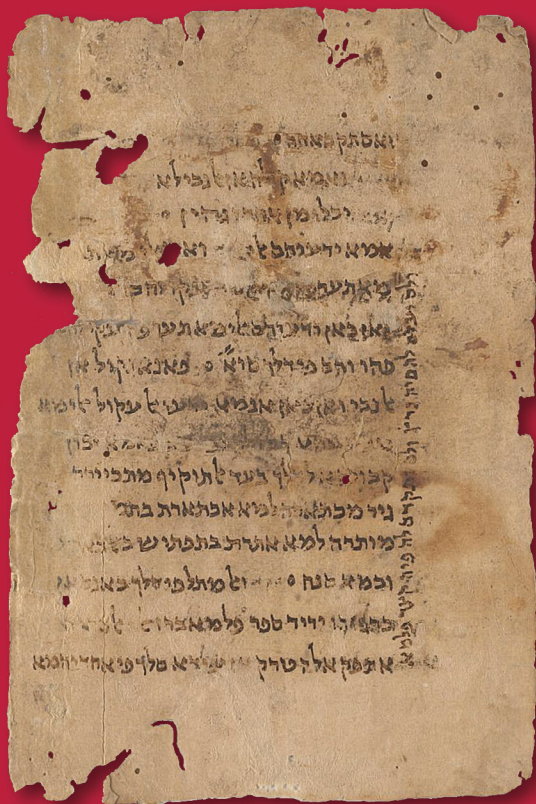


Religious and Intellectual Diversity in the Islamicate World and Beyond

VOLUME I

Essays in Honor of Sarah Stroumsa



EDITED BY

OMER MICHAELIS AND SABINE SCHMIDTKE

BRILL

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Volume 1

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Preface

I said to him one day: If the soul has such immortality that allows it, after death, to apprehend from the outside the state of [material] beings, then let us promise each other that if you die before me, you will contact me, and if I die before you, I will contact you. He agreed, and I urged him not to forget his promise ... Then I saw him in a dream, sitting outside a mosque, in an enclosure within its courtyard, wearing new white clothes of fine fabric. I said to him: 'You Doctor, didn't we agree that you will come to tell me what you found out?' So he laughed and turned away. I grabbed him by the hand and said: 'You must tell me what you found out, and what happens after death!' He said: 'The universal joined the universal, while the parts remained in the part.' I understood that he was speaking of himself, alluding to the fact that the universal soul returned to the world of the universals, while the partial body remained in the part, which is the earthly center.



These are the words that Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-Qiftī (d. 431/1248), a devout Muslim sage from the city of Aleppo, wrote about his friend Joseph ben Yehuda of Ceuta (d. 623/1226), a Jewish scholar and disciple of Maimonides. Al-Qiftī's words, which were mentioned by Sarah Stroumsa in her acceptance speech on the occasion of receiving the Lucas Leopold Prize, testify not only to the close friendship that developed between the Muslim scholar and the Jewish one while they both lived in Aleppo. They also attest to a shared conceptual environment, to similar dilemmas and doubts, and to a unique intimacy that allowed them to communicate, in their lifetime and even after death, about such weighty philosophical questions as the fate of the soul. This kind of connection, stated here in the first person, opens a window onto the possibility of recognizing the mutual bonds, the reciprocal relations, and the exchanges of gestures and knowledge that occurred between Muslims and Jews—in the Levant, but also far away from there across the Islamic world. Such ties were not the only form of contact between Jews and Muslims—as well as contact between these two and Christianity—in the pre-modern world, but they were a firm and valid form of communication, and played a formative role in the

formation and evolution of the various religions and in the movement of knowledge that characterized the Middle Ages.

This is a festschrift in honor of Sarah Stroumsa, an eminent scholar, a close friend and colleague, who through the years has embodied and advanced the possibility of collaboration across borders. It is presented to her by scholars who have had the privilege of collaborating with her in one way or another, in work on the study of the intellectual history of the Middle Ages, the intercultural contact and migration of knowledge in the Islamic world, and many other topics. Over the course of an illustrious career, that is still ongoing, Sarah has shown generosity, diligence, and a dedication to cultivating the fields of research in which she works, to mentoring young researchers, and to establishing collaborations that enable the creation of communities of knowledge that bring together representatives of different disciplines, from varied geographical and intellectual spheres and from different stages along the academic path. This book features new studies written by members of the multi-faceted, ever-growing community of Sarah's collaborators, friends, and students.

The articles in this book were written in some cases with an emphasis on the historical approach, and in others with an emphasis on philosophical methodology, by authors working in a wide range of disciplines, including the study of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in their various facets, philosophy, literature and theology, hermeneutics, the study of manuscripts in the Muslim world, the reception of pre-modern sources, and varied forms of the study of history—intellectual, social, institutional, legal, history of the book and the history of science and technology. The studies that appear herein are all in English but were written by authors who also regularly write in many languages other than English, among them Hebrew, Arabic, German, French and Spanish, and who hail from all corners of the world—Israel, Palestine, Egypt, the United States, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, France, and more. With all of them, Sarah has forged a professional and personal connection, in writing and in meetings face to face.

The book is divided into seven sections, designed in relation to the central areas and themes of Sarah's research. In many studies, Sarah addressed the history of the relations between religion, knowledge, and society across the Islamic world in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian contexts, from the emergence of Islam in the seventh century through the various changes, incarnations and manifestations they have known since then (the section *History, Society and Religion*). Over the years, Sarah developed an integrative approach to the study of the transformation of ideas among Jews and Muslims, beginning with an understanding of the place and unique intellectual affinities of the earliest Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, Dāwūd ibn Marwān

al-Muqammas (Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ and his *ʿishrūn maqāla*, 1983), who was based in the Levant, and continuing all the way through to her monograph *Andalus and Sefarad* (2019), which traces the development of a reciprocal philosophical culture in the Iberian peninsula among Muslim and Jewish scholars (the *Andalus and Sefarad* section). Sarah's studies place a special emphasis on the links between Maimonides and Muslim thought and culture, and on the responses that his work evoked among some of his closest students and his sharpest opponents already during his lifetime, and beyond. This scholarly focus, which is evident already in Sarah's early book on *The Beginnings of the Maimonidean Controversy in the East* (1999) and which reached a pinnacle in the book *Maimonides in His World* (2009), is reflected in the *Maimonides and the Maimonidean Dynasty* section of this book. One of Sarah's methodological innovations, which has to do with understanding the multiplicity of dimensions involved in the movement of knowledge across communal boundaries, is the idea of a "whirlpool effect." The image of the whirlpool also captures the special challenge of identifying the vectors of this movement and deciphering the elements that make it up, since ideas in motion are like colorful drops that fall into a whirlpool and are immediately carried away by the current, coloring the body of water into which they have become integrated and changing their own color in the process. Inter-cultural motions and contacts of this sort are presented in the studies that appear in the section of this book titled *The Whirlpool at Work*. Ever since her doctoral thesis, and in dozens of later studies, Sarah's writing has been characterized by a mastery of the technical philosophical terminology of various movements and schools of thought in the Islamic world, and an ability to follow the steps of the philosophical argument with precision and care. These are crucial features for scholarly writing in the area of the history of philosophy, the discipline to which belong the studies that appear in the section *Philosophy in the Islamicate World and Beyond*. Throughout her years of work, Sarah took part in shaping the community of scholars who are active in the broad field of the *Intellectual History in the Islamicate World*, which encompasses such varied fields of knowledge as theology, philosophy, literature, hermeneutics and law, and various bodies of knowledge, such as the Rabbanite, Karaite, Sunnī, Mu'tazilite and Shī'ite literature. A section of the book is devoted to this subject. Finally, modern scholarship, too, is the result of historical processes, encompassing various figures, institutions, disciplines, and categories. It has been shaped by a multitude of potentials, by paths taken and not taken. Sarah's preoccupation with the history of scholarship and the annals of its reception is expressed, inter alia, in her methodological criticism of one-dimensional scholarship that ignores the reciprocal relations between cultures, and in the effort—in which Sarah

participated—to compile Shlomo Pines' *Studies in the History of Arabic Philosophy* (1996) and to revisit his legacy as the English translator of *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Studies in this vein appear in the book's final section, ***Modern Scholarship and Scholars***.

This festschrift was made possible by the efforts of many people. Guy Stroumsa was committed to this project from the moment the idea was born. Hans Hinrich Biesterfeldt and Sebastian Günther were generous and supportive, first in offering a home for the book in the series they edit at Brill, "Islamic History and Civilization," and then in their assured accompaniment of the manuscript and their good advice. Camilla Adang generously helped us give the book its name. The copyeditors Valerie Joy Turner, Hanna Siurua, and Pamela Lankas worked efficiently and diligently on preparing the various articles and giving the book a unified style. Yotam Schremer also helped us in preparing the manuscript, with speed and intelligence. The book's publication was supported throughout by the generosity of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton NJ.

And above all, this book would not have been possible without the willingness and dedication of the contributing authors to share with us the fruits of their research. It was a pleasure and a privilege to work on the book, to learn from the thought-provoking papers, to come into fertile intellectual contact with old friends and forge new connections throughout the process. To our great sadness, Josef van Ess, who wished to contribute, was denied the opportunity and we were denied the privilege. May his memory be a blessing. Finally, we thank Sarah, from the bottom of our hearts, in our names and in the names of the contributing authors, for many years of diverse research, unflagging support, sharp criticism and faithful advice, and we wish her many good and pleasant years of blessed work.

Omer Michaelis and Sabine Schmidtke

Tabula Gratulatoria

Peter Adamson
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Sarah Stroumsa: A Bibliography to 2023

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Aleida Assmann is an emeritus professor of English and literary studies at the University of Konstanz. Her interests are the history of German memory since 1945, the role of generations in literature and society, and theories of memory. In 2017, she was awarded the Balzan Prize for Collective Memory together with Jan Assmann. In 2018, both were awarded the Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels. Among her recent publications are *Menschenrechte und Menschenpflichten* (Human rights and human duties, 2018), *Der europäische Traum* (The European dream, 2018), and *Die Wiedererfindung der Nation:*

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Menahem Ben-Sasson, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, focuses on the social and intellectual history of medieval Jewry in Muslim lands from the seventh to the fifteenth century. This period includes both the Golden Era of Jewish culture in Islamic lands (eighth to eleventh centuries) and the era of the decline of Judaic culture from the twelfth century onward. His current research is dedicated to the Maimonidean dynasty (1140–1410) and to apocalyptic works of the ninth and tenth centuries. His close acquaintance with Professor Stroumsa goes back to their years as young adults in the mid-1960s and continues through their close fields of research, their partnership in research groups, and their mutual service in the administration of the Hebrew University.

