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INTRODUCTION

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The period covered by this volume – from roughly 600 to 1500 CE – witnessed radical transformations both within the Jewish community itself and in the broader contexts in which the Jews found themselves. By focusing on the Islamicate world, this volume necessarily engages questions about how the development, rise, and maturation of Islam itself from its cradle in the Arabian Peninsula to its florescence and expansion from the Iberian Peninsula in the West to India and China in the East shaped that context. The rise of Islam and its penetration into Byzantine, Sasanian Persian, and Visigothic domains had a decisive influence on Jews and Judaism in these regions as the conditions of daily life and elite culture shifted throughout the Islamicate world. At the outset of this period, the vast majority of world Jewry lived in the "East," with the spiritual and demographic center of Babylonia/Iraq occupying a place of particular prominence. Islamic conquest and expansion would come to have a definite effect on the shape of the Jewish community as the center of gravity shifted west to the North African communities, and long-distance trading opportunities led to the establishment of trading diasporas as far from the early centers as the Malabar Coast of India. Of course, with the turn of the millennium, the seedling Jewish communities of Christian Europe would begin to take root. By the end of our period, many of the communities on the "other" side of the Mediterranean had come into their own – while many of the Jewish communities in the Islamicate world had retreated from their high-water mark. Here, too, developments in the broader Islamic context – the rise of the Berber Almoravid (al-Murābiṭ) and Almohad (al-Muwaḥḥid) dynasties in the West, the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk sultanates in North Africa and the Levant, and the Mongol Īlkhāns in the East – trickled down to all levels of Jewish society and significantly transformed Jewish life. Although there would be areas of continued Jewish flourishing and creativity – particularly in the areas of *piyyuṭ*, mysticism, and rabbinic literature in the form of legal responsa (*teshuvot*), these shifts in the broader society led to a retrenchment of many

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aspects of Jewish life.[1] The history of medieval Jewish civilization, then, is inextricably entwined with that of Islam. And as some amount of people, texts, practices, and ideas migrated from the Islamicate world to the Christian world in this period and were therefore at least partially responsible for nurturing Jewry on both north and south of the divided Mediterranean intellectually, spiritually, religiously, and even organizationally, Jewish life in Islamic lands produced a heritage that provided a formative impress on subsequent Jewish life in Christian Europe.

Yet Jewish life in the medieval Islamicate world differed from its counterpart in Christian Europe. Whether one has in mind rabbinic scholars, urbanized elites, craftsmen, or rural peasants, the activities Jews pursued and the framework which gave rise to those pursuits were given their distinctive character by medieval Islam. At the same time, medieval Islamic society owed a great debt to its predecessors – in the domain of thought, this meant the classical Greek philosophical and scientific tradition, often mediated through its Syriac Christian guise; in the domain of religion, this included Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, pagan Arab, and other traditions; in the domain of quotidian life, inside and outside the city, this often included technologies and models of mercantile cooperation that hearkened back to Greek and Roman traditions. Thus, at its foundations the story of Jewish life in the medieval Islamic world is one of the reception of late antiquity under new conditions: the presence of ethnic Arabs throughout the Mediterranean in the wake of Islamic conquest, the kindling – or rekindling – of connections between the communities of the Diaspora and the Jewish centers of Babylonia and the Land of Israel, a rising wealth disparity between urban elites and rural peasants amidst deepening ties between urban and rural areas, and the emergence of an ever more confident Islam whose classical underpinnings faded into the background.

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[1] For a discussion of continued Jewish creativity in these areas, see the relevant chapters in this volume, "*Piyyuṭ*" (Tova Beeri), "Mysticism" (Sara Sviri), and "Jewish Law" (Gideon Libson). For the historiographic narrative of declining conditions over the course of the period covered by this volume, see, for example, Oded Zinger's discussion in "The Maghrib and Egypt," in which he points to a "spirit of mounting religious strictness, if not intolerance" identified by S. D. Goitein as having gripped Egypt over the course of Ayyūbid and Mamlūk rule. For an important rejoinder to this narrative, see, for example, Amir Mazor, "Jewish Court Physicians in the Mamluk Sultanate during the First Half of the 8th/14th Century," *Medieval Encounters* 20 (2014), 38–65, and also Nathan Hofer, "The Ideology of Decline and the Jews of Ayyubid and Mamluk Syria," in Stephan Conermann, ed., *Muslim-Jewish Relations in the Middle Islamic Period: Jews in the Ayyubid and Mamluk Sultanates (1171–1517)* (Bonn, 2017), 113–20.

