Religious Conversions: Then and Now- Contents

A Matter of Conversion:

Reform Jewish Conversion in Israel as a Process of Constructing Identity and Belonging
Einat Libel-Hass

My paper addresses Reform Jewish conversion in Israel as a transformative process involving the adoption, adaptation and interpretation of religious traditions and identities. This venue of conversion differs immeasurably from the Orthodox conversion which is considered the conventional way of conversion in Israel.

Much of the recent research in Israel has dealt with Orthodox conversion as a religious switch, national identity change (Kravel-Tovi, 2014), and as part of a naturalization process (Goodman, 2008; see Hacker, 2009 on gendered implications of this process).

Only Skortowskia's (2011) research and my own (Libel-Hass, 2016) have focused on the study of the Reform conversion in Israel. However, our research differs a great deal from one another. While Skortowskia's work is based exclusively on interviews with Russian speaking female converts, my research, on the other hand, focuses on women who came from Russia or the Philippines, and who have Israeli partners. Furthermore, in contrast to Skartowskia's research, my research addresses the issue of belonging to - and continuous active involvement in a Reform congregation, during the conversion process.

I argue that Reform Jewish conversion can be seen, in Victor Turner's terminology, as a liminal (transition) period, during which the converts are introduced to various identity options and reconstructs their identity and belonging by combining new and old elements. This is demonstrated clearly by the way converts and their partners speak about their Jewish identity and congregational belonging, during the liminal period of negotiation with competing traditions (Christianity vs. Judaism, Reform Judaism vs. Orthodox Judaism).

This paper is based on my doctoral dissertation, which analyzes the expansion of Reform Judaism in Tel Aviv in a well-known Reform congregation. My findings demonstrate that in an urban setting such as Tel Aviv, where global and local trends converge, the Reform conversion process takes shape as an intercultural encounter.

Contemporary Journeys of Conversion from Indonesia to Israel

Mirjam Lücking

Indonesia, the largest Muslim majority country in the world, is home to a Christian minority of approximately 24 million people. Christianity, like Islam, is a missionary religion and in contemporary Indonesia both Muslims and Christians are highly active in spreading their beliefs. Strikingly, these modern missionary activities resemble each other with regard to the intertwinement of neoliberal consumer culture and the dissemination of exclusivist ideologies. Economic and ideological competition go hand in hand with growing interreligious tensions. Among other things, religious tourism is a booming business in this context.

For Christian Indonesians, especially for converts to charismatic traditions of Christianity, pilgrimages to Israel are increasingly popular. Religious travels are an opportunity to represent (new) religious identities, class affiliation and demarcation from adherents of other religious traditions. Yet it is not only Indonesian Christians who travel to Israel and Palestine but also Indonesian Muslims, who promote the region as their destination, next in importance to the Muslim holy sites in Mecca and Medina. Pilgrims, travel agencies and tour guides not only compete in economic terms but also regarding religious convictions.

Evangelist and Pentecostal movements especially are highly active in missionary activities. Evangelicalism is one of the fastest growing religious movements both in Indonesia and globally. The use of distinctive clothing, certain jargon and travel preferences serve as ways of distancing them from their Muslim compatriots and from fellow Indonesians who adhere to other Christian denominations. Along with religious lifestyle trends, political positioning in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict features in these manifestations of social identities. Religious tourism from Indonesia to Israel thereby becomes a stage for performative and symbolic acts of boundary making. One of these performative acts is baptism in the River Jordan as the climax of a convert's journey and the epitome of the evangelical idea of being 'born again.'

Through ethnographic snapshots of these 'journeys of conversion,' this paper shows how travel agents, tour guides and pilgrims engage with competitive economic, religious and ideological standpoints. The analysis of the stakeholders' experiences contributes to the discussion about conditions for solidarity and/or demarcation between adherents of different religious traditions. The religious identity makings are considered in relation to other features of social identities such as class, gender, ethnicity and nationality.

The Conversion of Joseph Wolff – Missionary, Imperialist, Englishman
Hilda Nissimi

Joseph Wolff (1795-1862), born a German Jew, converted to Catholicism and later to Protestantism, and became a missionary to the Jews. Reports of his missionary efforts and his travels to find the Ten Lost Tribes made him a household name in England. Wolff presents an example of how a sense of belonging is fashioned by the individual through his interpretation of the general discourse of a collectivity and his participation in it.

Wolff conceptualized his conversion in a way that made him a participant in the discourses on Englishness and Jewishness. Wolff's missionary efforts were brought before the reading public as his active self-presentation in both these discourses. His ideas of Jewishness as the belonging to a community through unbreakable ethnic ties, a utilization of ideas just emerging in England, were presented as part of his missionary credentials. His depiction of Englishness was based on his participation in common ideals and missions. The Englishness he perceived was based on Empire and Protestantism going hand in hand. His missionary efforts were proposed as opening up lands closed to Europeans and he pursued imperial interests where he saw them. More than anything, his travelogues brought the empire home, bring with them tales of the "other" that can help better define the English homeliness. Yet it was also an empire dotted with Jewish communities and his tales were often tales of Jewish woes.

Jewish Female Apostasy in Kraków: "Religious Kidnapping" or Voluntary Conversion?
Rachel Manekin

Jewish female apostasy in Kraków reached crisis proportions between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. In a twenty-five year period beginning in the 1880s over three hundred Jewish women converted in Kraków alone, almost all of them at the convent of the Felician sisters, which provided shelter for Jewish female runaways. The vast majority of the Jewish converts to Catholicism in Kraków were young women between the ages of 15 and 22, most of whom came from the city and its surrounding areas.

My talk will focus on this phenomenon. After providing historical and legal background, I will discuss the case of Michalina Araten, a daughter of a well-to-do Hasidic family in Kraków, who

ran away from her home, took refuge in the Felician convent, and disappeared shortly thereafter. Her father, claiming she was kidnapped and held in the convent against her will, mobilized the Viennese liberal press, as well as government ministers, to return her to the bosom of her family, but to no avail. As reported in the press, the father's accusations against the convent, the local police, and the local courts, aroused bitter opposition among the Polish Catholic population, who viewed this as a Jewish affront to the Catholic religion. An examination of the voluminous police file, however, which includes a letter from Michalina to a Christian friend shortly before she fled her home, reveals a more complex story.

