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The taifa of Denia and the Jewish networks of the medieval Mediterranean: a study of the Cairo Geniza and other documents

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The rulers of Denia, on the Mediterranean coast of eleventh-century Islamic Spain, and one of the principal taifas, or kingdoms, to emerge from the fallen caliphate of Cordoba, developed a unique maritime policy that bound their polity to the Mediterranean. The taifa is best known for its active promotion of piracy against Christian coasts, as well as its failed conquest of Sardinia, but the port also participated in direct maritime trade with Christian and Muslim ports. From a minor harbor in the tenth century, Denia became second only to Almeria in the transfer of goods between al-Andalus and the Mediterranean by the end of the taifa period. Denia's rulers and commercial elites built complex networks that spanned from Barcelona to Alexandria. Essential to their success was their ability to attract and conduct business with members of the Mediterranean Jewish community, as evidenced by Denia's unique and significant presence in the documents of the Cairo Geniza. This study examines commercial ties between Denia's rulers and the Jewish trading houses of the Mediterranean, while attempting to retrace the networks built by the taifa's own Jewish community with their coreligionists in Iberia and across the Mediterranean.

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Introduction

Muslim-Jewish relations in the Middle Ages have received increasing attention from scholars in recent years, as historians look to the past as a laboratory for understanding many of the issues that characterize the contemporary world. Medieval Spain, in particular, has emerged as one of the more popular theaters for examining interreligious relations in the past. Much of the scholarship is colored by the extent to which Muslims and Jews did, or did not, get along. This question is included in the larger debate over *convivencia*, and the idea that the interaction of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in medieval Spain was largely harmonious, and led to the creation of a unique culture of tolerance.¹ Opposite this interpretation is what is often called the “neo-lachrymose” view, which emphasizes the persecution of religious minorities, and of Jews in particular.² Behind both of these

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¹Wolf, “*Convivencia* in Medieval Spain,” 72–85. See also Glick, “Convivencia: An Introductory Note,” 1–9.

²See Cohen’s discussion of both the utopian and “neo-lachrymose” views of interfaith relations: Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, 3–16.

concepts hide political views and visions of contemporary society that are projected onto the past. In the end, this is a largely “glass half-full or half-empty” debate, and one that inhibits our understanding of the past more than it helps. As one historian has noted, communities and individuals live in specific moments, not broad historical tendencies.³ And, as David Nirenberg has pointed out, there is no reason that the term *convivencia*, literally “living together,” should mean harmonious coexistence.⁴

Beyond medieval Spain, the Mediterranean has also enjoyed increased study, again partly due to the interaction of Muslims, Christians, and Jews on and around its waters. Likewise, twenty-first-century historians living in an age of globalization and interconnectivity often see the Mediterranean as a connected space reflective of their own, revamping earlier ideas of a Mediterranean made whole by climate and culture.⁵ Communications between ports, communities, and individuals are now often advanced as the defining characteristic of the Mediterranean, to the point that it has become a model for examining other regions offering similar perceived cohesion through communications.⁶ While this approach is useful, and corrects some of the homogenizing aspects of the earlier geographic and climate-based Mediterranean model, it still imparts to the sea a unity that it did not necessarily have.⁷

A key tool that has emerged for examining both individuals and the structures they evolved in is the idea of networks.⁸ Through this kind of analytical grid, it is possible to understand how individuals operated through separate identities depending on context, and to see the relationships that they built and maintained. Moreover, we can apply this concept of networks to larger entities such as political states, and even combine the two to see the ways in which states and individuals interacted and often depended on each other. This approach can also help us move away from some of the more simplifying interpretations of interreligious relations. Rather than seeing individuals as simply Muslims, Christians, and Jews, we can also try to understand the different identities they held, the ways that their roles were determined perhaps in part by their religion, but also by several other factors. According to context, people activate specific overlapping identities, none of which excludes the other facets of themselves.⁹ The question here is not one of religious tolerance or *convivencia*, both of which are anachronistic concepts that impose presentist interpretations on the past. Nor is it of intentional ignorance of religious identity, as it was often the very bundling of religious identity with others that determined and informed individuals’ participation in the networks described below.¹⁰

The present study examines then the activities and movements of Jews both within the taifa of Denia and in connection with the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, and the Middle East. Just as Muslims, Christians, and Jews were not solely believers in their religions, the Jews of Denia created networks based on several shared interests that sometimes traveled

³Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*.

⁴Nirenberg, “Review of Jews,” 753–7.

⁵Braudel, *La Méditerranée*; Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*.

⁶Abulafia, “Mediterraneans,” 65.

⁷See Goldberg’s discussion of the Mediterranean and recent historiography on the subject: “The Geographies of Trade and Traders,” 18–25.

⁸See for example Goldberg, “The Geographies of Trade and Traders,” and the discussion of networks as a tool for historical research by Coulon and Valérian, “Introduction.” See also Bruce, “Réseaux et territorialité.”

⁹Lahire, “From the Habitus”; Burke and Stets, *Identity Theory*.

¹⁰I follow here Fancy’s masterful reassessment of the salience of religious identity in medieval intercultural relations: Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean*.



the same lines of communications, but that could also be distinct and separate. Religious and intellectual networks did not always coincide, and while they could piggyback on commercial relations, and vice versa, this was not always the case. Through these networks, Denia's Jewish community participated in the kingdom's growth over the course of the eleventh century from a backwater harbor to one of the most important ports and polities of the Western Mediterranean.

Historical introduction

The eleventh century marks a turning point in the history of Islamic Spain. The previous century had witnessed the consolidation of caliphal power under 'Abd al-Rahmān III (r. 912–961) and al-Hakam II (r. 961–976), and the culmination of that power in the hands of the *hājib* al-Mansūr (d. 1002).¹¹ The Umayyad Cordovan caliphate had developed a centralized system in which the weight of the capital determined the circulation of resources. This included not only economic resources in the form of taxes and commerce, but also the movements of intellectuals and religious scholars, all of which were drawn to the caliphal court and administration. The fall of the Cordovan caliphate in 1009 led to the political fragmentation of al-Andalus into over thirty provincial polities, while it also released resources from the centripetal pull of the Umayyad court.¹² The flow of commerce was redistributed to regional markets, while the taifa courts each vied for the services of intellectuals and administrators who had served the erstwhile caliphate. Many of the taifa kingdoms worked to replicate the Cordovan caliphate on a regional scale, some even sought to take the place of Cordova, and the most common strategy of state-building was to imitate the terrestrial and peninsular model commonly held under the caliphate.¹³ The taifa of Denia, on the eastern coast of the Peninsula, was among the most successful of the taifa kingdoms.¹⁴ Its success, however, did not lie in its imitation of Cordova, but in the conscious policies of its rulers to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the renascent eleventh-century Mediterranean. Mujāhid al-'Āmirī and his son, 'Alī, created, appropriated, and supported a series of networks that made Denia into a conduit between al-Andalus and the Mediterranean. This included physical infrastructures such as ports and roads, as well as a complicated human infrastructure that ran their state, served their court, and legitimized their rule.¹⁵ Overlapping and participating in this state infrastructure were merchants, ship owners, and scholars who also tied the taifa into local and interregional commercial and intellectual networks.

Denia's success was all the more singular in that the coastal town was practically non-existent prior to the eleventh century, and its port was little more than a secondary harbor

¹¹The most thorough study of caliphal Spain remains Lévi-Provençal's *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*, vols. 2 and 3. Readers may also profitably consult Safran's work on the construction of the caliphal court under the Cordovan Umayyads: *The Second Umayyad Caliphate*. Recent studies on al-Mansūr are Ballestin Navarro, *Al-Mansur y la dawla 'amiriya*, and Sénac, *Al-Mansūr*.