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On the surface, this volume shares much with its companion volume, volume 6, *The Middle Ages: The Christian World*. The two volumes were certainly conceived with each other in mind and the structural parallels are obvious, even if in substance they describe different worlds of Judaism. But the fact that this volume includes two chapters on "non-rabbinic religious movements" – one devoted to Karaism alone and the other a broader survey of non-rabbinic movements other than Karaism – suggests the complexity and diversity of Jewish religious life spread over the vast geographic and human expanse that was the medieval Islamicate world. Judaism itself underwent radical transformations as the Babylonian Talmud reached its close in late antiquity and the talmudic academies (*yeshivot*) exercised at least a putative and at times even palpable influence on the communities of the Diaspora, although this authority would come to be challenged both by movements that rejected the authority of the Talmud directly (that is, "non-rabbinic" movements) and those that accepted the authority of the talmudic academies yet weakened their hold as local rabbinic leadership in the Diaspora came to supplant the power of the central academies.

The complexity of Jewish religious life was matched by the breadth of its intellectual life generally. Science, mathematics, and philosophy all captured the Jewish imagination in the lands of Islam, and the engagement with Islam represented a sea change from the Sasanian, Byzantine, and talmudic influences of the late antique world. These fields of study are rounded out by the world of magic, which itself occupied a place on a continuum between science and medicine, on the one hand, and mysticism, on the other. A favorable disposition toward empiricism known from antiquity led many to accept the efficacy of "magical" remedies (cf. Mishnah Shabbat 6:10 and the reception of this passage in part III, chapter 37, of Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*), and recourse to magic cut across strata of society – with geonic figures considering which magical practices might be permissible from the perspective of *halakhah*, on the one hand, and the amulets and spells practiced by common people, on the other.

Of course, the enumeration of life both among intellectual elites and the "common" people alike is immeasurably aided by the source material of the Cairo Genizah – which the *doyen* of Genizah studies, S. D. Goitein, called "a true mirror of life, often cracked and blotchy, but very wide in scope and reflecting each and every aspect of the society that originated it."[2] The present volume, then, owes a tremendous debt to the

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[2] S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley, 1967–93), 1:9.

Cairo Genizah and to Goitein himself. The Genizah not only provided (and continues to provide) new vistas into the classical texts of rabbinic and even biblical literature which were of interest to the religious scholars; it shed glimpses of light on a world of daily life previously available only through its infrequent shadows in other materials. The twentieth-century turn to social history typified by Goitein's own work and paralleled by (if not necessarily shaped by) the rise of the Annales school of historians[3] betokened a shift toward "ordinary people" and their pursuits as much as earlier historians had looked to rabbinic scholars and communal elites. Goitein's own transformation of what earlier scholars had deemed "rubbish" into a coherent depiction of daily life in the medieval Islamic Mediterranean bore fruit in the master's five-volume magnum opus (plus index volume, prepared by Paula Sanders), *A Mediterranean Society*. Yet Goitein did not see his work as history per se; he termed it historical interpretive "sociography."[4] Goitein's use of the indefinite article "A" at the beginning of his title was not simple humility, but rather a caveat that his sociographic analysis was restricted to the "Genizah society," only one society among many within the Mediterranean – let alone the Islamicate world as a whole. Even if the Genizah provided a mirror, that mirror is bounded in time and space by the documents of the Genizah. And while Goitein *did* turn to Genizah documents concerning the Red Sea trade and India in his posthumously completed *India Book* (completed by Mordechai Akiva Friedman in English in 2008, with Friedman's subsequent publication of the *India Book* volumes in Hebrew, 2009–13), and the discovery in 2013 of a much smaller "Afghan Genizah" opened up the possibility of applying Goitein's methods to yet another collection of materials, such studies are once again bounded in time and place by their source materials. A close reading of Goitein's sociography might allow us to infer his historiographic pretensions and reveal him as a historian, and in fact, Jessica L. Goldberg unlocked for us how Goitein's masterwork is a complex of competing syntheses and hypotheses.[5] But *A Mediterranean Society* is not