The Araten affair was debated in the Austrian parliament and widely reported in the Jewish and non-Jewish press in Austro-Hungary and beyond. The affair left a lasting impression on Galician Jews, including on young Jewish women who continued to find shelter in the Felician convent.

Does the Soul Have a Sex?
Gender, Missions of the London Society, and Conversion of the Jews
Agnieszka Jagodzińska

The London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews was the oldest and the largest British Evangelical organization that carried out missions to the Jews. It was established in 1809 in London but soon moved beyond the English borders, reaching Jewish communities on three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. One of the most strategic missionary fields of the London Society was the Kingdom of Poland with its large Jewish population. The Polish case offers an important insight into the relation between gender, Christian missions, and Jewish conversions.

As I claim in this paper, the missions of the London Society to the Jews were highly intellectual, male-led and male-oriented in their character. This caused marginalization of both Christian women as independent missionaries and Jewish women as potential missionary targets. In the paper I analyze the evolution of the role of Christian women in the enterprise of the London Society: from missionary wives, school assistants or nurses, to female missionaries in their own right. I am also interested in strategies which the Society adopted to reach Jewish women with its message. I study the character of these strategies, their scope and effectiveness.

Although the geographical and chronological scope of my paper is Poland between 1821–1939, I also study the general gender policy of the Society and I adopt a comparative approach, referring

to other British missions to "the heathens" in this respect. In my analysis I use a wide range of Christian and Jewish sources, including the press, missionary reports, pamphlets, official and personal correspondence, (auto)biographical accounts and others.

Conversion in Contemporary America
Nadia Beider

Over forty percent of American adults no longer identify with the religious tradition in which they were raised. My research, based on data from the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Survey is an attempt to establish the extent to which converts adopt the religious norms of the group which they have joined. Although prior research asserts that converts adopt the norms of their new religion, even becoming overzealous in their religious behavior, I did not find this to be the case. Two important trends in modern Western society account for this shift. Firstly, identities no longer replace each other, but are layered upon one another or held simultaneously, in a hierarchy of salience. Secondly, individuals exercise a great degree of personal autonomy in their religious choices and seem to pay limited attention to clerics or indeed any form of religious authority. Consequently, people feel free to retain some aspects of their prior religious identity, whilst adopting aspects of their new religion, creating new hybridized forms of religious identity and commitment.

Confronting Cyprian:
Sacramental Rigorism and the Problem of Converts in the Early Severan-Jacobite Church
Simon Ford

Far from effecting ecclesiastical unity, the efforts of the emperor Justin I and his successors to impose a pro-Chalcedonian confession upon the patriarchate of Antioch served to splinter the communion, giving rise to an autonomous anti-Chalcedonian movement within the empire. In this environment of de facto pluralism, members of both the laity and clergy might move with some fluidity between the pro-Chalcedonian imperial church and the evolving anti-Chalcedonian movement — of which the Severan-Jacobite church constituted the best attested branch. Faced

with the problem of how best to receive the converts from the pro-Chalcedonian church, the dominant party within the Severan-Jacobite episcopate appears to have followed the patriarch Severus of Antioch in adopting a comparatively lenient penitential framework. There remained, however, a significant and persistent rigorist faction within the church. Drawing upon the writings of the third-century bishop Cyprian of Carthage, this rigorist faction sought imposition of a harsher framework for conversation, including the nullification of pro-Chalcedonian sacraments, requiring — in theory at least — the re-baptism of lay converts and the reordination of clergy.

The proposed paper will trace the contours of this debate as it evolved between 518 and the end of the sixth-century. At the same time, it will also seek to examine the legal and conceptual framework erected by proponents of the anti-rigorist position in order to regulate and justify the conversion of clergy and lay persons from pro-Chalcedonian church. In doing so it will make use a range of canon legal, epistolary, polemic, and historiographic texts, including a number of unpublished episcopal letters and treatises. Finally, while the focus of the paper will be on the particulars of the rigorist controversy within the Severan-Jacobite church, it will also seek to situate that controversy in the context of the larger ongoing debate within late ancient Christianity regarding the treatment of converts and their place within the evolving legal and sacramental structures of the church.

From *Rerum Novarum* to the Theology of Liberation: A Long Journey to the Establishment of Integral Christian Humanism in the Modern World

Eitan Ginzberg

This presentation will deal with the historical journey of the Catholic Church, from 1891 to the present, to restore believers to its midst, mainly from the urban strata, who gradually abandoned it after the advent of the Renaissance and the Reformation, rationalism, the liberalism of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution; and later on, with the development of positivism, socialism and communism, which went hand in hand with capitalism and industrialization. Recognizing its sin of seclusion and loss of relevance, the Church embarked on a comprehensive journey of reappearance, with the aim of becoming an active and significant element in the "Temporal City," with all its components: labor market and economic development, administration, welfare, education, academic research, and the power of decision-making systems.

This journey was formulated in a long series of pragmatic and sincere social encyclics: the *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII (1891); an equally long series of ecumenical and synodal conferences, the best-known of which was the Second Vatican Council (1963–1965); and a series of daring theological decisions, which adopted the Marxist analysis of the capitalist world and its dire social consequences. It gave it a "revisionist" social democratic and theocentric solution, leading to a welfare like state, a development known as "integral humanism," following the thinking of the French Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain.

While in Europe this new movement was heralded a major achievement and renewed interest in the church and in Catholicism in general, it became clear that expanding the trend into Latin America — a Catholic subcontinent in principle — as well as in countries in other parts of the world was not possible, at least as long as the Church tried to avoided any direct confrontation with the state, even when her demands for changes were not accepted, restricting itself to involvement within the limits of the law. In the early sixties, a new theology developed in Latin America, based on an integral humanistic conception, and leading to a comprehensive structural and legal revolution that guarantees socioeconomic equality and political access to all. In a synodal conference held in the city of Medellín in the summer of 1968, which dealt inter alia with the implications of this theology, it was given the name "Theology of Liberation." Over the years this theology gained popularity, spread to the Protestant communities as well, and became prevalent — in its various forms (including the "People's theology" developed in Argentina) and depending on the various levels of readiness to become involved in illegal and even violent actions — in Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay, Chile, Ecuador, Argentina, Nicaragua, and Mexico, as well as in several other third-world countries, revealing significant achievements. One of the most prominent of these was the appointment of Archbishop Fernando Lugo of Paraguay, a member of the Liberation Theology movement, known as the "Bishop of the Poor," as president of the republic in 2008. Another achievement was the appointment of Argentinean cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, a follower of the "People's theology," to the post of Holy See, choosing the papal name Franciscus. It was thus not too surprising that one of Franciscus's first moves was to invite to Rome, as his personal guest, 89-years-old Father Gustavo Gutierrez, originally from Peru. Gutierrez was the first to formulate a theology of liberation in the early 1970s, while turning it into a new international theological canon.

