In his comparison of the status of Jews in Christian Europe and the Islamic world, Mark Cohen concludes that the evidence for Muslim and Jewish mercantile collaboration is illustrative of the workings of a “unified, non-sectarian economic community.”\(^1\) Examining the legal infrastructure of business in the medieval Islamic world, A. L. Udovitch had earlier found that “differences in religious affiliation were no barrier to economic collaboration,”\(^2\) and S. D. Goitein wrote of a close “interfaith cooperation in economic matters.”\(^3\) As these scholars observe, the legal position of Jews in Islamic states, and the cultural and, to a large extent, legal commensurability of Jewish and Muslim approaches to commerce, contributed to the operation of a system navigable for participants of both faiths in the Islamicate Mediterranean world.

In the contiguous system of the Indian Ocean, some of the same Jewish traders encountered an even more diverse world, with many political divides and greater religious diversity. In this more complex landscape, what kind of “economic community” did these businessmen form with their non-Jewish colleagues, and what were the strands that held this community together?

The task of debating this broad question in the context of Indian Ocean studies has become easier thanks to the publication of the first four volumes of Goitein’s much-awaited “India Book,” which make a significant part of

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1 Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 95. Building on A. L. Udovitch’s conclusions on the subject of “interdenominational commenda,” Cohen summarizes the normative Jewish and Islamic legal positions governing what he calls “interdenominational partnerships.” Overall, such relationships were acknowledged and tolerated by both Jewish and Muslim legal discussion, if restricted and regulated in their details with special attention to ritually and ethically prescribed practices. As Cohen suggests, the very fact of these restrictions and prohibitions suggests the prevalence of the practices involved. See ibid., 95–96.


the Geniza documentary corpus relating to the so-called India trade now readily accessible in English, Hebrew, and the original Judaeo-Arabic. One of the many topics illuminated by the documentary corpus of the “India Book” is the formation of commercial networks across denominational, ethnic, linguistic, and geographical boundaries in the inter-regional arena extending from the Straits of Malacca to Cairo and beyond. In Goitein’s words, this material reveals “an astonishing degree of interdenominational cooperation matched by an almost complete absence of animosity against other communities.” Indeed, it is noteworthy that the documents contain far fewer instances of disputes between members of different confessional communities than they do of disputes among Jewish coreligionists, both in absolute terms and proportionally. “India Book” documents show that Jewish traders, some living along the Indian Ocean littoral and others traveling there from the Mediterranean, mobilized a variety of Jewish and non-Jewish partners in the wider western Indian Ocean world.

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4 The India Book was the original project undertaken by Goitein as his foray into the documentary Geniza. He redirected his efforts to focus on the much denser documentation for the Mediterranean material in the repository when he realized that tackling the Mediterranean-centered activities of the Jewish communities was crucial to understanding the less thoroughly documented Indian Ocean component. The publication of the India Book material is ongoing thanks to the efforts of Goitein’s former student Mordechai Friedman, the distinguished scholar of Jewish law and the family. Available now is the first and most substantial part of the project envisioned by Goitein in the following volumes: S. D. Goitein and Mordechai A. Friedman, India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza, “India Book” (Leiden: Brill, 2008); eidem, India Book I: Joseph al-Lebdī, Prominent India Trader [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2009); eidem, India Book II: Madmun Nagid of Yemen and the India Trade [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2010); eidem, India Book III: Abraham b. Yijū, India Trader and Manufacturer [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2010); Mordechai Akiva Friedman, India Book IVA: Ḥalfon and Judah Ha-Levi, The Lives of a Merchant Scholar and a Poet Laureate According to the Cairo Geniza Documents [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2013); S. D. Goitein and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, with the assistance of Amir Ashur, India Book IVB: Ḥalfon the Travelling Merchant Scholar, Cairo Geniza Documents [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2013).

5 Goitein and Friedman, India Traders, 25.

6 I use the term “non-Jewish” heuristically, as a device meant to facilitate the inquiry into the diversity of associates hinted at by our documents, and not one claiming to describe a real category of people. I assume that the authors of Geniza documents in Judaeo-Arabic (as almost all India Book documents are) identified as members of the Jewish faith (among other things). As it becomes clear here, I do not believe that “non-Jews” constituted a similar category that had any substance on the ground. On a similar use of the term and a discussion