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[3] For a discussion of Goitein's relationship with Fernand Braudel, one of the leaders of the "second generation" of Annales historians and certainly one who directed the school toward a greater focus on "ordinary people," see Peter N. Miller, "Two Men in a Boat: The Braudel-Goitein 'Correspondence' and the Beginning of Thalassography," in Peter N. Miller, ed., *The Sea: Thalassography and Historiography* (Ann Arbor, 2013), 27–59.

[4] For the impact of Goitein's method on the "sociography" he produces, as amounting to "a collection of brilliant syntheses and hypotheses," see Jessica Goldberg, "On Reading Goitein's *A Mediterranean Society*: A View from Economic History," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 26, 2 (2011), 171–86.

[5] See ibid.

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a history of Jewish life in Islamicate lands in the medieval period. The impact of Goitein's remarkable, seminal work may be found on nearly every page of the present volume – but the present volume serves as an introduction to a world much broader in terms of its geography, cultural milieux, and time frame than *A Mediterranean Society*.

Thus, even if we may adduce the historiographical direction of *A Mediterranean Society* amidst (or despite) its masses of data, the geographic narrowness of its data set (even a data set as large as the Cairo Genizah) restricts its focus. And so, in thinking about Jewish life in the medieval Islamic world, there are a number of important regional histories or histories of one or another sector of the population that bear mention here. But if *A Mediterranean Society* may be seen as narrow despite its depth, one might make a similar comment concerning Walter Fischel's still more circumscribed *Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Mediaeval Islam* (1937) or H. Z. Hirschberg's *History of the Jews of North Africa* (Hebrew, 1965; English, 1974): both these studies are building blocks in a much larger edifice, which this volume seeks to establish. In the former, the role of elite Jews in the ʿAbbāsid, Fāṭimid, and Īlkhānid administrations edges out the daily life of those who were not directly involved with those administrations; in the latter, the author *does* draw the trajectory of the *longue durée* and engages many aspects of a *histoire totale*, but Hirschberg restricts himself to only one region among many.

Moshe Gil's *A History of Palestine, 634–1099* (Hebrew, 3 volumes, 1983; English, 1 volume, trans. Ethel Broido, 1992) also focuses on one region (if a different one from Hirschberg); and as such aims to be a history of that region (to include the people who lived in it) rather than first and foremost a history of its Jewish inhabitants per se – let alone a history of "Judaism." Gil, like Hirschberg, does take great concern with economic life, communal organization, and even religious diversity, but his study – focused heavily upon letters from the Genizah (the presentation of Genizah documents made for vols. II–III of his Hebrew work) – does not quite aspire to being a *histoire totale*. Rather, Gil takes on a number of specific historical problems in *A History of Palestine*, such as the nature of Islamic conquest of the Land of Israel, which he describes as gradual and designed to bring Arab tribes in erstwhile Byzantine territory into the Muslim fold. The English-language version of the work includes a marketing blurb opposite the front cover on an unnumbered page describing it as "the first comprehensive history of Palestine from the Muslim conquest in 634 to that of the Crusaders in 1099," but in his review of the Hebrew version of the work, Norman A. Stillman wrote that "Gil modestly refers to his chapters as 'Studies,' arguing that the time is still too early and the sources too incomplete for a proper history."[6] That is to say, Gil's work tended toward the encyclopedic in tackling his problems (even if his approach was incomplete in avoiding numismatics, the archaeological record, and material culture), but his work is not quite a history per se.[7] Gil's *Jews in Islamic Countries in the Middle Ages* (Hebrew, 4 volumes – vols. II–IV including transcriptions and translations of Genizah documents, 1997; English, 1 volume, trans. David Strassler, 2004) covers geographical domains far afield of both *A Mediterranean Society* and *A History of Palestine* – Gil discusses the Arabian Peninsula, Babylonia/Persia, and Sicily. But much discussion here, too, is focused on the great men who led the *yeshivot* or (reminiscent of Fischel) elite Jews who served ʿAbbāsid or Fāṭimid rulers as "financiers" or provisioners. In reaching beyond the elites, Gil *does* devote a section to a discussion of slavery, but this is presented in the context of economic activities generally and is not devoted to the lives of slaves per se. And so while communal organization and the role of the geonim of Babylonia figure prominently here, questions of, say, religious education – or even of the implementation of the rulings of the talmudic academies in the local community itself – are in the background if they are present at all.