I will seek to present this long journey as an historical move of repentance of the Catholic Church in an effort to return to its ranks believers whose confidence it had lost, and who turned to

socialism, communism, radical liberalism, or to atheism or even to anti-religionism. I will discuss the principles and circumstances of that journey, as well as the conceptual innovations of liberation theology and its biblical and Jewish foundations. I will also recount the story of Camillo Torres, Colombian priest, sociologist, precursor of the theology of liberation, political leader and guerrilla fighter. Torres dedicated his apostolic mission to the service of the poor, until the guerrilla struggle in which he was killed in February 1966. He left behind a vibrant legacy, with a worldwide resonance, of a church profoundly involved in society, seeing it as a necessary condition for the implementation of God's will (The Word), for the recognition of God, the expansion of the Kingdom of God and for human and universal redemption.

"I was born Jewish, I won't die Jewish": Judaism and Islam in the Person of an Italian Jew Converting to Christianity under Napoleon's Domination in the Nineteenth Century
Federico Dal Bo

My paper addresses the case of conversion to Christianity of Ludovico Giuseppe Franceschi, an Italian Jew who, in 1808, published a dissertation in Italian against his former Jewish compatriots who allegedly accused him of apostasy.

The historical setting is particularly important. Franceschi published his dissertation in Ferrara—a Northern-Italian city that was formerly part of the State of the Church and at the time belonged to the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy. Despite Napoleon's decision emancipating the Jews in 1806, Franceschi's text shows the enduring anti-Semitic sentiments and the vitality of Catholic prejudices against the Jews—reflecting a number of well-established religious patterns.

Interestingly enough, Franceschi appears to defend his conversion to Christianity also by vehemently attacking Islam, which he describes in brutal terms as an "abomination," "a licentious religion," if a religion at all. In short, he believes that Islam drives man to an instinctual, animalistic life. His remarks are possibly motivated by implicit political assumptions, as it is implausible that he had never had contact with any Muslims in the former State of the Church. Muslims were rather identified with "Turks," who had posited a threat to several emerging Italian States for centuries. In contrast, Franceschi believes Judaism to offer all the necessary instruments for acknowledging the messianic nature of Jesus and therefore to be a historically and culturally preliminary to conversion to Christianity. In a few dense pages, he describes the interaction between Judaism and

Christianity with the mystical metaphor of the "divine sea"—whose waves are actually produced by Jewish hermeneutics. According to this, Franceschi concludes his dissertation, proudly claiming: "I was born Jewish, I won't die Jewish." In so saying, Franceschi assumed Judaism to be neither a social nor an ethnic membership but rather a sort of "epistemological deficiency"— a "blindness" from which he had been cured.

Attempted Conversions to My Kind of New Mankind: Restaging the Conversations of Alexander the Great with the Indian Sages in Medieval Literature

Peter Sh. Lehnardt

Alexander the Great impersonates, as conqueror of immense dimensions, the promises of Hellenistic universalism. With Aristotle as teacher, living and leading according to what seems universal virtues, Alexander should have been, not only the conqueror of the known world, but also a wise ruler of the new order for the foreseeable future. Puzzled by his death, undefeated in battle, at a young age, his contemporaries and later historians looked for reasons for the sudden end of this one man's venture to subject the world to the new universal principles of Hellenism. A primary suspect was, on the one hand, the decaying forces of oriental culture, but on the other, a staged scene where Greek universalism met its inner limits. The later scenes became, when remolded in the Romance of Alexander, highlights of the Alexander tradition in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The meetings with these Indian sages, if in the persons of Dandamis or other Gymnosophists, turned in the hands of the translators and rewriters of the Alexander traditions into test cases for the encounter of different anthropologies. While the historical Alexander may be partly redrafted each time according the religion of the medieval authors and their audience, the Indian sages had to be reshaped for the sake of the drama as a 'relevant other' according the actual cultural bias. And while the character of Alexander could be 'converted' by minor omissions or additions to his new cultural and religious environment throughout the whole story, the conversations with the Indian sages had to be adapted far more concisely to relevant rivaling worldviews or religious ethics. The paper shall focus on an analysis of a few examples of these attempted conversions to a new kind of mankind, or in other words: the restaging of the limitations of universalisms.

Conversions Between and Within Religions: A Case from Elizabethan England
Raphael Magarik

We typically think of conversion as happening between religions, an association registered in the very name of the "Center for the Study of Conversion & Inter-Religious Encounters." But in early modern England, the word "conversion" far more frequently designated the intra-religious movement from sinfulness to redemption. Or more accurately, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, English divines largely did not distinguish between intra- and inter-religious conversion. Paul, on this view, was correcting not so much the particular misfortune of being Jewish than the universal misfortune of being a fallen human. Further, because these theologians and ministers understood conversion as an integral step in Christian life, they called the rejection of Christianity not "conversion" but "apostasy."

The temptation to impose our own conceptions of conversion is considerable. Indeed, otherwise excellent work on conversion in early modern English literature often isolates inter-religious conversion for analysis, focusing on confessional movement between varieties of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (Molly Murray, to name one), or the imagined conversions of Jews (Jeffrey Shoulson) and Muslims (Daniel Vitkus). By reading closely one conversion narrative, that of Redcrosse in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, I argue that this isolation is a mistake, and I suggest that correcting this mistake has broad implications for studying conversion trans-historically.

Redcrosse might be said to convert in both senses. On the one hand, his time in the House of Holiness is meant to cure his lust and pride. But having been under the grips of the Catholic Archimago, Redcrosse is also moving from one religion to another. (As indeed countless English people did in late Tudor England.) But the poem purposely entangles these two transitions, polemically associating Catholicism with vice while also suggesting that ordinary sinners, who would self-identify as Protestant, are in some sense actually Catholic. *The Faerie Queene*, then, imagines the movement between religions as internal to Protestant Christianity, and imagines ordinary, fallen religious identity as necessarily fluid, muddled, and contradictory.