¹²On the fall of the caliphate and the ensuing *fitna*, see Scales, *The Fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba*. On the taifa period in general, see Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party Kings*; Viguera Molins, *Los Reinos de Taifas*; or the more recent Guichard and Soravia, *Les royaumes de taifas*.

¹³The Umayyads were not ignorant of the sea, and took a number of measures over the course of the tenth century to improve their maritime presence, but the Mediterranean was never a priority for the caliphal court. See Lirola Delgado, *El poder naval de al-Andalus*, and Picard, *La mer et les musulmans*.

¹⁴On the taifa of Denia, see Sarnelli Cerqua, *Mujāhid al-'Āmirī*; Rubiera Mata, *La Taifa de Denia*; Bruce, *La taifa de Denia*.

¹⁵On the *kuttāb* who were essential human pieces of the Andalusī state, see first Soravia, "Les fonctionnaires épistolières." For *kuttāb* active in Denia, see Sarnelli Cerqua, "La vita intellettuale a Denia," and Rubiera Mata, *La Taifa de Denia*.

without mention in geographical sources.¹⁶ Not a single intellectual or scholar is listed as coming from or even transiting through Denia under the caliphate. By the end of the taifa period, however, Denia had become the second port of transit for scholars traveling either to or from the East, and it had also become a center for Islamic scholarship and Koranic reading renowned throughout the Mediterranean.¹⁷

Mujāhid and ‘Alī drew political legitimacy as Islamic rulers from their active pursuit of maritime *jihād* and their patronage of Islamic scholars, but the taifa was also home to two important *dhimmi* communities on whom the taifa court depended on several levels. Denia’s Christian community was large enough to attract the attention of the Bishop of Barcelona, and it was the object of a treaty between the two courts that helped cement an alliance against the taifa of Zaragoza in 1058.¹⁸ The treaty assigned religious authority over Denia’s Christians to the Barcelonian See, but it also obliged them to recognize ‘Alī b. Mujāhid as their secular ruler during their weekly sermons, thus contributing to the legitimization of his reign. Other than this treaty, however, documentation on these Christians and their role within the greater community is fragmentary. Mozarabic scribes seem to have worked for the court, since ‘Alī b. Mujāhid sent a letter in 1060 to the countess Almodis of Barcelona that was translated from Arabic to Latin and written in a “Visigothic” hand dissimilar from that employed in the Christian North.¹⁹ In addition, ‘Abd Allāh b. Buluqqīn al-Zīrī notes that the Christian *kātib* Abū ‘l-Rabī‘ moved to Denia from Granada after the 1066 riots, perhaps aware of the welcome he could expect there.²⁰ Evidence indicates trade with the Italian port of Pisa, and some of the Christians residing in the taifa’s ports may have been involved with this trade, or have been Pisans themselves.²¹ However, beyond this, there is little we can know about the Christian community’s contribution to the taifa and its networks.

Several different sources, however, document Denia’s Jewish community, indicating its members’ participation in the taifa’s growth and the different ways in which the taifa’s Islamic rulers relied on their services. Jewish courtiers, scholars, and merchants, though religiously distinct from their Muslim neighbors, nevertheless were active members of the greater community. Moreover, they built relationships with Jews and Muslims throughout the Mediterranean, creating networks that offered opportunities for profit

¹⁶Though Denia had been an episcopal see in late Antiquity and even the early years of the Umayyad Emirate, it fell into ruin along with other coastal towns. The coastal site seems to have been abandoned for the inland town of Ondara, where a governor is mentioned for the late caliphal period: Bruce, “The Taifa of Denia and the Medieval Mediterranean,” 150–2.

¹⁷Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘ibar*, vol. 1, 552; Sarnelli Cerqua, “La vita intellettuale a Denia,” 1–26; Bruce, “The Taifa of Denia,” 398.

¹⁸Bruce, “An intercultural dialogue,” 25–33.

¹⁹Both Valls Taberner and Aurell note the scribe’s “Visigothic” hand, and raise the possibility of his Mozarabic identity. “La lletra en què està escrit el fragment de pergamí conservat, és de tradició visigòtica i completament distinta de la que en el segle XI era corrent al nostre país”: Valls Taberner, “Notes per la història de la família comtal de Barcelona,” 216; “La paléographie dénote des archaïsmes wisigothiques qui le rendent très différent des documents catalans de la même époque”: Aurell, *Les Noces du comte*, 275, n. 1; Mesa Sanz, “Para la edición crítica de la carta de ‘Alī ibn Muyāhid a la sede episcopal de Barcelona,” 6; Bruce, “An intercultural dialogue,” 23.

²⁰‘Abd Allāh b. Buluqqīn al-Zīrī, *Kitāb al-tibyān*, 95.

²¹Bruce, “The politics of violence and trade,” 139–41; Mathews, “Plunder of war or objects of trade,” 233–58; Smith, “Calamity and Transition,” 41–3. M. de Epalza posited the fact that the 1058 treaty between Denia and Barcelona referred only to transiting Christians – merchants and mercenaries – and doubted the existence of any stable and indigenous Christian community in Denia. Though his denial of any local Christian community seems extreme, it is possible that transient and semi-transient Christians were also included in the treaty: Epalza, “Falta de obispos,” 385–400; Epalza, “Los cristianos en las Baleares musulmanas,” 141; Epalza, Llobregat, “¿Hubo mozárabes en tierras valencianas?,” 22; Rubiera Mata, *La taifa de Denia*, 102–4.



and growth that went beyond their group. In fact, Denia's Jewish community and its activities within the Peninsula and across the Mediterranean illustrate well the pursuance and promotion of communications that characterized the taifa and its court. The redirection of resources made possible by the fall of the Umayyad Cordovan Caliphate also affected the Jewish community of Denia. The human infrastructure that supported the state and fed the city – literally and figuratively – included Jews at many levels. The growth of the Jewish community over the course of the century mirrors the taifa's own success, while the taifa, its rulers and its merchants benefitted from the networks that tied their port to markets of the Mediterranean.

Scholarly networks

In the tenth century, it was only natural that an Andalusī religious scholar, even a Jewish one, would exercise his activities as a community leader and teacher in Cordova. Ḥasdai b. Shaprut was a noted Jewish leader, scholar, and supporter of his coreligionists throughout the Mediterranean and beyond. He resided in Cordova and derived his influence in large part from his position at the caliphal court.²² The twelfth-century Jewish author Abraham ibn Daud traced the rise of Sephardic scholarship to the arrival of an Eastern scholar in Cordova in the second half of the tenth century, tying in the caliph's own support for the independence of the Andalusī Jewish community vis-à-vis the gaonic academies in Baghdad.²³

This was no longer the case in the following century, however, as centralizing forces no longer held the same sway. The flight of courtiers and intellectuals from the capital after the fall of the caliphate and the civil unrest that ensued was not limited only to Muslims. Just as Islamic scholars sought to land on their feet in regional courts and capitals, so too did members of other religious communities. The creation of over thirty regional courts likewise created a need for intellectuals capable of serving those courts. Individuals educated in the Cordovan administration found a demand for their services in the different taifas in need of capable officials.²⁴ In many cases, this included Jews who could act as scribes and administrators, philosophers, and doctors.²⁵ As was often the case, these intellectuals rarely limited their learning to one field, extending their interests to religious and

²²Hasdai b. Shaprut served as the secular leader of the Cordovan Jewish community, and most likely of the Andalusī Jewish community as a whole. As a Jewish leader, and an integral member of the Umayyad court, Ibn Shaprut supported the Umayyad court's anti-Abbasid policies, compiling a library of Hebrew religious and legal literature and attracting Jewish scholars from abroad to help make Iberian Jews independent of the Baghdadi Jewish authorities. His efforts were so successful that al-Andalus indeed became an important source of Jewish scholarship and, at least under the caliphate, relations between Spanish Jews and the Iraqi academies ceased. On Hasdai b. Shaprut's relations outside al-Andalus and his promotion of Jewish scholarship, see Mann, *Texts and Studies*, vol. 1, 3–30. See also Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-qabbalah*, 63–7.

