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Multiculturalism, Polyglossia, and Ethnic Diversity: Conflict, Accommodation, and Synthesis in the Premodern Mediterranean

AHA Session 192

Sunday, January 5, 2020: 10:30 AM-12:00 PM

Nassau East (New York Hilton, Second Floor)

Chair: *Núria Silleras-Fernandez, University of Colorado Boulder*

Papers: *"Seeking Refuge under the Wings of the Shekhinah":*

Political and Theological Lexicons of Exile in 16th-Century Sephardi Responsa Texts

Rebecca Wartell, University of Colorado Boulder

The Miraculous Virgin of Olovo

Marianne Kupin-Lisbin, University of Rochester

Christians, Jews, and Converts in the Island of Majorca around 1400: Spatial Segregation, Business Relations, and Language Practices

Ingrid Houssaye Michienzi, CNRS (French National Center for Scientific Research)

Comment: *Brian A. Catlos, University of Colorado Boulder*

Session Abstract

The Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean was a dynamic zone of cultural

contact, exchange, and innovation, the nexus between Europe, Africa, and Asia, and between the Byzantine, Latin, and Islamic worlds. It was home to an array of ethnic groups, and an array of vernacular and literary languages. Muslims, Christians and Jews of various origins, denominations and persuasions lived throughout the region, frequently cohabiting within the same regions, towns, and even households, engaging in dynamics of conflict and of collaboration, and exhibiting common identities that frequently crossed religious and ethnic lines. Multilingualism, bi-culturalism were common among individuals, and "code-switching" a common strategy. This panel brings together three papers that illuminate dynamics of interaction, transgression, engagement and conflict involving individuals and groups and the strategies they deployed as they navigated this diverse environment.

The session's papers bridge the late-fourteenth to early-seventeenth centuries, and cross the Mediterranean, from the Iberian peninsula to the Ottoman empire. Wartell's "Seeking Refuge under the Wings of the Shekhinah" takes a philological approach to analyze the use of multilingual rabbinical *responsato* mitigate the trauma of post-1492 diaspora Jewish communities. Kupin-Lisbin show how a multiconfessional religious ceremony to delve into the ambiguities and fluidities of religious identity in the early Modern Balkans. Houssaye Michienzi focuses on the tensions inherent in inter-ethnic and inter-communal relations, and the divergence between ideal and practice among the merchant community of late Medieval Mallorca.

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