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## Intolerance, Polemics, and Debate in Antiquity

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# Intolerance, Polemics, and Debate in Antiquity: Politico-Cultural, Philosophical, and Religious Forms of Critical Conversation in the Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, Graeco-Roman, and Early Islamic Worlds

This volume addresses the phenomenon of forces and methods of “cultural resistance” in the ancient world, calling attention to the whole spectrum of intolerance, polemics, and debate in which cultural resistance against other individuals and groups, or even dominant societies, found expression. It takes “the ancient world” in a rather broad sense, encompassing the ancient Near East and Graeco-Roman antiquity, the latter also including early Judaism and early Christianity, together with early Islam. In this way, the volume seeks to understand polemics and intolerance in their different (dis)guises of cultural, religious, and philosophical intolerance and polemics in antiquity. By taking such a broad perspective, it tries to question common modernist assumptions that “religion” is, by definition, associated with intolerance and polemics, whereas “philosophy” is naturally characterised by tolerance and debate. The questions that underlie the contributions to this volume enquire into the boundaries between debate, polemics, and intolerance. What is the precise nature of intolerance? When is debate transposed into polemics, and at what point does polemics spill over into intolerance? Is every assertion of values and norms, every exclusivism necessarily intolerant? Where, when, and how do cultural, religious, or philosophical self-identities begin to exclude others in an intolerant way?

It will become clear that the boundaries between debate, polemics, and intolerance are very difficult to draw. They signify intensified levels of critical conversation, with polemics perhaps bearing the connotation of a hostile attack in a public setting, and intolerance possibly exerted principally from a majority position upon a minority, whereas it may be that cultural resistance particularly indicates the reverse phenomenon: the reaction of a minority to a dominating culture. Other recent collective volumes and monographs on these issues in antiquity, which are in themselves very informative and stimulating, have often focused on one particular cultural era, rather than performing a cross-cultural analysis, or centred either on *religious* polemics (and often, in

one breath, on religious intolerance)<sup>1</sup> or on *philosophical* polemics,<sup>2</sup> although there are also a few comparative studies.<sup>3</sup> The current volume, however, consciously seeks a broader understanding of antiquity and also includes both philosophy and religion in order to prevent any modern, anachronistic separation of fields that were closely linked in antiquity. The regular conferences organised by the Department of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Origins of the Faculty of Theology & Religious Studies at the University of Groningen on the reception history of biblical themes have encouraged us to take this approach, to work cross-culturally and cover the intellectual, “discursive” side of critical conversation as inclusively as possible. This reception history, which is deeply defined by the twin activities of acculturation and cultural resistance, made us aware of the need to devote a special conference to modes of critical conversation in antiquity. This volume consists of the revised papers that were presented at that conference, which took place in Groningen on May 16–18, 2017.

The volume consists of four sections. The first section addresses discourses in the ancient Near East and early Judaism, paying attention to prevalent polemics and instances of religious intolerance. The second and third sections focus on discourses in the Graeco-Roman era, differentiating between the discourses of particular individuals and groups who held Greek and Roman socio-political power (in section two) and discourses among and between Greeks, Christians, and Jews (in section three). Finally, the fourth section engages with discourses

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- 1 Martin Wallraff, ed., *Religiöse Toleranz: 1700 Jahre nach dem Edikt von Mailand* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016); Dirk Rohmann, *Christianity, Book-Burning and Censorship in Late Antiquity: Studies in Text Transmission* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016); Albert C. Geljon and Riemer Roukema, eds., *Violence in Ancient Christianity: Victims and Perpetrators* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014); Jordan D. Rosenblum, Lily C. Vuong, and Nathaniel P. DesRosiers, eds., *Religious Competition in the Third Century CE: Jews, Christians, and the Greco-Roman World* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014); Wendy Mayer and Bronwen Neil, eds., *Religious Conflict from Early Christianity to the Rise of Islam* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013); Maijastina Kahlos, *Forbearance and Compulsion: The Rhetoric of Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2009).
  - 2 Sharon Weisser and Naly Thaler, eds., *Strategies of Polemics in Greek and Roman Philosophy* (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2016).
  - 3 Peter Van Nuffelen, *Penser la tolérance durant l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2018); Christoph Riedweg, ed., *Philosophia in der Konkurrenz von Schulen, Wissenschaften und Religionen: zur Pluralisierung des Philosophiebegriffs in Kaiserzeit und Spätantike* (Berlin/ Boston: De Gruyter, 2017); C. Kavin Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2016); Maijastina Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures c. 360–430* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). See also H. A. Drake, ed., *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); and idem, “Lambs into Lions: Explaining Early Christian Intolerance”, *Past & Present* 153 (1996): 3–36.

between Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Greeks. The volume is brought to a conclusion with a modern cinematic reflection on intolerance.

