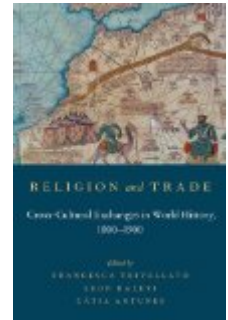


Francesca Trivellato, Leor Halevi, Catia Antunes, eds.. *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000-1900*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Illustrations. 296 pp. \$99.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-937918-7.



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In 1984, Philip Curtin published his *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*. Curtin was interested in the history of what he called “trade diasporas”: networks of alien merchants that facilitated trade between distinct and often geographically remote cultures. Curtin cast his net wide, tracing and contrasting the roles of trade diasporas from ancient Mesopotamia to eighteenth-century Quebec and twentieth-century Hong Kong. His trade diasporas were far-flung networks of merchants who often shared an ethnic, linguistic, and religious culture: Jews in the medieval Mediterranean, Armenians in Persia, the Chinese in South Asia, the Portuguese in the Atlantic, etc. Curtin was trained as a Europeanist and subsequently focused his research on Africa. Where an earlier generation of historians had studied European presence in Africa from the point of view of economic history (looking at how trade was driven by European economic needs) and political history (examining the impact of conquest and colonialism on both European and African polities), Curtin focused on how European merchants

present in Africa carved a place for themselves in their host societies and forged mutually beneficial relations with African potentates. These exchanges had an important cultural impact on both Europeans and Africans, and Curtin was in tune to their richness, variety, and ambivalence.

Thirty years later, this volume brings together the contributions from a session “Commerce and Religion in Medieval and Early Modern Times” at the European Social Science History Conference in Ghent in April 2010. The book, *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000-1900*, serves both as an homage to the legacy of Curtin’s work and an assessment of the evolution of the field over the last thirty years. The chronology announced in the title is more restricted than Curtin’s, covering “only” nine hundred years. In fact, the majority of the essays deal with trade involving Europeans in the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries; the title is hence somewhat misleading.

In her introduction to the volume, Francesca Trivellato evokes the legacy of Curtin's "milestone contribution," insisting on the importance (and slipperiness) of his key concept of "trade diasporas" (p. 2). Trivellato sets out five questions that the volume seeks to address: "Did religion affect cross-cultural trade?" (p. 13); "Did trust work across religious groups?" (p. 15); "What role did legal institutions play in building cross-cultural trade?" (p. 19); "When and how did violence coexist with cross-cultural trade?" (p. 20); and "Do material artifacts bear the imprint of cross-cultural trade?" (p. 21). These are the questions posed to the authors of the ten essays brought together here, though they are not systematically addressed; no doubt not all of the authors were interested in all the questions or felt them of equal importance for their subjects.

Leor Halevi, in chapter 1, "Religion and Cross-Cultural Trade: A Framework for Interdisciplinary Inquiry," explores the role that religious norms play in encouraging, facilitating, or discouraging certain types of trade across religious boundaries in the medieval Mediterranean world. He examines in particular a series of Islamic legal texts (principally *fatwas*) concerning the permissibility or not of different kinds of transactions with non-Muslims: buying used sandals or clothing from them, selling military equipment to them, or selling them items that were prohibited to Muslims (such as pork or wine). Halevi uses these texts as a springboard from which to try to understand what we mean by such terms as "culture," "religion," or "trade," looking at how economic historians and anthropologists have approached cross-cultural trade. He finds two books particularly helpful: Richard White's *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (1991), for which the locus of trade between French and Algonquins is a shifting, mutually negotiated space that is neither French nor Algonquin, but in which each party adapts to the needs and expectations of the other; and Nicholas Thomas's *Entangled Objects:*

Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific (1991), which similarly addresses the mutual adaptation of European and native traders in the South Pacific.