Other works *have* taken a broader approach – for example, Stillman's *The Jews of Arab Lands* (1979) or his magisterial *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* (hereafter: "*EJIW*," 2010) – but *The Jews of Arab Lands* is intended as much to provide a "historical tableau . . . painted with broad brushstrokes"[8] as the five-volume *EJIW* aims at comprehensiveness. The *EJIW* included in its initial publication – and continues to include in its electronic updates – important, comprehensive surveys that parallel or complement the chapters in this volume. Yet as an encyclopedia, the *EJIW* is designed in the first instance to provide the reader with a *Vorspeise*. Good encyclopedia articles – and the *EJIW* is overflowing with *outstanding* articles – will introduce the reader to the most prominent

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[6] Norman Stillman, "Review of *Palestine During the First Muslim Period (634–1099)* by Moshe Gil," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, 1 (1989), 139. *Pace* Steven Bowman, who in his review of the English version calls it a "comprehensive, indeed encyclopedic history." (Steven Bowman, "Review of *A History of Palestine, 634–1099* by Moshe Gil," *Speculum* 69, 4 (1994), 1172.)

[7] See Carole Hillenbrand's review of *A History of Palestine*, Carole Hillenbrand, "Review of *A History of Palestine, 634–1099* by Moshe Gil," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24, 2 (1997), 261: "It is a pity that a book so full of information should suffer from a rather short-sighted attitude toward the writing of history."

[8] Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia, 1979), xvi.

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scholarly literature concerning one or another matter,[9] but the technical limitations of the genre of the encyclopedia make it difficult to initiate the reader into the controversies that enliven one or another corner of the field. The overview essays (say, Stillman's own 12,500-word essay there on "The Academic Study of Islamicate Jewry") do serve as important tools for professional researchers – no less than the briefer articles that present both the beginner and the seasoned researcher with "data." But *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Volume 5* aspires to present simultaneously syntheses or overviews useful to both the entry-level reader and the professional, while nonetheless including notes and bibliographic references for those who wish to delve deeper.[10] These syntheses are at the very heart of the *Cambridge History*, while they are just a part of the *EJIW*.

With its far-reaching overviews augmenting its historical entries, the *EJIW* gives the reader a view of the elements of a *histoire totale* across the trajectory of Jewish history in the Islamicate world. This volume builds on that. But *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Volume 5* finds itself in the middle of a series that reaches across a broader spectrum of both time and place. The series not only established the literary frame for the volume, presenting detailed surveys accessible to scholars, students, and lay readers alike, with detailed notes where possible to slake the thirst of those eager for more, but the series established some of the basic questions asked by this volume. Religious, legal, literary, economic, and social history are covered both in volumes 4 and 6; although, as I have said, the complex nature of Jewish religion in the medieval Islamicate world means that particular attention is paid in the present volume to "non-rabbinic" religious movements – both the Karaite "movement" and others. This complexity is certainly due in part to the inchoate, developing, and even fragmentary nature of Islam in its early centuries – even as rabbinic Judaism strove to solidify its own place in the daily life of Jews in the centuries following the close of the Talmuds.

Volume 6 includes chapters on "The Prior Church Legacy," "Medieval Church Doctrines and Policies," and "Mutual Perceptions and Attitudes," whereas the absence of an institutional "Church" in the medieval Islamicate world makes for a necessarily more complex treatment of

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[9] See Stillman's introduction, that "a good academic encyclopedia ought to provide not only an introduction to a subject but also references for further reading and research."