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Haggai Ben-Shammai is professor emeritus in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His areas of interest are medieval Judeo-Arabic texts of Bible exegesis and *kalām* theology by Rabbanite (mainly Sa’adia) and Karaite authors, as well as Quran exegesis and Islamic *kalām*. His writings include his PhD thesis, “The Doctrines of Religious Thought of Abū Yusūf Ya’qūb al-Qirqisānī and Yefet Ben ‘Eli” (Hebrew University, 1978, in Hebrew) and *A Leader’s Project: Studies in the Philosophical and Exegetical Works of Saadya Gaon* (a collection of articles in Hebrew, 2015). He first encountered Sarah when he was a fresh assistant professor in the Department of Arabic and she applied to study in the department. This was the beginning of a long acquaintance, and later friendship, at first as teacher/“Doktorvater” and student and then as colleague and friend in the department and beyond, continuing to this very day.

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Godefroid de Callataÿ

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Jonathan Decter is the Edmond J. Safra Professor of Sephardic Studies in the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University. His most recent book, *Dominion Built of Praise: Panegyric and Legitimacy among Jews in the Medieval Mediterranean* (2018), was the winner of a National Jewish Book Award. His first book, *Iberian Jewish Literature: Between al-Andalus and Christian Europe* (2007), won the Salo W. Baron Prize. His numerous publications address medieval Hebrew literature, Judeo-Arabic literature, and medieval Jewish thinking about religion. He says: "I first met Sarah while I was a

graduate student at the Jewish Theological Seminary and she was visiting Harvard as a Starr fellow. Reading Maimonides with her in Judeo-Arabic was one of the most formative and memorable experiences of my intellectual development. Since then, I have considered Sarah to be the paragon of everything a senior scholar should be: brilliant, productive, poised, generous with students and junior colleagues, and a capable leader.”

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Hussein Fancy is associate professor of medieval history at Yale University. His research and writing focus on the social and intellectual history of religious interaction as well as the intersection of Latin, Arabic, and Romance archives in the western Mediterranean. He is the author of *The Mercenary Mediterranean* (2016) and, most recently, the editor with Alejandro García Sanjuán of *What Was the Islamic Conquest of Iberia?* (2021). He has benefited from conversations and collaborations with Sarah over many years during visits to Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Carlos Fraenkel

Carlos Fraenkel is James McGill Professor of Philosophy and Jewish Studies at McGill University in Montreal. He was also (briefly) Professor of the Study of the Abrahamic Religions at Oxford. His publications include *From Maimonides to Samuel ibn Tibbon: The Transformation of the Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn into the Moreh ha-Nevukhim* (2007), *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza* (2012), and *Teaching Plato in Palestine: Philosophy in a Divided World* (2015). He also writes for publications such as the *London Review of Books*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *New York Times*, and *Boston Review*. He says: "Sarah first introduced me to the intertwined intellectual worlds of medieval Islam and Judaism when I was an undergraduate student at the Hebrew University in the mid-1990s. I have admired her intellectual curiosity, moral graciousness, and courageous leadership ever since!"

Gil Gambash

Gil Gambash is a classical historian studying the ancient Mediterranean. Former chair of the Department of Maritime Civilizations and former director of the Recanati Institute for Maritime Studies, Gambash is now professor at the University of Haifa and the cofounder and director of the Haifa Center for Mediterranean History, which Sarah has supported and advised from the beginning. His current projects include a book on the maritime southern Levant and multidisciplinary research on arid areas and their interaction with the maritime sphere. Gambash was recently Leverhulme Visiting Professor at the Institute of Classical Studies at the School of Advanced Study, University of London.

Robert Gleave

Rob Gleave is professor of Arabic studies at the University of Exeter as well as a British Academy/Wolfson Professor (2023–2026). He is a member of Exeter's Centre for the Study of Islam (CSI) and was its director from 2011 until 2018. His

research interests include Islamic legal theory, particularly legal hermeneutics, and the history of Shīʿī legal thought and institutions. He is the author of *Islam and Literalism* (2011) and coeditor of *Shiʿite Legal Theory* (2023).

Miriam Goldstein

Miriam Goldstein was trained at Harvard, Cambridge, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and is professor in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the Hebrew University. A specialist in medieval Judeo-Arabic texts, she focuses on interreligious relations in the medieval Arabic-speaking world as well as Judeo-Arabic Bible exegesis. Her most recent book is *A Judeo-Arabic Parody of the Life of Jesus: The “Toledot Yeshu” Helene Narrative* (2023). Her work has been supported by the Israel Science Foundation, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the Minerva Stiftung, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, and the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development. She first met Sarah in the classroom at the Hebrew University in 2001 and has been a grateful recipient of Sarah’s wise guidance and mentorship from that time until the present. In 2001–2005, Miriam was employed in the Firkovitch cataloging project of the Center for the Study of Judeo-Arabic Literature and Culture at the Ben-Zvi Institute, codirected by Sarah.

Frank Griffel

Frank Griffel is the Louis M. Rabinowitz Professor of Religious Studies at Yale University. He has published widely in the fields of Islamic philosophy and theology as well as Muslim intellectual history. After working on apostasy in Islam and on the leading theologian and philosopher al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Griffel turned his interest toward the history of philosophy in Islam, particularly during the twelfth century and after. His most recent book *The Formation of the Post-Classical Period in Islam* (2021).

Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila

Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila received his PhD in 1994 (University of Helsinki) and is professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of Edinburgh. He has published extensively on classical Arabic and Persian literature and historiography. His recent monographs include *Al-Maqrīzī’s “al-Ḥabar ‘an al-baṣar”* (Vol. v, Section 4) *Persia and Its Kings* (2018 and 2022), *Khwadāynāmag: The Middle Persian Book of Kings* (2018), and *Portrait of an Eight-Century Gentleman: Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān (d. 135/752) in History and Literature* (2020).

Steven Harvey

Steven Harvey is professor emeritus of philosophy at Bar-Ilan University and president of the Commission for Jewish Philosophy of the Société internationale pour l'étude de la philosophie médiévale (SIEPM). He has published extensively on medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy, with a special focus on Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, and on the influence of the Islamic philosophers on Jewish thought. His recent coedited volume, *The Popularization of Philosophy in Medieval Islam, Judaism, and Christianity* (2022), features an important chapter by Professor Stroumsa.

Warren Zev Harvey

Warren Zev Harvey is professor emeritus of Jewish thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the author of many studies on Jewish philosophy, including *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (1998). He is an EMET Prize laureate in the humanities (2009). He is Sarah's onetime teacher and long-time friend and colleague.

Meir Hatina

Meir Hatina is professor in the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies and the Jack and Alice Ormut Chair in Arabic Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His research focuses on the history of ideas and politics in the modern Middle East from a comparative perspective, especially in relation to Western and Jewish thought. His publications include *Martyrdom in Modern Islam: Piety, Power and Politics* (2014) and *Arab Liberal Thought in the Modern Age* (2020). He is also the coeditor of *Martyrdom and Sacrifice in Islam: Theological, Political and Social Contexts* (2017, with M. Litvak).

Geoffrey Khan

Geoffrey Khan (PhD, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1984) is Regius Professor of Hebrew at the University of Cambridge. His research publications focus on three main fields: biblical Hebrew language (especially medieval traditions), Neo-Aramaic dialectology, and medieval Arabic documents. He is the general editor of *The Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (2013) and the senior editor of *Journal of Semitic Studies*. His recent publications include *The Tiberian Pronunciation Tradition of Biblical Hebrew* (2020) and *Performance of Sacred Semitic Texts* (2022, coedited with Hindy Najman). He says: "I first met Sarah in the 1980s when she visited the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit in Cambridge, where I was working at the time. Our conversation made a deep impression on me. Since then I have been following her research work, which has inspired me in many ways."

Gudrun Krämer

Gudrun Krämer is professor emerita of Islamic studies at Freie Universität Berlin and the former director of the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies. She is a member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council, and the executive editor of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam Three*, published by Brill. She has published widely on the history of the Middle East since the early modern period, Islamic reform, Islamic political thought and activism, and, more recently, Islamic responses to secularization and secularity.

Ehud Krinis

Ehud Krinis is a scholar of Medieval Judeo-Arabic thought. He is affiliated with the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He has published two books and several articles on Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* and its background in Shī'ī literature as well as other currents in the Islamicate world. Currently, he is working on a book dedicated to Bahya ibn Paquda's *Duties of the Heart* and the Islamic *zuhd* tradition. Sarah Stroumsa was one of the official readers of his dissertation back in 2008. Since then, he has greatly profited from her comments and suggestions on drafts of his studies.

Y. Tzvi Langermann

Y. Tzvi Langermann received his PhD in History of Science from Harvard, where he studied under A.I. Sabra and John Murdoch. For fifteen years he cataloged Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic texts in philosophy and science at the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem before joining the Department of Arabic at Bar Ilan University, from which he recently retired. His most recent books are a translation and study of a treatise by Ibn Kammūna, *Subtle Insights concerning Knowledge and Practice* (2019) and *In and around Maimonides: Original Essays* (2021). His latest book, *Before Maimonides: A New Philosophical Dialogue in Hebrew*, to be published by Brill, is now in final proofs. He says: "Sarah, my paper is a small testament to decades of collegiality and your well-deserved international recognition."

Daniel J. Lasker

Daniel J. Lasker is the Norbert Blechner Professor of Jewish Values (emeritus) at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva, and has also taught at Yale University, Princeton University, the University of Toronto, the University of Texas, and other institutions. He is the author of eight books and close to three hundred other publications in the fields of Jewish philosophy, especially the works of Judah Halevi; the Jewish-Christian debate and its philosophical

implications; and the thought and history of Karaism. His most recent book is *Karaism: An Introduction to the Oldest Surviving Alternative Judaism* (2022). Together with Professor Stroumsa, he published *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest* (2 vols., 1996), which contains Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew polemical texts with English translations.

Reimund Leicht

Reimund Leicht (PhD 2004, Freie Universität Berlin) is the Ethel Backenroth Senior Lecturer for Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His fields of research are medieval Jewish philosophy, ancient and medieval history of science, Christian Kabbalah (Johannes Reuchlin), and the history of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. He is (together with Giuseppe Veltri) the academic director of the long-term DFG research project “PESHAT in Context” on pre-modern scientific and philosophical Hebrew terminology (www.peshat.org). Among his publications are *Astrologumena Judaica* (2006) and *Verzeichnis der Hebraica in der Bibliothek Johannes Reuchlins* (with W. v. Abel, 2005), and he coedited with Giuseppe Veltri *Studies in the Formation of Hebrew Philosophical Terminology* (2020).