In chapter 2, "The Blessings of Exchange in the Making of the Early English Atlantic," David Sacks begins by presenting an instance of trade between English merchants and Beothuk Indians in Newfoundland in 1612. There was no common language to facilitate commerce, only an elaborate grammar of gesture and gift exchange to emphasize the lack of bellicose intentions and the desire to engage in trade. Indeed, the border between gift exchange and commerce is often porous, and may be interpreted differently by the different partners. The Beothuk engaged in what Sacks calls "silent trade": they left a number of wares (mostly animal skins and furs) hanging in a place where the English could peruse them, take what they wanted, and leave appropriate items in exchange. John Guy, who participated in the expedition and who wrote the narrative that is the principal source, emphasized that the English traders sought to scrupulously respect what they saw as fair trade, taking only part of what the Beothuk had left and leaving what the English regarded as merchandise of equivalent value. Respect of unwritten rules of fairness was key, for Guy as for other early modern authors, in assuring peaceful exchange.

Giuseppi Marcocci explores the complex interactions between theological arguments and Portuguese trade with non-Christians in chapter 3, "Trading with the Muslim World: Religious Limits and Proscriptions in the Portuguese Empire (ca. 1480-1570)." Theological arguments were used to proscribe theoretical limits to Christian trade with non-Christians, but also to promote and justify it. The fifteenth-century papal bulls that separated the Atlantic world into Portuguese and Spanish spheres of influence (and of trade monopoly) evoked the duty of the monarchs to spread Christianity and fight infidels. Vasco da

Gama famously set off in search of “Christians and spices”; one of the motivations (or at least pretexts) of his and other Portuguese expeditions was to forge an alliance with Eastern Christians in order to vanquish the Muslims. The tensions between ideology and commercial interest produced some strange conjunctions; at the end of the fifteenth century, at the same time that the Portuguese obliged their domestic *mouros de paz* (resident free Muslims) to nominally convert to Christianity, they carved out protectorates in North Africa whose residents they dubbed *mouros de paz*. Marcocci shows how the Portuguese Crown mobilized theological argument to justify its presence in the East and its trade with non-Christians, but creatively pursued its own interests and not necessarily those of the papacy. As he concludes, “religious proscriptions became a meaningful tool of political and economic control of overseas commerce, rather than an anachronistic homage to the church doctrine concerning trading with non-Christians that was never wholly in force” (p. 106).

The following two chapters deal with captive exchange and ransom in the Mediterranean. War, piracy, corsair activity, and cross-border raiding produced a great number of captives, around which a large and lucrative economy developed. Captives might be exchanged to obtain the release of captives held by the enemy, they might be ransomed to their family members or compatriots, or they might be sold as slaves. Captors made choices based on a variety of factors: generally rich or socially important captives could yield considerably more money via ransom than on the slave market. The market value of slaves depended on a number of factors, such as health, age, professional skills, and sexual attractiveness. Charitable religious organizations—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—grew up in order to procure the release of captive coreligionists. This led to the rise of a network of go-betweens who raised money, negotiated with captors or owners, and organized the return voyage of the liberated captives. Sometimes

this was a side business for merchants, but some of these go-betweens were professionals who devoted full time to this activity, financed by cities, princes, or religious organizations.

Chapter 4, by Wolfgang Kaiser and Guillaume Calafat, is titled “The Economy of Ransoming in the Early Modern Mediterranean: A Form of Cross-Cultural Trade between Southern Europe and the Maghreb (Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries).” They show how, in the early modern Mediterranean, captive exchange and ransoming held considerable military, political, and economic importance. For rulers and other owners of captives, ransoming was a lucrative business and could play an important role in affirming their social and political prestige. The middlemen played a delicate and at times difficult role that required knowledge of the written and unwritten rules of the societies between which they navigated. Yet for merchants, ransoming could also be a “lubricant of trade” (p. 125): it gave them impeccable justification for their voyage in the eyes of both Christian and Muslim authorities, allowing them privileged access to lucrative markets. Respect for the rules of the game were essential to their economic interests; hence European merchants gladly transported ransomed captives but balked at providing passage for escaped captives—to do so was to risk losing their privileged access to Muslim rulers and markets.

This need to respect the implicit rules of captive ransom and exchange is also the theme of chapter 5, by Kathryn Miller, “Reflections on Reciprocity: A Late Medieval Islamic Perspective on Christian-Muslim Commitment to Captive Exchange.” She examines an incident that took place in Malaga in the fifteenth century where a Muslim accepted ransom money from a Christian intermediary for the freeing of a Christian captive he owned. However, he subsequently refused to free the captive, explaining that the latter had converted to Islam thus invalidating the agreement; he refused to return the money he received.