²³Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-qabbalah*, 66; Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a also notes Andalusī Jewry's new independence in a number of religious and legal matters in his '*Uyūn al-anbā' fi tabaqāt al-ṭibā'*, 498; Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 207, n. 10. Ibn Daud projects onto Ibn Shaprut's patronage of Jewish scholars his story of the four rabbis who established the great seats of Jewish scholarship in the West, especially in al-Andalus. Though Gil sees no reason to doubt the historical core of the four rabbis story, Cohen's analysis of the episode and its literary precedents demonstrates the extent to which Ibn Daud borrowed and crafted his origin story of Spanish Jewish scholarship: Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries*, 177, 195–7; Cohen, "The Story of the Four Captives," 55–131. The Babylonian and Palestinian gaonic academies, or *yeshivot*, were the principal institutions for Jewish religious and legal scholarship from the sixth to the thirteenth century. Although the West had traditionally followed the Palestinian *yeshivah*, by the eleventh century the Babylonian *geonim*, the leaders of the academies, had established their leadership in the Maghrib and al-Andalus: Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries*, 165.

²⁴Guichard and Soravia, *Les royaumes des taifas*, 238–55.

²⁵Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 190–223.

legal studies related to the Talmud and the Hebrew language.²⁶ In fact, this multiplication of courts and thus of patronage for Jewish intellectuals contributed directly to the “Golden Age” of Sephardic culture.²⁷ Thus, the most important Jewish political figure of the eleventh century did not live in Cordova, but Granada, where he served as vizier for the ruling Berber dynasty. Like Hasdai b. Shaprut, Samuel b. Naghrila was a scholar and an administrator. He wrote poetry that was read throughout the Jewish Mediterranean, corresponded with Jewish community leaders as far away as Baghdad, and cultivated the image of a Jewish prince leading armies in battle.²⁸ Ibn Naghrila’s path to power from scribe to vizier was not exceptional, despite Islamic prohibitions on *dhimmis* serving in positions of authority over Muslims, and Wasserstein lists Jewish viziers serving in the taifa courts of Almeria, Seville, and Zaragoza.²⁹

There are no Jewish viziers mentioned for Denia. This does not mean that Jews did not play a role in the taifa’s administration, and it certainly does not mean that there were no Jewish members of its court. From the beginning of the *fitna*, the *Sharq al-Andalus* had been one of the principal destinations for courtiers fleeing the civil unrest in post-caliphal Cordova.³⁰ Mujāhid arrived in Denia already with a large following sometime around 1011, and the taifa court became over the course of the century a major pole in Andalusi intellectual networks.³¹ Denia’s success in attracting former members of the caliphal administration, secretaries, scholars, and other intellectuals contributed directly to the court’s political legitimacy.³² Among these, the noted Jewish physician Abū Ibrāhīm Isaac b. Yashush served both Mujāhid and ‘Alī until moving to Toledo shortly before his death in 1057.³³ The use of Jewish physicians was fairly common in al-Andalus and

²⁶Ibn Sa‘id, *Kitāb tabaqāt al-ūmam*, 88–9 (English trans. Finkel, “An Eleventh Century Source,” 293).

²⁷Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 193 and n. 3; Wasserstein, “The Muslims and the Golden Age of the Jews in al-Andalus,” 179–96.

²⁸In his poetry, Samuel b. Naghrila celebrated in particular his military victories at the head of Granada’s armies: Cole, *Selected Poems of Shmuel HaNagid*. Wasserstein makes much of the fact that he was the first Jew to lead an army since Antiquity: Wasserstein, “Samuel ibn Naghrila ha-Nagid,” 114ff; Wasserstein, *Rise and Fall*, 197. On Samuel b. Naghrila’s extra-peninsular relations: Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-qabbalah*, 74–5; Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries*, 198; Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 112.

²⁹Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall*, 210–3. The tensions that resulted from Ibn Naghrila’s power over Muslims, and that eventually resulted in the riots that ousted his son and successor Joseph and the massacre of Granada’s Jews in 1066, do not seem to have spread from that city. The violence of the 1066 riots resulted in part from the particular authority held by Ibn Naghrila and a number of Jews within the Granada administration. This level of authority, and so also this level of violence, does not seem to have been reached elsewhere. Aside from an isolated incident in Almeria involving an Islamic judge angered at seeing a Jewish vizier and a young Muslim boy together in the baths, which seems to have had nothing to do with the man’s political position, I know of no other violence of this kind for eleventh-century al-Andalus. Brann’s discussion of Jews and Jewish political figures in eleventh-century al-Andalus reiterates Wasserstein’s valid highlighting of these incidents as examples of the precarious position for Jews. However, as seems clear from Brann’s analysis, Jewish presence in the secular political sphere posed problems primarily for Islamic religious figures such as Ibn Hazm who, during the eleventh century, rarely were able to push public opinion to the point of action. See Brann, *Power in the Portrayal*, especially introduction and chapter 1. For the Almeria bath house incident, Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall*, 210–1, citing al-Dabbi, *Kitāb bughyat al-multamis fi tārikh rijāl al-Andalus*, n. 928, 345–6.

³⁰The term *fitna* refers in general to unrest and division that tests the unity of the Islamic community. For Islamic Spain, it refers to the civil war provoked by the fall of ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Abī ‘Amir ‘Sanchuelo’ in 1009, and that ended in 1031 when the last caliphal pretender was deposed without a replacement. The geographical term *Sharq al-Andalus* designates the eastern and Mediterranean provinces of al-Andalus: Guichard, “Shark al-Andalus,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 9:351a.

³¹Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, 116. For Denia’s literary court, see Sarnelli Cerqua, “La vita intellettuale,” 1–26, as well as Rubiera Mata, *La taifa de Denia*, 115–53; Urvoy, *Le monde des ulémas andalous*, 29, 71–3.

³²Guichard and Soravia, *Les royaumes des taifas*, 237. Among the most important of these were Abū b. Burd al-Asghar, Abū ‘Amir Ahmad b. Abī Marwān b. Shuhayd, and Abū ‘I-‘Alā Šā‘id al-Baghdādi. See the article by Sarnelli Cerqua cited *supra* for a more complete discussion of Denia’s *kuttāb*.

³³Ibn Yashush appears as Ibn Qastār in Ibn Sa‘id’s *Kitāb tabaqāt al-ūmam*, 89 (Finkel, “An Eleventh Century Source,” 52). This deformation appears also in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s compendium of physicians and is discussed in Steinschneider, “Zur arabischen Literatur,” 8: 551 and 9: 838.

throughout the Islamic world, but Ibn Yashush's reputation went far beyond his medical role and reflects the literary and scholarly activities that bolstered Denia's place among the taifa courts. Mujāhid and 'Alī's court physician was recognized as one of the premier Hebrew grammarians of the Middle Ages. His work circulated throughout al-Andalus in dialogue with many of the notable Jewish scholars of his age, namely Samuel b. Naghrila of Granada and Abū al-Walīd Marwān b. Janāḥ of Zaragoza.³⁴ It is important to note that Ibn Yashūsh's reputation extended beyond Jewish intellectual circles; in his essay on the rise of science in the West, Ibn Sa'īd not only praises Ibn Yashush's skills as a physician, but highlights his keen intellect and mastery of philosophy and Hebrew grammar and history.³⁵ Ibn Yashush's long tenure in Denia's court was thus due in part to his qualities as a physician, but his scholarly activities likewise complemented the renown of his Muslim peers and the taifa's reputation as a center of intellectual excellence.