Gideon Libson

Gideon Libson, a professor of Jewish and Islamic law, held the Frieda and Solomon B. Rosenzweig Chair in Law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His research focuses on comparative Jewish-Islamic law and mutual influences between the two in the Middle Ages amid social exchanges between Jews and Muslims. Libson has received several prestigious accolades including the Herzog Prize, the Warburg Prize, the Lady Davis Fellowship, and the Goitein Prize. He led the HU Institute of Jewish Law and edited its *Annual of Jewish Law*. Libson has authored numerous works on Jewish, Islamic, and comparative law, including *Jewish and Islamic Law: A Comparative Study of Custom during the Geonic Period* (2003). He is currently working on a monograph entitled “Philosophy, Poetry, and Halacha through the Eyes of Maimonides” and holds a position at Safed College Law School. Libson’s relationship with Sarah began in 1980 when she became his first Arabic teacher. They have maintained a lasting friendship and professional connection, collaborating at conferences and during their respective tenures at the Hebrew University.

Menachem Lorberbaum

Menachem Lorberbaum is vice dean of the Humanities and professor of Jewish philosophy at Tel Aviv University. He was also a founding member of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, where he headed the Bet Midrash

program. He has recently published a study of Hassidism as a model of Jewish religious revitalization in early modernity, *Before Hassidism* (2022). He is the author of *Politics and the Limits of Law* (2001; Hebrew translation 2006) and *We Are Dazzled by His Beauty* (2011, in Hebrew). Together with Professors Michael Walzer of Princeton and Noam Zohar of Bar-Ilan he is a senior editor of Yale University Press's Jewish Political Tradition series (vol. 1, "Authority," 2000; vol. 2, "Membership," 2003; vol. 3, "Community," 2018). Like Professor Stroumsa, he has spent many wondrous years traversing the allies of the Mediterranean society caught betwixt and between Hebrew and Arabic, then and now.

Maria Mavroudi

Maria Mavroudi is professor in the departments of History, Classics, and Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research was recognized with a MacArthur Fellowship in 2002 and highlights the reception of Arabic literary culture in Byzantium and the reception of Byzantine literary culture in the East and the West during the medieval and early modern periods. This begs reconsidering the position of the ancient Greek classics within the Byzantine, Arabic, and Latin intellectual traditions, as well as the supposed marginality of Byzantium within a broader medieval intellectual universe. Sarah Stroumsa has been her interlocutor on religion, philosophy, and modern politics for more than fifteen years.

Jon McGinnis

Jon McGinnis is professor of classical and medieval philosophy at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. His general research interest is in the history of natural philosophy within the Aristotelian tradition of the Greek-, Arabic-, and Latin-speaking worlds. In addition to numerous articles, he is the author of *Avicenna* (2010), the translator and editor of Avicenna's *Physics* from his encyclopedic work *The Healing* (2009), and the cotranslator, with David C. Reisman, of *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources* (2007).

Omer Michaelis

Omer Michaelis is an associate professor at Tel Aviv University's Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud. Specializing in medieval Jewish thought and philosophy in the Islamic world, he focuses on the dynamics of the production, transmission, and integration of knowledge in medieval Judaism and their intersection with parallel processes in Islamic culture. He has published two monographs, *Crisis Discourse and the Dynamics of Tradition in Maimonides' Oeuvre* (2024) and *Interiority and Law: Bahya ibn Paquda and the Concept of Inner Commandments* (2023).

Yonatan Moss

Yonatan Moss (PhD Yale University, 2013) holds the Leeds Senior Lectureship in Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and serves as the director of the Brenninkmeijer-Werhahn Center for the Study of Christianity. He works on the histories and comparative study of the Abrahamic religions, and on the relations between them. He is the author of *Incorruptible Bodies: Christology, Society and Authority in Late Antiquity* (2016) and a wide range of articles on the Abrahamic religions in the Mediterranean basin (and beyond) during the first millennium (and beyond).

David Nirenberg

David Nirenberg is the tenth director and Leon Levy Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Prior to his appointment at IAS, he was the Deborah R. and Edgar D. Jannotta Distinguished Service Professor of Social Thought, History, Divinity, and Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Chicago, where he also served as the founding director of the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society (2011–2014), dean of the Social Sciences (2014–2017), executive vice provost (2017–2018), and dean of the Divinity School (2018–2022). Nirenberg is a historian of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in medieval Europe and the Mediterranean. His work explores the history of ideas, particularly medieval ideas about communication, exchange, and social relations, as well as ideas of race and racism.

Sari Nusseibeh

A longtime admiring friend of Sarah Stroumsa, Sari Nusseibeh has taught courses on philosophy in Islam mainly at the universities of Birzeit and Al-Quds in Palestine. Sarah graciously addressed his graduate students in one of his seminars at Al-Quds. His publications include *The Story of Reason in Islam* (2016) and *Avicenna's "Al-Shifa"* (2018).

Olaf Pluta

Olaf Pluta's first meeting with Sarah Stroumsa took place in 1995 during a conference on atheism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance at the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel, where she read a paper entitled "The Religion of the Freethinkers of Medieval Islam." Like her, he is interested in the heterodox thinkers of the Middle Ages. Having published extensively on the Latin commentary tradition of Aristotle's *De anima*, he has also written on the late medieval zeitgeist analysis "On the Actual State of the World" (*De statu mundi actuali*), in which we first encounter Nietzsche's slogan "God is dead!" (*Deus est mortuus*).

Meira Polliack

Meira Polliack is professor of the Bible at Tel Aviv University. From 2012 to 2018, she was one of the principal investigators of the international research project “Biblia Arabica: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims.” She is the author of *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation* (1997), *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (2001, with Colin F. Baker), *Yefet Ben Eli’s Commentary on Hosea* (2009, with Eliezer Schlossberg), and *Yefet Ben Eli’s Commentary on the Book of Zephaniah* (2020, with Eliezer Schlossberg). The books she has edited include *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources* (2003) and *Jewish Biblical Exegesis from Islamic Lands: The Medieval Period* (2019, with Athalya Brenner-Idan). She says: “I always remember how Sarah welcomed me with a bright smile to sit in her room when I was a postdoc at the Hebrew University. Her wide-ranging cultural and literary contextualization of Arabic and Judeo-Arabic sources is a source of inspiration to many scholars in the field.”

James T. Robinson

James Theodore Robinson is the Caroline E. Haskell Professor of the History of Judaism, Islamic Studies, and the History of Religions in the University of Chicago Divinity School. He is the author, editor, or coeditor of seven books and dozens of articles focused on medieval Jewish philosophy, philosophical exegesis, and literature, ranging from the Karaites and Rabbanites in the tenth century to Maimonides and the Maimonidean tradition from the twelfth to the fifteenth.

Marina Rustow

Marina Rustow is the Khedouri A. Zilkha Professor of Jewish Civilization in the Near East and professor of Near Eastern studies and history at Princeton University. A social historian of the medieval Middle East and a 2015 MacArthur Fellow, she directs the Princeton Geniza Lab. Her published works include *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (2008) and the 2022 Haskins Medal recipient *The Lost Archive: Traces of a Caliphate in a Medieval Synagogue* (2020).

Sabine Schmidtke

Sabine Schmidtke is professor of Islamic intellectual history in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. Her research interests include Shī‘ism, the intersections of Jewish and Muslim intellectual history, the Arabic Bible, the history of Orientalism and the Science of Judaism, and the history of the book and libraries in the Islamicate world. Her

recent publications include *The Beginnings of Shi'i Studies in Germany: Rudolf Strothmann and His Correspondence with Carl Heinrich Becker, Ignaz Goldziher, Eugenio Griffini, and Cornelis van Arendonk, 1910 through 1926* (2023), *Al-Šarīf al-Murtaḍā's Oeuvre and Thought in Context: An Archaeological Inquiry into Texts and Their Transmission* (2022, with Hassan Ansari), *Muslim Perceptions and Receptions of the Bible: Texts and Studies* (2019, with Camilla Adang), and *Traditional Yemeni Scholarship amidst Political Turmoil and War: Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. al-Muṭahhar al-Manṣūr (1915–2016) and His Personal Library* (2018).

Gregor Schwarb

Gregor Schwarb is a senior research associate in the ERC Consolidator Grant project MAJLIS (PI Professor Ronny Vollandt) at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. His research interests and scholarly publications (lmu-munich.academia.edu/GregorSchwarb) center on the history of transdenominational intellectual thought in the premodern Islamicate world, notably traditions of *kalām* among Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Samaritan thinkers; the Mu'tazila; Zaydism; Karaite Judaism; Jewish and Samaritan Bible translations and hermeneutics; Copto-Arabic literature; the Firkovitch Collections; Arabic and Hebrew manuscript studies; digital codicology and palaeography; and Handwritten Text Recognition. He says: "I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to study with and learn from Sarah on many occasions. The standard of her research as well as her generous and engaging commitment to students and junior and senior colleagues will continue to serve me and many others as a shining example and stands in stark contrast to the self-absorbed and appropriating disposition of certain scholars that I had to deal with in some corners of Teutonic academia."

Mark Silk

Mark Silk is professor emeritus of religion in public life at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. Although most of his recent scholarship has focused on religion in America, he has continued to pursue an interest in Western intellectual history, writing such articles as "Numa Pompilius and the Idea of Civil Religion in the West," "John of Salisbury and the Civic Utility of Religion," and "The Abrahamic Religions as a Modern Concept." He and his wife Tema have been friends with Sarah and Guy since the then newly married couple arrived in Cambridge, MA, in January 1974.

Uriel Simonsohn

Uriel Simonsohn is senior lecturer in the Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at the University of Haifa. He specializes in the social intersections of diverse religious communities in the medieval Islamic world, whether through human agency or institutional arrangements. He is the author of *A Common Justice: The Legal Allegiances of Christians and Jews under Early Islam* (2011) and of *Female Power and Religious Change in the Medieval Near East* (2023). He has known Sarah for almost two decades and sees her as both a colleague and a mentor.

Josef Stern

Josef Stern is the William H. Colvin Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus) at the University of Chicago. His research interests span contemporary philosophy of language and medieval Jewish and Arabic philosophy, especially topics in epistemology, metaphysics, logic, and language. Among his publications are *Metaphor in Context* (2000), *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide* (2013; awarded the 2014 prize for the best book in 2013 on the history of philosophy by the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* and translated into Hebrew as *Ha-homer ve-ha-tzurah be-Moreh Nevukhim le-RaMBaM* in 2017), and *Quotations as Pictures* (2023).

Guy G. Stroumsa

Guy G. Stroumsa is Martin Buber Professor Emeritus of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and professor emeritus of the study of the Abrahamic religions at the University of Oxford. He is a member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and holds an honorary doctorate from the University of Zurich. He has received the Humboldt Research Award, the Leopold-Lucas Prize (together with Sarah Stroumsa), and the Rothschild Prize. His publications include *The Idea of Semitic Monotheism: The Rise and Fall of a Scholarly Myth* (2021).