[10] Of course, had he not written it for the *EJIW*, Stillman's summa on "The Academic Study of Islamicate Jewry" could well have been included here – in a different form, focusing on the medieval Islamic world and with notes. One might compare Stefan C. Reif's chapter on liturgy in this volume with his overview, "Prayer and Liturgy," in the *EJIW*.

"Islamic Attitudes and Policies" in the present volume (written by Mark R. Cohen) – one which concerns both formal policies and the lived experience of the Jews of Islamicate lands.[11] Thus, Cohen begins with the life of the Prophet Muḥammad and attitudes toward Judaism in the Qurʾān, and makes his way to daily life in the High Middle Ages. Cohen pays particular attention to the document known as the Pact of ʿUmar and its formative role in relations between Muslims and others – even if, as he notes, the rules of this document were only enforced in the breach. Yet the importance of the Pact lies in its guarantee of security for non-Muslim *dhimmī* populations – thus, physical security and the ability to "maintain a separate identity for their own communities . . . was 'toleration' in the medieval sense of the word."

Although volume 6 describes medieval church doctrines and policies, there is no single attitude of "Islam" as an entity; Cohen's chapter therefore describes the breadth of the field rather than falling prey to either the earlier mytho-historiographical frames of a "golden age" or a "[neo-] lachrymose theory of Jewish history in Islamic lands" – both of which Cohen has engaged and debunked in his own writing.[12] The "obverse" of this coin,[13] perhaps, is Ross Brann's chapter, "Jewish Perceptions of and Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims" – which itself begins with an important discussion of the historiography of Jews in Islamic lands. This complements Cohen's discussion of the Pact of ʿUmar, its sources and its implementation, because Brann draws the trajectory of how historians have *described* Jewish-Muslim relations from the rise of modern history-writing all the way up to Cohen himself. Brann richens his analysis by yoking together developments in historical perspective with developments in historical *methodology*, since the rise of cultural history in particular has opened up new vistas for viewing Jewish-Muslim perceptions and relations. Brann inclines toward a historical-anthropological lens that is more expansive in the material it considers and more nuanced in its depiction than other modes of historiography. From texts which view the Qurʾān as

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[11] This is obviously an area in which Cohen has written extensively, most notably in Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1994).

[12] For a discussion of this, see Cohen's introduction in ibid.

[13] I use "obverse" here deliberately, suggesting that *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Volume 5* might put "Jewish Perceptions of and Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims" before "Islamic Attitudes and Policies" – whereas Robert Chazan's editorial decision in volume 6 was to put "Medieval Church Doctrines and Policies" *before* "Mutual Perceptions and Attitudes" – perhaps because the former played a significant role in establishing the Christian-Jewish dynamic, whereas the picture of Muslim-Jewish relations is more contingent and local and perhaps less defined by an approach toward Jews "qua Jews" (as Cohen puts it).

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a proof text in defense of Jews and Judaism to *piyyuṭim* that lament Israel's fate, Brann identifies texts which push back against Islam and view its rise negatively. Yet he also uncovers amicable personal relations between Jews and Muslims that challenge these negative images. As in the biblical narrative of Abraham's first two sons, Brann sees "ambivalence, rivalry, intimacy and conflict governing the ways in which Jews thought of Muslims, Islam, and Islamdom."

