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Christians and Jews in the Muslim World

The Dilemma of Religious Space

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The long history of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims is a history of physical, metaphorical and ideological proximities and distances. From among the myriad expressions of Muslim and non-Muslim identities, churches and synagogues provide unique insight into the complex interactions between Islam and other religious and spiritual traditions. The design and construction processes undertaken by various inhabitants of those communities often reflect the competitive tensions and reconciliations within and between member groups. Whether constructed by non-Muslims in a predominantly Muslim society or preserved in their original forms and / or functions after the arrival of Islam, it is in such sites, structures and spaces that one may find some of the most potent applications of architecture to the articulation of cultural identity.

This paper aims to make a foundation for the study of churches and synagogues in Muslim societies. Referring to specific historic cases, the authors clarify how the development and construction of these sacred spaces have been influenced by the social and political contexts. The design of churches and synagogues and their relationship with the urban fabric often depended on the political and religious context. During the times of fanaticism, non-Muslims' religious building became less visible either in terms of height, location, and even ornamentation. In general, most non-Muslim religious buildings adopted the local language of architecture and materials. The churches and synagogues and spaces that remain or emerge after the arrival of Islam provide art and architectural historians a basis upon which to form important questions about changing notions of the sacred over time and from one culture to another.



The long history of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims is a history of physical, metaphorical and ideological proximities and distances. Because of Islam's originary historical and geographical contexts, these proximities and distances emerged perhaps most strikingly at the intersections of and in the interstices between the smoothing forces of Arab nomadism and the hierarchical striations of the sedentary monumentalism of the societies that have encountered, and in some cases converted to, Islam.¹ From among the myriad expressions of Muslim and non-Muslim identities, sacred architecture provides unique insights into the complex interactions between Islam and other religious and spiritual traditions. More than temples, synagogues, churches and mosques, sacred architecture comprises the visible and invisible sites, complexes, structures and spaces (natural and manmade) where members of a community manifest their devotion and summon divine presence by performing the recitations, rituals and processions that distinguish them as adherents to a particular set of beliefs. Relationships between sacred buildings convey relationships between people of different faiths. In the case of Islam, they also call attention to historical misconceptions about interreligious intolerance.

1. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 1987), 530.

Cultural diffusions and collisions in predominantly Islamic countries have resulted in complex conceptual exchanges between Muslims and religious minorities; the design and construction processes undertaken by various inhabitants of those communities often reflect the competitive tensions and reconciliations within and between member groups. The temples, churches, synagogues and sacred sites and spaces that remain or emerge after the arrival of Islam provide art and architectural historians a basis upon which to form important questions about changing notions of the sacred over time and from one culture to another. Whether constructed by non-Muslims in a predominantly Muslim society or preserved in their original forms and/or functions after the arrival of Islam, it is in such sites, structures and spaces that one may find some of the most potent applications of architecture to the articulation of cultural identity. The design of churches and synagogues and their relationship with the urban fabric often depended on the political and religious context. During the times of fanaticism, non-Muslims' religious buildings became less visible either in terms of height, location, and even ornamentation. In general, most non-Muslim religious buildings adopted the local language of architecture and local materials. This also varied as in

some ages. European artists and architects found an opportunity to play a role in the construction of churches in the Islamic world, in cities like Istanbul and Isfahan. Reliance on local resources had to do with the limits in terms of finance. It also created a sense of protection for people who could be easily accused of establishing relations with enemies.

A number of scholarly analyses have interrogated relationships between the architectural forms associated with Islamic cultures and non-Muslim expressions of architectural tradition. These investigations have led architectural historians to draw many valuable conclusions regarding expressions of faith, power and desire in the built and designed environment. Scholars have devoted less attention, however, to the formal and theoretical qualities of non-Muslim religious monuments in Islamic societies. Those few who have attempted to overcome the challenges have for the most part undertaken a case-study approach clarified by spatial and temporal parameters but seldom connected to broader historical and cultural trends. This literature review aims to make a foundation for the study of churches and synagogues in Muslim societies. Referring to specific historic cases, we try to clarify how the development and construction of these sacred spaces have been influenced by social and political contexts.²

2. The research conducted for this paper is part of a collective project that includes twenty-seven case studies on non-Muslim sacred sites in the Islamic world. This edited volume, which was initiated by the author in 2011, is currently under review and is to be published in 2014.