Sara Sviri

Sara Sviri is professor emerita in the Department of Arabic and the Department of Comparative Religions at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and formerly belonged to the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London and to the University of Oxford. She has studied Islamic mysticism, medieval Jewish mysticism, comparative aspects of early Islam, and the mystical wisdom of Ibn 'Arabī. Her books include *The Taste of Hidden Things: Images on the Sufi Path* (1997), *Sufi Anthology* (2008, in Hebrew; Arabic translation 2016), and *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism: The World of al-Hakim*

al-Tirmidhi and His Contemporaries (2020). In 2009, a paper on Ibn Masarra, which was the outcome of several years' collaboration with Professor Sarah Stroumsa, was published in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*. This was a remarkable collaboration that saw the growth of their acquaintance with one another and with the emergence of Andalusī mysticism.

Alexander Treiger

Alexander Treiger (PhD Yale University, 2008) is professor of religious studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. His interests include Arabic and Syriac Christianity, Greco-Arabic studies, and Islamic philosophy, theology, and mysticism. He is the author of *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation* (2012) and the coeditor of *Patristic Literature in Arabic Translations* (2020). He was Professor Sarah Stroumsa's student in 1996–2001; his Master's thesis on the Arabic translations of Dionysius the Areopagite (published in *Le Muséon* in 2005 and 2007) was written under her supervision.

Roy Viložny

Roy Viložny is an Arabist studying the history of ideas with a specialization in Shī'ī intellectual history and religious thought from the ninth century CE until the end of the Safavid era (1501–1722 CE), currently working as senior lecturer in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Haifa. His research is based on close, critical reading of works produced by Muslim scholars during this period and their analysis and juxtaposition with the changing sociohistorical circumstances and intellectual climate. His recent publications include *Constructing a Worldview: Al-Barqī's Role in the Making of Early Shī'ī Faith* (2017).

Ronny Vollandt

Ronny Vollandt is professor of Judaic studies at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. His teaching focuses on rabbinic Judaism and on the intellectual history of Jews in the Islamic world. He researches Arabic versions of the Bible, Judeo-Arabic literature, and the Jewish cultural heritage, above all manuscripts, in the Near East. He is the author of *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch: A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Sources* (2015, awarded the Boehlig Prize in 2017).

Elvira Wakelnig

Elvira Wakelnig is assistant professor of Arabic philosophy in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Vienna. Her main research interests

are the history of philosophy, medicine, and the sciences in the world of Islam, the history of texts, and the transmission of Greek scientific literature into Arabic. Among her publications are *Feder, Tafel, Mensch: Al-ʿĀmirīs “Kitāb al-Fuṣūl fī l-maʿālim al-ilāhīya” und die arabische Proklos-Rezeption im 10. Jh.* (2006), *A Philosophy Reader from the Circle of Miskawayh* (2014), and “Translation as Interpretation: Translating Galen’s Polysemous Term *Physis* into Arabic,” in *Medieval Worlds* (2020).

Paul E. Walker

Paul E. Walker (PhD University of Chicago, 1974), is the deputy director for academic programs at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago and has published dozens of papers and seventeen books, among them *Early Philosophical Shiism* (1993), *Exploring an Islamic Empire* (2002), *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs* (2009), *Caliph of Cairo: Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, 996–1021* (2009), *Affirming the Imamate* (2021, with W. Madelung), and, most recently, *The Fatimids: Select Papers on Their Governing Institutions, Social and Cultural Organization, Religious Appeal, and Rivalries* (2023). His research focuses on popular ritual, governing institutions, and Ismāʿīlī doctrine in the Fatimid period.

David J. Wasserstein

David J. Wasserstein read classics and Oriental studies at Oxford. He taught at University College, Dublin, before coming to Tel Aviv University, where he served as professor of Islamic history until 2004, when he moved to Vanderbilt University as professor of history and the Eugene Greener, Jr., Professor of Jewish Studies. He has written extensively on Islamic Spain, Jews in the Islamic world, Islamic numismatics, the Septuagint, and the Islamic State. Currently he is working on the Bible.

Tanja Werthmann

Tanja Werthmann is lecturer in the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She specializes in medieval Jewish philosophy and mysticism against the background of Greek and Arabic thought.

Dong Xiuyuan

Dong Xiuyuan is professor of Jewish and Arabic philosophy at the Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies, Qingdao Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shandong University. His publications include Chinese translations of Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah: Sefer ha-Madda* (2022) and of al-Fārābī’s *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* (2016), as well as 《迈蒙尼德宇宙生成论思想研究》 (A study

of Maimonides's cosmogony, 2022). Professor Sarah Stroumsa has been his mentor ever since he started to pursue the study of Judeo-Arabic philosophical literature as a PhD student (Shandong University, 2010–2014) and then as a postdoctoral scholar (Bar-Ilan University, 2015–2016).

Arye Zoref

Arye Zoref (PhD Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2013) specializes in Judeo-Arabic and interreligious discussions and was until recently a research fellow in the Department of Biblical Studies, Tel Aviv University. His publications include “David the Prophet in Sa’adya Gaon’s Commentary on Psalms and Its Syriac and Karaite Contexts,” in M. Zawanowska and M. Wilk (eds.), *The Character of David in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. (2021), and “Sa’adia Gaon’s Commentary on Exodus 32:1–6: Why Did Aaron Agree to Build the Golden Calf?,” in M. Polliack and A. Brenner-Idan (eds.), *Jewish Biblical Exegesis from Islamic Lands: The Medieval Period 1*, ed. (2019).

Questioning ... Sarah Stroumsa

Sabine Schmidtke

Sarah Stroumsa, born in 1950, is one of the most influential experts in the field of philosophy and religious thought in the Islamicate world of the Middle Ages.¹ She is especially known for her interdisciplinary approach to the study of the intellectual history of Islam, taking into account the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian perspectives and their common intellectual history. Sarah Stroumsa studied Arabic language and literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She also studied at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. Since 2003, she is The Alice and Jack Ormut Professor (now Emerita) of Arabic Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She served as the Vice-Rector of the Hebrew University from 2003 until 2006, and from 2008 to 2012 she was the Rector of the Hebrew University, the first woman to hold this position. Sarah Stroumsa has taught and conducted research at various universities and institutions in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Being a prolific writer, she is the author of numerous books and articles. Among her books are *Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammaṣ's Twenty Chapters (Ishrūn Maqāla)*, originally published by Brill in 1989, re-edited and published by the University of Chicago Press in 2016; *Free-thinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rawāndī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and Their Impact on Islamic Thought*, published by Brill in 1999; and *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*, published by Princeton University Press in 2009. In her latest book, entitled *Andalus and Sefarad: On Philosophy and its History in Islamic Spain* (Princeton University Press, 2020), Stroumsa focuses on the Iberian Peninsula under Islam in the Middle Ages. Turning her scholarly insight into higher education in the contemporary political context, Sarah Stroumsa has also been engaged in bringing Israeli, Palestinian, and German students together by initiating, together with her friends and colleagues Sari Nusseibeh and Sabine Schmidtke, the MA program *Intellectual Encounters of the Islamicate World* (2013–2019). The program was anchored at the Freie Universität Berlin, which cooperated with The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, on the one hand, and with Al-Quds University on the other. Sarah Stroumsa is a member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, and the Israel Academy of Sciences

1 This interview originally appeared in *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 21 (2018), pp. 183–203. DOI:10.1075/bpjam.00026.sch. Reprinted, with slight adaptations, with permission.

and Humanities. She is a laureate of the Humboldt Research Award, and of the Italian Order of Merit. Together with Professor Guy Stroumsa, she is the recipient of the Leopold Lucas Prize for 2018. Sarah Stroumsa is also (since 2021) a member of the American Philosophical Society, and president of The Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies (since 2022). The interview was conceived and conducted by Sabine Schmidtke, Professor of Islamic Intellectual History at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey, and was recorded at Princeton on 8 October 2017.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *Sarah, you were born and raised in Haifa where Arthur Biram, who himself was one of the representatives of the Science of Judaism and was trained in both Jewish and Islamic studies, in 1913 founded the famous Reali School. What prompted you to go into studying Arabic and to embark on the study of the intellectual history of Jews and Muslims and, in fact, Christians?*

These are actually three different questions. I was born near Haifa, not in it, and I did not go to the Reali. I lived near Haifa in a small neighborhood called Qiryat Bialik, which was founded by German Jews, and Arabic was not on the horizon there, certainly not on my horizon as a child. When I reached the age of high school, we moved to Jerusalem, so I did not go to the Reali, but to a high school in Jerusalem called the “near (next to) the university” high school (nicknamed “Leyada”). It was not connected to the university, although that was its name. But your question is correct nonetheless. If I try to think where my academic interest begins, it begins at home, and it begins in high school. I think the interest in Judaism, in literature, in philosophical thought, and in particular in Jewish thought, came from home. My parents loved to talk about things. Neither of them was an academic or an historian; my father was an engineer, but he loved reading, he loved studying, and he loved to discuss things. And then, when I entered high school, I had several amazing teachers. I had one teacher who taught a class in Jewish philosophy and in philosophy. As 15-year olds, we read some Plato, and some Maimonides and some Zohar—and I loved it. To have an inspiring teacher at that age, who makes you realize the depths of thought and allows you to experience the interest in it with the immediacy of personal mentoring—it forms you for life. We read Maimonides in Hebrew, and this teacher, who did not know Arabic, told us: “You know that Maimonides wrote in Arabic, you should study Arabic.” I therefore opted for Arabic as a second foreign language, but there were not enough students that year to open a class, so I didn’t learn Arabic, I learned French instead. Somewhere the interest remained, and when I was about to enter the university after finishing my military service, I was not sure what I wanted to do. I con-

sidered history, philosophy, and Jewish philosophy, and enrolled in all three, hoping to be able to decide when the time comes. I had three free months that summer. In the mornings I had an odd job, and I found out that in the afternoon, there was a summer course in Arabic at the Hebrew University. And I remember thinking: If you don't do it now, you will regret it when you are older. I thus took a summer course in modern Arabic, and by the end of that summer course, I knew that this is what I wanted to do. I did not have enough Arabic to enter the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, so I started with modern Islamic history, Middle Eastern history, and then a year later I added to it a major in Arabic. During my undergraduate studies, I did not connect it in any way either to Jewish studies or to Christian studies. I studied only modern Middle Eastern history and whatever was an obligatory part of studying in the Department of Arabic. But when I started my PhD, which is a different story, I worked on a Jewish text. And then the love for medieval Judeo-Arabic thought came back. But that is a long story.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *Part of that you already said, but during your studies, at the Hebrew University, and also at the EPHE in Paris, and at Harvard later on, you were exposed to a wide spectrum of teachers and academic environments. Could you explain in some detail who among your teachers influenced you most and how you experienced the different academic environments in Israel, in France, and in the United States at the time?*

This is a hard question because of the word “most”: I can think of quite a few people who were responsible for triggering my interest. I mentioned my high school teacher, Ya‘aqov Meir. When I finished my BA, I loved a few things in my studies, but I didn’t intend to continue in an academic career; I intended to continue studying, but not as an academic career. And then we went to Paris for a year and I wanted to study with Paul Nwyia, to work with him on the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, the *Stories of the Prophets*. It turned out that Paul Nwyia’s class was held late on Friday night. As an observant Jew, I was unable to take this course, so I talked to him and he said: “Well, here are the other courses that you can take; you can write your thesis with me but take another course.” There was a course given by Daniel Gimaret on Islamic theology, and at the Hebrew University I had already taken a course with Haggai Ben-Shammai, reading texts of Muslim theology, and I loved it. So, I said: “Okay, I will attend Gimaret’s course and I will write my thesis with Nwyia.” The two of them got along very well with each other, and they were both amazingly helpful and encouraging.