The scholarly reputation of Denia's court contributed to the overall legitimacy of its rulers. More importantly, Mujāhid and 'Alī were conscious of the religious aspects of that legitimacy. As rulers of an Islamic polity, they needed the approbation of Islamic religious scholars, or '*ulamā'*, as evidenced by participation and association with the taifa. The tacit support of the '*ulamā'*, through their simple presence, could help to bulwark a precarious regime, and religious studies played an especially important role in medieval Islamic politics, notably so in Denia. As with scribes and other intellectuals, the disintegration of the Cordovan caliphate had fragmented the system of religious scholarship. The distribution of '*ulamā'* across al-Andalus adapted to the rise of the taifa capitals, and Denia was among the most successful courts in attracting religious scholars. This feat was even more impressive since, as stated above, the city seems to have completely lacked religious scholarly structures prior to Mujāhid's arrival. Mujāhid himself studied Koranic recitation (*qirā'a*), and he made his capital into the most important center for the study of Koranic reading in al-Andalus; he even wrote treatises on the subject.³⁶ Although he did not follow his father's penchant for religious study, 'Alī continued Mujāhid's active patronage of the '*ulamā'*.³⁷ Denia's rulers were perhaps pious and sincere, but their support for religious scholarship presented political benefits in addition to those more edifying for the soul. Denia's reputation in religious studies attracted '*ulamā'* from across al-Andalus, and its reputation spread throughout the Muslim Mediterranean.

Similarly, from what must have been a small, if not nonexistent Jewish community at the beginning of the century, Denia became one of the main centers for Jewish religious studies in the Peninsula.³⁸ Just as the taifa participated in a network of Islamic '*ulamā*'

³⁴ Moses b. Ezra referred to him and Abū 'l-Walīd Marwān b. Janāḥ as consummate masters of the Hebrew language, while Ibn Janāḥ himself extolled Ibn Yashūsh's science and knowledge. Ibn Yashūsh's intellect ranged across many subjects, and his biblical exegeses also garnered much attention. See Derenbourg and Derenbourg, *Opuscules et traités*, xix–xxi.

³⁵ Note that Ibn Sa'īd, who in addition to his activities as an author and historian also served as *qaḍī* in Toledo, apparently befriended Isaac b. Yashūsh and appreciated his candor and personality.

³⁶ Ibn Bassām, *Dhakhira*, 3:21; Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, 3:155–6; Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Kitāb a'māl al-a'lām*, 250; al-Dabbī, 632, n. 1384; al-Humaydi, 564, n. 829; Yāqut, *Kitāb irshād al-arīb ilā ma'iṣafat al-adib*, 6:243–244; Ibn Khaldūn, *Prolegomènes*, 2:455–6; Guichard and Soravia, *Les royaumes des taifas*, 222; Sarnelli Cerqua, "La vita intellettuale a Denia," 601.

³⁷ 'Alī walked at the head of the funeral procession for Abū 'Amr al-Dānī, the principal scholar of *qirā'a* for his age. On another occasion, when he learned that the scholar Abū 'l-Fadl was in his port, he hastened to have food sent to welcome the traveler. See Ibn Bashkūwāl, 592, n. 882; Ibn Bassām, *Dhakhira*, 4:65.

³⁸ The sole possible indication of a Jewish community in Denia prior to the *fitna* is the *nisba* of a trader named Joseph b. Samuel al-Dānī who lived in Palermo around 1025, indicating that either he or his father may have come to Sicily from Denia: Simonsohn, *The Jews in Sicily*, v. 1, n. 42, 43–4 (Geniza document OR 1080 J 22).

that reached to the Middle East, Denia's Jewish community attracted and produced scholars with connections and recognition that went far beyond al-Andalus. The relations built and maintained with Jewish religious authorities across the Mediterranean are especially notable since, as mentioned above, ties with the Babylonian gaonic academies had been severed under the Umayyad Cordovan Caliphate. The ease with which Andalusī communities reconnected with the academies in the East after the fall of the Caliphate speaks to the relatively intense level of commercial communications that existed between those same communities. It equally indicates the polyvalent status of each individual, with Jewish merchants also serving as messengers and couriers between the communities. The growth of Denia's Jewish community and its integration in the Jewish religious networks benefitted from the commercial activities of that same community, as discussed below, and most likely from support on the part of the taifa's Islamic rulers.

Even as Islamic rulers, Mujāhid and 'Alī derived legitimacy from the religious activities of Denia's Jewish authorities. In maintaining and even supporting *dhimmī* communities whose reputations went beyond the borders of their kingdom, Mujāhid and 'Alī followed the examples set by the Umayyad caliphs of Cordova under whom Christian and Jewish religious figures had been an integral part of court life. Sponsorship of Jewish scholarship had benefitted both 'Abd al-Rahmān III and al-Hakam II in their efforts to defend Cordovan claims to the caliphate vis-à-vis their Abbasid rivals in Baghdad. Ibn Abī Usaybi'a directly linked Ḥasdai b. Shaprut's high position in the caliphal court, and the resources that came with it, to the rise of an independent Jewish scholarly community in al-Andalus.³⁹ Likewise, according to Ibn Daud, 'Abd al-Rahmān III was delighted that, because of the arrival in Cordova of Moses b. Ḥanokh and the subsequent growth of Andalusī Jewish scholarship, "the Jews of his domain no longer had need of the people of Babylonia."⁴⁰ In supporting the growth of their own Jewish community, Denia's rulers thus gained doubly in legitimacy, through the accumulation of recognition by religious authorities, and by associating the image of their court with that of the erstwhile caliphate.⁴¹

Abraham Ibn Daud's *Sefer ha-qabbalah* is the principal source for the history of Spanish Jewry during this period. The twelfth-century author's purpose was mainly to extoll the superiority of Sephardic scholarship, and he describes the rise and succession of Jewish scholars in the Peninsula beginning with the fortuitous arrival of Moses b. Ḥanokh in the second half of the tenth century. For the following period, the eleventh century, Ibn Daud writes that "the mastery of the Talmud now rested exclusively in Spain, where there flourished five rabbis all of whom were named Isaac": of these five Isaacs, two were members of the Jewish community of Denia.⁴² In addition, a third religious scholar trained in the East immigrated to Denia during the same period.⁴³

Whatever small Jewish community may have lived in Denia before the taifa period, it did not produce any notable scholars. The rise of Jewish scholarly activity was directly related to the establishment of Mujāhid's taifa capital there and the conscious construction of maritime infrastructures and networks. In fact, Ibn Daud directly associates Denia's

³⁹Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-qabbalah*, 66; Ibn Abī Usaybi'a, 'Uyūn al-anbā' fi tabaqāt al-attibā', 498.

⁴⁰Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-qabbalah*, 66.

⁴¹The importance of this recognition is evident in the 1058 treaty signed with Barcelona, in which Denia's Christian community is bound to acknowledge 'Alī b. Mujāhid's rule in their weekly sermons: Bruce, "An intercultural dialogue," 25–33.

⁴²Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-qabbalah*, 78. Ibn Daud writes that two "were natives of Spain; a third came from a neighboring area; while the remaining two migrated from abroad."

