
The book presented here is a modified version of the author’s doctoral dissertation (Venice’s Colonial Jews: Community, Identity, and Justice in Late Medieval Venetian Crete, Harvard University [2014]). Its main theme is the social and legal status of Jews in Candia (today Heraklion) and the rest of Crete during the late Middle Ages, a subject matter that has been dealt with previously by several historians. Rena Lauer focuses on the period from the mid-fourteenth century (Black Death) until the mid-fifteenth century (fall of Constantinople), during which Jews in Crete were joined by a few Sephardi Jews, among others, and thus Jewish communities on the island were culturally revived while threatening the dominance of the Greek-speaking Romaniote Jews there.

The title of the book itself reveals concepts marked by gravity from the point of view of history and historiography, such as law, justice, colonies, etc. Historians of the Venetian state have had many discussions about the legal order in the Eastern Mediterranean territories of Venice: custom law, Venetian, or imported by the Latins (the so-called Assizes of Romania)? Recent bibliographies also reveal some approaches that make use of concepts such as colony or empire as tools for the study of the overseas territories of the Serenissima. The author here makes use of the first one, the concept of the colony, inevitably accepting a series of related prerequisites. The book comprises six main chapters, besides the introduction and the conclusion. The first chapter introduces the formation, synthesis, and development of the Jewish community in Candia from the thirteenth century, while the other five chapters refer to specific issues, such as the relations between Jews and Christians inside and outside the Jewish neighborhood or within the framework of the economy and daily social interaction; the institutional interventions by state authorities in order to monitor relations between Jews and Christians; and the content of legal disputes concerning Jews who resorted to secular Venetian courts, especially in marital cases concerning bigamy, conflicts between spouses, and so on.

The book aims to examine the social and legal status of the Greek-speaking Jews in Crete in the context of Cretan society—that is, their relations not only with other members of the Jewish community but also with the Greek Orthodox and Latins on the island and of course with the Venetian authorities for whom the Jews were a firm ally, according to the author. To reach her aim, Lauer makes use of the existing literature, the older and the contemporary, yet, as in her doctoral dissertation, she ignores the quite rich and reliable academic historiography in Greek about Venetian Crete. This study is mainly based on sources about legal disputes as they have been recorded in Venetian courts and the traces they left in time (court briefs, notarial acts, decisions
of the Jewish community), and they are combined to some extent with the relevant passages in Jewish sources (Taqqanot Quandiya).

Thanks to a plethora of case studies referring to disputes between Jews in matters of criminal or civil law, taxation, and trade, the author applies an intelligent reasoning that allows us to infer the following: Jews in Crete, in contrast to other Venetian possessions and other areas of Europe in general at the time, resolved their disputes not only before the rabbis but also in the Venetian courts. Despite the opposition of the Jewish religious authorities, the judicial system that had been established by Venice in her possessions had won the trust of the quintessential others in late medieval societies who resorted to them even when the disputes in question were exclusively inter-Jewish.

In these terms and through the description of Cretan society during the period under consideration—a description based mainly on earlier reference works (Sally McKee, Uncommon Dominion: Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity [2000])—the book sheds light on a state of tolerance and coexistence with the Christians (Catholics, such as the Venetians, and Orthodox, such as the vast majority of the islanders). This tolerance allowed room for professional cooperation, despite the problems, and could be characterized as relatively harmonious as well as enviable, particularly in comparison with the persecution of Jews in other areas of Western Europe.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2020.376

*Polemical Encounters: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Iberia and Beyond.*
Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers, eds.

The term *convivencia* (literally, coexistence), coined in the 1950s by literary historian Americo Castro, has been repeatedly applied to the history of the interaction of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in medieval Iberia, with an emphasis on intergroup harmony. A more lachrymose approach presents medieval Iberian history as a millennium of inter-communal confrontations punctuated by crusading zeal and forced disputation, culminating in the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 and expulsion of the Muslims in 1609–15. Polemical encounters figure prominently in the interactions of the three faith communities in the latter understanding of the Iberian past. The present volume suggests a modification of the conventional binary interpretations of Spanish history and sheds new light on the polemical literature of medieval and early modern Iberia.

*Polemical Encounters* consists of thirteen articles based primarily on presentations from a conference convened at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) in Madrid in 2004. The volume’s three sections analyze selected polemical