At the time, I had very little idea of what I wanted to do. I had a little baby, so I had little time to do anything. Both Gimaret and Nwyia were extremely

helpful, and I remember that after each conversation with one of them I would come home, my head exploding with new ideas. I remember that I had difficulty finding books in Paris, because the libraries are spread all over the city; and as I said, I had a baby, my husband was also a busy graduate student, and I did not have the possibility to go and collect the dispersed books. Gimaret, however, realized it and he said: "No problem, I have my library, you can use it." He opened his own private library for me, and he also sat with me, showing me how to use the books. You do not forget such a generous behavior; and you do not forget anything you learnt this way.

Then we spent a few years in the United States. My husband was a graduate student at Harvard. I was not registered as a student, but I audited courses. I remember vividly the courses of Oleg Grabar, and how ignorant I felt in every class. There was also a course I audited with Annemarie Schimmel, and another one, reading Quran commentaries with Ilse Lichtenstadter. When we came back home to Israel, I did not intend to go to the university, I started working as a research assistant in a project at the Ben Zvi Institute. Shaul Shaked had thought of reviewing Moritz Steinschneider's book on Judeo-Arabic literature. I started working there, and I came across the name of a philosopher of whom I had never heard before: Dāwūd al-Muqammaṣ. Steinschneider says about him: "The first Jewish philosopher." I thought, "The first, and I have never heard his name???" At the end of the entry, Steinschneider mentions that there is a modern copy of al-Muqammaṣ's book, made by Avraham Shalom Yahuda, so I started looking for it, and it turned out that it was in New York. I almost gave it up, but then someone said: "The copy in New York was kept by Moshe Zucker, and Moshe Zucker gave it to Abraham Halkin. All that is left of the modern copy is one half, but Abraham Halkin has it and he will give it to you." I got this modern copy, went to Haggai Ben-Shammai and said: "I want to write a Master's thesis on this," and he answered: "That's material for a PhD," which is how I started. Parallel to that—I was already registered as a Master's student—I took a course with Shlomo Pines. Although I mention him last, he is probably the one who is the most influential of all. He was not my PhD advisor (Haggai Ben-Shammai was), but the conversations with him were ..., I cannot even say "inspiring," it does not begin to explain the impact of these conversations. Every time you asked a question, his answer would be something that you did not expect. He behaved as someone who didn't know the difference between university departments, it didn't interest him. He knew the relevant languages, and he just saw a huge world of what we would today call "networks of intellectuals," and he followed them. This approach was something that fascinated me. So, you see, if you ask for the person who was most important as a teacher, it is very difficult to say, but I think that as a young person, you see people doing different things and it's all interesting.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *Speaking of your dissertation, which you completed in 1984 and which was then published in 1989 by Brill, and which, as you mentioned, is devoted to the earliest theological summa by a Jewish theologian and philosopher writing in Arabic, Dāwūd b. Marwān al-Muqammaṣ, this text was recently republished in 2017, one of the principal differences being that the edited Arabic text is now rendered in Arabic characters instead of Hebrew characters as was the case in 1984/1989. Could you explain in some more detail how you became interested in this remarkable work in the first place, and how your views changed over the decades on how best to present the literary oeuvres of Jewish authors writing in Arabic to the scholarly audience, on the basis of this case?*

I described already the serendipity of finding the modern copy of Muqammaṣ's manuscript, but one can see a manuscript without becoming interested in it. The reason it fascinated me was particularly al-Muqammaṣ's interest in heresiography. He was a Jew who converted to Christianity and then returned to Judaism. Apparently, he traveled a lot with his teacher Nonnus of Nisibis, he met Christians, did not agree with them but knew (or thought he knew) what they thought; he met Muslims, he met Indians, and he read about Sabians. The puzzle of different religions interested him—and it interests me. This was what really caught my attention.

Most Rabbanite Jews who wrote in Arabic in the Middle Ages wrote Arabic in Hebrew characters. Muqammaṣ was the earliest Judeo-Arabic thinker in many ways; he, however, clearly wrote in Arabic characters, perhaps because that was easier for him, or perhaps because of his intended audience. There are very few marks of his Judaism in this text, perhaps he intended the book for a broader audience. Whatever the reason may have been, he wrote it in Arabic characters, but all the manuscripts we have are in Hebrew characters. When I wrote my dissertation, I discussed it with my supervisor Ben-Shammai and with Joshua Blau, who was regarded then as today as “the dean of Judeo-Arabic studies,” and I remember Blau saying to me: “You don't touch a manuscript! If you don't have an Arabic manuscript [in Arabic characters], how can you invent one?” So I published the text as it was, in Hebrew characters, and I must admit that I was happy with it.

But then, I remember a review that Daniel Gimaret wrote shortly afterwards. It was a rather complimentary review, but at the end of the review he said: “But why is it in Hebrew characters? You can't really expect us to read Hebrew!” At first I thought: “Why not? I can. Scholars are learning so many foreign languages, they can learn twenty-two more letters and read Judeo-Arabic ...” But as the years passed, I realized that by publishing this text in Hebrew characters I made it inaccessible to its natural scholarly audience. It was as if I just put a

sign on it, saying that it should not interest Islamic scholars; this is only for Jews and for people interested in Jewish history. Muqammaṣ, however, is not only the earliest Jewish theologian, he is also one of the earliest theologians of any religion whose writings in Arabic we have. He is, for example, an enormously important source for Christian Arabic theology. But by publishing his work in Hebrew characters, I closed the door to people for whom this text should be relevant. Which is why (I should add, with your encouragement, Sabine) I decided to publish it in Arabic letters. This was not a simple decision because, as I have said, I had to invent the manuscript. The new published edition is probably an eyesore for people who are used to classical Arabic, because this is middle Arabic. It is probably also an eyesore for people who are used to the conventions of publishing Judeo-Arabic texts. I hope, however, that it makes the content of this text, an important link between cultures in a formative period, available to people who can now use it.

After the new edition was published, a dear friend and colleague, Sari Nus-seibeh, saw it and invited me to speak to his students at Al-Quds University. We had a two-hour discussion of this text, after they had read two chapters. The ability to discuss it with young researchers and students for whom Hebrew and Judaism are in many ways beyond the horizon—I believe that this justifies the publication.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *If one were to define a red thread running through your scholarly oeuvre, it is certainly your remarkable ability and readiness to analyze intellectual history beyond denominational borders. Dāwūd al-Muqammaṣ was already a good example in that he was born, as you mentioned before, as a Jew, then converted to Christianity, and eventually returned to Judaism, writing his 'Ishrūn maqāla, that you have published, a theological summa in which he also polemicizes against Christianity. Now, in one of your remarkable publications, you spoke about the 'whirlpool' effect to describe the intellectual interactions that characterized Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies over many centuries. Your monograph on Moses Maimonides is another excellent example of this approach and so is your current book project devoted to philosophy in Islamic Spain. So, could you elaborate on both your approach that you exemplified in your book on Maimonides and perhaps also give some glimpses into your forthcoming book on philosophy among Jews and Muslims in Islamic Spain?*²

2 Sarah Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad: On Philosophy and Its History in Islamic Spain* (Princeton University Press 2020).

I think in modern academia the word ‘influence’ is frowned upon, and it is not well viewed to look for ‘influences.’ Well, I, for one, do not mind using the word ‘influence’: I think it is actually the appropriate term, in the sense that it does not indicate hard, material connections, but, like rays of light that shine upon objects, it captures the influx of the light that leaves its mark.

In studying the medieval intellectual world, the search for influences cannot be avoided. I do not romanticize the society of the Middle Ages. It was a premodern society, segregated in many ways, and tolerance was not among its ideals. But it was a functioning society, where intellectuals could look for what interested them. Intellectuals—philosophers, but also theologians, poets, and certainly scientists—strove to understand the world as they saw it, and they also looked for teachers who could help them understand. Many of them did not refuse the teaching of a person who belonged to another religion. They were not always friends, sometimes they were just colleagues and at times not even that; occasionally they just exchanged books. What we would call a network sometimes amounted only to occasional meetings—and yet, we can see knowledge and ideas moving around between the different communities.

It was not just by mistake that they came across these ideas, they were really hunting for them. We hear about a bookdealer like Ibn al-Nadim getting a manuscript that he was about to sell, and sitting all night copying it. He wanted to own that book, and he did not check beforehand if it had the *imprimatur*, if he was allowed to read it, if it was, so to speak, a *kosher* book or not—he just read it. Especially among philosophers, there was also an ideological concern, a conviction that truth transcends religious borders. Some of them said it plainly, others formulated it in a different way, but the sentiment was that truth is one and the same. Those philosophers lived in a religious society, and they do not always tell us where they got their information or their ideas. Because they lived in a religious society, with censorship, sometimes they do not even tell us plainly what they themselves think, they just give us hints. But if we want to get a full picture (or as full a picture as possible) of what they think and of their intellectual biography, we must assume a very broad ‘hunting ground’ and try to imagine it. People heard that a neighbor in the other street had a book, say, by Ptolemy, and they borrowed it. If they were not sure if they could understand it, they sat with the neighbor and read it together. One person went to the mosque, the other to church, and the third to the synagogue; they may even have written polemical works against each other, but as philosophers, they had some points of meeting.

If I go back to the question of influence: for the historian, it is very nice when a medieval philosopher says explicitly: “I studied this with X,” and then we can be sure that we have the correct information. More often, however, they do not

tell us of a direct influence. Nevertheless, we can sometimes follow the idea as it moves, for instance, from a Christian to a Muslim, and then to a Jew; and then another Christian, a generation later, gets it, through the back door, as it were, from another Jew. This circular movement, which sometimes goes back and forth, is what I tried to describe by the metaphor of the 'whirlpool.' Sometimes, we cannot really say if it is a Christian idea or a Jewish idea; there are some elements that are obviously more in line with Christian theology, others are more in line with Muslim theology—the fabric of ideas is very complex.