## 1 Discourses in the Ancient Near East and Early Judaism

The first section focuses on discourses in the ancient Near East and early Judaism. In her contribution “Religious Intolerance in the Ancient Near East,” *Marjo Korpel* (Amsterdam/Groningen) shows that religious intolerance in the ancient Near East was not confined to the monotheistic religions, but was also widespread in polytheistic milieus. Egypt and Mesopotamia justified their aggressive behaviour towards their weaker neighbours by invoking divine authorisation of their acts. Religious intolerance was expressed in many ways, from mockery of other gods to the destruction of their temples and cult images.

*Dominik Markl* (Rome) argues in his “Polemics Against Child Sacrifice in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History” that polemics can also have a positive effect on societies and cultures. Although the Deuteronomistic tradition emphasises the foreign origin of child sacrifice, several texts indicate that the idea of the sacrifice (or “consecration”) of the firstborn son, in particular, seems to be a genuine part of Israelite religion. Sacrificing human or animal offspring could be understood as returning to the deity that which has been received—in the hope of gaining divine favour to produce further offspring. Moreover, surrendering one’s beloved child to a deity could be seen as proof of the highest degree of piety. Child sacrifice was a last resort in desperate situations for worshippers of deities who were believed to require sacrifice. This motivation and the resulting historical practice of child sacrifice form the background for the polemics against it in biblical texts, especially in Deuteronomy and Kings. The motif of child sacrifice is embedded there in a cluster of cultic sins which lead to the exile of Israel and Judah. Both Deuteronomy and Kings employ sophisticated literary warfare, with the declared aim of abolishing child sacrifice. These Deuteronomistic polemics contributed, in the end, to reducing child sacrifice in several cultures to a merely archaeological fact.

In “*Jubilees* 11–12 Against the Background of the Polemics Against Idols in the Hebrew Bible and Early Jewish Literature,” *Jacques van Ruiten* (Groningen) shows that intolerance for foreign influence can lead to polemics against one’s own people. In the book of *Jubilees*, separation from other nations is explicitly required and is accomplished by refusing to conclude agreements with other nations, abstaining from common meals with foreigners, and refraining from intermarriage with them. This separation is religiously motivated and consists in the idea that there is one unique and eternal covenant between God and his

chosen people, and it is this that establishes Israel as different from all other peoples. This corresponds to the polemical attitude against idolatry (*Jubilees* 11–12), which is related to the broader discourse of polemics against idols in the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature. In these texts, other gods and their worshippers are criticised in a particular way—by denigrating the gods as mere artefacts. The impotence of the statue-gods brings shame on the people who attribute power to them and is an expression of their lack of knowledge. What is interesting is that the idol worshippers do not always come from among other peoples, but can also be found within the Israelite group. One may suspect that the insertion of this theme into the book of *Jubilees* is motivated by historical events, although no specific historical clues can be found. The author integrates the broader discourse into his own narrative, where the polemical objects are members of Abraham's family. What remains clear, however, is that the influence of idols is closely related to the influence of evil spirits and demons, and their origin is explicitly identified with Ur of the Chaldeans.

*Stefan Beyerle* (Greifswald) argues in “Intolerance in Early Judaism: Emic and Etic Descriptions of Jewish Religions in the Second Temple Period” that the acts and practices of intolerance and toleration are operationalised on the basis of construed differences that, through the technique of “othering,” are ascribed to “the others” as defining features. The Samaritans are taken as an example, demonstrating how literary constructions (e.g., in Josephus, Ben Sira, and texts from Qumran) could lead to the construal of differences that did not necessarily reflect historical reality. These differences are invented as part of a literary strategy emphasising the otherness of the Samaritans. By contrast, the Yehûdites at Elephantine, long before the Samaritan conflict, teach us how a lively Jewish religious reality could function in a syncretistic, tolerant environment.