At some point (perhaps in response to the complaint of the Christian intermediary), the case was submitted to a legal council in Granada, which ruled that ransoming Christian captives should be stopped completely. We know about this case because someone (it is not clear who) then submitted the case to an anonymous *mufti* who pronounced a *fatwa* (legal consultation). The *mufti* overruled the Granada council, arguing that Muslims were obliged to respect their contractual obligations with non-Muslims and that the breach of this contract was not only illegal but also potentially harmful to Muslims, since it broke the trust on which relations with neighboring Christian polities depended. Miller shows how this *fatwa* gained importance far beyond the specific case, as it was copied and cited by other Andalusian and Maghrebi jurists and was included in al-Wansharisi's influential compilation of *fatwas*. Miller shows how this *mufti* invoked not only *direct* reciprocity, respect for one specific agreement, but also what she calls *diffuse* reciprocity, the idea that a whole web of cross-cultural relations depends on the mutual respect of written and unwritten rules of conduct, and that each breach of those rules on either side endangers the entire system.

In chapter 6, "Cross-Cultural Business Cooperation in the Dutch Trading World, 1580-1776," Ctia Antunes seeks to question "the conventional wisdom among historians" according to which "the cheapest and safest way of doing business before the Industrial Revolution was within kinship groups and religious communities" (p. 150). Indeed, studies on the Jewish, Armenian, Chinese, and other diasporas have shown how they could function as far-flung business networks. Yet these networks have their weaknesses, as well, such as limited availability of capital and lack of access to markets lacking community members. Antunes examines notarial contracts from Amsterdam to examine how Protestant and Sephardic partners forged fruitful business partnerships. She concludes that "early modern Amsterdam was char-

acterized by a high degree of cross-cultural economic cooperation" (p. 168).

Silvia Marzagalli, in chapter 7, "Trade across Religious and Confessional Boundaries in Early Modern France," similarly nuances the importance of faith-based merchant networks as she examines records from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Bordeaux involving complex networks of collaboration between Jews, Catholics, and Protestants. Even the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 did not put an end to these practices, as non-Catholics could continue to do business in Bordeaux alongside Catholics, some of whom, converted Huguenots or Portuguese "new Christians," may have been only nominally Catholic. Moreover, family networks could cut across confessional boundaries, as in the case of Huguenot merchant families who emigrated after 1685 leaving the local business in the hands of a converted, now Catholic family member.

Eight of the ten essays in this book deal with Mediterranean or Atlantic trade, which is one of the reasons that chapter 8—Roxani Eleni Margari-ti's "Coins and Commerce: Monetization and Cross-Cultural Collaboration in the Western Indian Ocean (Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries)"—is particularly welcome. She examines the use of different types of coins by merchants working across the Indian Ocean. In this huge zone of great linguistic and religious diversity, political fragmentation and plurality of legal systems, the use of coins (especially gold and silver) held distinct advantages over other instruments (such as promissory notes and bills of exchange). Certain issues of coin were appreciated for their high quality and reliability, and hence are found far beyond the lands dominated by those who minted them. Along the littoral of the Indian Ocean, from western India to Yemen to eastern Africa, one finds a complex and shifting mix of Arabic dinars (minted by Fatimid, Abbasid, Mamluk, and other rulers) alongside Chinese copper coins and silver coins minted in east Africa. If practical economic

interests were often foremost, religious and cultural factors in some cases remained important. The Mamluks began to mint gold coins to replace the Venetian Ducats, which, it was said, contained idolatrous images of Saints Peter and Paul (in fact a likeness of the Doge paying homage to St. Mark). One could cite a parallel example, not mentioned by Margariti, from the western Mediterranean at the same time: French king Louis IX prohibited the minting in France of Almohad *millares*, square silver coins that sported Islamic inscriptions including an invocation of the prophet Muhammad. Yet there was little evidence of such concerns in the Indian Ocean, as coins seem freely to cross linguistic, cultural, and religious boundaries, testifying to the density of networks of exchange.