Foundations of Muslim Relations with Jews and Christians

When he was forced out of Mecca in 622 the Prophet settled in Medina, an oasis with a large Jewish population. Here he initially attempted to establish perfect equality between his companions and the community which received them: “To the Jews their religion, and to the Muslims theirs.” However, the Qur’anic revelation was rejected by the Jews who soon became openly hostile, forcing Muhammad to expel them. The Prophet’s subsequent encounters with the People of the Book were as a warrior. Before launching an attack he would offer them three choices—conversion, payment of a tribute, or to fight by the sword. If they did not choose conversion a treaty was concluded, either instead of a battle or after it, which established the conditions of surrender for the Christians and Jews—the only non-Muslims allowed to retain their religion at that time. The terms of these treaties were similar and imposed on the *dhimmi* (the people protected by Islam) certain obligations.³

3. Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, trans. Judy Mabro (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 2.



Upon his return to Mecca in 630, one of Muhammad's first acts was to rid the Ka'aba, a cubic stone structure in the center of the city, of the pagan idols that had accrued there over the centuries. According to the Qur'an, the Ka'aba had been built by Abraham as an acknowledgment of his personal, monotheistic faith. Today the Ka'aba serves as a unifying monument for all Muslims, who face the direction of the structure when praying and who, if able, must make at least one pilgrimage (*hajj*) to circumambulate the structure. During his lifetime, Muhammad sought to coexist with members of the other Abrahamic faiths (Jews and Christians) while remaining staunchly and violently opposed to the practices of the Meccan polytheists whose idols had populated the Ka'aba.⁴ In both instances, Muhammad established formal principles and practices that served as the models for his successors.⁵ The establishment of Muslim political power moved the subject population into *dar al-Islam*, regardless of whether the conquered peoples converted to Islam. Because Islam shared a narrative tradition with those of the Jews and Christians, many converted.⁶ And because the Qur'an had been revealed in the Arabic language, the nomadic tribes who spoke that language converted in large numbers.⁷

Two texts form the bases for regulating non-Muslim social, cultural and religious practices under Muslim political rule: the Qur'an, or the word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, and the Pact of 'Umar, a collection of prescriptions and proscriptions intended to control the behavior of non-Muslims who lived under Muslim rule. The Muslims' holy text, the Qur'an, refers to freedom of religion as one of the fundamental principles of Islam. According to the Qur'an, "no one should be forced" to accept a new religion.⁸ Another Qur'anic scripture, Sura IX, 29 exhorts Muslims to "Fight against those to whom the Scriptures were given ... and follow not the true faith, until they pay tribute (*jizya*) out of hand, and are humbled." Those to whom the scriptures were given included the monotheistic religions identified as the people of the book (*ahl al-kitab*), most especially Jews and Christians, but Zoroastrians and Sabians as well. The general practice associated with these Suras in combination has been that once the people of the book cease to resist Muslim political control and accept Islamic government, they pay tribute through the *jizya* and receive permanent protection.⁹ As is the case with all faith traditions, the history of religious minorities in the Islamic world is not a homogeneous narrative. The high level of variances in terms of religious freedom and repression,

4. On the names and origins of the pagan idols of the Meccan polytheists, see Hisham ibn al-Kalbi, *Kitab al-Asnam* [*Book of Idols*], trans. Nabih Amin Faris (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).

5. Courbage and Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, 2.

6. According to Courbage and Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, 6: "At the time of the Muslim revelation ... the Arab East probably contained some 15 million Christians and less than 200,000 Jews."

7. Courbage and Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, 21.

8. Qur'an, II: 256.

9. Norman A. Stillman, "Dhimma," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Josef W. Meri (New York: Routledge, 2006), vol 1, 205-207, quote 205.

tolerance or persecution depended on the governments and cultural context. This reflects the diversity of interpretations of Islamic instructions in different situations and conditions at different times.

