exclusivity to the masses, also contributed to the enhancement of the Jew’s “otherness” and to his eventual exclusion from western Christendom. This exclusion was accomplished by violence, in the form of murder, forced conversion, or, most successfully, expulsion—as well as by irrational antisemitism..

The paradigm proves its usefulness when applied to the Islamic world, where diminished anti-Jewish violence and the near absence of real, irrational antisemitism correlated with a lower level of religious intolerance, a less arbitrary legal status under the protection of religious law, the absence of monarchic possessory rights, widespread Jewish economic differentiation and integration, greater social inclusiveness, and ethnic and even religious pluralism.

* * * * *

If the value of the paradigm is truly to stand up to scrutiny, even Christendom should show lower levels of anti-Jewish violence and antisemitism where some or all of the factors discussed above in connection with northern Latin Europe were altered--where they bore greater similarity to the

economic, legal, and social circumstances of the Jew in medieval Islamic society. Below, I offer, briefly, some suggestive observations along these lines.²²

a. Northern Europe in the early Middle Ages

As the paradigm predicts, Jews in northern Europe in the early Middle Ages experienced relatively little anti-Jewish violence. Although identified largely with international trade, Jews displayed a certain amount of economic differentiation, as Bernhard Blumenkranz has argued. Secondly, the legal status accorded the Jews strongly emphasized monarchical protection, rather than, as developed later on, monarchical possession. Royal jurisdiction over the Jews manifested, not arbitrariness, but consistent favoritism--directly related to the utility Jewish long-distance merchants offered to secular princes and their courts. Furthermore, law in the ethnically pluralistic Germanic society of the early Middle Ages was based on the principle of personality (rather than territoriality). Jews represented just another ethnic group with its own tribal law. Jews were socially more included in northern Europe in the early Middle Ages than they were later on. Indeed, adumbrating Church objections to such favorable Jewish status that would help erode it later on, Agobard, the bishop of Lyons, railed against the liberties of social intercourse encouraged by the privileges granted Jewish merchants by the Carolingian rulers in the ninth century.²³

Religious totalitarianism was not yet established in northern Europe during the early Middle Ages. Much of society still clung to its pre-Christian, Germanic (pagan) tribal religious ways. Massacres of the Jews and other types of persecution reared their ugly head only in the eleventh century, and especially beginning with the First Crusade. As the paradigm suggests, this shift of attitude and treatment of the Jews corresponded with several important changes: the penetration of Catholic exclusivity to the lower classes; the rise of Christian commerce, forcing Jews out of the commercial marketplace and into despised moneylending; the growth of constraining possessory rights; and the decline of ethnic pluralism.

b. Southern France and Italy

Turning our attention now to southern France, the Midi, and also to Italy, the paradigm again proves its heuristic value. Mediterranean Latin Christendom, most agree, offered a much more hospitable environment to Jews than the northern reaches of Europe.²⁴ There is no hard

²² See Cohen, "Anti-Jewish Violence and the Place of the Jews in Christendom and in Islam: A Paradigm" (above note 1)

²³ Agobardi Lugdunensis Archiepiscopi Epistolae, ed. E. Duemmler in Momumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae Karolinae Aevi (Berlin, 1899), 3:182-185, 190ff. An abridged English translation of Agobard's letters was published by Kenneth R. Stow in Conservative Judaism, 29, no. 1 (Fall, 1974), esp. pp. 63, 65.

²⁴ An dissenting view is proffered by Maurice Kriegel. In his "Un trait de psychologie sociale dans les pays méditerranéens du Bas Moyen Age: le juif comme intouchable," (Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations 31 [1976], 326-330), and more comprehensively in Les Juifs à la fin du moyen âge dans l'Europe méditerranéenne (Paris, 1979), Kriegel argues--against received wisdom--that the attitude toward the Jew in southern Europe was just as hostile as it was in the North. Noël Coulet has challenged this revisionist thesis in "'Juif intouchable' et interdits alimentaires," in Exclus et systèmes d'exclusion dans la littérature et la civilisation médiévales (Aix-en-Provence,

