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On a hill overlooking the city of Mosul from across the Tigris River, in what is today northern Iraq, there stood a building with a very long history. At the time of the Arab Islamic conquests in the seventh century, and for centuries thereafter, it was a Christian monastery dedicated to the prophet Jonah, visited by Muslims as well as Christians. A mosque built adjoining the monastery eventually co-opted the original structure, and when Timūr Lang conquered the city at the end of the fourteenth century, he visited the tomb shrine dedicated to Nabī Yūnus, as the prophet came to be known in Arabic. Despite its conversion, the shrine remained accessible to Christians as well as Muslims, until it was detonated in the summer of 2014 by militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. In their quest to eliminate what they believe to be tantamount to polytheism, ISIS has also erased the long history of religious diversity in Iraq’s northern metropolis.

Before 2014, Mosul always had been a multireligious city. A Christian priest who took refuge in the city in 1918 recorded a list of fifty-five mosques out of “many without number,” as well as seventeen churches (one of which was abandoned) and four monasteries.

4 Vatican sīr. 592, ff. 93a–94a.
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In 1743, according to an earlier priest seeking the city’s refuge during wartime, the Ottoman governor commanded Muslims, Christians, and Jews to prepare the city’s defense against the siege of the Persian ruler Nādir Shāh, and when the siege was lifted, the Ottoman sultan permitted the Christians to rebuild their churches, eight within Mosul itself. Two centuries earlier, Mosul was where Christians had gathered from various cities in the region to send an unexpected letter to the pope in Rome complaining about their patriarch. In the last years of the fifteenth century, Mosul had been both the patriarchal residence for one Syriac Christian denomination and the headquarters for the second-highest-ranking ecclesiastical official in a rival Syriac hierarchy, making it not only a major Islamic city, but also the Christian capital of post-Mongol Iraq.

The significance of the city of Mosul to Christians as well as Muslims is not unusual for the late medieval Middle East, where Muslim rulers still governed substantial non-Muslim populations. The Cairo Geniza provides the most spectacular, but not the only, demonstration of non-Muslim diffusion across the medieval Middle East. The fourteenth-century Moroccan traveler Ibn Batūtah noted the large number of Christians in Anatolia, and on his travels he benefited from the hospitality of a Syrian monastery. Nor were Jews and Christians the only non-Muslims in the region: a fifteenth-century Christian author from Erbil in northern Iraq referred to the Yezidi followers of Shaykh ‘Adī. The pilgrimage guide of the twelfth-century traveler ‘Alī al-Harawī gave numerous examples of

7 BL Add. 7177, f. 321a; Vatican sir. 97, f. 142a.
11 Berlin orient. fol. 619, f. 104a.
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sacred places shared among Muslims, Christians, and Jews, for example a stone outside the “Jewish Gate” at Aleppo. The late medieval Middle East was diverse but not ghettoized or balkanized, a world in which people of different religions rubbed shoulders on a daily basis.

At the crossroads of Eurasia, the Middle East may well have housed the most diverse society in the premodern world. Indeed, the presence of non-Muslims was so pervasive in much of the medieval Middle East that it “went without saying.” Even as prominent an achievement of Islamic culture as the fifteenth-century astronomical manual (zīj) of Ulugh Bey b. Shāhrūkh, the Timurid ruler of Samarqand, silently drew information from an Iraqi Christian source. The work’s discussion of the Seleucid (“Rūmî”) calendar included common Christian holidays such as Nativity, Epiphany, Annunciation, and the “Feast of the Cross” (īd-i ʿalīb). The distinctive dates given to those holidays unmistakably point to an informant from the Church of the East, with its hierarchy centered in northern Iraq. Yet the zīj not only failed to mention the “Nestorian” source: it nowhere explicitly mentioned Christianity. It did not need to, because even in Samarqand, non-Muslim ways of keeping time were presumed to be recognizable.