## 2 Discourses with Greek and Roman Socio-Political Powers

The second section on discourses with Greek and Roman socio-political powers highlights the types of discourses in the Graeco-Roman era in which the participants encounter the power of the state. It starts with a discussion of the famous confrontation between Socrates the philosopher and the political institute of Athenian democracy, in a chapter written by *Paulin Ismard* (Paris), entitled “Intolerance and Freedom of Thought in Classical Athens: The Trial of Socrates.” In this contribution, Ismard basically demonstrates a tension between education and democracy that we, as modern people, might

find counter-intuitive, but which is perhaps sometimes sensed when political discourse no longer trusts science, or when democratic movements and referenda seem to acquire populist overtones, revealing a discrepancy in value judgments between “democratic” and “populist”—even if on occasion, at least factually, these terms describe the same phenomenon. According to Ismard, although Athens was not an obscurantist democracy that persecuted its own intellectual elite, neither was Socrates’s trial merely a political trial. Rather, it seems that Socrates’s pedagogy took education out of the traditional private sphere of the family and also liberated it from the contractual constraints that characterised the relation between the sophists and their pupils. Out in the open, in the public spaces of the city, his pedagogy offered the opportunity for a charismatic, life-long bond between a philosopher and his pupils—a bond that could be seen as a potential threat to the established social order (even if this order was egalitarian and democratic) and to its institutions, including its law courts, as Socrates submitted “the agnostic space of the tribunal to the imperatives of philosophical practice.”

The second chapter in this section studies the confrontation between Greek-Seleucid politics and the ethnicity of the Jews (or Judaeans) in the second century BCE, in a contribution by *Peter Franz Mittag* (Cologne) under the title “Antiochus IV Epiphanes’s Policy Towards the Jews.” Antiochus IV is often seen as the initiator of a decree in 167 BCE ordering the full hellenisation of the whole Seleucid Empire, and consequently the forceful prohibition of the Jewish religion and the conversion of the Jerusalem temple into a Hellenistic cultic space. For these reasons, it is deemed to constitute “one of the most prominent examples of religious intolerance in the ancient world.” However, following the revisionist views of Sylvie Honigman and going against the prevailing scholarly consensus, Mittag argues that Antiochus IV’s decree cannot possibly be authentic. Not only is the decree missing from 2 Maccabees, despite its author’s inclination to include as many relevant documents as possible, but the initial hellenisation of Jerusalem is voluntary and meets with no significant resistance. Instead, Mittag ascribes the subsequent crisis to a power struggle within the Jewish elite and understands the assumption of an anti-Jewish decree issued by Antiochus as a misperception, by some Jews, of measures that were taken in the wake of a Jewish insurrection put down by the Seleucids. Mittag’s alternative reading of the events is not meant to exonerate Antiochus IV, but to make sense of the otherwise unattested religious intolerance of the Seleucids. If Mittag is right, the relevant Jewish literature rather shows how a particular group of Jews portrayed themselves as victims of a consistent Seleucid religious policy, with the (simultaneous) intention of

discrediting the legitimacy of rival Jewish groups. Even so, this response is only one link in an uncomfortable and complex chain of occupation, insurrection, and polemical responses.

Different Jewish responses to Graeco-Roman rule are central in the remaining chapters in this section. A subsequent crisis between Roman political power and the Jews is examined in the chapter by *Pieter Hartog* (Groningen) under the title “Contesting *Oikoumenē*: Resistance and Locality in Philo’s *Legatio ad Gaium*.” This chapter explores the way in which Philo of Alexandria responded to the confrontational politics of the Roman emperor Gaius Caligula, who failed to protect Jewish political life in Alexandria from Greek and Egyptian attacks in 38 CE and even threatened to disrupt their religious life in Jerusalem by placing his statue in their temple. Hartog shows how Philo’s cultural resistance against the Roman emperor takes shape in a rather subtle way, by presenting the Jews as “the guardians of traditional Roman values.” Whereas the previous emperors, Augustus and Tiberius, conducted themselves as rulers of the global *oikoumenē* and exhibited a translocal mindset, taking care to foster the stability of the global Roman Empire by allowing the subjected nations to maintain their local ethnic customs, Gaius deviates from the succession of these good emperors, with his self-centred character and lack of virtue distorting the stability of the empire. The Jews, however, through the defence of their ethnic customs, contribute to the empire’s stability. Although polemicising against the figure of Gaius, Philo’s use of a strategy of “glocalisation,” in which he reimagines the Jews’ local identity from within the global context of the Roman Empire, allows him to remain as constructive as possible.