evidence for persecution of the Jews in the south of France during the First Crusade,²⁵ and Gavin Langmuir has pointed to the absence of the antisemitic ritual murder libel in southern France, particularly Languedoc.²⁶ In general, Jewish communities of the South lived in more placid, integrated fashion in their surroundings than their northern European brethren. They were less segregated from Christians, and their economic activities varied, from moneylending to small- and large-scale trade, including long-distance commerce. Jews also worked as toll-gatherers in association with Christians, and in land-transfer brokerage.²⁷ In Languedoc Jews also engaged in many other occupations, such as agriculture (either as landowners or as tenant farmers), artisanry, commerce (butchery, cereals), peddling, brokerage, medicine, and public offices. And they owned immovable property, whether in the form of agricultural land, houses, or artisan or commercial establishments.²⁸ Though moneylending was the dominant profession, it seems to have had less dire consequences for Christian-Jewish relations in the Midi than in the North.

If heterogeneity in Jewish economic life was a crucial agent tempering anti-Jewish feeling, so were other features peculiar to southern Europe, and here, Italy may also be included. In southern Europe, continuity with the Roman past and a sharper memory of Roman legal traditions and perseverance of Roman legal procedures contributed to the relative security of the Jews as compared with their status in the northern communities, where Roman law was virtually forgotten in the early Middle Ages. Similarly, the antiquity of Jewish settlement in the South--bordering on indigenous habitation and resembling the native status of Jewry in Arab lands--contributed to a more tolerant atmosphere.

To this should be added the general attitude toward urban life. In the North, urban autonomy, revived after centuries of decay, ran counter to feudal preferences. In the Mediterranean lands, by way of contrast, urban society of the Roman era had never quite died out. Moreover, unlike its counterpart in northern countries, the nobility in southern Europe was not cut off from city life.²⁹ Continuity of urban life, absence of rigid social boundaries between city and countryside, and an aristocracy receptive to town habits correlate with a greater

1978), 207-221. See also Coulet, "Les Juifs en Provence au moyen âge: Les limites d'une marginalité," in *Minorités et marginaux en Espagne et dans le Midi de la France VII^e-XVIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1986), 203-219.

²⁵ Norman Golb put forth a provocative theory to the contrary, based principally on the identification in a Geniza letter of a nearly effaced place-name as Monieux, a city in Provence. Norman Golb, "New Light on the Persecution of French Jews at the Time of the First Crusade," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 34 (1966), 1-63 (the document in question had been published earlier, but the place-name interpreted differently, by Jacob Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 1 [Cincinnati, 1931], 31-33). Recently a pair of scholars has shown that the place-name was much more likely Muño, a city in northern Spain, and hence the anti-Jewish violence had nothing to do with the First Crusade. Edna Engel, "The Wandering of a Provençal Proselyte: A Puzzle of Three Geniza Fragments" (Hebrew), *Sefunot* 7(22) (1998-1999), 13-21 and Yosef Yahalom, "The Muño Letters: The Work of a Village Scribe from Northern Spain" (Hebrew), *ibid.*, 23-31. Golb's argument about a connection with the First Crusade was to begin with weak.

²⁶ "L'absence d'accusation de meurtre rituel à l'ouest du Rhône," in *Juifs et judaïsme de Languedoc xii^e siècle-début xiv^e siècle*, ed. Marie-Humbert Vicaire and Bernhard Blumenkranz (Toulouse, 1977), 235-249.

²⁷ Y. Dossat, "Les Juifs à Toulouse: un demi-siècle d'histoire communautaire," in *ibid.*, 132-135.

²⁸ Gerard Nahon, "Condition fiscale et économique des juifs," in *ibid.*, 63-72, following Saige, Luce, Régné, among others.

²⁹ Susan Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977), 87, writes about the contrast between southern Europe, where "a good many people lived in towns although they worked in the country," and the English case, where the separation of town and country was more marked.

openness toward the Jew in the South. As in the Islamic world, urbanism fit more organically into the social order of Mediterranean Christendom than in the North, where the town represented a considerable disruption in the traditional pattern of social life and organization.