The range of ethnicities, languages, and religions of the medieval Middle East also reminds modern observers that diversity is not a product of European globalization. Middle Eastern society before 1500 gives scholars an opportunity to analyze the dynamics of diversity before nationalism, liberalism, secularism, global capitalism, or the other -isms that constitute the particularly Europeanized modern world order. Thus

13 Ulugh Beigus, Epochæ Celebriores Astronomis, Historicis, Chronologis, Chataiorum, Syro-Græcorum, Arabum, Persarum, Chorasmiornum, Usitææ Ex traditione Ulug Beigī, Indiae citra extræque Gangem Principis, ed. Johannes Gravius (London: Jacob Flesher, 1650), 99, 101. This calendar should not be confused with the Rūmî calendar adopted by the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire.
14 Only this denomination commemorated the finding of the true cross by Constantine’s mother Helena on 13 (not 14) September, and the same group uniquely celebrated Annunciation on the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, rather than 25 March. For a discussion of the inaccuracy of the older adjective “Nestorian,” which was nevertheless employed by Muslims and other Christian groups, see Sebastian P. Brock, “The ‘Nestorian’ Church: A Lamentable Misnomer,” Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester 78 (Autumn 1996): 23–35. The phrase “Church of the East,” although more accurate, lacks a corresponding adjectival form, for which I have used the approximate adjective “East Syrian.”
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the study of medieval Middle Eastern diversity may provide a counterbal-
ance to the alternately comforting or cautionary tales we modern people
tell ourselves about the diverse world in which we live today.

DIVERSITY VIEWED FROM WITHIN

Unlike most premodern societies, which supported only a single or a 
few social groups with the ability to compose texts, the medieval Middle 
East’s social diversity was expressed by a large number of literate classes 
whose works allow scholars to approach the dynamics of diversity from 
multiple angles. The Islamic learned elite (‘ulamā’) represent only one 
class of authors, alongside Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian religious 
leaders, and exceptional members of the ruling, mercantile, and profes-
sional classes (especially physicians). Indeed, for questions of diversity, 
the works of the ‘ulamā’ often give a clearer picture of how they thought 
society ought to function than how in fact difference worked in prac-
tice.\textsuperscript{15} Histories and chronicles authored by ‘ulamā’ evinced decreasing 
levels of interest in non-Muslims.\textsuperscript{16} Sporadic exceptions are found in 
travel accounts by such authors as Ibn Batṭūta, yet his choice of details 
was haphazard and colored by his own normative interests. The literati 
of less privileged groups, such as Christians and Jews, recorded in much 
greater detail how religious difference was lived out in the medieval 
Middle East.\textsuperscript{17} To learn about religious diversity, scholars must attend to 
non-Muslim voices directly.\textsuperscript{18}

Nevertheless, the non-Muslims of the late medieval Middle East rarely 
inform modern historical scholarship. By convention, Islamic historians

\textsuperscript{15} Luke Yarbrough, “Islamizing the Islamic State: The Formulation and Assertion of 
Religious Criteria for State Employment in the First Millennium AH” (PhD diss., 

\textsuperscript{16} For Ottoman Syria, the point was made by Bruce Masters, Christians and Jews in the 
Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism (New York, NY: Cambridge University 
Press, 2001), 28. For the paucity of references to non-Muslims in fifteenth-century 
sources from al-Jazīra and Iraq, see Chapter 3, fnn. 9–11.

\textsuperscript{17} Even synthetic works on earlier periods are often forced to rely almost exclusively on 
non-Muslim sources. Such are Sidney H. Griffith, The Church in the Shadow of the 
Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam (Princeton University Press, 2008); 
Franklin, This Noble House: Jewish Descendants of King David in the Medieval Islamic 

\textsuperscript{18} A comparable point was made by Jamsheed K. Choksy, Conflict and Cooperation: 
Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society (New York, NY: 
briefly acknowledge the existence of non-Muslims under Islamic rule, at least for the first millennium CE, while ascribing no historical significance to their continued presence. Almost forty years after his death, Marshall Hodgson’s work is still characteristic of most of the field: after conceding that “of course, non-Muslims have always formed an integral, if subordinate element” of “Islamicate” society, he proceeded to tell a story of Muslim rulers and Muslim intellectuals. Jonathan Berkey’s *The Formation of Islam* gives much greater attention to non-Muslims than most scholars, yet even his treatment segregates them into chapters apart from his main story, and only discusses them before the year 1000 CE. The result is that the study of the Middle East after 1000 CE often becomes almost exclusively the history of Islam and of Muslims, while silently excluding the many others who were in fact present.

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Yet this confessional definition of the field is unwarranted: at no point before 1461 were all Middle Eastern rulers Muslims, and we do not know when Islam became the religion of a demographic majority even in lands under “Islamic rule.” The only significant study of demographic Islamization remains Richard Bulliet’s *Conversion to Islam*, which attempts to extrapolate demography from the “Who’s Who” of Muslim *’ulamāʾ*, somewhat akin to trying to determine American population dynamics based on professors at Christian seminaries. As Tamer el-Leithy points out, our ignorance regarding the process of Islamization largely stems from the fact that medieval authors saw no political relevance in the relative demography of religious groups. In fact, such indications as do exist suggest that non-Muslims were almost as numerous as Muslims in portions of eastern Anatolia and northern Iraq into the fifteenth century. The confessional demarcation of Middle Eastern history as “Islamic” misrepresents the experience of ethnic and religious diversity in the medieval world between the Nile and the Oxus Rivers.

