

MEDITERRANEAN CITIES OF KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

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“Vet, donchs, la sciència com segueix les grans hedifficacions, e viles e ciutats. E açò per ordinació special de nostre senyor Déu, per tal que les ciutats sien lochs specials e pus convinents que tots los altres a foragitar l’om de si tota ignorància, e per saber ço qui és a hom necessari en cors e en ànima.”

Francesc Eiximenis

Dotzè llibre del Crestià, I part, vol. I, cap. 21

Secular and sacred knowledge were inextricably interwoven in civilizations such as those of the pre-modern Mediterranean, where the Creationist cosmovisions of the three religions descendent from Abraham, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, were widespread and prevailed. In the course of the late Middle Ages, the main space where cultural practices relating to both kinds of knowledge were developed gradually moved from the rural world to the urban one, including both towns and cities, in accordance with the fundamental socio-economic and demographic transformations taking place in the Mediterranean world at the time. New institutional realities emerged as a response to the new challenges confronted by these urban societies.

This section is devoted to the study of the production and circulation of knowledge and cultural practices, both secular and sacred, in late medieval Mediterranean cities. Our discussion is presented in the context of human communities that were characterized by commercial and financial economies, by a multiplicity of languages, cultures and religions, by the increasing interconnection among all of them, and by an intensive circulation and exchange of goods, knowledge, and people.

Given the breadth and complexity of this subject, the round table at which this article originated, focused on four major questions, dealt with by four prominent scholars, namely:

1. Dr. Jacques Verger (Paris-Sorbonne University) has tackled the origins and development in the cities of the Latin West, of a new space where expert knowledge was produced — the *studia generalia* or universities — as well as the role that a greater mobility of students, masters, and books played in spreading this movement throughout Europe.
2. Dr. Michael R. McVaugh (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) has considered the major features of the process of social “medicalization” that took place mostly in Latin Mediterra-

nean cities. Instrumental to this process was a new, professional model of medical practitioner, whose hegemony in the field of health care practices was gradually consolidated throughout the following centuries.

3. Dr. Josef (Yousef) Meri (Centre for the Study of Muslim-Jewish Relations, Woolf Institute, Cambridge) offers an overview of Muslim and Jewish pilgrimage as a shared experience and opportunity for cultural exchange between the faithful of both religions in the cities of medieval Islamdom, from al-Andalus and Northern Africa to the Middle East and present-day Iraq.
4. Dr. Jonathan Harris (Royal Holloway, University of London), after first emphasizing the crucial function of Constantinople as communicator of the cultural heritage of ancient Greece to the medieval world, both Islamic and Latin Christian, goes on to consider the role that Byzantine *émigrés* played in the cultural exchanges among the cities of the Eastern and Western Mediterranean in the late Middle Ages, by briefly recounting the life journeys of some of their most prominent members.

Unavoidably, our discussion leaves aside many other important issues. However, I am certain that those set out here are sufficiently illustrative and representative of some of the most relevant cultural features of late medieval Mediterranean cities. Also, I would like to emphasize not only the inextricability of secular and sacred knowledge in the three great Mediterranean civilizations during medieval and early modern times, but also the common cultural roots and mutual exchanges among all three of them throughout the centuries. Thus, from the thematic distribution of the four contributions included in this section, it should by no means be inferred — quite the opposite — that secular knowledge and practices were unique to Christendom, while the sacred were characteristic of Islamic or Jewish civilizations. In all three, cultural

practices based on knowledge both secular and sacred were developed, although the processes involved in their production and circulation, and their institutional settings, differed significantly, not only between the three cultures, but also within them, and over a long period of time.

I would like to finish this brief presentation by acknowledging the generosity of the speakers in offering a revised version of their papers, and to sincerely thank them for the effort of synthesis made in order to expound their arguments within the limited space available in this collective volume.