Rooted in the South since Roman antiquity, Jews comprised a more organic part of the urban landscape, as they did in the Islamic world. In the cities of Languedoc during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, for example, as in the Islamic world, residential segregation was minimal. Jewish communities in the Midi reaped more of the benefits and experienced fewer of the liabilities of corporate status than did the Jewish communities of England and royal France.³⁰ With William Jordan, we may also point to the absence of regional political unification in the south, which, as it developed elsewhere, was accompanied by intensified degradation of the Jew-as-alien. As the paradigm predicts, all these contrasts with the situation of the Jews in northern Europe served to temper anti-Jewish violence in the Midi. It was only after the conquest of southern France by the French monarchy that some of the anti-Jewish oppression characteristic of northern European Christendom began to appear in these annexed lands.

c. Reconquista Spain

The omission of medieval Christian Spain from previous discussion does not mean that Spanish Christendom belies the paradigm. Quite the contrary. Particularly during the period of the Reconquista, when conditions for the Jews were deteriorating in the northern European heartland, Jewish-Christian relations in Spain were relatively tolerable. In accordance with the paradigm, Jews displayed considerable economic differentiation. Yitzhak Baer's gleanings from Spanish archival documents in Die Juden im christlichen Spanien,³¹ which underlay his History of the Jews in Christian Spain, confirm that Jews worked in a wide variety of occupations, in commerce, agriculture, handicrafts, medicine, as well as in service to the Spanish courts.³² The legal status of the Jews, though similar in principle to the "Jewish serfdom" in France, Germany, and England, was less injurious in practice. While this improved juridical situation certainly owed something to the example of the less oppressive dhimma system in the regions of Muslim Spain (Andalusia) annexed by the Catholic conquerors, it also had much to do with the utility Jews provided the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile in the administration and taxation of the colonized Muslim territories. In the fueros, the town charters specifying immunities or exemptions granted by the king or lord, Jews were accorded a large measure of equality with Christians and Muslims, especially during the early period of the Reconquista. Christian Spain, too, exhibited pluralism in the mixture of Catholics, Jews, and Muslims that composed its society and influenced its culture, appropriately labeled the culture of "convivencia."

Things began to deteriorate with the conclusion of the Reconquista and the concomitant decline of Jewish utility, as Baer argues. Beginning with the pogroms of 1391, Jews in Christian

³⁰ Pakter, Medieval Canon Law and the Jews, 20-25. Among reasons historians have given for "the relative tolerance of southern society in respect to the Jews," as summarized by William C. Jordan, is the fact that "the Jewish communities of the Midi were an organic part of the cities and towns of the south. Jews had lived here since the period of Roman domination, and they had never lost the semblance of protection under Roman law." Jordan, The French Monarchy and the Jews: From Philip Augustus to the Last Capetians (Philadelphia, 1986), 110-111.

³¹ Erster Teil: Urkunden und Regesten, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1929-1936; reprinted Westmead, 1970).

³² Baer, A History of the Jews in Christian Spain, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1961)

Spain had to weather anti-Jewish violence akin to that experienced by their brethren in northern Latin lands. Mass conversions to Catholicism produced the well known Marrano problem. Former Jews and their descendants now entered halls of Catholic power formerly closed to them, including the Church, causing anxiety in the ruling classes. A by-product was the emergence of laws of “purity of blood” (in the 1440s) that invoked racial considerations for distinguishing old (hence “real”) Christians from Christians who were partially Jews—a distant mirror of modern racial antisemitism in its Nazi guise. At the end of the fifteenth century antisemitism of this type led to the establishment of the fierce Spanish Inquisition, which, though charged with prosecuting Catholic heresy in the form of Marrano Judaizing, indirectly undermined the security of unconverted Jews as well. The national unification of Aragon and Castille under Ferdinand and Isabella quashed pluralism in Spain, culminating in the dual expulsion in 1492 of the two main groups of infidel “others”: professing Jews and Muslims.

d. Byzantium

Like the Jews in Mediterranean France, on the one hand, and in Christian Spain during the Reconquest, on the other, Jews in the Byzantine domains, (which for several centuries following Justinian’s successful imperial expansion in the mid-sixth century included southern Italy and Sicily), experienced less violence in the Middle Ages than in the Latin West, especially during the period before the Fourth Crusade in 1204.³³ And, not surprisingly, the Jews’ economic, legal, and social position conformed to characteristics expected according to the paradigm.

