

CORPI

Conversion, Overlapping Religiosities, Polemics, and Interaction:
Early Modern Iberia and Beyond



POLEMICAL ENCOUNTERS

POLEMICS BETWEEN CHRISTIANS, JEWS AND MUSLIMS IN IBERIA AND BEYOND.

This conference on polemics is concerned with different styles of argumentation and controversy in the field of religion taking place in the Iberian Peninsula within its Mediterranean (North African, but also Ottoman) and Northern European contexts, in both the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. By using the term “polemics” we would like to shift attention from the specificity of historical genres of religious dispute (such as *Disputatio*, *Apologia*, *Confutatio*) to the larger frame of interreligious apologetics. In this larger frame dialectical exchange with the other also involved recognition, and sometimes even an ethnographic consideration of otherness. The conference may stress the imaginary discursive nature of texts as windows onto shared notions of history and in so doing, pay more attention to the particulars of each group’s idea of sacred history.

The forced conversions which took place in Iberia between the end of the 14th century and the first decades of the 16th gave rise to the formation of crypto-Muslim and crypto-Jewish groups whose former identities, religious beliefs and lifestyles were attacked through the kinds of different texts and images to be discussed in this conference. From the late Middle Ages onwards, Christian efforts to convert groups of Jews and Muslims, in addition to the defensive efforts of these communities to keep their members within their own faith, led to the production of a considerable number of polemical texts. Those texts are not only from Christianity against Judaism or Islam and their respective reactions: Jews and Muslims also wrote polemics against the religion of each other (*e.g.* Muslim polemics against Judaism). We intend to focus on religious polemics in a framework of shifting identities, languages, and both religious and erudite knowledge as seen in the genres of both texts and images.

Polemics with Islam and Judaism also provided the opportunity for Christians to clarify their own doctrines against competing Christian groups. They also helped both Catholics and Protestants to advocate reform in church and society. This is because polemics do not usually serve to convince an opponent, but rather to protect the

religious identity of the group the polemicists belong to. Since the issue of shifting religious identities was a pressing one in the Early Modern social and religious history of Iberia, this may explain the frequent occurrence of polemical texts and images. Polemical concepts like the idea of the corruption of previous Scriptures, or the dogma of the exclusiveness of salvation, were exchanged between the different groups involved in a process that has been termed *heresy transfer* (Mulsow).

The influence of such exchanges (both textual and iconographic) on other areas of the confrontations between Islam and Judaism and, especially, Christianity, which took place in the Iberian Peninsula cannot be underestimated. They were relevant in other areas and for other disputes inside Christendom: they acquired different meanings when used by “outsiders”. One significant example is provided by the Antitrinitarian polemics of the Morisco Muhammad Alguazir (early 17th century), which were translated into Latin and used against Catholicism by Radical Reformation groups in Northern Europe.

Another example is provided by the polemical work of the converted imam of the aljama of Xátiva, who assumed the name Juan Andrés and was canon of the cathedral of Granada at the beginning of the 16th century. Through its translation into Italian, English, Dutch etc, this work became a major source on Islam for Arabic Studies in Europe in the 17th century.

This is another aspect to which we would like to pay attention: polemics as a vehicle of Orientalist knowledge. This includes the diffusion of European anti-Muslim polemics in North Africa and the Middle East, especially among Oriental Christians such as the Copts and Maronites. For example, the Library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa houses the *Tractatus Zelus Christi contra Iudaeos Saracenos et Infideles*, written by the converted Jew Pedro de la Caballeria from Zaragoza (15th century) and printed in Venice in 1592.

All this will help to reframe or revise the now dated issues of “Orientalism” and “otherness” by exploring the connection between polemics and the origins of Arabic and Islamic studies, and of Hebrew and Judaic studies. We are particularly interested in understanding how knowledge of the Islam and Judaism influenced the birth of comparativism and the concept of religious tolerance among European elites, without forgetting that an overabundant and centuries-old production of religious polemics, hagiographies, evangelical tracts, etc. has widely and deeply spread anti-Judaism and Islamophobia widely throughout European society under the Old Regime, with effects which are still felt today.

- The conference will be on 28 September - 1 October 2014, Madrid.
- An abstract of the proposals must be submitted before 20 October 2013

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