JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN TO THE INDIAN OCEAN: EVIDENCE FROM MATERIAL CULTURE

Research on the written and material sources for Jewish-Christian interaction in medieval and early modern times has been, for the most part, focused on Western Europe and the Byzantine Empire. In these areas, Jews lived as a minority under Christian rule. In contrast, in regions to the east of the Byzantine Empire, from the eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia, the Red Sea and India, Jews and Christians interacted, in some cases, on different terms: Jews and Christians as two minority groups; Jews and Christians as two sovereign entities; and “imagined” Jews, appearing in Christian texts, artistic representations and discourse in regions where Jews may not have existed.

Up to the present, research on Jewish-Christian interaction east of the Byzantine Empire in medieval and early modern times (ca. 600-1800 CE) has tended to focus on textual evidence. This conference will examine the ways in which material culture can shed light on this interaction. The regions which will be addressed include the Near East, the Caucasus, Central Asia, China, India and the Horn of Africa.

JEWS AND CHRISTIANS IN THE EAST: STRATEGIES OF INTERACTION BETWEEN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE INDIAN OCEAN

The encounters and interactions between Jews and Christians in the Middle East, Ethiopia, India and the Caucasus, which have hitherto been only insufficiently researched, is the subject matter of the project Jews and Christians in the East: Strategies of Interaction between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean (JewsEast).

One of the main premises of JewsEast is that in order to obtain a truly accurate understanding of the dynamics of Jewish-Christian relations in the non-Latin world during the Middle Ages and early modern period, these various regions and traditions must be studied together because they were all profoundly interconnected through the exchange and translation of texts, artistic motifs and techniques, and other goods, via long-distance trade along the ‘silk road’, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean, which, of course, also entailed the movement and encounter of peoples, Jews and Christians among them.
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