Byzantium was the locus of early Christian-Roman Jewry law—in the Theodosian and Justinianic Codes. Despite the theological disparagement of Judaism and attendant social animosity that crept in, these corpora clung tenaciously to the tolerationist features inherited from pagan Roman legislation. This benefited the Jews even more than in northern Europe, for Roman law had a continuous life in the late antique Eastern Empire and its medieval Byzantine successor.³⁴ Moreover, the Latin Christian model of “Jewish serfdom,” with its monarchical possessory rights over the Jews and attendant arbitrariness, did not make significant inroads into the eastern Roman Empire. In addition, the evidence portrays a Jewish population with a differentiated economic profile, even in the later period.³⁵

Ethnic and religious pluralism characterized the Byzantine Empire, in some places until its very end in the fifteenth century. Armenians, Catholic Christians, Jews (both Rabbanite and Karaite) and in some parts of the Empire also Muslims (e.g. Sicily and Anatolia) occupied the same social space in the Byzantine domains, and this diffused the natural hostility towards the “other,” to the advantage of the Jews.

As in southern France, urban centers were never eradicated in the Byzantine Mediterranean. They presented relatively comfortable places for Jews to inhabit, and for the

³³ On the earlier period, during which Jews of the Byzantine Empire experienced only four episodes of outright state persecution, see Joshua Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641-1204* (Athens, 1939) and Andrew Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* (New York, 1971); and on the later period, Steven Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium, 1204-1453* (University, Alabama, 1985).

³⁴ Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium*, 98-99.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 117-121.

same reasons. Moreover, Jews had lived in Byzantium from pre-Christian Roman times and constituted a more indigenous and embedded element in society than the tiny, alien, immigrant communities from both shores of the Mediterranean that forged the virgin Jewish settlements in northern Europe during the early Middle Ages.

e. Medieval Poland

Medieval Poland also exhibits the applicability of the paradigm. In the thirteenth century, Polish kings invited German townsmen from the West to settle in their land in order to revive urban and commercial life there. Favorable legal conditions were offered, to Christians in the form of the liberal law code of the city of Magdeburg, to Jews in the form of protective royal charters. The least restrictive version of the German charters for Jews was chosen as the model, and the language of “Jewish serfdom” was omitted, as Polish kings side-stepped the harsh policies against the Jews then insinuating themselves in the West under the pressure of the above-mentioned papal doctrine of “perpetual servitude of the Jews.”³⁶ In Poland, Jews found expansive economic opportunities during the period of initial settlement that liberated them from exclusive reliance on moneylending and its untoward consequences in Christian animosity. Economic diversification, reaching a high degree with the stepped-up immigration of western Jews in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to the adjacent and gradually merging kingdom of Poland and duchy of Lithuania (formally united in 1569), made the Jews less “other” and further helped attenuate anti-Jewish violence.³⁷ The Polish Commonwealth, especially in its geographically expanded form, represented a large, multi-ethnic kingdom of Lithuanians, Poles, Armenians, Ukrainians (Orthodox Christians in distinction to the Catholic Poles), Tatars, and Jews. Pluralism, as the paradigm asserts, constituted an advantage for the Jews, as it did elsewhere in the Middle Ages.³⁸

5. The paradigm applied to late medieval Islam

The paradigm applies not only to “other Christendoms” but also to Islam in the late Middle Ages. In this period, the 13th-15th centuries, and in some places beginning as early as the twelfth, forces that had moderated Islamic intolerance in the earlier period weakened and Jews experienced greater oppression. In Morocco, Jews emerged from the catastrophe of the twelfth-century Almohad persecutions as the only non-Muslim religious minority group (Christian converts to Islam did not revert to their former religion). Thus, in Morocco, at least, the pluralism of the earlier period, when Jews, Christians, and Muslims occupied the same physical space and anti-dhimmī hostility was diffused among the two non-Muslim groups, ended. Economically, a general decline set in in most of the Islamic world in these centuries, and this, too, had an adverse effect on Jewish well-being. With the growth of an Islamic form of

³⁶ Bernard Dov Weinryb, The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1800 (Philadelphia, 1973), 35-50.

