# Introduction: Between Two Worlds

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During the long centuries termed, for convenience sake, "the Middle Ages," Jews lived mostly in their separate communities spread throughout the Christian and Muslim worlds in Europe, Western Asia and North Africa. Relations with the people of the majority religions in all these places were at times difficult and painful, but at other times also fruitful and mutually beneficial. The great legacy left by the scholars and writers of those centuries is a constant source of interest and fascination for us today. The lectures, papers and comments delivered in this year's conference trace some of the paths that take us back to those periods, offering some innovative perspectives regarding our view of historical events and interpretation of old texts.

The first part of the conference, as reflected also in the first part of this volume, tackled the issue of Christian influence on Jewish creativity against the painful background of the Crusades and later persecutions of European Jews. However, in his public lecture, entitled "Medieval Jewish Cultural Creativity in Response to Persecution," Prof. Marc Saperstein argues that this oppression also "led to a creative cultural response, inspiring written texts that became an integral part of Jewish literature." He proceeds to introduce two genres of literary works: the *chronicle*, which recorded experiences of persecution, and the texts of *ethical admonition and rebuke*, which expressed an internal critique of Jewish society in the wake of persecution. Prof. Saperstein introduces and quotes from such works which followed four periods of persecution, in Germany (the first Crusade), Spain (anti-Jewish riots in late 14$^{th}$ century and the expulsion in 1492), and Poland (Cossack pogroms in 1648). It is shown how studying this material may help us not only in understanding the religious responses of Jews to the calamities that befell them, but also to draw a more accurate picture of their lives during these various periods. In his workshop paper entitled "Medieval Jewish Cultural Creativity Influenced by Christian Models," Prof. Saperstein goes on to demonstrate that Jews' religiosity and writings were influenced by their life among a Christian majority, absorbing various ideas, such as those connected with penance and atonement. His conclusion is that despite the persecution and animosity, Jews "were open to positive influences of the external, Christian culture, capable of incorporating aspects of this culture in Judaism." In my response to Prof. Saperstein, I offer a closer look at three specific points raised in the above papers, namely the question of theodicy as it arises from the responses to the first Crusade, the relations between the Jewish "German Pietists"

and their Christian environment, and the description of the "Suffering Messiah" in the *Book of Splendor* and other Jewish writings.

The second and longer day of the conference was dedicated to Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), the great sage of Medieval Judaism, and to his close intellectual relationship with Muslim philosophy and science. His work left its substantial mark not only on Jewish thought and law, but also on Muslim philosophers and scientists, as well as Christian theologians. Maimonides exerted his influence through at least three genres of compositions, on Jewish law, philosophy and medicine. His major compositions included *Commentary on the Mishnah* and *Book of the Commandments*, both written in Arabic, the 14-volume code of Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah* ("The Repetition of the Law"), written in Hebrew, and his great philosophical work *The Guide of the Perplexed* (*Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn*), again written in Arabic. The speakers related in their papers to all of the above, as well as to some of Maimonides' numerous medical treatises.

The proceedings of the second day are hereby divided into two parts. The first part contains two contributions by Prof. Warren Zev Harvey, who first delivered a public lecture entitled "Maimonides' Monotheism: Between the Bible and Aristotle." Prof. Harvey traces Maimonides' theory of monotheism going through the sage's writings in historical order, opining that Maimonides followed Aristotle in asserting God's incorporeality, but his assertion of God's incomparability owed more to the Bible and Jewish thought. Maimonides' writing was partially esoteric, and therefore it is notoriously difficult to pin-point his exact opinion on certain theological and philosophical issues, however, Prof. Harvey believes that "he ultimately prefers Oneness as incomparability over Oneness as incorporeality," and he proceeds to show this through Maimonides' discussion of various biblical passages. In his workshop paper, entitled "Maimonides on the Meaning of 'Perplexity' (*ḥayra* = *aporía*)," Prof. Harvey focused on *The Guide of the Perplexed* in an attempt to understand who is the "perplexed" for whom Maimonides has written his *Guide*. Prof. Harvey shows that Maimonides used *ḥayra* in various contexts, quoting five different examples, and that the author of the *Guide* himself is never free of his own perplexity. This paper was followed by the response of Prof. Hisao Takagi, who acknowledged Prof. Harvey's fresh view on a matter that has been taken for granted for many years, as the meaning of perplexity has been limited in scholarly view to the conflict between philosophy and religious law (or Scripture and Reason). Prof. Takagi proceeds to show several ramifications of this new perspective. Prof. Harvey added two addenda to his original paper, one in which he responds to Prof. Takagi's comments, and the other in which he relates to the discussion that followed, and in particular the suggestion by Prof. Junya Shinohe for an additional meaning of the *Guide*'s title based on Qurānic verses.

In the third and final part of this volume, four more papers, read on the second day of the conference, are presented. Dr. Daniel Davies read a paper entitled "Between Philosophers and Theologians: Maimonides' Response to Avicenna's Infinite World," in which he traces Maimonides' indirect response to Avicenna's views concerning the nature of time and the creation of the world. Avicenna represents the philosophers with whom Maimonides largely agreed on many points, but opposed on the issue of creation, which for him was a necessity as a foundation of the Law. On the other hand, Dr. Davies demonstrates Maimonides' efforts to support reason rather than give in to the theologians' imagination, thus also challenging his readers to ponder the question themselves. In her paper entitled "Cosmology of Maimonides: Examining the Difference from Greek and Islamic Thought," Ms. Aiko Kanda looks at Maimonides' views on astrology, astronomy and cosmology against the background of the views of other Jewish and Muslim thinkers of his time, as well as the ancient Greek and Roman views which had guided them. Quoting from the *Guide of the Perplexed*, she shows that while following Aristotle, and finding his views agreeing with those of the Jewish Sages, Neoplatonic views were also incorporated into Maimonides' picture of the cosmos, and she argues that further work is required in order to identify the full scale of the sources leading to the forming of that picture. Another scientific and philosophical issue is tackled by Mr. Yu Hoki in his paper "The Generic Form and the Specific Property in Maimonides' Medical Literature and the *Guide of the Perplexed*." In medieval science "specific property" was a term related to medicine, but also had philosophical implications. Hoki uses the discussion of this concept to study Maimonides' position in relation to the medical and philosophical currents of his time, including Andalusian practical medical knowledge on the one hand, and the philosophy of Avicenna on the other. Finally, in his short preliminary overview entitled "Eastward Advance of Andalusian Jewish-Muslim Culture from the 12th Century onward: Toward a New Vision of Islamic Thought," Dr. Toshiharu Nigo traces the flow of knowledge from the Muslim kingdoms of the west, mostly on the Iberian Peninsula, to the Muslim heartland in the east, in which Jewish scholars also took part. Dr. Nigo first introduces works written in the east which incorporated data on scholars from the west, including Maimonides and Averroes. He then gives some specific examples for incorporating astronomical knowledge from the west in the work of astronomers in the east. This study is a first step towards a wider view of the transfer and sharing of knowledge among scholars of various ethnicities and religions during the Middle Ages.