Non-Muslim subjects of a Muslim state (*dhimmis*) had a right to live in an Islamic society in return to paying poll taxes (*jizya*) and land tax (*kharaj*) to the state. In most cases, the *dhimmis* had to pay only the *jizya*. This was a fixed tribute, in cash or in kind proportionate to produce or income of the community as a tribe, a family, or an individual.¹⁰ One of the earliest examples of peace treaties that incorporated the principle of the *jizya* was agreed upon between the Prophet and Medinese Jews. This charter was basically a tripartite formula for the confederal existence of the Muslims and Jews at Medina to live peaceably under the political supremacy of the Prophet Muhammad. According to this charter, other religious groups in Medina, including Jews, were guaranteed complete protection with a political and social status not less viable than what was imagined for the Muslims. What is interesting is that these non-Muslims were declared as an integral part of the *ummah* (the community of the Muslim faithful) as long as they adhered to the terms of the charter.¹¹ This agreement and other, similar treaties, served as the basis for a later document, titled the Pact of ‘Umar, which would take several forms and result in a variety of degrees of enforcement relevant to the conduct of non-Muslims under Muslim rule. The pact, “supposedly a writ of protection (*dhimma* or *aman*) from the time of Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (r. 634-644)” and redacted during the reign of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (717-720), derived from a number of different sources, “most notably the agreement of Sophronios, the patriarch of Jerusalem,” concluded in 639. In the English translation of its current form, the Pact of ‘Umar stipulates:

in exchange for the guarantee of life, property, and religious freedom, *dhimmis* accept a host of restrictions that reflect their subject status. Among these are the following: they may never strike a Muslim; they may not bear arms, ride horses, or use normal riding saddles on their mounts; they may not sell alcoholic beverages to Muslims; they may not proselytize, hold public religious processions, build new houses of worship, or repair old ones; and they may not teach the Qur’an (for polemical purposes), prevent kinsmen from embracing Islam, dress like Arabs, cut their hair like Arabs, or adopt Arab honorific names (*kunyas*).¹²

10. Ziauddin Ahmed, “The Concept of Jizya in Early Islam,” *Islamic Studies* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1975): 301.

11. Ziauddin Ahmed, “The Concept of Jizya in Early Islam,” 295.

12. Stillman, “Dhimma,” 205.



The guarantee of life, property and religious freedom was, of course, contingent upon regular payment of the *jizya*. As a financial burden, the *jizya* affected the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, and caused some local conflicts and resistance. In one instance, the Banu Taghlib, an influential mostly Christian Arab tribe, refused to pay the *jizya* to the Muslim caliph ‘Umar since they saw it unreasonable and humiliating. Instead, they agreed to pay *sadaqa* (alms) at the double rate. When ‘Umar refused to accept this proposal, many members of this tribe crossed over to the Romans and joined the enemy. This move made ‘Umar withdraw from his order and agree to their proposal.¹³ This situation became harsher for non-Muslims in the following century, when Umayyad caliphs became more stabilized. For instance, the aforementioned Umayyad caliph, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, had a reputation for humiliating non-Muslims and depredations against their holy places. In his letter to one of his administrators, he wrote: “All Crosses raised publicly and openly must be broken and destroyed. Jews and Christians must not ride on horse saddles ... Put a ban on those Christians, who are under your administration, to wear gowns, silken and Yemeni embroidered garments.”¹⁴ According to Bernard Lewis, two conditions imposed stricter conditions to the *dhimmi*s in the history of the Islamic world: When the rulers insisted on restoring a “more authentic” Islam, and when a messianic and millenarian regime ruled.¹⁵

A Sampling of Sites, Structures and Spaces of the *Ahl al-Dhimma*

Islam originated as an urban religion in which “migration to the town is considered meritorious ... because it is in the town that one can fully practice the Muslim way of life.” Islamic cultures evolved in urban centers, building upon the existing fabric of the chaotic Byzantine city.¹⁶ The Pact of ‘Umar placed restrictions on the building and repair of churches, synagogues, and temples within those urban milieus. The enforcement of these ordinances was sporadic at best and if a church or synagogue violated the covenant, “the payment of a bribe or fine sufficed to avoid demolition or confiscation of the offending building.”¹⁷ The extent to which action was taken against non-Muslims depended upon the circumstances under which Islam entered into an existing urban fabric. During the first decades of the spread of Islam, most Muslims separated themselves from non-Muslims by either constructing garrison towns or overtaking existing neighborhoods and transforming them to meet the needs of the *ummah*. Jews and Christians also preferred to live among people with whom they

13. Ibn al-Hummam, *Sharh Fath al-Qadir*, Cairo, Matba'ah Mustafa Muhammad, IV, 328-3; *Amwal*, 541-43; Abu Yusuf, *Kharaj*, 120-21. (Quoted in Ahmed, “The Concept of *Jizya*,” 299.)

14. Ahmed, “The Concept of *Jizya*,” 299.

15. Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 16.

16. See Nehemia Levtzion, “Rural and Urban Islam in West Africa: An Introductory Essay,” in *Islam in West Africa: Religion, Politics and Society to 1800*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1994), 7-26.