As I read the texts, I love seeing the fingerprints of the different people who read it. Think about a person like Maimonides, who tells us that he read everything that he could find and who lists also the things that he would have liked to have read but did not. It is very clear that the books and ideas that were circulating in his time were meaningful to him. He chose what to accept 'after' reading, not 'before' reading. He encouraged his students to go and read. He does not say: "This is beyond the pale; you don't read this book." But he does say: "You read it only when you're ready." The expectation was that one follows a training as a preparation for higher levels, but when you're ready, you read the relevant book and you reflect about its content. And you do so with an open mind.

My latest project focuses on al-Andalus, or Islamic Spain, which for various reasons can function as a good example of how I believe things worked in the medieval Islamic world. The territory of the Iberian Peninsula, as a peninsula, is defined by natural borders, a fact that seems to have encouraged the development of a pronounced local patriotism. One can see the interconnections between intellectuals—Jews, Christians and Muslims—within these territorial parameters, which is what I am trying to do. I am not working on al-Andalus because it is different from other places; I do not believe that it is inherently different. Regarding al-Andalus, scholars speak about the religious *convivencia* during the Middle Ages (a topic which deserves a separate conversation). I don't deny the existence of such *convivencia*, but parallel to working on Islamic Spain, I am also working on what I call "Oriental *Convivencia*." The same kind of wonderful culture, nourished by religious interconnections, existed in the area that was recently taken over by ISIS, an area that is now synonymous with bigotry, where the names of cities like Mosul, Raqqa, and Aleppo are associated today with such tragic events. When one reads Oriental texts of the Middle Ages, they shine just like texts from medieval Cordoba, with the same kind of *convivencia* among intellectuals. At the moment I have these two projects, where I try to see how ideas, books, interests, and students were shared between people of different religious communities.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *In addition to everything we discussed so far, you also contributed to fields which may be primarily defined as pertinent to Islamic Studies, for example, your remarkable work on the early history of the Mu'tazila that was published in 1990, or your monograph on freethinkers during the early centuries of Islam, published in 1999. How was your scholarship received among hard-core Islamicists? And the same for your scholarship on purely Jewish topics?*

I am really not the one that should be asked. The honest answer is that I do not know. In the life sciences or in the exact sciences, people speak of impact factor and they expect to see the impact shortly after something is published. In the humanities, however, even when there is an impact, it may take a very long time to manifest itself: because people work on their own field, because it takes time for a person to look into what somebody else is doing. So, the process of showing—and of seeing—impact is in general slower in the humanities. There are some cases in the humanities where a book immediately makes an impact: sometimes, these are really books or articles that make paradigm changes; at other times, these are books or works that introduce a new fashion. Rather than seeking the immediate impact, what I look for in the works of others is what remains after 20 years, not the immediate impact. But if you mention my works that have been published 20 years ago and ask me: “Did they make an impact?”—I really don't know. I do not see them cited very often. I think the fact that I do not remain within one department or niche ... Well, I do not want to put a value judgment on that, but it is a fact that I am not easily identifiable. I think this affects the impact it makes. But you mentioned the book on the freethinkers, and this book was translated into Indonesian more than 10 years ago; it made me very happy. I was recently addressed by young people from Turkey who want to translate it into Turkish, and this too is an impact that makes me very happy.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *Do you want to add anything about the reception of your scholarship on Jewish studies?*

I think it is the same, the reaction is the same. If I look at my book on Maimonides, this book puts a heavy weight on the fact that Maimonides wrote in the Islamic world and, while being a Jew rooted in Jewish culture, was part of the Islamic culture; the two cultures in his work cannot be separated. This presentation is not everybody's cup of tea. There are a lot of publications on Maimonides all the time, and I see publications that have appeared since the appearance of my book that do not mention it at all. I also see publications on Maimonides that do not mention the fact that he wrote in Arabic at all;

one would think that *The Guide of the Perplexed* could have been written in Lithuanian or in Hebrew ... As I say, I do what I think can be justifiable, that is the only way I know how to do things. But it comes with the knowledge that it's not to everybody's liking.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *Now, between 2002 through 2008, you were team leader of the research team Philosophy, Theology and Polemics within The Friedberg Genizah Project. Could you elaborate on where Genizah studies stands right now and outline some of the desiderata of this field for the future, I mean sort of "Quo vadis Genizah studies"?*

Well, let me start from the end of your question. I think, if you had asked me the question two years ago, I probably would have given a less optimistic answer than now. Things change very quickly. The idea behind the *Friedberg Project* was to put the *Genizah* online in an accessible way, so that it will not remain the domain of a few experts. To some extent it worked, but on the other hand it was not ambitious enough, because after all the *Genizah*—that is to say, what we call the *Cairo Genizah*, the *Ben-Ezra Genizah*—includes mostly fragments. Putting them online is a good way to get people to look at them and to see what they are, but this is not enough to enable us to reconstitute the library, the whole intellectual world, that went into the *Genizah*. You see a fragment and it is sometimes very moving; it is very exciting to recognize a fragment of a lost book, but sometimes the book remains lost. There are many other collections in the former Soviet Union, like the Firkovitch collection, which include full manuscripts, some of them manuscripts that can complement the fragments that we have in the *Genizah*. In order to reconstitute the intellectual world of the *Genizah* or to get a sense of what it was, we have to define *Genizah* studies in a much broader way.

Now, this is terribly ambitious; it takes many people working together, it takes a lot of funding, and it takes patience. It is not a project where we can say: "Okay, we have three years and the funding to put all the fragments online and that's it." That would be only the beginning. I think everyone understands that, I am not discovering anything new by saying it, but there are not enough people who are working on these materials with this broad ambition. In the last three years, however, I see more young people getting into the so-called *Genizah* studies. They define the *Genizah* broadly, they are curious to see the *Genizah* in its broader context. They know that the *Genizah* of Judeo-Arabic material must be connected to whatever treasure troves we find in the Great Mosque of Sanaa or in Damascus or in Qom, that this was one intellectual world that has to be put together. There is a Talmudic saying: "It is not your responsibility to finish

the job. At the same time, you are not free of the responsibility to do it.” One cannot say: “It’s not my responsibility.” One knows from the start that one will not be able to complete the ambitious plan, but that does not mean that one does not have to start. I find it very heartening to see young people, in Princeton, in Haifa, in Germany, getting into *Genizah* studies with the ambition to put it in its broader context. Wouldn’t you agree to that?

[Sabine Schmidtke] *Yes, especially what you said about the young generation and that the field is broadening: That is definitively fantastic.*

Much of your work was focused (and continues to be) on Islamic Spain, especially your work on Ibn Masarra, but also the interactions between Jewish and Muslim philosophers over the centuries. How did you get interested in this field? And where does the field stand right now? And how do you manage and evaluate the field and its very divergent players, especially in view of your own scholarly background which covers the Mashriq as well as the Maghrib and Islamic Spain?

When you say “the field”: What field do you mean?

[Sabine Schmidtke] *I think the background of my question (to explain a bit more) is my observation of the twentieth-century and twenty-first-century study of the intellectual history of al-Andalus or Islamic Spain—as far as I can see there is a significant group of scholars who only work on Islamic Spain. Most of the scholars who are engaged in this field never study anything that is happening in the Mashriq. Their exclusive focus on the Maghrib has implications on how they study things and on the outcome of their study. In addition, I also see the tendency (but again this goes back to something you said before) that the majority of scholars remain focused on one denominational group. You have started with Muqammas, who comes of course from the Mashriq, and my first question would be, what turned you toward studying Islamic Spain and not remaining in the Mashriq which is a big field for research; there is a lot to be done. But also as someone who has started studying the intellectual history of the Mashriq you go into the study of Islamic Spain and of course you are one of the leading experts now. Coming from this specific background, how would you describe the status quo of where the study of Islamic Spain and its intellectual history stands right now, both with respect to what is happening in the study of the Mashriq and to what is happening in the study of the Islamic world beyond denominational borders?*

Let me start with the personal aspect: I often feel, as I described concerning the manuscript of Muqammas, that things come my way, that I did not look for them. I first arrived in Spain only for a conference, but then—you tour, you

see things, people tell you things, and you get caught. So, there is a serendipity in finding something new, you try to understand what you see and then you dig a little deeper and finally you get caught. But, of course, this can happen only if you think that what you see and hear is relevant to you, that it is part of your field—which is why I asked how you define the field. I mean, it is not like in farming, where you mark a territory and this is your field and you don't go beyond it, although you can still see the trees on the other plot. I think everyone would agree that al-Andalus came under the influence (again that word!) and intellectual impact of the Orient, and *vice versa*. For example, Ibn 'Arabī is an Andalusian, but he wrote his biggest work, the *Meccan Illuminations* (*al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*), in Damascus and Mecca. The medieval Islamic world was one interconnected intellectual world.

My first inclination to study Spain may have been precisely 'because' I had been working on the Orient, not in spite of it. At some point, I felt that it was too embarrassing that I knew nothing about the Islamic West, and that it was time that I learnt something about it. I had a sabbatical, half of which I spent with a fellowship at Harvard, and I decided to study Spanish, I would go three times a week in the morning with my daughter to a Spanish undergraduate class. In the second half of the sabbatical, which was spent in Madrid at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), and with the help of the scholars there who are specialists of Islamic Spain, I realized that I knew nothing and that I wanted to learn, and they were willing to teach me. I was no longer a student at the time, but one of the wonderful things about being an academic is that you never say: "I've learnt enough, now it's only time for output." You must continue to study, and it is possible to do so. I remember opening books and not understanding them, and then asking Maribel Fierro or somebody else: "How do I continue from here? How do I do that?" Very generously, they helped me to get into this new field. But, of course, for me it is connected to whatever I did before, it just explains new things. As I learn new things, it throws new light on things that I have seen before. And the cross-denominational aspect of this world is inescapable. I do not know how to stress it enough: It is not I who choose the cross-denominational approach, it is the texts I read, they are cross-denominational.

I got interested in Ibn Masarra for the same reasons that I got interested in Muqammaṣ, because he is a first: the first Andalusian philosopher known to us. He was not much studied, and I wanted to see the beginnings of Andalusian philosophy. I started reading Ibn Masarra and what jumped to my eyes was the fact that he is using expressions that would fit better in a Jewish context than in an Islamic one. When I scratched the surface a little deeper, I could see that he is using whole sentences that have an equivalent in Judah Halevi's *Kuz-*

ari, much later. Probably both of them were drawing from some commentary on a Jewish mystical work on letter-speculation, the *Book of Creation*.

How did Ibn Masarra get to this Jewish text? The identification of where this sentence originated was very obvious. But Ibn Masarra was not a crypto-Jew, he was a very devout Muslim, so where did he get it? In such cases, there is detective work that must be done. I find such detective work fascinating, it's very enjoyable. You can be mistaken; but when you think that you identified something, it is a lot of fun. What this kind of work reveals, in this case, for example, is that this intellectual, who sat probably in Kairouan in North Africa, must have heard a Jew speaking about something and it clicked for him, it felt correct or important. So 'he' was the one crossing the border, not me. I am just observing it; with relish, but I am only an observant.