In Spenser's England, then, inter-religious conversion can only be understood in dialogue with theories of intra-religious development and change. Moreover, if the broad, comparative program of studying conversion trans-historically is to succeed, it must internalize this methodological caution. To separate a priori the encounters and movements between religions as an object of

analysis risks not only doing violence to the concepts of our research subjects, but also hypostasizing the existence of religions as stable, relatively static monads that can be sharply individuated and differentiated.

The Missing Link. The Latin Homoian Church in the Danubian Provinces and Its Role in the Conversion of the Goths

Marta Szada

Frequently, the studies focusing on the fourth-century Trinitarian controversy stop at the 380s and emphasize the importance of the Council of Constantinople and the Council of Aquileia in 381, and the end of Italian rule of the last Homoian emperor, Valentinian II. In very common interpretation, these events mark the virtual end of the Latin Homoianism – its final extirpation. This thesis greatly influenced the modern thinking about the Christianization of the Goths and other barbarian peoples. The process was conceptualized as an "ethnic switch" – the people of non-Roman ethnicity embraced the religion while the Romans completely abandoned it. Thereby, the disavowed Roman heresy changed into the creed able to preserve ethnic difference under the Roman pressure of acculturation. In the present paper, I will challenge this interpretation. I will argue that the Latin Homoian Church survived long into the fifth century and had an active role in the process of converting the Goths into Homoian Christianity. I will also call into question the role of Ulfila as the Apostle of the Goths directly involved in their Christianization in the 370s, the incontrovertible image created by the fifth-century Church historians. By these means, I will aim at dismissing a flat and unconvincing picture of the Christianization of the Goths which happened without the clergy, books, churches, liturgical celebrations, administration of sacraments and relying on the solitary mission of a single person. In this light, the "ethnic switch" is not a valid reconstruction of the events. The Goths (as well as other peoples who converted later) did not cling to the Homoianism because it kept them apart from their Roman neighbors and let them preserve their traditions. Quite the opposite, in the era of the Emperor Valens it was an act of political loyalty to the Roman Empire which later under the formative influence of the Latin Homoian Church transformed into the religious identification founded upon the concept of Catholicity – quality of being universally right in the matter of faith – and not upon ethnic exclusivism.

Islamization as a Political Act: The 717-720 Delegation to Ifriqīya (Tunisia)

Yaacov Lev

The focus of the present paper is both on the history of the Islamization process and the political and socio-religious forces behind it, and the way these events are depicted in the sources.

On two occasions the sources provide information about Islamization in North Africa: the failure of the Kāhina rebellion and the policies of the Umayyad caliph 'Umar II (717-720). The Kāhina rebellion is still a mystery. It probably took place between 698 and 703 and involved the Berbers of the former Byzantine province of Numidia. The sources claim that when Kāhina, the female leader of the uprising, realized that the rebellion had failed she exhorted her sons to adopt Islam and thousands of others also converted in the wake of these events. There is no way to corroborate these accounts but they fit a broader conceptual framework of the Islamization process. For what it is worth, the theme of "persecutions leading to Islamization" as an explanation is a trope commonly used in Coptic historiography. Thus, Islamization, following the failure of Kāhina's rebellion, fits both medieval and modern perceptions of the process.

The sources offer yet another more surprising insight into the Islamization of Ifrīqiya and link the process to 'Umar II's delegation of ten people sent to promulgate Islam in the province. The accounts suggest that the mission was aimed at both enhancing the Islamic identity of the Muslim population of Ifrīqiya and winning new converts. Any missionary impulse to spread Islam is rarely attested to in the sources. It can be argued that these reports highlight a totally new aspect of the Islamization process and the forces behind it.

From Moses Aaron to Johann Christian Jacob:
Reevaluating the Conversion of Johan Kemper of Uppsala (1670–1716)

Níels P. Eggerz

The phenomenon of Jewish conversion to Christianity in early modern Europe has received ample scholarly attention lately. As shown in recent studies, converts – together with their Christian mentors – sought to convey idealized narratives of their conversions portraying them as learned rabbis; whereas they, in fact, had most often officiated merely as second-rank religious functionaries.

One convert who has hitherto been perceived as an exception to that rule was Moses Aaron of Krakow alias Johann Christian Jakob (1670–1716) better known as Johan Kemper of Uppsala. Before his apostasy in 1696 Aaron experienced a messianic upheaval precipitated by a Sabbatian prophet, who had predicted the final redemption for 1695. This event has been understood either as the decisive factor or at least a catalyst for Aaron's conversion. Consequently, his Christian writings on the Zohar have been read against the backdrop of Sabbatian Kabbalah.

This paper puts forward a new reading of Aaron's conversion. It suggests that Aaron's personal circumstances coupled with his encounter with the parson Johann Friedrich Heunisch (1661–1725) were the determining factors in his conversion. Aaron was a discontent and underpaid schoolmaster, who was forced to live far away from his family. Heunisch, by contrast, was a highly educated and well-established Lutheran minister. Throughout the course of their joint study of rabbinic literature, they became friends and engaged in religious debate, in which Aaron proved to be no match for the eloquent Heunisch. Since the minister shaped Aaron's conversion narrative, its description of said messianic commotion is particularly revealing of Heunisch's perceptions of Jewish messianism implying that depicting disenchantment thereover was of importance to him rather than to Aaron.

Aaron/Jacob/Kemper was thus not the hitherto assumed learned Sabbatian rabbi who sought to preserve his Kabbalistic messianic enthusiasm but a somewhat typical early modern convert. Consequently, his works need to be interpreted accordingly.

A Jewish Boy in a Muslim Household. A Fatwā by al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277)
Camilla Adang

The proposed paper deals with a fatwā by the famous Shāfiʿī ḥadith scholar and faqīh al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), who is asked to address the following issue: a son is born to a Muslim man, but the mother dies. The man therefore places the child in the care of a Jewish wet-nurse, who has a son of her own. When, after an unspecified absence, the man returns, the Jewish wet-nurse has died and he cannot tell his own son apart from the Jewish boy. The Jewish woman left no one who could identify the boy, nor does anyone know the Jewish boy's father, and no physiognomist is at hand. What should be the status of the two boys, seeing that it is not clear which one of the two is Muslim and which one Jewish?