17. Stillman, “*Dhimma*,” 205.

18. Hugh Kennedy, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

shared a faith. The presence (and absence) of non-Muslim sacred precincts in the Islamic world must be considered within the broader context of the urban fabrics into which Islam insinuated itself as the faith spread outward from Mecca and Medina. In many predominantly Christian towns, archaeological evidence suggests that changes one might reasonably attribute to a Muslim reordering of the designed and built environment actually began during the late antique era, prior to the advent of Islam.¹⁸ Once Islam became a political force, non-Muslim sites, structures and spaces were either permanently abandoned (some theaters, for example), shared, repurposed, demolished, harvested, infilled or built over. Depending upon the year, the location and the ruler, monuments of sacred architecture may or may not have been treated differently from other types of buildings.

As Islam took hold and new generations of non-Muslims were born into societies under Muslim rule, relationships articulated in the designed and built environment changed. Throughout the Islamic world non-Muslims held important governmental and administrative positions. And though Muslims and non-Muslims often remained in separate neighborhoods in the Muslim-controlled urban centers, evidence suggests increasing interaction in the marketplaces and *hammams* (public baths) and in madrasas (Islamic religious schools), yeshiva schools and monastery schools. Of course, the major change instituted by Muslims was the introduction of the mosque, which shifted the axis of interaction from the political and social elite of conquered cities. As historian Hugh Kennedy notes,

in Damascus in the early eighth century the church was taken over and demolished, in Aleppo cathedral and mosque coexisted on opposite sides of a narrow street until the twelfth century, while in Emesa (Hims) mosque and church were simply two halves of the same building throughout the early middle ages. But the mosque also replaced the agora as the main outdoor meeting-place in the city. In Damascus, the great court of the Umayyad mosque forms the only open space of any size within the walls of the old city while in Aleppo the mosque was actually built on the old agora, its wide court occupying the area of the classical open space.¹⁹

19. Kennedy, *The Byzantine*, 15.

In addition to serving as the site for prayer, the mosque hosted a number of different social, cultural and political functions that had been conducted in the agora, theatre and hippodrome prior to the arrival of Islam. These events included the taking of the



oath of allegiance to new rulers (*bay'at*) and a weekly sermon in which the imam acknowledged the ruler by name (*khutba*). Some judges (*qadi*) held court in the mosque, which also served as the location for political and religious leaders to issue opinions and proclamations on matters of relevance to the entire community.²⁰

20. Kennedy, *The Byzantine*, 15-16.

Despite being considered second-class citizens in several eras, non-Muslims were often given rights to own, to worship, and to build places of worship. Islam acknowledges the truth of all earlier messages and even mentions that the places of worship should be protected against attacks. According to the only verse in the Qur'an that mentions synagogues and churches, there exists no stipulation that suggests the destruction of non-Muslim sacred structures:

Those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, "Our Sustainer is God!" For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, [all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques—in [all of] which God's name is abundantly extolled—would surely have been destroyed [ere now]. And God will most certainly succor him who succors His cause: for, verily, God is most powerful, almighty.²¹

21. Quran, Al-Hajj 22:40.

Again, according to the Pact of 'Umar, Christians committed not to build any new monasteries, synagogues, church or monk's hermitage, or repair those fallen into ruin. However, they had the right to maintain their places of worship. Churches and synagogues had to be protected and nothing would be taken away from them or from their properties. Their maintenance was facilitated through receiving donations (*waqf*) from the local community.²² One of the early manuals of Islamic law regarding *waqf* includes a statement of full recognition of donations made for Jerusalem: "If a Christian makes his land or his house *waqf* and prescribes that their revenue be spent for repairs in Jerusalem or to buy oil for its lamps or any (other) of its needs" it is permitted ... also, Jews have in this respect the same rights as the Christians."²³ However, an opposition towards this attitude evolved gradually as Muslims became more stabilized in newly invaded territories. This shift was especially important in cities such as Jerusalem where the wealth of Christians was invested in churches or monasteries; any decision regarding these religious structures by Muslims could affect the economic conditions of the

22. Moshe Gil, "Dhimmi Donations and Foundations for Jerusalem (638-1099)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 27, no. 2 (1984): p.156.