⁴³Ashtor, *Jews of Moslem Spain*, 294, citing Samuel ha-Nagid, *Diwan*, xxiii–iv and n. 74, ls. 16–18.

mastery of the sea with the presence of a flourishing, wealthy Jewish community there.⁴⁴ The growth of Denia's port and its emergence as the second Andalusī port of transit for Mediterranean travelers must have likewise facilitated the renewal of connections with Jewish scholars in the East. Thus, a Baghdadi rabbi named Samuel b. Joseph immigrated to Denia sometime during the first half of the century. Samuel had served at the rank of *rosh kallah* in the Pumbedita *yeshivah* in Baghdad, but was forced to flee because of an undisclosed quarrel.⁴⁵ Although Jewish communities with active scholars lined the southern Mediterranean, notably in Alexandria and Qayrawān, Samuel settled in Denia. The rabbi may have already had contacts with the Jewish community in Denia, or the somewhat unpredictable nature of Mediterranean navigation may have made Denia his first port of transit in the Western Mediterranean.⁴⁶ Whatever reason brought him there, Samuel exercised what must have been a high level of scholarly activity. He corresponded with Samuel b. Naghrila, with whom he exchanged poems. According to the Nagid, Samuel b. Joseph could have succeeded Rav Hai b. Sherira as head of the Academy had he remained in Baghdad.⁴⁷ This was great praise coming from Ibn Naghrila, who had also corresponded with Rav Hai and recognized his religious intellectual authority.⁴⁸ Denia's Jewish community must have undergone significant growth since the beginning of the century to attract such an exceptional figure, and his presence no doubt contributed to the quality of scholarly activity pursued there. In addition, his correspondence with Ibn Naghrila indicates participation in the Peninsula's Jewish intellectual networks while probably maintaining his contacts with communities to the east. We should also note that during this period Denia and Granada, where Ibn Naghrila served as vizier, were often in conflict, coming close to open battle.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the shared religious interests between Samuel b. Joseph and Ibn Naghrila included Denia and Granada in the same peninsular network of rabbinical scholars.

Ibn Daud does not mention Samuel b. Joseph, but his presence in Denia helped raise the level of rabbinical scholarship that characterized the taifa in the second half of the century. During this period, Denia was home to two of the "five Isaacs" whom Ibn Daud puts forward as evidence of Spanish mastery of the Talmud.⁵⁰ The first of these was Rabbi Isaac b. Moses b. Sukkari.⁵¹ According to the *Sefer ha-qabbalah*, Isaac b. Moses held the title of *ḥaver*, designating him as a scholar within the community. The quality of his scholarship was such that, at some point around 1070, he followed

⁴⁴ Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-qabbalah*, 83.

⁴⁵ Ashtor, *Jews of Moslem Spain*, 294; Samuel ha-Nagid, *Diwan*, xxiii–iv. The title *rosh kalla* was given to leading members of the Babylonian academies who were often responsible for lecturing and leading prayers and study groups: Ackerman-Lieberman, "Resh Kalla," *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/resh-kalla-SIM_0018350.

⁴⁶ For example, a Geniza letter from the representative of the Babylonian *yeshivot* in the Maghrib to Joseph ibn 'Awkal mentions a letter that transited through Almeria on its way from Alexandria to al-Mahdiyya: TS 13 J 36 f.1, ls. 13–14; Stillman, "East-West Relations in the Islamic Mediterranean," 199.

⁴⁷ Rav Hayya's term as *gaon* was a high point of authority and recognition for the Pumbedita *yeshiva* before its decline over the course of the eleventh century: Brody, "Hay (Hayya) Gaon," *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/hay-hayya-gaon-COM_0009480.

⁴⁸ Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries*, 198; Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 112.

⁴⁹ Abd Allāh al-Zīrī, *Tibyān*, 77. Ibn Naghrila sent a poem to his son Joseph celebrating Granada's victory over a coalition headed by Valencia that came about when Mujāhid left the coalition shortly before the battle: Samuel ha-Nagid, *Poemas*.

⁵⁰ Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-qabbalah*, 78.

⁵¹ The reading of Isaac b. Moses's surname has posed some problems, but Sukkari, which would seem to indicate some connection to the sugar trade, at least for his family, seems the most clear: Steinschneider, "An Introduction to the Arabic Literature of the Jews," 320, n. 465; Poznanski, "Les cinq Isaacs," 312; Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 126.

the opposite path of Samuel b. Joseph and moved east, where he became gaon of the Pumbedita academy in Baghdad.⁵² Isaac b. Moses's connections with the Jewish scholars in the East must have been quite close to allow for this move, having possibly benefitted from ties established or maintained by members of Denia's community.

The second of the Isaacs demonstrates even further the extent of Denia's Jewish networks and its draw for rabbinical scholars. Isaac b. Reuben's *nisba*, al-Bargeloni, indicates that he was a native of Christian Barcelona.⁵³ Despite this, Isaac b. Reuben studied in Cordova under Hanokh b. Moses, the son and successor of the Moses b. Hanokh who had helped establish a high level of Talmudic studies in al-Andalus.⁵⁴ Isaac returned to teach in his native Barcelona before immigrating to Denia later in his life; once established in the taifa, al-Bargeloni served as *dayyan*, or judge, of the Jewish community until his death.⁵⁵ Al-Bargeloni was a prolific scholar and writer, and he is most known for his *azharot*, liturgical poems written for the festival of Shavuot, which are still sung by the Jewish communities of North Africa.⁵⁶ Moses b. Ezra and Judah al-Harizi, both famous Jewish poets in their own right, praised his ability to interpolate biblical passages in his poems.⁵⁷ In addition to his liturgical work, al-Bargeloni wrote at least two Talmudic commentaries, leading Ibn Daud to include him among the masters of his day.⁵⁸ Finally, Isaac b. Reuben's interests also included Jewish law, and he translated Hai b. Sherira's text on commerce and sales, *Kitāb al-shirā' wa-l-bay'*, from Arabic to Hebrew under the title *Sefer ha-meqāḥ ye-ha-mimkar*.⁵⁹

Isaac b. Reuben's immigration to Denia demonstrates how the networks maintained by the taifa's Jewish community paralleled and enhanced those built by the court. 'Ali b. Mujāhid maintained a close relationship with Barcelona's rulers, exchanging personal correspondence with the countess Almodis and, at the request of count Ramon Berenguer I, intervening to liberate captive Cistercian monks for sale in the Denia slave market.⁶⁰ The

⁵²The lack of other documentation on Isaac b. Moses, and Ibn Daud's seeming purpose to show that Spanish scholarship had surpassed the East to the point of sending its scholars to head the academies, probably means that too much should not be made of this. Gil reiterates Mann's interpretation of this passage as an exaggeration of the importance of Spanish scholarship. For my part, especially given Ibn Daud's lack of precision elsewhere (see Cohen, "The Story of the Four Captives," 55–131; Poznanski, "Les cinq Isaacs," 312–13), I wonder if there has not been some confusion with Samuel b. Joseph: Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries*, 449; Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 207. Gil does mention, however, a Geniza fragment that reads "... b. Moses (Mishoi?), grandson of Isaac, head of the yeshiva of the Diaspora": Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries*, 198.

⁵³According to Barjau and Calders, al-Bargeloni was born in 1043 and died in 1113; no references are given, but Ashtor repeats the same birth year. In an earlier article, Mann cites Joseph b. Zaddik in writing that he died in 1070. See Barjau and Calders, "Les azharot de Rabí Ishaq al-Barseloní," 62; Ashtor, *Jews in Moslem Spain*, 294; Mann, "Glanures de la Gueniza," 157.

⁵⁴In a fragment from the Cairo Geniza, Isaac b. Reuben cites an explanation of a Talmudic text learned from his "great master" Hanokh b. Moses: Mann, "Glanures de la Gueniza," 158.

⁵⁵Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-qabbalah*, 83. According to the fourteenth-century scholar Simon b. Zemah Duran, Judah b. Barzillay al-Bargeloni was his disciple and Nahmanides his descendant: Mann, "Glanures de la Gueniza," 157, citing H.J. Michael, *Or ha-Hayim* (Frankfurt, 1891) 510, n. 1084. Klein, however, cites Halberstam's doubts on the assumed relationship between the two Bargelonis: Klein, "Power and Patrimony: The Jewish Community of Barcelona, 1050–1250," 45, n. 24, citing S.J. Halberstam (ed.), *Sefer Yeširah* (Berlin, 1885), p. xviii.

⁵⁶Barjau and Calders, "Les azharot de Rabí Ishaq al-Barseloní," 63.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁸Mann, "Glanures de la Gueniza," 157.