Despite their depth and wisdom, the chapters by Cohen and Brann do not entirely cover the territory of attitudes toward the other; and so Haggai Mazuz's chapter, "Jewish-Muslim Polemics," should be seen not only as part of the "Spiritual and Intellectual History" section of the volume in which it is included, but also as shedding some light on mutual perceptions and attitudes. Mazuz presents us both with polemics written by Jews confronting the ideas of Islam and their own place in Muslim society *and* parallel material from Muslims attacking the authenticity of the Bible and yet arguing that it announced the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad. Mazuz also encourages us to think about the audiences for these writings: given that Islamic law prescribes capital punishment for insulting Muḥammad and Islam, much of what could be labeled *polemic* should instead be labeled *apologetic* – that is, inward-directed rather than intended for Muslim eyes. Of course, the membrane between polemic and apologetic is permeable, often penetrated by liminal figures who traveled from one community to another. In fact, a number of the figures discussed by Mazuz converted from Judaism to Islam, contributed to the polemical literature, and played a formative role in subsequent Muslim-Jewish relations. Whereas in volume 6 questions about "perceptions and attitudes," to include those of the Church, fit under the broad rubric of "Jews in the Medieval Christian World," and therefore they precede the regional surveys, Mazuz's contribution in this volume fits better under "Spiritual and Intellectual History" because these polemics concern the inner life of the Jews as much as their quotidian interactions in the medieval Islamicate world.

Likewise, Stefan C. Reif's chapter, "The Sources," sits in front of the regional surveys in this volume (as opposed to Ephraim Shoham-Steiner's chapter in volume 6, which begins Part II) because the varied nature of the source material for Jewish life in the Islamicate world naturally dictates the tone and detail of the surveys that *can* be written for one or another region. The importance of the Genizah for the study of medieval Islamicate Jewry cannot be gainsaid, but as Menahem Ben-Sasson and Oded Zinger note in their survey of "The Maghrib and Egypt," the documentary Genizah is richest for its detail concerning the region in which most of its papers were written and where they were eventually found. Reif identifies the corpora of "literary" materials to which historians have made recourse – Rabbanite, Karaite, and Muslim historiography; legal sources from the hands of Jews and Muslims alike; travelogues; other documentary materials; and modern histories. In recent years, scholars have also begun to move beyond the written word to explore the contribution that archaeological finds might make to the writing of medieval Jewish history in the Islamicate world.[14] Yet these rich sources can complicate rather than facilitate the writing of history. As Reif notes, historical writers' intentions hardly lie in the presentation of what modern writers would call "history." Another complication to be faced is the irregular character of the data itself, painfully scant in some areas and so dense as to be nearly impenetrable in others. Further, the Jewish experience in each of these geographical spheres was distinct, and so the focus and tone of the regional surveys varies greatly.

With this in mind, Jane Gerber's survey of Jewish life in al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) focuses on urban elites, given that the documentary and literary materials alike from the region tell us something about life in the cities.[15] Many of those individual Jews who rose to prominence in al-Andalus are well known to us – whether through their impact on rabbinic literature, on Muslim rule while serving the Umayyads in Córdoba or their successors, the petty kingdoms (*ṭāifa*s) throughout al-Andalus, on the sciences and philosophy, or on belles lettres (including grammar and poetry). The urban character of Jewish populations (as we know them from the evidence) meant that there were substantial Jewish settlements in cities such as Lucena (reputedly *entirely* Jewish), Granada, Toledo, and beyond. Gerber taps the idea of a "golden age" of Jewish life in Spain for its utility in describing the lives of these individuals and the arc of Jewish culture from Arab conquest to decline under the Almoravids (1090–1147) and their successors, the Almohads (c. 1147–1235). Yet saying much about how this population interacted with the agrarian, ruralized majority is difficult.

On the other hand, the Genizah documents open the door to a broader history of Jews in other parts of the Mediterranean littoral – particularly Egypt and the regions with which it was well connected, including the Maghrib, Sicily, and the Land of Israel – and it also permits us to gain

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[14] One important example of this is the work of Miriam Frenkel and Ayala Lester, "Evidence of Material Culture from the Geniza: An Attempt to Correlate Textual and Archaeological Findings," in Daniella Talmon-Heller and Katia Cytryn-Silverman, eds., *Material Evidence and Narrative Sources* (Leiden, 2015), 147–87.

[15] For a discussion of some of these methodological issues, see David J. Wasserstein, "Jewish Élites in al-Andalus," in Daniel Frank, ed., *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity* (Leiden, 1995), 101–10, in which Wasserstein touches briefly on the problems of knowing much about Jews living *outside* of urban areas – at least in al-Andalus.