According to al-Nawawī, no decision should be taken as to their status until further information becomes available that settles the matter. Should they reach the age of discernment without any proof having been produced, they will be persuaded to embrace Islam, but in case they refuse, it will not be forced on them, nor will they be required to pray, fast, or observe other Islamic precepts. Although this is probably a theoretical query, for the Jewish boy would in all likelihood be circumcised, it is interesting to follow al-Nawawī's reasoning.

Conversion and Self-Transformation in Early Christian Monasticism:
An Interdisciplinary Perspective
Inbar Graiver

Within Christianity, "conversion" may refer either to a person becoming Christian who was previously not Christian; to a Christian moving from one Christian denomination to another; or to a particular spiritual development which includes a personal commitment to a life of holiness. The classic paradigm for the latter form of conversion is highly dependent on the idea of sudden conversion, the prototypical model of which is Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. The proposed paper focuses on another form of conversion, which played a crucial role in the historical development of the monastic movement in late antiquity.

Whereas in sudden conversions the convert is a passive recipient of the process, and the conversion entails a dramatic transformation of self, which happens in one single instance and is permanent thereafter, the early monastic movement offered a different path to a life of holiness, to turning from a lax to a fervent way of life. This mode of conversion (*metanoia*) involved a gradual process of self-transformation, based upon an intentional effort over years of systematic training (*askesis*), in which the self was the active agent of its own evolution.

Christian monasticism provided various strategies, both physical and mental (e.g. fasting, vigils, meditative prayer and recitation of biblical verses) for this purpose, whose practice eventually enabled ascetic practitioners to profoundly transform their mental disposition and their entire character. The paper presents these strategies, especially the meditative practices that were employed by Christian monks throughout the eastern Roman empire and examines the way in which they facilitated a gradual process of conversion. To show how this process actually worked, I propose to examine the ascetic literature of the early monastic movement in view of cognitive

research on attention and brain neuroplasticity. Thereby I hope to demonstrate how historians can benefit from recent developments in cognitive research, as well as the new avenues for comparative research that this perspective opens up.

Coping with Conversion: The London House of Converts Revisited
Franziska Klein

When King Henry III of England founded his house of converts in 1232, he created an often-overlooked milestone in the history of poor relief. In this religious home, Jews who converted to Christianity found shelter, food and education possibly for the rest of their lives. Men, women and children were accommodated in the same house, guided by a special warden. For a long period of time Henry's foundation has mainly been seen as a hospital which should merely inspire conversion. This lecture puts Henry's unique effort into a broader perspective of poor relief in general and welfare for converts in particular. It argues, that such welfare was a central tool for preventing backsliding and religious ambiguity as early as the 12th and 13th-century. It was not primarily meant to increase the number of converts, but to cope with those challenges Jewish conversion posed to secular and religious authorities, Jewish and Christian societies and – of course – the converts themselves. Therefore, it anticipated certain tendencies of the late medieval period and the early modern times.

Thus this lecture examines briefly the special place of the house of converts in the history of poor relief and the history of conversion, showing it was deeply rooted in European tradition as well as innovative and visionary. Furthermore, it offers a glimpse on the position of the house inside English conversion policies.

"[I]f Jews are made English, the English are Jewe." Jewish Conversions in English Law from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-First Century

Sarah Mandel

"*His mother could have been as Italian in origin as Sophia Loren and as Roman Catholic as the Pope for all that the governors [of the school] cared: the only thing that mattered was that she had not converted to Judaism under Orthodox auspices"*[1]

In December 2009 the British Supreme Court was asked to intervene in a Jewish school's admission policy, which itself manifested a fierce internal religious debate about Jewish identity and conversion. The school wished to accept only those students who were Jewish according to the definition of the Office of the Chief Rabbi (a normative Orthodox definition based on matrilineal descent), while a parent wanted the school to accept their child who was born to a woman who had converted under the auspices of the UK movement for Masorti Judaism. The judges, who were divided in their opinions as to how and whether the law should intervene, published comments which revealed that their legal stance was inseparable from their theological, religious and socio-political perspectives. Their majority decision that the school's admission policy contravened the 1976 Race Relations Act, and the consequent imposition of a religious *practice* test as the criteria of admission to any UK Jewish school has had repercussions for British Jewish ritual observance and communal life.

"The woman appears to be a Jewess, at least she is descended of Jewish parents; that she continues so is not proved"[2]

The long eighteenth century England saw the earliest examples of Jews and Jewish law coming before English judges following their "readmission" in the mid seventeenth century. Anglican judges whose self-conception as guardians of the unwritten English constitution with its intimate links between church and state, faced numerous questions of how to relate to Jewish conversions, how to translate them into changes in legal status or civil rights, and what criteria to judge them by. They grappled with cases involving a divergence between stated belief and religious practices, and questions with public policy as well as individual implications. The cases exhibit a clear willingness on the part of the judges to intervene in families when it came to conversion as well as an unashamed application of Christian conceptions of conversion to Jews.

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[1] Lord Rodger in R (E) v Governing Body of JFS [2009], para. 228
[2] Sir William Scott in Jones v Robinson [1815] at 161 Eng. Rep. 1146

My paper will explore the similarities and differences in the way Jewish conversions are approached in English law across the two eras. It will emphasise how, despite the ostensibly doctrinal criteria of the Race Relations Act, the comments of the judges in the contemporary JFS case display versions of the judicial uncertainties and anxieties about the source or nature of Jewish identity and conversion from the much earlier period of English history. A comparative analysis will highlight the challenges members of one religious group face in understanding the conversion of another and the manifestation of this difficulty in the legal sphere.

"A Believing Slave is Better than a Polytheist": Reactions to Forced Conversions of Kidnapped Yezidi Women
Idan Barir

In August 2014, only two months after ISIS's overtake of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, and right after the end of the holy month of Ramadan, ISIS stormed the Yezidi province of Shingal (or Sinjar, in Arabic), located on the Iraqi-Syrian border, some 120 kilometers west of Mosul. The ISIS invasion of the region heralded fateful consequences for the Yezidi community, a Kurdish-speaking ethno-religious community residing in a few enclaves in northern Iraq: The community was shattered and forcibly exiled from its native homeland in Shingal, with many of its members paying the ultimate price during the invasion itself or the cruel siege on Mount Shingal in the weeks that followed.