And when I observe a person like Maimonides who comes from al-Andalus, who longingly remembers his life in al-Andalus while sitting in Egypt, and who writes to people in Iraq or in Syria telling them about things that he had heard in North Africa or in Spain, one cannot but see what I call for simplicity 'the Mediterranean,' or what we can call the Islamicate world. The Islamic East, the *Mashriq*, has its character, and I am not denying the different character of the Islamic West, the *Maghrib*, but they are not worlds apart, they belong somehow to the same world.

I think that what happens in the study of Andalus now is that after a tendency of some scholars in the nineteenth century to stress the connections of Islamic Spain to Spain, to Europe, and to what they saw as a European Christian genius, it's been quite a few decades that the connection of Islamic Spain, of al-Andalus, to the rest of the Islamic world is very obvious, and people work on it. And I think it is going to be very interesting to see what comes out of this research.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *Over the course of your academic career, you not only proved to be a highly prolific and versatile scholar, you also opted at two occasions to serve in administrative positions, as vice-rector of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem between 2003 and 2006 and as its rector between 2008 and 2012. Unlike others, this clearly did not mark an interruption in your scholarly work as is evident from your steady flow of publications, especially your monograph on Maimonides which came out in 2009, during your term as the Hebrew University's rector. What prompted you to take those positions and what did you achieve?*

In some way, my response would be parallel to the way I described my academic work: Something came my way. I should say: I do believe in Free Will, I am not a predestinarian. But for me, in quite important ways, the Free Will

was to accept an opportunity that presented itself. One sees a door opening, and one responds (although there probably were other opportunities, which I did not respond to). I had never thought of an administrative career. I knew that, like everyone else, I would have to do some administrative service at some point, but I did not look for it. I never thought that it would get me to be the academic head of the university, because I had absolutely no ambition in this direction. I became Vice-Rector because the Rector asked me to be his Vice-Rector. The immediate reason was that my predecessor unfortunately became very ill, and the Rector had to replace her in the middle of her term. I had about 12 hours to give him an answer, it came to me as a complete surprise, and I remember coming to his office after the 12 hours were over, and saying: "I say 'Yes', because I couldn't find a good reason to say 'No'." As a complete novice, I had no knowledge of how to do things and what to do. I certainly did not think of continuing beyond completing this period of serving.

I learned a lot from the Rector with whom I worked. As I did the work and learned things, I also saw things that I wanted to do differently, or that I wanted to do more of. So the decision to be a Rector, or rather: to try to be elected as Rector, was already something I myself opted for, something that I actively sought. The first appointment, to be a Vice-Rector, was a response to circumstances, but then I said: "Ok, so I've learnt how to do it; now there are a few things that I want to do." Between being Vice-Rector and Rector, I had a sabbatical year. The Hebrew University has a wonderful, generous system of sabbaticals. The assumption is that people teach and do academic service very intensely and at the same time do research, but they also need to go somewhere else, to see how others are working. When I finished my term as Vice-Rector I had a scheduled sabbatical, and I was not intending to come back to administration. During these three years as a Vice-Rector, in terms of research I was just trying to keep my nose above the water, and do a little bit of research. The sabbatical year gave me the opportunity to plunge into a bigger project, which was the book on Maimonides. It was also during this year that the idea to do some more work in university administration crystallized. I know that in the American system people sometimes go into a career of academic administration and then they do 'admin' as a profession. In Israel, more often than not, administrative positions at the university are held by people who remain academics, who come from the academic staff and go back to it. This Israeli system has some very clear advantages, because you remain attached to the world of academia, you continue to see things through the lenses of academia, of research. It was always obvious to me that I will go back to it and that I have to keep in touch, as I said, to keep my nose above the water, not to forget why initially I came to the university. When you work with people who do research, you also have to

have your own identity as a researcher—even just in order to understand what bothers them, what works for them. So, I am glad I did service for a number of years, and I am glad to have returned to do research.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *When you began your academic formation in the mid-1970s, at a time when academia was even more male-dominated than is the case today, what did it mean being a woman at the time and how did things change (if they changed) over the course of your career?*

Well, I should first say that I myself have changed. I think that as a very young woman, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I was not aware of the problem. I knew that I was a woman and that I was going to study. For my parents, it was clear that a girl has to get an education and a profession, but not a career; and I did not think otherwise. As an undergraduate, we had a group of friends with whom I studied together very closely, we worked together and prepared together for the exams. This was a wonderful experience for me. We were two young women and two young men, and it was very clear that the two young men had academic ambitions. They wanted to become Professors; neither I nor the other woman said that, not even to ourselves. I remember one conversation when one of these young men said to me: “Well, for our teachers and our Professors you are not a threat, because they know that you will get married, that you will have children and that you will drop out.” The fact is that I do remember him saying it, so it made an impression; but I do not remember getting terribly shocked then by what he said. So, I changed.

I think that, at the time, there were many women like me who were not aware of what is going on. There were quite a few who had the awareness, but not around me. I am glad to say that I see my female students and my daughters completely conscious of what is going on; I am less glad to see that they still have to be aware of the fact that the academic world is male-dominated. I had hoped that this will not be the case, that my daughters and my female students will not face a world that is male-dominated. It is, however, absolutely still the case. Two or three years ago I still found myself in conferences where I was the only female participant. I know of other names of females who were competent scholars, but who were not invited. I am not a young person, so people treat me with the attitude reserved to older persons: some respect and some listening. But I still see people looking through me when I speak, in ways they would not look through male colleagues. I find myself having to say things more pointedly in order to be heard, because I am a woman. One then also gets the reaction of people complaining that they do not like women speaking this way. They still expect one to be ‘a delicate woman.’ I must say that it does not come

to me naturally to speak more forcefully, and I resent having to do so. I would have liked to remain the soft-spoken, even shy, young woman that I was. But I cannot, because as a woman, if you want to be heard, you have to say it more loudly.

Let me say something else: People talk a lot about diversity. I am an Ashkenazi Jew in Israel, where Oriental Jews feel discriminated against. I am white in America, where people with black or darker brown and other skin colors feel discriminated against. I can only imagine how much more difficult it is for them. So yes, I think diversity is important and not enough is done there. But you asked me about women: I think that women, that is to say: the advancement of their equality, suffers from the fact that it goes under the umbrella of diversity. 'Diversity' addresses the issue of minorities. Women are 51 percent of the population—this is not a minority group, and therefore not an issue of diversity; it is a different issue.

What changes nowadays is that not only more women are aware of the problems, but also more men become aware of them. Men now are aware that it's their responsibility and their problem and that they have to do something about it. I think that this is where the solution will come from, when men and women will realize that equality is not an issue for women but an issue for the academic world. I am frustrated to see that the process is slow; but I am heartened to see that, with occasional setbacks (and there are occasional setbacks) we are all the time advancing. I can see the setbacks coming, sometimes, but the last word is not for the setbacks, the last word is for the advancement.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *I think it is crucial what you said that it is not an issue of diversity, because it is usually discussed under this label. You are absolutely right; it is not an issue of diversity.*

I am not in a good position to say it. If I were a black woman, it would be more convincing. If I say it as a white woman, people could rightly say that I speak from a position of privilege, but I do think that the position of women in academia is a different issue. I see the percentage of women in some places that are considered to be well advanced in this respect, and it is often only 10 percent or 20 percent. If this is considered to be a success, that is because it is categorized as a diversity issue which concerns a minority. But among our students in the humanities, women are 51 percent of the graduate students. The curve of the famous 'scissors' diagram, here the percentage of women goes down drastically after the post-doctorate, is not acceptable. As I said: I would have enjoyed it if we could state these things softly and it would work, but I do not see it happening this way.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *A change of topic: You not only study cross-denominational dynamics in the intellectual history of Muslims, Jews, and Christians, you also engage in ensuring their continuity into our present times, despite countless obstacles. Together with Sari Nusseibeh in 2008 you initiated Intellectual Encounters, bringing together Israeli/Jewish students with Palestinian students who together study the literary, intellectual, and especially philosophical, heritage of Jewish and Muslim thinkers of the premodern period, an initiative which in 2013 evolved into an MA program Intellectual Encounters of the Islamicate World, run by Freie Universität Berlin in cooperation with The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Al-Quds University. Could you relate some of the background that led you into this wonderful initiative and some of the experiences and lessons you had along the way?*

This is a very long story that could have been told in one sentence. The one sentence is: Of course, isn't it natural? But you are right, there are not too many such initiatives. In a world torn by political and religious animosities, it becomes less and less natural. For me, as I think it is for you, it is natural. When I was a graduate student, my husband Guy and I came back to Jerusalem after he had finished his studies in America. Sari Nusseibeh had also just returned to Jerusalem from his studies at Harvard University. He was teaching at Birzeit University and there were some other scholars and young teachers we knew from abroad, Steven Harvey, for instance, also came to Jerusalem several years later. They knew one another from Harvard graduate school. I was a little behind them in terms of academic biography, but we all lived in or around Jerusalem and we thought that we will get together and read philosophical texts. We had several people from Birzeit University and several people from the Hebrew University and I think also from Tel Aviv, and at the time, it was in the late 1970s, none of us thought much of it. There was already a long history of political clashes between Israel and Palestine, but people in Birzeit and people in Israeli universities did not think twice about reading medieval philosophical texts together: It was normal. I do not remember when and how this group stopped meeting, but with some of the participants I remain in contact.

Then, in the early 2000s, there was an initiative of Yad Hanadiv, who knew that Sari and myself were good friends who worked in the same field, and they suggested that we do something together. They also suggested that we use modern technologies, the internet, to get across borders. The two of us were interested in doing that, but we did not quite know what to do. So we began with a one-day workshop at Harvard, where we got together several leading scholars in the field (Charles Butterworth, Patricia Crone, and others) and asked for their advice. We looked at the internet websites that existed, and, clearly,

each internet website was within one denomination: there was one for Islamic manuscripts, one for Hebrew manuscripts, for Islamic texts, for Jewish texts, for Christian texts etc.; everything was very well defined. The one thing that did not exist was a website that will recreate the interconfessional scene of the medieval intellectual world, where these people read and studied together, and this is what we tried to do in the *Intellectual Encounters* website. The idea was that a person looks for material on Maimonides or on al-Ghazālī, and this website takes her or him by the hand and shows him the connection to the other person, to the Maimonides he did not look for, to the Ghazālī she did not look for, or to Yahyā b. ʿAdī about whom they had never heard.