Eric Tagliacozzo's "The Hajj and Commerce from Pre-Modern Southeast Asia" (chapter 9) explores the links between pilgrimage to Mecca and long-distance trade. The title is somewhat misleading since much of the essay deals with the nineteenth century. In the precolonial and early colonial periods (roughly, before the nineteenth century), only a small wealthy elite of the Muslims in Southeast Asia could afford the long voyage to Mecca. This changed in the nineteenth century because of European colonial administration (the British and Dutch for Southeast Asia, the French elsewhere). Additionally, and perhaps more important (though underemphasized by Tagliacozzo), it was also aided by a revolution in transportation technology: large steam-powered ships made the hajj feasible and affordable to masses that a generation earlier could not have imagined making the trip (much as cheap air travel had a similar impact on the hajj in the second half of the twentieth century). Tagliacozzo shows how local indigenous authorities and colonial administrations reacted to this massification and created new structures to aid, finance, transport, and sometimes exploit the hajjis. It would be interesting to compare Tagliacozzo's conclusions with those of Luc Chantre, notably in his 2012 dis-

sertation "Le pèlerinage à La Mecque à l'époque impériale (1870-1940): Une approche comparée" (Université de Poitiers). Hajj was linked to commerce in several important ways. First of all, pilgrims (particularly in the medieval and early modern eras) often conducted business during their trips, if only to help defray their costs. Second, pilgrimage (in Islam and elsewhere) was and is big business, analogous to today's mass tourism, as a whole industry grew up to transport, house, and feed the pilgrim. Tagliacozzo concludes that for Southeast Asia, at the far edge of the Muslim world, "the Hajj was an important—but not always crucial—lynchpin to the economic orbit of the greater Indian Ocean" (p. 234).

The tenth and final chapter, by Peter Mark, is "African Meanings and European-African Discourse: Iconography and Semantics in Seventeenth-Century Salt Cellars from Serra Leoa." Mark examines a small number of intricately carved ivory salt cellars, which were luxury items created by African carvers and subsequently sold or given to European traders. By tracing the history of these objects and placing them in the context of trade and colonization, he untangles complex webs of signification. Created from a material (ivory) highly prized both by west Africans and Europeans, these objects are anything but "traditional"; indeed, their production was made possible by trade, as the African artists used European steel knives. Moreover, as Mark shows, they make constant reference to trade, through representation of important goods exchanged (textiles, weapons, kola, slaves, elephants). And they were used to hold salt, another important item of trade. These provide part of the key to what he calls the "visual discourse" of these works. For Mark, "in the case of these salt cellars, the semantic structure is grounded in conceptions of wealth, power and social status" (p. 266).

Taken individually, each of the ten chapters provides a cogent, interesting, and on the whole well-written case study in the practice of cross-

cultural exchange. Taken collectively, the volume is both less and more than it promises. Less, because despite the evocation of “world history” in the title, the focus of eight essays is on the northern Atlantic and Mediterranean networks of trade: China, the Mongol Empire, the Pacific, and Central and South America are entirely absent. Moreover, other than Tagliacozzo’s essay, which deals with the nineteenth century, all of the chapters cover the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Finally, the five questions Trivellato poses in the introduction, which seem to be meant to structure the work, are to a certain extent ignored by different authors.

Yet the book is also more than a collection of thematically related essays, as several important common strands emerge. First, as we have seen, several of the essays nuance the standard topos of trade being the privileged domain of ethnically or religious-based trade diasporas. Second, in spite of the dangers and risks involved in long-haul trade in foreign lands (or perhaps because of those dangers and risks), trading partners developed ways to establish and cultivate trust, seeking to find common ground on which to pursue exchange. Abuse of trust, though no doubt common, is frequently decried, as merchants affirmed the importance of respecting engagements both for short-term interest (direct reciprocity) and for long-term interest (diffuse reciprocity). Common ground does not require common understanding—gestures (gift giving or trade), symbols, and trade objects (furs, coins, or carved ivory) could have very different meanings to different parties involved—nor was it necessary to understand their importance to one’s partner. The volume thus raises important questions on the nature of cross-cultural exchange and should be on the shelf of all those interested in these issues.

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