It seems, however, that the harshest consequence of the invasion was the kidnapping of some 7,000 Yezidi women and children by ISIS members. The children were sent to ISIS Jihadi camps while the women were often taken as *Sabaya*, captives of the Islamic Caliphate who were treated as spoils of war. The Yezidi women were enslaved as sex-slaves and traded in the Caliphate's slave markets. These women were also forcibly converted to Islam according to the Shar'i law demanding that Sabaya become Muslim.

The forced conversion aroused dramatic reactions in both Muslim and the Yezidi societies. These discourses will be the focus of my talk.

The Islamic polemics on the forced conversions, led by Sunni scholars from many schools of jurisprudence as part of the polemics on the Islamic nature and authenticity of ISIS, focused mainly on the legitimacy of enslavement according to Islamic law in the 21st century. ISIS brought back

to center stage a plethora of pre-modern Islamic traditions and practices that had been virtually abandoned by most Islamic schools of thought by the 20th and 21st centuries. The polemics on the enslavement of the Yezidi women were only a part of this larger polemic on ISIS. No decisive conclusions were reached, and the Islamic religious establishment continued to maintain a passive position with regard to events.

The Yezidi debate on the issue of enslavement was naturally far wider and more charged. Even though the danger of Islamic extremists was well known to Yezidis long before the 2014 invasion of Shingal, the enslavement of women was a unique occurrence that the Yezidi community could not believe was going to happen or to expect in any way. These extreme circumstances, along with the gradual return of some of the enslaved women in the years that followed the events, forced the community and its religious establishment to find dramatic and unprecedented religious solutions that would allow for the swift acceptance of women, formerly enslaved and Islamized, back to the Yezidi community. The mechanisms that allowed this represent one of the most dramatic reforms in the history of the Yezidi community and religion.

From Monologue to Dialogue: Wahhabi Da'wa and Reassessment of 'the Other' after 9/11
Muhammad Al-Atawneh

This paper focuses on the contemporary Wahhabi dissemination of Islam (*da'wa*). Emphasis is placed on the doctrinal developments and changes in approaching the Other (Muslim and non-Muslim), when preaching Islam. Note that Wahhabi Islam found itself under an unflattering spotlight in the wake of the events of 9/11. The fact that fifteen of the nineteen suicide skyjackers were Saudi citizens, provoked an avalanche of criticism; in the West, as well as in some parts of the Arab/Islamic world, and even by some Saudis themselves; against Saudi/Wahhabi religious beliefs, rulers, social customs and education. This paper will argue that post-9/11 official Wahhabi da'wa demonstrates a breakdown from the traditional monolithic Wahhabi discourse of exclusivism, thus, acknowledges other cultures and nations, perhaps more than any time before. Now Wahhabis enable and promote dialogue, at the expense of their historical role of delivering "the truth" to the ignorant Other, both Muslim and non-Muslim, by way of a monologue.

The New Jews of Latin America
Renen Yezersky

In recent years, more non-Halachic Jews self-identify themselves as Jewish, establish communities that practice Jewish customs, convert and express their desire to join the Jewish people officially. This phenomenon revises the boundaries of the Jewish people, alters the accepted definitions of "Who is a Jewish?" and undermines the hierarchy and inter-Jewish politics. In this paper, I shall explore the phenomena of newcomers to the Jewish people in the Latin-American countries in which, it has been exceptionally prominent. I shall focus on the characteristics of the "New Jews" communities, which claim the bloodline of Spanish and Portuguese conversos (Anusim), the means available to them for the purpose of conversion, and their relationships vis-à-vis the official Jewish communities. Furthermore, I shall explore in detail the manners in which the "New Jews" challenge the Law of Return and the Israeli immigration policy, and in contrast, I will present and discuss how they have become a new target audience for Israeli immigration.

Tales of Fake Conversion: Constantine´s Conversion between Polemics and Political Ethics
Jonathan Stutz

Constantine, one of the most controversial figures for scholars in Late Antiquity, has been the object of much debate in both Byzantine and Arabic literature. Among the several accounts of his conversion to Christianity, certain Islamic authors, rather than passing it in silence or adopt the standard narratives used by Christian writers, doubted the authenticity of the conversion itself, presenting it as a political device in order to unite the Roman empire. This literary trope, however, was not polemical in nature but could be functionalized in several ways as shown by three separate writers who will be briefly presented in the paper. While historians such as al-Mas´udi were collecting several versions of the same event with the methodological concern of not wanting to present a one sided historical narration, theologians such as ʿAbd al-Jabbar made use of this interpretation in order to doubt Christianity´s truth claims altogether. Authors of "mirrors for princes" such as Miskawayh on the other hand used this story in order to show a prince's ability to drive the course of events for the sake of the state.

Religious Conversion as Political Protest: Aymara Indians, Catholic Authority and the Seventh day Day Adventist Church

Yael Mabat

The history of indigenous struggles for political and cultural rights has come to the fore in the last 30 years, especially since the 500th anniversary of Columbus's landing in the Americas, instigating debates over the way in which native populations engage in political protest and promote social change. In this context, historians studying the Andean region during the 19th and 20th centuries, have pointed to the various methods, ranging from peaceful demonstrations to violent rebellions, that Aymara and Quechua Indians implemented in a quest for their rights. Yet, the role of religion in general, and religious conversion in particular, played within the larger framework of social and political transformations has been overlooked. Moreover, conversion to Protestant or Evangelical Christianity, has specifically been viewed as an attempt to avoid political evolvement. Delving into the case of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Puno, Peru, exceptional for its success among Aymara Indians in the early 20th century, this paper argues to the contrary. It contends that for Aymara Indians, conversion was a political act of protest and integral to their fight for social justice on the local level. Conversion provided a way for believers to dispute the traditional Catholic communal authorities while providing legitimacy to new ones. Thus, this paper sheds light on the importance of religious change within the wider framework of political protest in the 20th century.

Based on archival research carried out in the regional archives of Cusco and Puno, the national archive of Peru and Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist archives, this presentation is part of a larger project focusing on the relationship between religious conversion, class and race in a neo-colonial setting.

Second Baptism of Christian Emirs: Conversion as Assurance of Political Loyalty on the Byzantine-Seljuk Confrontation of the Twelfth Century

Roman Shliakhtin

Conversions and interreligious marriages were the everyday reality of twelfth-century Anatolia. Byzantine sources mention the conversion of Byzantine princes to Islam and conversion of Seljuk

Emirs to Christianity as well as many marriages between Christians and Muslims. The children of those marriages operated as cultural brokers on both sides of the religious and political divide.

