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## INTRODUCTION

The study of Muslims in Europe is, in academic terms, a growth industry. From the foundations of the work of the nineteenth century “orientalist” philologists the edifice of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies has taken shape over the last century. The literary historians of the first half of this century introduced the Arabic literatures of medieval Europe to a western audience, and established the methodological and literary-historical guidelines that are still largely accepted by European scholars. As the century progressed, some scholars began to explore strictly historical questions which were inspired by the work of those pioneers. They began to utilise non-literary sources and approaches, and the European study of Islamic history took on an identity which gradually came to distinguish itself from literary studies. Today more than ever, as Western society grows more conscious of its own plurality and perceptions of the Muslim world become more sophisticated, not only are new questions being posed, but old issues and approaches are being re-appraised. As more scholars are being drawn to the field, they bring with them a set of new methodologies and analytical and comparative approaches, and incorporate perspectives drawn from a wide range of disciplines: post-colonial critiques, new trends in archaeological research, uses of different written sources, anthropological approaches, new readings of the figure of the Muslim in Western literature and of the Arabic literature written in Europe.

This volume presents a range of Western scholarly readings of Islamic society in the European Mediterranean and of Muslim contributions to the formation of European culture and history. Suzanne Conklin Akbari works with Western literary texts, using new literary critical methodologies to read responses to Islam in Christian works often written at a historical and geographic distance from the Muslim world. Patrizia Onesta’s rigorously philological readings of Arabic, Occitan, and Latin lyric reopen the question of Arabic influence on Provençal courtly culture. Karla Mallette parallels the revolutionary vernacular poetic traditions that emerged in the Arabic — and Romance-speaking worlds, demonstrating the similarity of the fundamental urges that inspired and shaped those literary movements. In his examination of Andalusī *kharjas*, Otto Zwartjes questions the relation between courtly poetic styles and popular traditions. Maria Rosa Menocal has produced

some of the most provocative and vital work on the question of literary connections between Muslims and Christians in southern Europe; her article in this volume reflects on the changes in perceptions of that question during the years between her first interventions in the field and the present. In the “review” of her most recent book, four scholars working in different disciplines respond to the challenges her work poses to literary-historical tradition. Arnold Cassola and Oliver Friggieri explore a literary tradition that represents, in purest form, the legacy of the cohabitation of Muslims and Christians in medieval Europe—the literature of Malta, whose language combines Semitic and Romance elements—and follow the evolution of Maltese cultural self-awareness through the modern, post-colonial period. Antonio Pellitteri re-reads the Sicilian historians of the nineteenth century, exploring the influence of continental philosophical developments on Sicilians’ conception of Sicilian history.

Among the articles which can be most strictly termed as historical studies are two contributions based on unedited archival material. Such sources are instrumental in our understanding of Muslim minorities living in Christian lands, and there is a wealth of such documentation for medieval Iberia. Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol gives a preliminary sketch of the institutions and administration of the Muslim community of Christian Tortosa (Catalonia) from its origins in the twelfth century through to the fifteenth. Brian Catlos, looking at documents from around the whole of the Crown of Aragon, studies cases of the abduction of Christian children and attempts to underscore the importance of understanding the Muslim minority as *part of* Christian society rather than *apart from* Christian society. Thomas Burman, by examining twelfth-century Latin translations of the Quran, investigates the ways by which contemporary Christian Europeans strove to understand their neighbours across the religious divide; and Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, in her reading of an early modern translation of the Qur’an into Hebrew, considers a Jewish European response to Islam. A similar approach is taken by Michael Weber who uses al-Farabi’s “Mathematical Sciences,” a scientific rather than a religious text, as the basis of his study. Charles Burnett’s investigation of the Arabic roots of the Latin *Sortes regi Amalrici*, takes the comparative approach to the far East of the European Mediterranean, the Crusader Kingdoms of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, forcing us to reconsider the traditional scholarly canon that the Holy Land was not a region where cultural exchange took place. The independent society of Islamic Spain is the setting for Manuela Marin’s work, and she demonstrates how a well-known source, the Islamic biographical dictionary, may be used in an innovative manner as an exciting new tool for social history. Focusing on

a single historical narrative, William Granara uses the biography of the eighth-century political/religious figure Ibn al-Furat to explore the socio-religious values of early Islamic society in the Mediterranean. Finally, Harry T. Norris takes us to a often neglected corner of the Islamic Mediterranean — the Balkans, and beyond to the Caucasus in his work on early Islamic folk epic.

The work of these eighteen contributors illustrates a wide range of possibilities for exploring and evaluating this significant and integral component of Mediterranean culture and society. The various methodologies and approaches taken help us to re-appraise traditional scholarship in the field, and suggest new directions and departures for future research.

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