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HEATHER J. SHARKEY, *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Pp. 390. $93.99 cloth, $31.99 paper, $26.00 Adobe e-book. ISBN 9780521769372.

REVIEWED BY LOREN D. LYBARGER, Associate Professor, Department of Classics and World Religions, Ohio University, email: lybarger@ohio.edu

In *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East*, Heather J. Sharkey offers a compelling study of intercommunal dynamics across the broad sweep of Islamic history with a particular focus on the period of late Ottoman imperial rule (the long nineteenth-century). Committed to highlighting the experiences of nonelite individuals and groups (the *petites gens*), Sharkey emphasizes "sites of 'little history'" (taverns, cafes) and a range of evidence—memoirs and travelogues but also photographs, clothing, recipe collections, shoes, and other objects of daily life—to describe how Muslims, Christians, and Jews negotiated their relationships with one another at multiple levels. The result is an eminently readable history that reveals the complexities of cross-communal relations. The book is appropriate for undergraduate and graduate courses on the Middle East. It will also be of interest to historians and scholars in the social sciences and religious studies fields concerned with questions of religion, identity, and pluralism broadly.

The book opens with a discussion of the sharply declining Christian and Jewish populations in Muslim majority nation-states in today's Middle East. This decline marks the culmination of processes reaching back at least to the nineteenth-century, when rising nationalist movements spurred violent "ethnic cleansing" campaigns, devastating massacres, and mass population transfers of Muslims, Christians, and Jews. The persisting challenges of ethnic and religious pluralism today makes Sharkey's book especially timely. Islamdom and Islamicate societies succeeded in

providing religious minorities with a wide degree of autonomy albeit at the price of unequal social status. How did they achieve this modus vivendi? How did it work in the lives of the *petites gens*? Why did it unravel? Why did the new Ottomanism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in particular, with its promise of equality and unity across differences, fail as an alternative to ethnic nationalism?

Sharkey poses these questions, critically, seeking to navigate between the pitfalls of two historiographical tendencies: scholarship that contrasts a supposed intercommunal harmony under the Ottomans with the violent interethnic conflicts of the present; and the new Orientalism that links the intercommunal violence in the Middle East to some sort of inherent resistance of Islam to modernity. Sharkey documents the surprising ways in which conviviality could develop among Muslims, Christians, and Jews. She points, for example, to "sites of convergence" such as the "gazinos," whose owners, typically "Greeks, Armenians, and Jews," served alcohol, invited musicians to play, and served a diverse clientele that included Muslims (253). At the same time, she shows how Islamic governance and social convention created a hierarchy of inequality between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Sartorial norms, imposed by the state but also enforced locally, dictated the colors and styles of clothing, headgear, shoes, and public bathhouse attire that the three communities could wear. Similar concerns to mark status distinctions dictated the exclusion of Christians and Jews from military service and the requirement to pay a special tax in lieu of such service. Attempts to change these conventions, such as through the introduction of universal military conscription, often met sharp resistance among everyday Muslims anxious about a loss of prestige (145).

Still, despite the inequality and humiliation of the status hierarchy, non-Muslims generally accepted these arrangements. Predicated on the notion of Jews and Christians as subordinate yet protected tribute-paying peoples (*ahl al-dhimma*), these conventions allowed for the recognition, inclusion, and relative autonomy of non-Muslims under Islamic imperial rule. The contrast with Christendom and Europe is instructive: there were no organized pogroms and wholesale massacres of non-Muslims within Islamic domains, although this would change with the rise of European power and nationalist agitation.

The advent of European colonialism and a global capitalist market system created new challenges that ultimately undermined the established patterns. Russia, France, and Britain wrung "capitulations" from the Ottoman Porte that allowed them to intervene on behalf of Christian communities. The primary beneficiaries were Greeks, Armenians, and other Christians who were able to serve as "dragomans" (translators) and take advantage of the economic opportunities that trade with the European powers provided. As Ottoman reforms such as the Edicts of 1839 and 1856 came into force—measures that seemingly established "universal religious liberty"—Christians, in particular, began to feel more comfortable with ostentatious displays of their wealth (for example, by building large homes) (135–142). Such changes caused Muslims to resent Christians. These feelings sharpened in reaction to Russian expansion in the 1860s; the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78; and Slavic-Christian national revolts in the Balkans. The massacres that accompanied these conflicts forced two million Muslim refugees into the Anatolian heartland (185). Violence of similar scale against Christians soon followed.

An important contribution of Sharkey's book lies in her focus on religion as a lens through which to make sense of these shifting communal relations. Unfortunately, Sharkey never really explains what "religion" is. She notes that it is a "murky concept, more like a fog than like a fixed and sturdy box" (18). Moreover, she observes, religion was never the sole factor determining identity among the three groups. These are cogent points. Still, the avoidance of the thorny definitional question causes her to leave unexamined two assumptions that scholars of religion have begun to abandon. The first presupposition, deriving from structural functionalism, is that religion is primarily a matter of communal identity and social integration. The second assumption is that there is a distinction between religion proper and popular beliefs in "the world of spirits." Sharkey points out "these assumptions [belief in spirits, i.e.] amounted to 'religion,' too" (317). How they did so, however, remains unexplained in her discussion. Sharkey thus misses an opportunity to specify what religion means in her usage and in relation to Ottoman society. Recent interpretive and practice-centered approaches have challenged both assumptions—that religion is mainly a mechanism of social cohesion or that there is a relevant distinction between religion and magic—by defining religion as a meaningful system of practices that addresses crises in

a range of areas affecting human life.[1] In this approach, the popular-elite dichotomy disappears and the analytical emphasis shifts to focus substantively on what religion is rather than what it does (for social cohesion purposes, for example).

This matter of conceptual clarity aside, Sharkey's book remains exceedingly useful for rethinking questions of religio-communal identity and intercommunal relations in the Middle East. The Islamic imperial arrangements, as the immensely complex Ottoman example shows, succeeded in enabling a type of functioning "multiculturalism." Revisiting those arrangements with a critical appreciation affords us perspective on our own fraught moment of mass displacements and violent, xenophobic reactions against refugees, immigrants, and minorities. As Sharkey pointedly reminds us, other worlds have been and are possible.

NOTES

[1] For example, see Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).