³⁷ Salo W. Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, 2nd ed., vol. 16 (Philadelphia, 1976), chap. 70 (“Socioeconomic Restructuring”)

³⁸ Gershon Hundert, “An Advantage to Peculiarity? The Case of the Polish Commonwealth,” AJS Review 6 (1981), 21-38.

“feudalism,” better, statism, in the Mamluk Empire of Egypt and Syria-Palestine (1250-1517), tighter economic controls meant less economic freedom for the merchant and artisan classes, and as a minority group, the Jews necessarily fared worse than Muslims.

The principal factors eroding the security of the Jews in the 13th-15th centuries affected the Christians as well, indeed even more seriously. Political developments were decisive here. The invasion and occupation of the Levant by the Crusaders beginning at the end of the eleventh century and of Muslim Spain by Reconquista Crusaders in the West, as well as the Mongol conquests in the thirteenth century in the eastern Islamic world, threatened Islam from without. Non-Muslims living in the “Domain of Islam” were suspected of collusion with the enemy, or at least of tacit support, and this raised Muslim anxieties, with ensuing harsh treatment.

It should be noted that fear of non-Muslim treachery had some rational basis. Many Christians favored, or could be rationally suspected of favoring the Christian Crusaders,³⁹ while both Jews and Christians might have supported the Mongols, happy about the relief from Islamic restrictions that accompanied the conquests by these pagan Central Asians--at least until they themselves converted to Islam after settling down in Islamic territory. In the Latin West, by way of contrast, Jews were irrationally suspected of treachery despite the fact that they were helpless in their dispersion and lacked loyalty to an external enemy state. The Jews in northern Europe became imagined enemies of Christendom, allies of the devil, and inveterate, recidivist Christ-killers, allegedly murdering Christian children and also desecrating the host, poisoning wells, and wreaking other atrocities against Christians and Christianity. These were the hallmarks of antisemitism.

Pursuing the paradigm further, the Islamic world experienced an economic upswing in the sixteenth century, owing to the Ottoman conquests in the Levant, Egypt, and North Africa. This more or less coincided with the expulsion of the Jews from Christian Spain. Many thousands of the Iberian exiles resettled in the Arab and Turkish lands of the Muslim world, where they were welcomed by the Ottoman rulers because of their commercial skills and international contacts and because of their ingrained enmity towards the Ottomans’ own foreign Christian foes in the Catholic Habsburg Empire. They thus contributed significantly to the renewed florescence of a monetary, commercial economy on the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. This buoyed up a hitherto languishing Jewish economy.

Even though certain factors changed in the late Islamic Middle Ages--and the paradigm helps explain how this impacted adversely on Jewish life--things did not reach the low-point they did in northern Christendom. Pluralism, which never died out in the Islamic world the way it did in Latin Christendom, assured a certain amount of protection to the Jews in the Ottoman period and even earlier, especially in places where Christians and Jews continued to co-exist. The most characteristic causes of Christian anti-Jewish violence in the West did not occur in the Islamic world, even in this later period. Irrational antisemitism expressed in Christendom in the blood libel and the host desecration accusation were absent in Islamic lands. The Ottoman cases of ritual murder accusation, a handful in the early modern period and a proliferation in the period of Ottoman stagnation in the nineteenth century, were almost without exception incited by

³⁹ This is notwithstanding the extravagant and unconvincing theory of Allen and Helen Cutler in The Jew as Ally of the Muslim: Medieval Roots of Anti-Semitism (Notre Dame, 1986).

Christians, and the Ottoman government steadfastly rejected them.⁴⁰ Jews did not come to be identified with the devil, nor with heresy, for neither the devil nor heresy had the same salience in Islam as in Christianity. Conversions to Islam, especially by Christians, increased in the late Middle Ages, and often the neophytes were suspected of opportunism, although the claim that there was a kind of Muslim “inquisition” is highly doubtful.⁴¹ But professing Christians and Jews continued to hold positions of power in Muslim governments, even during the period of decline, and despite the vigorous complaints of Muslim clerics.