23. Moshe Gil, "Dhimmi Donations," 157.

24. Moshe Gil, "Dhimm Donations," 160.

minority Christians. Further actions (for example, destructions of churches and confiscations) were made in border areas such as Jerusalem as tools to increase pressures on Christians.²⁴

25. Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman, "Muslim Society as an Alternative: Jews Converting to Islam," *Jewish Social Studies, New Series* 14, no. 1 (Fall, 2007): 92.

Depending on the time and the location, new construction by non-Muslims aroused skepticism among Muslims, whether sacred or not. Some Muslims felt threatened by the expansion of non-Muslim neighborhoods or by their increasing visibility. For instance, it is known that Jews in Yemen were not allowed to construct houses taller than Muslims.²⁷ Another threatening factor for Muslims was that the religious buildings of minorities were potentially much more than spaces of worship. They were used as places for social meetings, and even gatherings for political affairs, as was the case with the mosque for adherents to Islam. This multiple functionality was a potential threat for governments who tried to control these institutions or limit them to religious affairs. They could even serve as places of asylum for Muslims determined to convert to other religions. Islamic governors and Muslim clerics often saw these buildings—in their mere presence in the cities—as promoters of other religions.

The Qur'an and Sunnah defined some principles, but the destiny of churches and synagogues in the Islamic lands was ultimately determined by juristic regulations (*fatwas*). Based on the contents of surviving documents, one can argue that by adopting such legal terms as 'non-prohibition' of destruction and repair of non-Muslim houses of worship with a negative connotation, Islamic tradition grants Muslim jurists the right to make decision based on different circumstances. Religious Studies scholar Seth Ward's doctoral dissertation, *Construction and repair of churches and synagogues in Islamic law* offers a descriptive narrative of historical monographs written by the fourteenth century jurist, al-Subki, on the subject of the construction and repair of non-Muslim houses of worship in Muslim lands. This dissertation studies the legal aspects established by Sunni Muslims beginning with the Pact of 'Umar and continued in the legal treatises of al-Subki, who wrote as a reaction to the permissibility of repair and construction of churches and synagogues by other jurists at the time.²⁶

26. Seth Ward, "Construction and Repair of Churches and Synagogues in Islamic law," (PhD diss. Yale University, 1984).

Another historic document discusses the process of repair of two synagogues that were partially destroyed in a fire. First, a detailed survey was provided by the Jewish community and submitted to the chief *qadi*. Then the *qadi*, Sheikh Taki-al-Din, reviewed their



request to double-check this matter “in harmony with the dictates of the holy law according to his excellent school [of law].”²⁷ In his review of the survey and two local visits of these synagogues, the *qadi* was accompanied by his colleagues as well as some local architects. After a thorough investigation and consultation with God, the *qadi*, who was apparently an expert in this area of the law,²⁸ agreed to permit the synagogues to be repaired and restored to their original condition.²⁹ This document emphasizes that the restorations and replacements to be done in a legal manner and that nothing whatsoever be added during the reconstruction process. The repairs were to be made only in areas that belonged to the Jews.³⁰

Noted Africanist John O. Hunwick, analyzes a *fatwa* (legal statement) issued by the fifteenth-century jurist, al-Tanasi, regarding the destruction of a Jewish synagogue in Tlemcen. This paper explores this legal pronouncement that influenced the Jewish-Muslim relation in the North African city of Tlemcen. Showing the complexity of the *fatwa* process, Hunwick explains how sensitive the issue was in the fifteenth century North Africa and how a fatwa on a specific case could contradict the pact of Umar due to the contextual complications.³¹ These legal statements usually depended on the dominant juristic school to which they belonged (for example, Maliki, Shafi'i). For instance, Malik in response to a question answered that “[Dhimmi have not any right to set up places of worship] unless they have something which was granted to them.” This quote was widely used to ban the construction of new synagogues in North Africa in the medieval ages.³² The Shi'ite laws regarding the construction and repair of churches, synagogues and fire temples seems to be in accord with some Sunni Muslim legal documents. Al-Tusi distinguished between places which belonged to the Muslims or have been conquered by them and places that were acquired through peace treaty. In the first case, non-Muslims were not allowed to erect or repair any churches, fire temples or synagogues, while in the case of peace treaty they could repair their sacred structures. In the latter case, religious minorities still had to follow the ruler's stipulations including the prohibition on building higher than Muslims' structures, et cetera.

As Islam overtook the Maghreb, Christianity continued to flourish in some areas while barely surviving in others. In Tunisia, Christianity maintained a sufficient presence such that the church

27. Richard Gottheil, “A Document of the Fifteenth Century concerning Two Synagogues of the Jews in Old Cairo,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series* 18, no. 2 (Oct., 1927), 149.