This paper analyzes the case of several "Hagarenes" who were baptized into the Orthodox church during the reign of emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180). According to the Byzantine canonist Theodore Balsamon, the Turks reported that their Christian mothers baptized them in the Seljuk Lands. The Synod of Orthodox Church investigated the matter and concluded that baptism was done as the regional custom "for the health of their bodies." Thus the synod declared the baptisms invalid and demanded that the "Hagarenes" be baptized again.

Theodore Balsamones, labels these "Hagarenes" as "Persians." This specific term allows us to identify the converts-in-question as the Danishmendides, members of the Seljuk dynasty, who were cultural and political brokers of Byzantine-Seljuk divide. In the second half of the twelfth century sultan Kilic Arslan II of Ikonion forced the Danishmendides out of their domains. The exiles came to Constantinople and entered the service of Manuel I Komnenos.

The paper argues that the second baptism of Danishmendides had political overtones. It bound the former cultural brokers to Byzantium and transformed them into the religious orientation of the Orthodox emperor. In the end, children of mixed marriages had to choose their religious and political affiliation, the choice that many children of mixed marriages have to make in our age as well.

Architecture of Conversion: Conversion of Architecture in the Wake of the Reconquista
Doron Bauer

My paper examines techniques of conversion of Muslim religious spaces in Iberia and Africa between the conquest of Toledo (1085) and the fall of Granada (1492). Once an Islamic city was taken by the advancing Christian forces, a long-term process of political, cultural, and material transformation eventually gave way to the incorporation of the city into the cultural and political realm of the Christian West. This process included, among other things, the conversion of religious spaces: great mosques, neighborhood mosques and madrassas. Conversions of religious spaces consisted of particular liturgical performances, staged spectacles, as well as architectural modifications. However, the exact nature of those varied from city to city betraying different modalities. My paper aims to establish a typology of conversions of religious spaces during the

Reconquista; to explore comparatively the logic behind the employment of different techniques of conversions in particular historical and architectural contexts (or in different cities); to analyze the manner in which architectural styles and aesthetics of space were linked to ethnic and religious identities; to postulate the role of conversion of sacred architecture in encouraging or discouraging conversion of communities and individuals; and to offer a reflection on the extent to which policies and mechanisms of aesthetic colonization of religious spaces developed in the Middle Ages were used or rethought during the Age of Discovery. The paper particularly draws upon non-canonical case studies from such understudied former Islamic cities as Palma de Mallorca, Huesca, and Ceuta.

Economic Security, Status Negotiation and Political Opportunity as Correlates in Explaining the Politics of Conversion to Islam in the Northern Region and Northern Igboland of Nigeria

Ihediwa Nkemjika Chimee

Nigeria is the biggest "Black Country" in Africa and a former British colony. It is multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual in character and geographically divided in half by its two most dominant religions Islam and Christianity. The British conquest of the disparate groups saw the establishment of a country out of a medley of people, religions and cultures in 1914 with the name Nigeria. Prior to the British conquest, the Northern part of the country had been under Caliphal Islamic rule since 1804; the British colonial encounter thwarted a further push by Islamic forces beyond their original boundary. European contact and British rule brought Christianity to the Southern parts of the country (and to the North central and pockets of areas in Northern Nigeria).The relationship between the Muslims and Christians in the North has never been smooth. Because of Islamic practices and the insistence of the clerical and spiritual leadership of the region, separation of Christian southerners from Northern Muslims was encouraged by the British colonial authorities and zones of exclusion were built for non-Muslim southerners named Sabon Gari meaning visitor's quarters. As colonialism unraveled, and regional government was created for the three regions to which Nigeria was divided in 1946, the emergent leadership in the North, began to use economic empowerment, political appointment and other forms of privileges to lure non-Muslims in the region to convert to Islam. Many of those from other minority groups began

to face serious economic, social and political challenges as a result of their religious identity. Most of those desirous of getting employment and surviving economically began to convert to Islam. In the early 1950s, the Northern Regional government rolled out the official Northernization policy, whereby southerners who were not Muslims were removed from the regional administration and barred from securing contracts. This once more increased the challenge for non-Muslims and the policy drove away many southerners who refused to convert to Islam away from the North. In Southeastern Nigeria, where the Igb speaking group is the dominant group, the Northern Igboland areas of Nsukka, Abakaliki and Afikpo, because of their proximity to the North as a buffer zones, have had contact with Muslim traders from the North, and people there have over time been lured by material opportunities to convert to Islam. Thus appreciable numbers of people in this densely Christian area are Muslims; courtesy of material, cash and other forms of inducement like giving scholarships and jobs. This subtle approach to conversion to Islam worked where there was no feasibility again for a holy war (Jihad). The paper intends to examine the factors of economic security, status negotiation and political opportunity as correlates explaining the conversion of animists, Christians, African traditional worshippers to Islam in the Northern region of Nigeria and the Northern Igboland areas of Nsukka, Abakaliki and Afikpo, during the colonial and post-colonial periods of Nigeria.

Conversion as Return:
The Jewish Community of Mizoram, India and the Politics of Religious Freedom
Laura Dudley Jenkins

The Jews of Mizoram believe that Mizos (an ethnolinguistic group in Northeast India) are the Bnei Menashe, descendants of one of the ten ancient lost tribes of Israel. After formal orthodox conversions to Judaism, members of the Bnei Menashe community have migrated to Israel under the law of return. They, along with others in India, Israel and the United States, advance varied narratives about this community, ranging from Knesset testimony to Christian Zionist Youtube videos. Whereas Mizo Jews tend to emphasize their present day Jewish piety and practices, many of their allies look back to ancient Jewish history or forward to the end of days. Their critics downplay religion and stress economic and political aspects of their conversion and migration. These divergent depictions of the Mizo Jews have implications for their religious freedom,

especially their rights to convert and to migrate. For some, they are a group defined by changes of identity (converts and migrants). For the Bnei Menashe, being Jewish and Israeli is not a change but a return.