The humiliating provisions of the Pact of ‘Umar intensified in application as the well-being of the Muslim masses declined in the late Middle Ages. But pressures here and there to cancel the protection granted non-Muslims by the dhimma system to the contrary notwithstanding, the Pact of ‘Umar stood fast within the Islamic *sharī‘a* to safeguard Jews from the kinds of violent antisemitic excesses that struck Jews in Christian lands. Mass murder did not plague the minority communities in Islam as it did the Jews in Latin Europe. Occasional zeal to destroy non-Muslim houses of worship was often held in check by the application of due-process of Islamic law.⁴² Even in the later Middle Ages, with little exception (one temporary episode in the Yemen in the seventeenth century), Islam did not employ the strategy of expulsion to rid itself of Jews and other religious minorities.

Life was more difficult for Jews and Christians in the later Islamic Middle Ages, to be sure, and the paradigm helps explain this. But Jews continued to hold their place in the social order of Islamic society. It was a lowly rank, a marginal position, to be sure, and it was accompanied by considerable humiliation. But it was nonetheless a recognized rank. Unlike Christendom, which solved its Jewish problem in the later Middle Ages by antisemitic excesses of murder, forced conversion, or expulsion, none of these violent “solutions” to the “Jewish problem” were employed in the Islamic world, for Islam continued to accept the Jews as an embedded and organic element of society even as the general climate of well-being and security of the earlier period waned. Abraham Marcus’s case-study of Aleppo in the eighteenth century documents how these continuities worked to uphold the Jewish (and Christian) place within Islamic society right down to the eve of modernity in the Middle East.⁴³

Islamic/Arab Antisemitism Today

It is only when competing nationalism in the nineteenth and especially the twentieth century entered the scene that feelings of enmity towards the Jews became so inflamed that we can

⁴⁰ Uriel Heyd, “Ritual Murder Accusations in 15th- and 16th-Century Turkey” (Hebrew), *Sefunot* 5 (1961), 135-150; Jacob Landau, “Ritual Murder Accusations and Persecutions of Jews in 19th-Century Egypt” (Hebrew), *ibid.*, 417-460; Jacob Barnai, “‘Blood Libels’ in the Ottoman Empire of the Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries,” in *Antisemitism Through the Ages*, ed. Shmuel Almog, tr. Nathan H. Reisner (Oxford, 1988), 189-194.

⁴¹ E. Strauss (Ashtor), “L’inquisition dans l’état mamlouk,” *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 25 (1950), 11-261; and see now Tamer El-Leithy, “Coptic Culture and Conversion in Medieval Cairo, 1293-1524 A.D.” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2005).

⁴² Mark R. Cohen, “Jews in the Mamluk Environment: The Crisis of 1442 (A Geniza Study).” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 47 (1984), 425-448.

⁴³ Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1989).

apply the term antisemitism to the Islamic world. But this did not arise as an indigenous or inherent phenomenon. Oriental Christians imported Christian antisemitism into the Muslim Middle East as part of the discourse of nationalism. Seeking greater acceptance in a fledgling pan-Arab nation constituted by a majority of Muslims, Christians in the Arab world, aided by European Christian missionaries, began to use western-style antisemitism to focus Arab/Muslim enmity away from themselves and onto a new and, to them, familiar enemy. This Christian antisemitism has since become absorbed into the fabric of Islam as if it were there from the start, when it was never there from the start at all. The widely read Arabic translation of the late-nineteenth century Russian-Christian forgery, "the Protocols of the Elders of Zion," seems almost to be an Islamic text, echoing old themes in the Qur'an and elsewhere of Jewish treachery toward Muhammad and his biblical prophetic predecessors. The "Protocols" seem all the more credible in the light of the political, economic and military success of the Jewish State of Israel. As a result, the pluralism and largely non-violent attitude towards the Jews that existed in early and classical Islam, well-known to those who are familiar with classical Islamic texts, seems to have lost its public face. At the same time, age-old Jewish empathy with Islam has similarly receded. Comparative study of antisemitism in Christendom and Islam explains the difference between the two societies, though it does not make present-day Arab antisemitism any less unfortunate than its Christian roots.