⁵⁹Steinschneider, *Die Arabische Literatur der Juden*, 99; Hai b. Sherira, Isaac b. Reuben al-Bargeloni, Moses b. Isaac Mintz, *Sefer ha-meqāḥ ye-ha-mimkar*. This translation indicates that Isaac b. Reuben must have maintained ties with Jews living in Christian Spain even after settling in al-Andalus. Andalusi Jews would have had no need for a Hebrew version of Rav Hayya's text, since it had originally been written in Arabic, a language in which Andalusi Jews themselves wrote and communicated.

⁶⁰Bruce, "An intercultural dialogue," 19–21.



1058 treaty signed by 'Ali b. Mujāhid and count Ramon Berenguer I further recognized political links between the two states through Denia's Christian community.⁶¹ There is no equivalent for the Jews living in Denia, but al-Bargeloni's travels and scholarship point to ties that crossed the Muslim–Christian border.⁶² His decision to immigrate to Denia during the same period indicates communications between the two communities. The high level of scholarship in Denia and relations with Jewish communities throughout the Peninsula and Mediterranean must also have informed al-Bargeloni's decision to settle there.

Al-Bargeloni's interest in Hai b. Sherira's legal treatise on purchases and sales points also to other ties that bound Denia's Jewish community to its co-religionists further afield. On a personal level, Isaac b. Reuben had married into one of Denia's leading Jewish families, the Alkhatush, who themselves were commercially active and maintained relations with Jewish merchants across the Mediterranean. As *dayyan*, al-Bargeloni would have been confronted regularly with legal questions concerning Jewish involvement in the commercial relations that were at the heart of the taifa's success.

Commercial networks

There was no clear delineation between the public and private spheres in the medieval Islamic world, and the interests of private individuals who occupied the public space often spanned whatever division may have existed between the two. In his 1988 article, "Merchants and *Amīrs*," Abraham Udovitch examined the interaction between government officials and merchants in instances where those officials themselves were acting as commercial figures. He pointed out how government officials in Fatimid Egypt were active in commercial affairs and did not hesitate to use their positions and power to advance their own personal economic interests: "A flexible definition of roles extended beyond the political sphere and penetrated into the economic, social and even religious domains."⁶³ In the examples he cites, an *amīr*, or senior military official, in Alexandria interacts on several occasions with Jewish merchants active in the trade transiting through Egypt's great port. Following a common power and economic dynamic, the *amīr* disposed of one or several ships, related perhaps to his military functions, which he sought to exploit through trade. This elite private individual with governmental authority thus engaged the services and expertise of Jewish merchants who had spent their lives acquiring commercial acumen and especially personal networks that allowed them to move goods profitably from one market to another. In the end, the merchants and the *amīr* arrived at an asymmetrical but mutually beneficial relationship. Udovitch's discussion focuses on Fatimid Egypt, but this scenario must have played out in ports across the Mediterranean, and it certainly did in Denia.

⁶¹ *Supra*.

⁶² Cohen's assumption that al-Bargeloni's arrival in Denia resulted from an arrangement similar to the 1058 treaty does not seem logical. The level of Jewish scholarship in al-Andalus, and in Denia itself, would seem to indicate that Denia's rulers hardly needed to import a scholar from Christian Barcelona to head their Jewish *dhimmīs*. The reverse would, in fact, make much more sense. See Ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-qabbalah*, 141, n. 372. On Barcelona's Jewish community in the eleventh century: Klein, "Power and Patrimony," chs. 1–4; Berner, "On the Western Shores," ch. 2.

⁶³ Though Udovitch follows Goitein in arguing that merchants enjoyed the benefits of free-market competition for shipping, it is also clear that governmental officials were not against using their power to bend the market in their favor. He cites the example of an *amīr* who blocks other ships in the port of Alexandria to (unsuccessfully) force merchants to buy passage on his own, while in another instance the *amīr* confines a merchant to ensure the payment of a commercial debt owed to him: Udovitch, "Merchants and *Amīrs*," 54, 61–5. Udovitch does not raise the question, but we do wonder to what extent the merchants' minority status might have made them more vulnerable to such strong-arm.

Many of the ships that transported commercial goods along the Mediterranean sea lanes were owned by rulers, governors, and other public officials.⁶⁴ Denia was known especially for its pursuit of piracy and maritime *jihād* against Christian shores and ships, but its shipyards also produced vessels for trade, at least one of which was owned by ‘Alī b. Mujāhid.⁶⁵ The routes plied by Denia’s ships appear in a few Arabic geographical treatises, but we know about their activities, sometimes down to the day and almost hour, because of a number of letters from the Cairo Geniza that point us to ‘Alī b. Mujāhid’s ship.⁶⁶ They allow us to understand how as an elite private individual with considerable financial and political means, ‘Alī was involved in the mundane affairs of international commercial shipping. They show that he participated in the networks built by Jews operating from his own port, and relied on similar networks that linked Denia with markets in the central Mediterranean, Egypt, and the Middle East.

‘Alī’s boat first appears in Geniza documents in 1045.⁶⁷ His father may have been commercially active as a ship owner before his death in 1044, and this first instance simply mentions “Mujāhid’s boat,” perhaps out of habit, and later letters specify “Ibn Mujāhid’s boat.” This is not an exciting description of a pirate attack, or a coastal raid, as Latin sources describing Denia’s activities would have us expect, but a commonplace yearly account book detailing sales for a specific Alexandrian Jewish merchant. The merchant records that a bale of flax valued at 15 and 1/6 dinars was loaded onto Mujāhid’s ship in Alexandria.⁶⁸ There is no mention of Mujāhid’s governmental status, nor of any special recognition of his position as ruler of Denia. In fact, although Ibn Mujāhid’s ship appears at least five times in the Cairo Geniza, he is never more than a ship owner. Far from his port, ‘Alī’s influence does not appear, and his commercial interests depended on the merchants writing these letters who were willing to purchase space aboard his ship. The merchants themselves depended on ship owners like him to transport them and their goods from market to market.

Jessica Goldberg’s recent analysis of how Jewish merchants built commercial networks in the eleventh century clearly shows that the scale of activity for these merchants was limited by their personal relations, and that the preferred means of operations was through a network of personal acquaintances built up over years and decades.⁶⁹ In part because of this, the Jewish merchants whose lives filled the Cairo Geniza limited their commercial activities to networks that went generally no farther west than the central Mediterranean markets of Tunisia and Sicily. This, coupled with the fact that shipping in the central Mediterranean became increasingly unstable in the second half of the century,

⁶⁴ Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 309–13. See also Goldberg, “The Geographies of Trade and Traders,” 34, n. 92.

⁶⁵ Al-Idrīsī, *Opus geographicum*, 5:557. On Denia and piracy, see Bruce, “Piracy as Statecraft.” See below for a discussion of the sources concerning ships owned by ‘Alī.

⁶⁶ For geographic descriptions of sea routes connecting the taifa of Denia with Mediterranean ports: Al-Bakrī, *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, 81–2/164–6; al-Ḥimyārī, *La Péninsule ibérique au Moyen Âge*, 188/228; Idrīsī, *Opus geographicum*, 582. On the Cairo Geniza, see the introduction to Goitein’s *Mediterranean Society*, and on the historiography of Goitein’s work and the need for a historiographical reanalysis of the Goitein corpus, see Goldberg, “On reading Goitein’s *A Mediterranean Society*,” 171–86.

⁶⁷ Bodl. MS Heb e98 64–5; Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 283.

⁶⁸ The merchant in question was Nahray b. Nissim, one of the most well-represented merchants in the Cairo Geniza. This letter dates from early in Nahray’s career, when he was still working under the guidance of his uncle. See Gil’s discussion of Nahrai b. Nissim in his *Jews in Islamic Countries*, 705–21.