When historians do consider Middle Eastern Christian populations, they often privilege the more familiar European forms of the religion. Studies comparing Islam and Christianity often take a narrowly European definition of the latter. Islamicists continue to deploy categories of Christian “orthodoxy” (and, by implication, “heresy”) to Middle Eastern Christians from the normative perspective of European Christendom, which only slowly became the dominant form of Christianity in Eurasia over the course of the Middle Ages. Thus Middle Eastern Christians

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23 The Christian empire of Trebizond continued until 1461.
25 El-Leithy, “Coptic Culture,” 27, especially fn. 71. Although the use of the term “minorities” and its political implications date from modern liberal politics, el-Leithy acknowledges a descriptive use of the term, and it is in this sense that the word is employed in this book.
26 See below, fnn. 35–36.
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often find themselves in a “catch-22” of scholarly expectations. To the degree that their society and culture agreed with that of their Muslim neighbors, they are regarded as “authentically” Middle Eastern, but also as adulterating their (Western) religion. To the degree that their theology and religious practice agreed with those of European coreligionists, they are regarded as “authentically” Christian, but also as foreigners in their native lands. The discourse of authenticity is a dangerous yardstick for judging social and cultural integration, precisely because of the canonical status conferred upon Middle Eastern Arab Muslims and European Christians. To the Muslim inhabitants of medieval Iraq and Syria, however, European Christianity was bizarre compared with Middle Eastern forms of the religion. The study of the late medieval Church of the East, probably the largest non-Muslim population in Iraq, challenges Eurocentric definitions of Christianity and suggests the possibility of framing the late medieval Middle East as a diverse society mostly ruled by Muslims.

EAST SYRIAN CHRISTIANITY AND THE WIDER WORLD

The breadth of terrain inhabited by the Church of the East is not readily designated by regional or national boundaries, whether medieval or modern. Mosul, the geographical center of this regional study, is now part of Iraq. Medieval Arabic geographers divided regions differently: to the south of Mosul along the Tigris River was the smaller region of Iraq, while to its west and northwest, as far as the headwaters of the Tigris, lay the region of al-Jazīra, as Mesopotamia was then known. Further east and northeast of the Mosul plain lay the region of Adharbayjān, and due


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north lay the mountains of Armīniya.33 The late medieval region of Syria, which ended at the Euphrates, was at that time across an imperial boundary, under the control of Egypt’s Mamlūk Empire. This study ranges from Baghdad in the south to the Kurdish and Armenian mountains in the north, and from Ṭabriz (today in northwest Iran) in the east.34

The Christian minorities of these regions were not negligible, although they have been neglected. John Woods cites European travelers’ accounts demonstrating “[t]he large number of Christians relative to Muslims in the urban centers of Arminiya and Diyār Bākr” in the fifteenth century, a phenomenon also visible in early Ottoman defters.35 In the following century, Ottoman records indicate that the population of Mosul and its hinterland was around one-third Christian.36 Although no systematic information about the proportion of the region’s population that belonged to Christianity or other religions is available from the fifteenth century, these limited data indicate that in certain areas the Christian population was substantial, to say the least. Despite this fact, the literary histories produced for Muslim rulers very rarely mention these subject populations. The modern historical narrative of this period, basing itself on these literary histories, has told the story of two nomadic Türkmen confederations: the QarƗqūyunlū, or “Black Sheep Türkmen,” ruling Iraq from bases in Mosul, Ṭabriz, and Baghdad, and the Āqqūyunlū, or “White Sheep Türkmen,” ruling what is now eastern Turkey from the area around Ṭabriz and later Ṭabriz, after the Āqqūyunlū defeated the QarƗqūyunlū.37

33 For example, al-Dimashqī, Cosmographie, 187–90; al-Dimashqī, Manuel, 254–57. The southernmost mountains north of Mosul are also labeled the Ḥakkārī mountains.
34 I follow fifteenth-century usage by terming the city Ṭabriz and the region Diyār Bākr, although today both are named Diyarbakır.
36 Slightly different assumptions lead to different calculations based on the same sources. Gündüz reported non-Muslim totals (both in the city and the villages) slightly below one-third in 1523 and slightly above one-third in 1540, but only around a quarter of the whole province’s population if one includes nomadic tribes: Ahmet Gündüz, Osmanlı idaresinde Mosul (1523–1639) (Elazığ: Fırat Üniversitesi Basımevı, 2003), 238–39. Khoury calculated a percentage of 37 percent Christian among the rural population in 1541: Dina Rizk Khoury, State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834 (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 29.
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scholarly account of Muslim rulers and Islamic religious leaders ignores the large non-Muslim population, and thus misses the social and cultural dynamics of what was in fact a very diverse society.

