

NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES

EXPRESSION AND REPRESENTATION IN THE
CHRISTIAN - JEWISH - MUSLIM MEDITERRANEAN

HOME PROGRAM FACULTY & ORGANIZERS PARTICIPANTS FACILITIES FAQ

Brian Catlos (co-Director & Faculty)

Biography:

Brian Catlos (Montréal, 1966) earned a PhD in Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto, and currently holds appointments as Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder and Research Associate in Humanities at the University of California Santa Cruz. His work centers on Muslim-Christian-Jewish relations and ethno-religious identity in medieval Europe and the Islamic World, and the history of the pre-Modern Mediterranean. A board member of various academic journals, he also co-directs The Mediterranean Seminar, a major initiative and a forum for international and interdisciplinary collaboration in the emerging field of Mediterranean Studies. He has published a number of books and articles including *The Victors and the Vanquished: Christians and Muslims of Catalonia and Aragon, 1050–1300* (Cambridge, 2004), *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, 1050–ca. 1615* (Cambridge, 2014), and *Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors: Power, Faith, and Violence in the Age of Crusade and Jihad* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014). Forthcoming books include *The Crucible of the West: Al-Andalus and the Muslims of Spain, 650–1650* [working title], and *Paradoxes of Plurality: Ethno-Religious Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean and Beyond* (both under contract with Basic Books), and an undergraduate textbook to be co-written with Thomas Burman (U Tennessee - Knoxville) and Mark Meyerson (U Toronto), *The Sea in the Middle: The Mediterranean World 600–1700CE* (Bedford). Awards and distinctions include the Governor-General of Canada's Gold Medal for Academic Achievement, two National Endowment for the Humanities Research Fellowships, and many other university, national and international fellowships and prizes. In July 2015 he will co-direct his fourth four-week NEH Summer Institute for College and University Professors in Barcelona, Spain. *The Victors and the Vanquished* won the AHA's Premio del Rey and the John E. Fagg Prize; *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom* was recently awarded MESA's Hourani Book Prize.



He is also a free-lance travel writer and historical consultant, based near Boulder CO and in Barcelona, Spain. In addition to his *Rough Guide: Languedoc & Roussillon* he contributes chapters and updates for other guidebooks, and provides historical expertise for book and film projects.

Talk/Lecture Abstracts:

Week 1:

"Ethno-Religious Diversity in the Medieval Mediterranean: An Historical Introduction"

One of the essential characteristics of the Mediterranean region during the Middle Ages was ethno-religious diversity. The Mediterranean was a fragmented but integrated zone of interdependent micro-ecologic and micro-economies consisting of zones inhabited (often simultaneously) by communities of Christians, Muslims and Jews of various confessional and ethnic orientations. As a prelude to our analysis of the dynamics of inter-communal interaction, we will survey the history of Mediterranean diversity from 600-1600 CE.

"Mutual Intelligibility and the Culture of the Mediterranean"

Mediterranean can certainly be seen as divided culturally and socially into various spheres: Christian/Muslim/Jewish and Latin/Byzantine/Hebrew/Arabic to name two modes of distinction. However, as well defined as these formal cultural/religious identities may have been on a formal or doctrinal level, they do not represent the totality of Mediterranean culture and society. Of equal importance was the informal Mediterranean culture that bridged the various confessional, ethnic and linguistic groups, rooted in common approaches to religion, philosophy, knowledge, social values and so on, which emerged as a consequence of the movement of people and goods throughout the region and the experiences of living in a common geographical environment. This engendered a condition of "mutual intelligibility" among the communities of the region, which facilitated social and political integration, and acted as a catalyst for cultural synthesis and innovation that crossed communal lines.

Seminar: "Mediterranean Institutions: Three Case Studies"

The seminar will review three case studies taken from the Mediterranean of the eleventh and twelfth century: the Ha-Hagid dynasty (Jewish wazirs of a Muslim kingdom), the Palace Slaves of Palermo (crypto-Muslims) who ran the Norman kingdom of Sicily, and Ibn Dukhkan, a Coptic finance minister of Fatimid Egypt, as means of exploring institutional integration between Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities and the opportunities and limits of *convivencia* in the Age of Crusade.

Week 2:

"Plural Societies in the Medieval Mediterranean: A Matter of Convenience"

Diversity was an advantage in this complex economic and social environment, and rulers regardless of their ideological orientation learned that it was in their best economic and political interests to cultivate minority religious communities and to give them a legitimate place in society. Minority communities, for their part, were prepared to trade off prestige and preeminence for influence and security. Throughout the Mediterranean such relationships were formalized by pacts and treaties, and incorporated into law and scripture; nevertheless, it was practical concerns and the maintenance of economic and political equilibrium between majority and minority groups that enabled such communities to survive. Such arrangements, and the legitimate integration of minority ethno-religious communities in the fabric and institutions of the dominant majority was made possible by the Mutual Intelligibility which was derived from the Mediterranean culture. Foreign as they may have been, conquerors and conquered recognized each other, and with very little friction were able to adopt and each others' institutions and integrate socially and economically. As a consequence, conquest did not spell catastrophe in the medieval Mediterranean, often it opened up new opportunities, not only for the victors but for the vanquished.

Week 3:

"Ethno-religious Relations & Physics of Scale"

The complexity and diversity of the Mediterranean world ensured that Muslims, Christians and Jews were in constant contact, but in most of the contexts in which they interacted, for most individuals, religious identity was simply not an issue. Hence they could engage in friendships, alliances and business partnerships, even though on some formal but abstract ideological level, one might have considered the other an infidel. By understanding that societies are complex systems in which relations on different planes of organizational complexity engender different perceptions and responses associated with different modes of identity one can build a coherent picture of the dynamics of communal interaction here. It was the interplay between modes of identity manifested on the macro- (ecumenian), meso- (corporate), and micro- (local) scales, and the styles of rhetoric associated with each of these that lent subtlety and flexibility to ethno-religious relations, but which gives the false appearance of inconsistency and self-contradiction to the modern observer.

Week 4:

"The Paradoxes of Plurality and Diversity in the Medieval Mediterranean"

The Mediterranean appears to be a region of paradoxes, characterized by the tension between of engagement, and exclusionary polemic versus inclusive rapprochement... the ideal of religious purity and homogeneity and rigor, versus the practical necessity of diversity and compromise. Bringing together the three elements of Mediterranean ethno-religious and social identity: Mutual Intelligibility, the Principle of Convenience and Physics of Scale renders these apparent paradoxes moot and provides a framework for analyzing Mediterranean history as well as the history of communal relations in other places and times.

Important: Generally, US citizens who wish to stay in Spain for tourist or business purposes for up to 90 days do not need a visa. They should travel with a round trip air ticket and a passport valid for a minimum of six months. To confirm this, and for visa information for foreign visitors to Spain, click [here](#).

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