28. Gottheil, “A Document of the Fifteenth Century,” 149.

29. Gottheil, “A Document of the Fifteenth Century,” 150.

30. Gottheil, “A Document of the Fifteenth Century,” 151.

31. John O. Hunwick, “The Rights of Dhimmi to Maintain a Place of Worship: A 15th Century Fatwa from Tlemcen,” *al-Qantara* 12, no. 1 (1991): 133-156.

32. John O. Hunwick, “The Rights of Dhimmi,” 147.

33. Courbage and Fargues, *Jews and Christians under Islam*, 40. See also Henry Koehler, *L'Église chrétienne du Maroc et la Mission franciscaine, 1221-1790* (Paris: Société d'éditions franciscaines, 1935).

34. Courbage and Fargues, *Jews and Christians under Islam*, 38.

35. Courbage and Fargues, *Jews and Christians under Islam*, 41.

36. Courbage and Fargues, *Jews and Christians under Islam*, 42-43.

37. As Ari Ariel mentions, the study of Middle Eastern Jewry is plagued by two oversimplifications: The Zionist authors some recent studies on Jews in the Islamic world have attempted to study the Jews' as an isolated group within the Islamic world and to highlight intolerance against Jews in Arab countries and in order to justify their immigrations to Israel and the formation of this state. In the meanwhile, Arab nationalists often describe the Jewish experience as an experience of harmonious multi-dimensional co-existence. Ariel reminds us about the significance of studying Jews as an integral part of their social and political surroundings. Ari Ariel, "Review of Jews and Muslims in lower Yemen by Isaac Hollander," *The Arab Studies Journal* 13/14, no. 2/1 (Fall 2005/ Spring 2006): 174-177.

in Carthage had sufficient membership to warrant a bishop, but in 1159 Abd al-Mu'min razed the See of Carthage and forced "the remaining Christians into exile or apostasy."³³ According to Ibn Khaldūn's history of the Berbers, Idris I, who founded the ruling dynasty of Morocco, had by the year 788:

eliminated Judaism, Christianity and Magism from the plains of Fez, Tadla and Chellah. A century later, under his descendant 'Umar b. Idris II, the church no longer existed as an organized institution, but Christianity survived among a part of the population, as well as, on occasion, priests.³⁴

Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, Christianity had almost no recorded presence in Morocco. In Rabat at the end of the fifteenth century the bells of the Church of Saint Francis were ringing again and by the end of the first decade of the sixteenth century the convent of Saint Catherine at Safi had been established.³⁵ Jews, on the other hand, maintained a continuous (and mostly peaceful) presence in the Maghreb until the twentieth century.³⁶

Conclusion

The study of chronicles, archival accounts, and travelogues reveals that the situation of churches and synagogues in the Islamic territories highly depended on the sociopolitical and religious contexts. Some contemporary studies in the field are accused of taking sides, either to romanticize the situation of non-Muslims or to fully blame Muslims for their non-tolerance towards Jews and Christians, and consequently, their religious buildings.³⁷ The history illustrates numerous examples of collaboration between Muslims and non-Muslims in the construction and renovation of churches and synagogues, while witnessing the destruction of some others. During the times of fanaticism, non-Muslims' religious buildings became less visible either in terms of height, location, and even ornamentation; and most non-Muslim religious buildings adopted the local language of architecture and local materials. The symbioses and conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims affected the way that churches and synagogues were perceived, designed, and developed. For instance, the high social status of Christian Armenians in the seventeenth century Safavid



Persia resulted in the construction of churches based on a complex hybrid architectural language, while in the same context Jews did not easily receive permissions to develop their synagogues. This instance, as well as many others, prove that any generalization in this field would be misleading.

This review aimed to highlight some basic questions regarding the design and development of churches and synagogues by analyzing certain documents and case studies. Any research on churches and synagogues can shed light into the concept of intercultural relations in the Muslim world. In other words, in contrast to the former studies which conventionally start with an overview of the social and political contexts, architectural historians may take a reverse approach by studying the history of sacred buildings in order to highlight complexities within the Islamic world. Using buildings as sites for the archeology of history may result in findings that may not have been discussed by historians. The architecture of most churches and synagogues proves to follow intangible hybrid styles combining both local and universal elements. The examination of these complex sites could challenge some common understandings of architectural styles in Islamic architecture and lead to new tools and methods of analysis.