Then, for one year, the website turned into a platform for teaching, and it was concluded, with the help of the Hermes Foundation, in a workshop in Marrakesh. It would have remained a one-year initiative, had it not been for you, Sabine. You had your own project on the History of the Islamicate World, and this was the point where the three of us got together and said: "Teaching is what has to be done. We have to look for young people who will study the field in a cross-denominational way and who will do it using the modern techniques of online teaching." We also thought that this is an opportunity to get Palestinians and Israelis together: just as they were able to study together in the workshop in Marrakesh, they could study for a whole year together. The Freie Universität Berlin got in because you were there at that time. The DAAD got in and financed it with an amazing vision. The German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development got in and helped. Yad Hanadiv pitched in. And an anonymous friend who heard about it and got excited also pitched in. She wants to remain anonymous, but I am still very thankful because she pitched in at a moment when her help was crucial.

We are now in the fifth year of the one-year MA program in Germany, where Palestinians, Israelis, Iranians, Germans, Egyptians, or Bosnians get a German degree. They all study together in the same way that Ibn al-Qifṭī and Maimonides' disciple Joseph Ibn Shim'on studied together, as friends. For me, it is like recreating something that should naturally be there. Except that, when things are natural, you are not moved by them, they are just natural; but when I see Israelis, Palestinians, Iranians, Bosnians, and Germans bent over one manuscript and reading it with shining eyes, I find it very moving, because it is so rare. It should not be rare, but I know it is. This does not mean that the same students will not have a fierce political disagreement over dinner afterwards, but that's fine. If they disagree, and discuss it over a common dinner, it's fine.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *Your parents left Europe during the 1930s: your father left Germany before Hitler's rise to power, your mother was able to leave Polish*

Ukraine in 1938. What does it mean for you today to interact with German scholars and scholarship, and how do you experience Germany and its society during your repeated sojourns, especially in Berlin, as recipient of the Humboldt Prize or as fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin? And do you see your scholarship as some kind of continuation of the early Science of Judaism (Wissenschaft des Judentums), some of whose representatives had a very similar approach in their work as you have, and most of whom were, in fact, based at the turn of the twentieth century in Germany and its neighboring countries?

My father came from Chernovitz (Ukraine), at the time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his mother tongue was German. He had a very strong Jewish education, his culture was Jewish, and it was also German, although he never went to Germany. As a small child, behind our dining table there were volumes of the *Buddenbrooks*, so in some way, personally, the connection to Germany and its culture was there since childhood. The horror of the Holocaust was always there, too. Both my parents were already in Palestine during the war, but both of them were in many ways survivors, because they lost many of their family members. My in-laws are survivors of the camps. Going to Germany and to any of the countries of origin of my, I should say, four parents, my parents and my in-laws, is not simple. The past is there, it is very palpable all the time. I now go often to Germany; I have dear friends in Germany, people who are really very close friends and colleagues. So, on the individual side, of course, I do not look on any of my friends as responsible for anything that was done by others.

However, my encounter with Germany goes beyond the individuals. I think Germany dealt with its past and continues to deal with it in an amazing way, not only compared to Poland, Austria, Ukraine, but compared to every country that has a blemish on its past. To come and say: We bear the responsibility for our parents and grandparents, although we ourselves did not do anything, and we ask to correct it as a nation—this is immensely difficult, immensely generous, and Germany does it, day in day out. I spent a semester at the Wissenschaftskolleg almost five years ago, and that was the first time that I spent a consecutive long period in Germany. This was in Grunewald, and going every day to the train station from which the Berlin Jews had been deported was very difficult for me. I remember thinking, what will I do if I hear someone saying: “Well, we’ve heard enough, let bygones be bygones”? For me, they are not bygones. And it was very—I do not really have the words for it—it was touching and healing and instructive for me to see that my German colleagues at the Wissenschaftskolleg are bearing the weight in the same way that I do, not differently. I felt, I still feel, very close to them. And I feel that it would be good if

we all took a lesson from the way Germany is dealing with the past. If we can correct, if Israel can correct and approach the Naqba in the same way, rather than as a threat. Or if the Palestinians can recognize their mistakes, the blemishes of their past, in the same way, rather than feeling entitled as victims. I am not speaking only about my region; you can see it elsewhere too; not everywhere people react to the crimes of the past in the same way that Germany does. I find it remarkable. So, the short answer is: I come to Germany without any hesitation. The past is still difficult for me, but not Germany. I was horrified to see the extreme right raising its head again in Germany. But I know that my German friends are horrified at least as much as I am. It is our common front: I am on the same side as my German friends, not on another side. But you know that.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *Do you have a comment on the other unrelated question whether you see your work as a continuation of the Science of Judaism?*

Yes and no. In some way it is. As I said, this is how I started; I got into this path through Steinschneider. I very often have a humbling experience, when I think that I discovered something new, and then I go and read Steinschneider, and I find in a footnote in tiny letters that are now difficult for me to read that he saw it all. So, in some ways, yes: I would like to see myself as continuing that great tradition, very humbly. But in other ways, no, because I do not define my field as the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. In still other ways, yet again, yes, because if you look at people of that generation—Munk, Steinschneider, Schreiner, and many others—there was no question for them that they have to read the original Judeo-Arabic, and they also read the Muslim philosophers and the Arabic Christian philosophers, and they did not say that it is not related to what they do. In many ways they are, therefore, a model for imitation. But I think that, since we have privileges that they did not have, possibilities that they did not have, we should be using these privileges, including the modern technical possibilities. I remember reading somewhere of Mrs. Steinschneider sitting in the library in Oxford and copying, through a transparent paper, a manuscript for her husband in letters that she could not read, in a language that she did not understand. We have photocopy and scanning machines, we have the Internet, we can use them even if we are called Mrs. So-and-So, not only Mr. So-and-So, and this should encourage us to do more daring things than they did. For the time being, I think they were still more daring than we are. So, we have a way to go.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *What would be the three most important things you would tell a young scholar of today in the field you are studying to strive for?*

This is perhaps the hardest question that you asked until now, because I have a list of things that, in retrospect, I would have told myself as a young student. These are the things that I think would have been crucial for me as a student, the things that I consider most important: Going into academia in a serious way is so difficult: it is so hard to find your own ideas, there is so much to learn, you have to be so dedicated. It is hard work, and on top of the hard work you want to have a new idea, which you do not know if you will ever find; you hope for it, but you do not know. It is hard, and often frustrating. So, the first and most important thing is that you really must love what you are doing. It is going to remain hard even if you love what you do, but if you are not completely fascinated by what you are doing—it is impossible. It is not worth it, if you are not fascinated. Of course, sometimes you are bored by what you read, but on the whole, you are willing to do some boring things because something bigger interests you. This holds true for every student and every young scholar.

Let me mention again a Talmudic saying: “A shy person cannot learn, and a strict teacher cannot teach.” I think that when students begin their studies, they are often shy and insecure in some way. As a retired teacher, what I want to say to them is: “Ask, do not hesitate to ask, do not be shy. If you want to use your potential, ask. It is not a shame not to know.”

There is a technical skill that is very important in our field, which is languages. This is not as appreciated as it used to be in the past. I think that it is a crucial, essential key for our field, to get the languages early and to get them right. This holds true not only for philologists. A student may begin to do philological work and then switch to another aspect, but you have to be grounded in a solid knowledge of the language so that you do not impose on the texts something they do not say.

These, then, are the three essential things that, from my own experience, I would say to a student: Choose something that you do with passion; keep asking and banging on doors; and get the tools, get the languages.

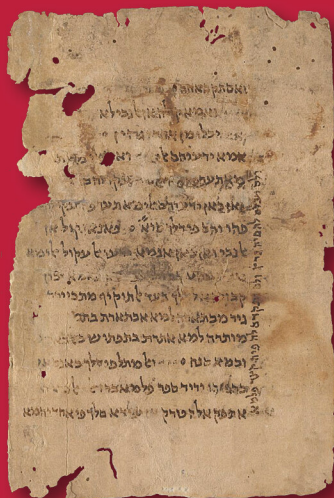
But these answers are not enough, because the academic world today is very well organized and it has additional requirements. These requirements are essential if you want to get ahead, to do what you want to do. There are rules to the contemporary academic world, or the academic game. Fortunately, it is not only the children of the wealthy who get into the academic world today. In order to be funded, however, you have to play by certain rules, and the rules sometimes take you on a different way than the three points I have mentioned. You are not always encouraged to admit ignorance; you have ‘to sell yourself.’ I find this very hard ... I do not tell students to sell themselves, to say “I’m the best, I am the ‘this,’ I am the ‘that.’” But they often find themselves encouraged in this direction. Students are also sometimes taken away from the things they

are most passionate about, because it is not where they are likely to find a job, and they need to look for something that is more in fashion now.

We also spoke about interdisciplinarity. I find that crossing borders is something that many excellent students want to do, because it is fascinating. If I were to give them advice that is directed by the job market, however, I should say: It is easier to find a job if you are within a field and in the center of that field, and not in some God-forsaken corner. The Bologna agreement forces students into modes of very short periods for each degree. It is three years for a PhD, in England, in Italy, in France, in Germany. You have three years, and then people realize that perhaps in the humanities you find yourself without the languages that you need for your work. So, in Germany you get the propaedeutic year: half a year, or an extra year for languages; this, however, is not enough. Realistically, then, one should encourage students to choose a topic that they can finish in three years. This is possible, but then you need to know exactly what can be done in three years. You will still have to continue to study afterwards even though you have your PhD, because you have not finished. You have learned just what can be done in three years. There are some people who are very talented, but even they need time. The academic system today does not give this time.

I remember a manifesto that several members of the British Academy published a few years ago, speaking against the system that sets strict time limits for a degree: three years, two years, the system of counting heads in academia and calculating and counting number of articles, forcing people to publish, publish, publish before they get a position. I remember that some of the members of the British Academy mentioned the fact that, as young students, they got a scholarship to All Souls College, in Oxford, and had 8–10 years to write a book, taking a deep, long breath and having the time to do serious work. If they found out that they needed another language in order to finish the book—they took the time, learned the other language and went to read the sources written in it. This is hardly possible today. I cannot suggest this path to a student, because it would be unfair and unrealistic, but I still consider it important. I still believe that universities should minimize the bibliometric considerations of how much people published, how many pages, how many times they were cited, or how many students sat in their classroom. This “How much?” becomes crucial today because we are funded by public money, and I understand that. But I think the people who fund us with the public money must be shown the shortcomings of what they ask for. They can be brought to see the results of what they are asking, and maybe one can thus minimize the impact of these bibliometric calculations.

[Sabine Schmidtke] *Thank you.*



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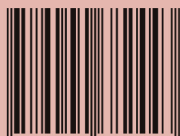
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Religious and Intellectual Diversity in the Islamicate World and Beyond is a collection of essays in honor of Sarah Stroumsa, an eminent scholar who through the years has embodied and advanced the possibility of collaboration across borders. The volume is presented to her by scholars working on the study of the intellectual history of the Middle Ages, the intercultural contact and migration of knowledge in the Islamic world, and many other topics.

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