It is probable that the largest non-Muslim population of Iraq and southern al-Jazīra was the Church of the East, a Christian denomination whose patriarchs lived in Mosul or the surrounding plain at the end of the fifteenth century. Before the rise of Islam, this group had been the most prominent branch of Christianity in the Sasanian Persian Empire. It claimed a first-century foundation by the saints Addai and Mārī, disciples of the apostle Thomas, although evidence for the existence of the church in the first three centuries of the Common Era is very sparse. In the Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries, the Church of the East gained a reputation for “Nestorianism” by virtue of its refusal to condemn Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople as a heretic, although in fact their theology was influenced less by the ideas of Nestorius himself than by those of his teacher, Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428). Under the early ‘Abbasid caliphate, the patriarchal residence of the Church of the East moved from Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the capital of the defunct Persian Empire, to Baghdad, and this community contributed to the intellectual culture of the caliph’s capital with translations of Greek philosophical and medical works into Arabic. From the seventh century they sent missionaries to Central Asia and China, expanding so significantly among the steppe nomads that when Hülegū, the grandson of Genghis Khan, conquered Baghdad and destroyed the ‘Abbasid caliphate in 1258, his chief queen Doquz Khātūn was a member of the Church of the East. She persuaded the Mongol commander to spare the Christians of the city. Under Mongol rule, Middle Eastern Christians of all varieties enjoyed royal patronage again, and the Mongol rulers of Persia sometimes sent them as ambassadors to the Latin states of Europe.

The Church of the East was socially and culturally at home in the Middle East, even as it confronted the chronic political instability of the

38 See Chapter 1, fnn. 93–96.
40 The basic evidence for the Mongol period was assembled by Frédéric Luisetto, Arméniens et autres Chrétiens d’Orient sous la domination Mongole: l’Ilkhanat de Ghāzān, 1295–1304 (Paris: Geuthner, 2007); J. M. Fiey, Chrétien syriaques sous les Mongols (Il-Khanat de Perse, XIIIe–XIVe s.) (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1975).
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fifteenth century under Türkmen rule. Seemingly incessant wars were punctuated by bandit raids, mob violence, and insatiable tax-collectors, the symptoms of a society under stress. In this context, the Church of the East saw itself primarily as a Christian community, but it defined that in a Middle Eastern (and specifically Iraqi) manner rather than based on Western assumptions. They defined their Christianity by theology and ritual, through prayers to Christ as God, as well as socially and historically through their ecclesiastical hierarchy and their saints. Their understandings of Christianity reveal complex dimensions of diversity in the late medieval Middle East.

THE DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

This study examines multiple social and cultural dimensions to religious diversity in al-Jazīra and Iraq under Türkmen rule, from the conquests of Tīmūr Lang (d. 1405) to those of the Safavid Shāh Ismā‘īl starting in 1501. To understand how social diversity functioned, it is necessary to understand the varieties of diversity present. Since the fifteenth-century history of these regions is unfamiliar to most scholars, Chapter 1 sketches the independence of local Türkmen and Kurdish rulers, lays out the different Christian groups present, and documents the social structure within the Church of the East itself. The next two chapters explore how social relations functioned across religious boundaries, first between Muslim rulers and their Christian subjects, and secondly among subjects both Muslim and non-Muslim. While scholars have typically studied the “status” of Christians in Islamic society through the framework of the Pact of ‘Umar’s regulations on dhimmī (non-Muslim) populations, Chapter 2 suggests that there was no overarching framework structuring rulers’ relations with their subjects in late medieval al-Jazīra and Iraq. This lack of a shared script led to both unexpected opportunities for and extreme violence against fifteenth-century Christians. Chapter 3 includes the discourse of dhimmī status within the broad range of ways in which Muslim subjects (including ‘ulamā’) and Christian subjects interacted, relations which were occasionally violent and occasionally friendly but more often distrustful.

The cultural dimensions of this diversity include the ways in which different groups shared – or alternatively diverged in – ideas and values, as well as the broad-based concepts used by the people of the past to understand the diversity of the society in which they lived. To access these