⁶⁹ This is in fact one of the primary results of Goldberg’s study: “Geographies of Trade,” 300–8, 401–6.



meant that the onus was on Andalusi traders to bridge the gap with the lucrative markets of the East.⁷⁰

Members of Denia's Jewish community were among the most active of these Andalusi traders heading east. Denia is in fact the Andalusi port that figures the most often in the Cairo Geniza.⁷¹ As mentioned earlier, al-Bargeloni's legal interest in commerce must have stemmed from his community's involvement in Mediterranean trade, trade that the *dayyan* was particularly close to since members of his wife's family were among the most prominent of those Andalusi merchants operating in the East.⁷² Sometime in the second half of the eleventh century, the son of Ibn Laktush (a variant of Alkhatush),⁷³ arrived on a ship from Denia in the port of Alexandria.⁷⁴ He was accompanied by Mukhtār al-Halabī, the *ghulām* of Nahrai b. Nissim, one of the most important Jewish merchants of Fustat (this is the same merchant who loaded Mujāhid's ship with flax in 1045 and who interacted with the governmental official in Alexandria). Since the ship carrying both men and a number of their coreligionists had not stopped in al-Mahdiyya along the way, Mukhtār al-Halabī's presence indicates possibly close trading ties between Denia and Nahrai b. Nissim of Fustat. This would not be surprising, since, in addition to the 1045 flax shipment, Nahrai was notified of the arrival of Ibn Mujāhid's boat in Alexandria on two other occasions.⁷⁵ The letter also indicates that the son of Ibn Laktush was not an unknown merchant come simply to sell goods in Egypt and then return home.⁷⁶ Through what must have been repeated contact via ships such as Ibn Mujāhid's, he had created personal relationships with some of Alexandria's most important merchants, who noted his arrival in their letters. In fact, this son of Ibn Laktush is likely the Samuel b. Laktush who later married into one of the most prominent Jewish Egyptian families of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.⁷⁷

Ships from the central Mediterranean did not generally make the voyage west, and so Andalusī traders like the Alkhatūsh were reliant on those operated by their countrymen to

⁷⁰ Goitein, followed later by Constable, makes much of the decline of the Western Mediterranean beginning in the first half of the eleventh century based on the eastward movements of Jewish traders and remarks in letters that "the whole [Muslim] West is not worth a thing these days." Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 1:56; Stillman, "The Eleventh Century Merchant House of Ibn 'Awkal," 82. Gil likewise documents a large number of Jewish families moving eastward beginning in the early fifth/eleventh century: *Jews in Islamic Countries*, 676–9. Although markets and circulation were certainly perturbed by the political instability of the period, much of the perceived decline seems more the result of changes in those conducting trade, rather than a loss of trade itself. Goldberg's study demonstrates that markets shifted to different ports in the same region, while Andalusi and other merchants took up the tasks left by their Central Mediterranean counterparts. Moreover, the struggle by Norman Sicily and the Italian port republics to gain and control access to Maghribi markets demonstrates their continued vivacity. Goldberg, "Geographies of Trade," 306, 328.

⁷¹ Almeria and Seville are also represented, though less so than Denia. Most letters simply refer to ships arriving from al-Andalus, and so their exact provenance is unclear.

⁷² Ashtor refers to the Alkhatūsh family as "esteemed" and "distinguished," while Goitein writes that they were "one of the leading families of the country": Ashtor, "Jews of Moslem Spain," 292, 296; Goitein, "The Biography of Rabbi Judah Ha-Levi," 43.

⁷³ This is a variant of Alkhatush: Goitein, "The Biography of Rabbi Judah Ha-Levi," 28.

⁷⁴ Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 1:318, 3:116; Geniza TS 10 #J 16, f. 17.

⁷⁵ Geniza ENA 2805, f. 26; Geniza TS 13 #J 19.20; Simonsohn, *Jews*, 147; Goitein, *Letters*, 168–73.

⁷⁶ The letter states that the ship was loaded with silk. In this instance, as in others, it is not possible to know what Ibn Laktush was trading, nor what 'Ali's ship had transported from Denia, since the common practice was for ships and merchants to stop and trade at ports along the route. The taifa of Denia did indeed produce silk worthy of repute – the geographer al-Rāzī notes quality silk production in the mountains of Alicante – but the letter writer does not specify the origin of the cloth: al-Rāzī, "La Description de l'Espagne d'Ahamad al-Rāzī," 70–1.

⁷⁷ Goitein, "The Biography of Rabbi Judah Ha-Levi," 43; Ashtor, *Jews of Moslem Spain*, 292. Samuel's brother-in-law, Nethan-nel ha-Levi, was a prominent scholar, and two of his nephews served as chief judges in the rabbinical court in Fustat. This marriage, along with al-Bargeloni's, illustrates well the overlap between religious, political, and economic spheres typical of the medieval Mediterranean.

move their goods east. Few if any Spanish Jews were ship owners, and so they booked passage on ships such as ‘Ali’s.⁷⁸ Though we can assume that ‘Ali was not at the helm, his ship regularly made the trip from Denia, connecting first with Sicily and Tunisia, then continuing on to Alexandria.⁷⁹ Letters in the 1050s and 1060s mention Ibn Mujāhid’s ship stopping in Mazara del Vallo before continuing on to Alexandria. These letters make it clear that while ‘Ali’s ship was carrying goods and passengers from Denia to the East, it also connected merchants in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean. In one case, the ship bore goods for the addressee, but the need to specify that it did not on other occasions indicates that the merchant and his associates were in the habit of dealing with ‘Ali’s ship. Moreover, other ships from Denia connected the port with markets in the Central Mediterranean, since a legal dispute was brought before the Jewish court in Denia in 1083 concerning a shipment of cinnabar between Denia and al-Mahdiyya – the dispute involved two Jewish merchants who had traded between the two ports a number of times in the past.⁸⁰

The legal dispute from 1083 involving Jewish traders in al-Mahdiyya and Denia, along with a power of attorney signed by Ephraim b. Jacob in Denia for an inheritance in Alexandria and later acknowledged by a judge in al-Mahdiyya, points to other networks that paralleled the commercial ties built by Denia’s Jewish community.⁸¹ To assure the fluid functioning of relations, Jewish traders sought to conduct trade through personal acquaintances. Nevertheless, when conflicts or legal problems did arise, Jewish judges adjudicated disputes, and their decisions were upheld by their professional and religious colleagues elsewhere. Names and signatures were recognized, likely from correspondence and personal contact because of voyages east for Sephardic merchants, pilgrims, and scholars. This legal network was a necessary support for the commercial one whose lines it often shared, and on which it certainly depended for the logistics of communications.⁸²

‘Ali was not personally ferrying Jewish traders around the Mediterranean, but his own economic activities tied him to Jewish traders from Denia and other ports along the Mediterranean sea lanes. Just as the *amīr* mentioned above, ‘Ali needed the intermediary services of experienced, connected merchants to profit from the maritime resources his position provided. This profit, incidentally, was no small matter for ‘Ali, since his

⁷⁸Few merchants in general owned ships, and even fewer Jewish merchants: Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 309–13.

⁷⁹Letters in 1053 and 1062 mention Ibn Mujāhid’s ship stopping in Mazara before continuing on to Alexandria: TS 10 #J 20.12; TS 13 #J 19.20; Simonsohn, *The Jews in Sicily*, n. 101 and n. 147; Goitein, *Letters*, 168–73. Another letter’s specific statement that the ship did not stop in al-Mahdiyya seems to indicate that this would have otherwise been normal: Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 1:318, 3:116; Geniza TS 10 #J 16, f. 17b. These letters also show that an Andalusi merchant based in Sicily, Abū Jacob Joseph, used ‘Ali’s ship on multiple occasions, either for himself, or his goods: TS 13 #J 16 f.19 (Simonsohn 112); TS 13 #J 19 f. 20 (Simonsohn 147).

⁸⁰Geniza TS 12.570; Geniza TS 13 #J 21 f.7; Ashtor, “Documentos españoles de la Genizah,” 76–80.