One narrative, the Israeli Chief Sephardic Rabbi's recognition of Mizo Jews as "descendants of Israel," resulted in spatial mobility for some via formal conversions and the right of return. Another representation, the Mizo Jews as "fulfillment of Biblical prophecy," inspired funding from American Christian Zionists for Mizos to settle in Israel. Visual imagery of the community often features women to demonstrate observance and piety. But critical depictions of the Mizo Jews as missionary pawns, economic migrants, or illegal settlers has denied their sincerity or agency, impeding their religious freedom.

This case study is from my book manuscript on religious freedom and mass conversion in India, which includes other movements by marginalized communities in India to embrace different religions, including Christianity and Buddhism. In all these cases a predominant narrative that genuine converts must exhibit sincerity and agency inhibits the religious freedom of Indian religious minorities. The Mizo Jews complicate this predominant conversion narrative. Identifying as a lost tribe challenges the notion that they are converts at all. Making aliyah is returning rather than migrating. To the Bnei Menashe, aliyah is not a sign of ulterior motives but rather the epitome of Jewish sincerity.

Conversion and Marriage in the Canon Law of the Catholic Church
Rossella Bottoni

This paper aims to illustrate the legal consequences of conversion to Christianity and, more specifically, to the Catholic Church, as far as marriage is concerned. In the Catholic Church's doctrine, indissolubility is one of the essential characteristics of marriage, but conversion may provide the legal ground for the dissolution of the existing marriage and the celebration of a new one. Since the origins of the Catholic Church, this type of dissolution has been a regarded as a privilege *in favorem fidei*, which has been granted to safeguard faith in view of the pursuit of eternal safety. In this regard, special rules have been devised in order to ease conversion to Christianity, through the removal of the obstacles posed to a convert by his or her marriage contracted before conversion. The special rules concerning dissolution – whose application any

faithful, under certain conditions, has the right to request – include: 1) the Pauline privilege; 2) the special concessions granted since the 16th century in the cases of a) polygamy or b) deportation (the latter concerned the deportation of Africans and South-Americans as slaves, but it is still of topical importance when considering the current, widespread phenomenon of persecution and forced migration); 3) the so-called Petrine privilege. Although this paper is not comparative, it aims to contribute to the discussion on the legal aspects of conversion, and on mixed marriages in the three Abrahamic religions.

Rabbanit Chana and her Filipino Orthodox Jewish Convert Community in South Tel-Aviv
Gabriella Licsko

One of the most interesting social phenomenon today in the ha-Tikva neighborhood - this problematic, poverty ridden part - of Tel-Aviv is a very characteristic community, where naïve religiousity, strict halachic observance and Filipino pop music could merge together.

Most of the Filipinos (whose majority are devout Roman Catholics) arrived in Israel as foreign workers whose choice to be in Israel is almost entirely driven by economic reasons. Remedios (Chana) and Joselito (Eliezer) Megia choose Israel out of ideology and the desire to convert to Orthodox Judaism. They became disillusioned with Catholicism and found Jewish theology to be more convincing. Chana is a partial descendant of Bnei Anusim from Spain, Eliezer`s aunt was the first Jewish convert in their homeland. These two pharmacists who come from a wealthy background, exchanged their high social and economic status for a difficult life in Israel and became cleaners living in a poverty stricken neighborhood. Their and their children`s strong connection to Judaism were very convincing for their secular and Orthodox neighbors and friends alike, but not for the authorities, and it took a long time for them to convert and to receive citizenship.

Around 10 years ago the Megias initiated an informal platform for aiding potential Filipino converts. The group started to thrive, and today counts around 100 "members" and has become one of the most rapidly growing convert communities in Israel. Their central figure is "Rabbanit Chana" (a name given to her by some of the respected local Sephardi orthodox ladies) the "*magna mater*" of the community, teacher of potential converts, major transmitter of Jewish values for many Filipinos and host of friends, strangers and the poor of the neighborhood. The core group is

made up of Filipino converts, potential converts and convert families; former foreign workers, who were attracted to a strict form of Judaism combined with simple faith and a warm community; or Filipina spouses of Israelis who need halachic conversion.

The community is a very interesting subject of research also because of their relatively extensive social connections, complex self-identification and attitude (which never exhibits zealous or isolationist tendencies - sometimes so dominant in "neofite" groups.) This strict Orthodox community maintains very close and friendly relationship with the Catholic Filipinos in Israel and preserves strongly those parts of Filipino culture and identity which do not contradict their chosen faith. Even though they have newcomer and exotic status, they have managed to become an accepted and characteristic group of Sephardi Orthodox Jewish culture in South Tel-Aviv.

Contemporary Transnational Marriages and Cultural Conversion
Olga Kirschbaum

In our global era, people marry accross national, cultural, and religious borders with greater frequency, and Israel is no exception. While some transnational couples are equally well versed in each other's cultures, traditions, and languages, often such marriages also include an adaptation, even acculturation of one partner to the culture of the other. In this paper I argue that this process is a form of cultural conversion, and that this type of conversion is the most relevant form of conversion today among secular people. This paper will take Israel as a case study to examine this phenomenon with regard to Israelis married with non-Israelis (defined as citizens of another country who are not eligible to emigrate under the law of return, whether converts to Judaism or of Jewish heritage) living in Israel. Using a sample of 200 couples, it will consider the cultural, religious, and social backgrounds of both partners. It will also analyse the patterns of acculturation of both partners to either culture in terms of values and identity, measured by language, practice of traditions, cultural consumption, and social networks. I will pay special attention to whether there are gender, class, or ethnic patterns in the process of acculturation.

Conversion or Multiple Religious Identity – Sarmad Said as a Precursor for Today
Alon Goshen-Gottstein

Sarmad Said (d. 1661) was a Jewish-born, Sufi master, who was influential with Prince Akbar in Mughal India. He is typically considered a Jewish convert to Islam. I will problematize this view of his "conversion". Sarmad's writings suggest, instead, a more complex religious identity that retains aspects of his Jewish identity, along with Muslim, as well as Hindu identity. He allows us to explore where and when "conversion" is the optimal category for viewing a historical figure and where we might need alternative conceptualization, such as multiple religious identity. Sarmad is evoked by various contemporary Jewish seekers and in fact is a precursor for much contemporary Jewish involvement in religious life of the India subcontinent. Studying Sarmad allows us to pose questions that are of interest both in terms of theory of conversion and in terms of theological and pastoral concerns, in relation to Jewish involvement with other religions.