⁸¹Ephraim b. Jacob signed a power of attorney in Denia for someone to claim his late father’s possessions in Egypt; on the way to Alexandria, the document is also signed by the judge Moses b. Labrat in al-Mahdiyya: Geniza document TS 13 #J 7, f. 11; Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 406, n. 45. In another example of a Jewish trader from Denia not returning from a commercial voyage, c. 1070, a man left his house in the custody of his wife before leaving on a long voyage. Years later, the couple’s son was seeking to take possession of the property since no word had come from his father: Ashtor, *Jews of Moslem Spain*, 2:291, citing *Responsa Alfāsi*, Ms. Bodleiana 2794, n. 11.

⁸²Goldberg comments on the disjunction between Jewish religious and economic networks, specifically on the religious ties that bridged distances where gaps existed between merchants’ regional networks (“Geographies of Trade,” 35–6). This may be in part specific to the region that houses her study and its situation more or less at the center of the Geniza world. Communications by Jewish Andalusi merchants and scholars, however, seem to have largely traveled the same routes, since both groups, which were not mutually exclusive, looked to the East for much of their activity. They were certainly not coterminous, as Goldberg notes, the actors were not necessarily the same, but sharing and similarities may have been more common than further east.



contemporaries describe him as being overly concerned with filling his coffers.⁸³ ‘Alī’s ships were profitable in large part because of the Jewish networks that tied merchants in Denia, such as the Alkhatūsh, to merchants in the East, such as Nahray b. Nissim. Their patronage contributed to ‘Alī’s personal wealth, and indirectly to state coffers, while the maritime infrastructures that Mujāhid had built and that his son maintained allowed Denia’s Jews to participate directly in trade networks that reached as far as the Middle East.

Conclusion

These interreligious interactions are not meant to illustrate anachronistic twenty-first-century notions of religious tolerance. Mujāhid and ‘Alī were Islamic rulers who justified their position in part through the active pursuit of *jihād* against Christian ports and ships. Denia’s Jewish scholars corresponded freely with Samuel b. Naghrila, the greatest Jewish figure of his day, but his son Joseph and a large portion of the Granadan Jewish community were killed in anti-Jewish riots only a few years later. However, the sizeable and active Jewish community that lived in Denia points to integration, and the numerous instances of interaction between Denia’s rulers and their Jewish *dhimmī* subjects indicate a high level of pragmatism concerning interreligious relations. The increase in examples of those relations over the course of the century is partly the result of Denia’s growth, and the taifa’s Jewish community participated in that growth on several levels.

As mentioned at the beginning of this study, a key factor for understanding that participation is the notion of identity, of multiple identities and the ability of individuals to exercise multiple roles in society under different identities. Denia’s rulers, Mujāhid and especially ‘Alī, would have been particularly sensitive to this, allowing for their pragmatic approach to interreligious relations. Mujāhid was himself a *Siqlabī*, a Slav of non-Arab extraction, possibly Sard or Italian. Although he was raised as a Muslim in the court of al-Manṣūr, and was particularly aware of the importance of religious orthodoxy, Denia was also known for the number of foreigners that circulated there and populated its court – one Arabic lexicographer complained that he found it hard to work in Mujāhid’s court because he was surrounded by ‘*ajam*, or foreigners.⁸⁴

The regime change between Mujāhid and his son ‘Alī in 1044 corresponded with an increase in pacific interreligious relations in Denia. Mujāhid had established the taifa at the beginning of the century as a base for creating a maritime caliphate.⁸⁵ Although his plans were upset by the rise of the Italian city ports of Pisa and Genoa, Mujāhid continued to use his ports as harbors for sending fleets against the Christian coasts. ‘Alī did not interrupt this policy, but under his reign the taifa diversified its activities, or at least the traces of its activities became more diverse. I argue that ‘Alī himself played a direct role in this. While Mujāhid had been raised from childhood to serve the Umayyad caliphate in both a military and administrative capacity, ‘Alī spent sixteen years of his youth as a diplomatic hostage in Pisa, where he was housed by a Pisan merchant magnate.⁸⁶ When he finally

⁸³Ibn Bassām, *Dhakhira*, 4:183; ‘Abd Allāh b. Buluqqīn, *Tibyān*, 103.

⁸⁴*Dhikr bilād al-Andalus*, 217/229; Rubiera Mata, *La taifa de Denia*, 123–5; de Epalza, “Notas sobre el lingüista Ibn Sidah,” 168.

⁸⁵On Mujāhid’s aspirations for creating a maritime caliphate and the influence on the taifa’s evolution, see Bruce, “Le califat méditerranéen et maritime de Denia.”

⁸⁶Bruce, “Politics of Violence and Trade,” 138; *Liber maiolichinus de gestis pisaniorum illustribus*, 43.

returned home a couple of years before his father's death, 'Alī dressed like a foreigner, could not speak Arabic, and had to learn the religion of his father; he had been, essentially, raised as a Pisan.⁸⁷ His experiences must have informed his point of view on interreligious relations and maritime merchant activity, and thus helped shape policies that pushed Denia ever further in following commerce to the East. As shown above, those policies relied in part on networks built in relation with Jewish merchants across the Mediterranean.

Denia's rulers were not the only ones to benefit from these interreligious interactions. The Alkhātūsh family serves as a prime example of the asymmetrical but symbiotic relationship that existed between Denia's Jewish community and its rulers. The family rose to prominence because of trade conducted in conjunction with 'Alī b. Mujāhid, and participated directly in the taifa's economic growth over the course of the century. The Alkhātūsh also increased their place within the community, integrating the religious and political spheres, by welcoming Isaac b. Reuben al-Bargeloni through marriage, and the presence of such a prominent scholar in Denia was made possible by the policies of its Islamic rulers.

This being said, Denia's story was not exceptional. 'Alī could connect with Jewish merchants in his own port and across the Mediterranean because others did as well. He was certainly not alone as an Islamic ruler trading with Jewish merchants at home and abroad. The Talmudic scholars who thrived in Denia remained connected with their peers in Ifrīqiya, Egypt, and Baghdad because their letters and colleagues traveled on ships owned by Muslims. In each of those ports, pragmatic relations were created and maintained between the Muslims and those under their rule, Jews and Christians. Of course, religion did define society, much more than many today can imagine. It defined and delimited the place of every individual in a society that was highly hierarchical. Nevertheless, individuals did not stop at their religion. They also existed as scholars and merchants, as consumers and tradesmen, and as family members. Each of their identities gave them different motivations, and through these they built relations with others with similar identities and interests. The networks thus created functioned sometimes vertically, linking merchants with economic and political elites. They also functioned horizontally, connecting individuals in Denia with markets and urban centers across the Mediterranean and Middle East. Most of these networks were regionally specific, often contained by the interests of those involved. They did, however, overlap with others, creating the possibility for greater connectivity through the polyvalence of individual members. The reticular interactions of Denia's inhabitants speak exactly to the literal meaning of *convivencia*. In eleventh-century Denia, Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived together, but so did rulers, merchants, judges, and scholars. In the end, reducing any of these figures to their religion deprives us of understanding the rest.

⁸⁷ Ibn Bassām, *Dhakhira*, 4:183; Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Kitāb a'māl al-a'lām*, 253. 'Alī's subsequent transformation and embrace of Islam sufficed to ensure his rulership over the taifa, but doubts did linger in some corners. A poem commissioned by Ibn Hud of Zaragoza to help prepare his invasion of Denia called on the taifa's Muslim population to rise up against their irreligious ruler. In the following century, an Egyptian scholar describing the transfer of a Christian relic via 'Alī to Fernando I of Castille, wondered if 'Alī had not wanted the relic for himself, given his mother's Christian origins. Turienzo, "De dos pergaminos árabes," 23–5; al-Jazzār, *Diwān*, 78–9/102–3.



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