The final chapter in this section focuses on the way in which Flavius Josephus responds to the charges that Rome (through the mouths of its historians) levelled against the Jews after its destruction of Jerusalem following the Jewish revolt against Rome (66–70 CE). In a contribution entitled “Stranger Danger! *Amixia* among Judaeans and Others,” *Steve Mason* (Groningen) shows how a Roman historian such as Tacitus, writing his *Histories* after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and extinguished the Jewish revolt, polemically accuses the Jews of separating themselves from all other peoples and also exerting an attraction upon non-Jews who, after adopting the Jewish way of life, “quickly grasp the principle, with which they are indeed thoroughly infected, of despising the gods, disowning their *patria*, and holding in contempt their own parents, children, and brothers” (5.5). Mason demonstrates how these two seemingly contradictory accusations (of Jewish separation from and simultaneous attraction of non-Jews) are in fact rather coherent when understood against the background of the notion of *amixia* or “non-mingling.” This *amixia* was criticised by some as a misanthropic vice, but commended by others

(including Plato in his comments on Spartan *amixia*) as a virtue that resonated with the strongly ethnographic mindset of the Graeco-Roman world, which commended loyalty to one's ancestral laws and customs. According to Mason, Jewish intellectuals such as Philo and Josephus, in various polemical circumstances, join this discourse of *amixia*, accepting the fact of *amixia* but denying that this implies any misanthropy on their part. Rather, the Jews' positive form of *amixia* surpasses that of the *Germani*, inasmuch as the Jews, unlike the *Germani*, live throughout the Roman Empire. Jewish *amixia* also supersedes that of the Spartans, since the Jews "welcome foreigners who truly resolved to live under their laws." This study of Philo and Josephus thus demonstrates that an important potential response to polemics consists in the fluency with which victims participate in a common cultural discourse with their antagonists.

### 3 Discourses between Greeks, Christians, and Jews

The third section continues our interest in intolerance, polemics, and debate in the Graeco-Roman era, but here the attention switches from the more clearly socio-political aspects to the more intellectual and deliberative confrontations found in philosophy and religion. In the opening chapter of this section, under the title "Difference, Opposition, and the Roots of Intolerance in Ancient Philosophical Polemic," *George Boys-Stones* (Toronto) explores the emergence of a "distinctive polemical vocabulary" in post-Hellenistic philosophy that distinguished between two forms of disagreement: the weak form of "difference" within a particular philosophical school, and the strong form of "opposition" between the schools. According to Boys-Stones, mere differences are turned into oppositions when a school emphasises its own qualitative explanatory difference over and above another school, believing that its position enables a better or fuller explanation of particular phenomena than rival theories do. This polemical "subordination" is then greeted by the other schools in a critique, stating that the more comprehensive frameworks are unnecessary, illusory, and in need of "deflation." Yet despite these mutual polemics of subordination and inflation, each school regarded the philosophical training of the rival schools as "propaedeutic" to its own, enabling the kind of "intellectual journey through the schools" that Justin Martyr experienced when he progressed from Stoicism to Aristotelianism, Pythagoreanism, Platonism, and finally to Christianity. It is this hierarchy of successive subordination, Boys-Stones argues, that prevents the post-Hellenistic schools from becoming intolerant, although an important antithesis remains: between these "dogmatic" schools on the one hand and Scepticism on the other. Christianity fits into



these kinds of inter-school polemics, but only up to the point at which some Christians argued, not that they had access to the ultimate explanatory principles, but that this access remained unavailable to the Greek philosophers even in principle, because it was dependent upon divine help and revelation. These Christians joined the debate with the philosophical schools with the intention not only of subordinating the other schools, but also of rendering them irrelevant, as they deemed faith to be possible without (and even despite) the propaedeutic utility of the philosophical schools. Although scholars increasingly doubt whether a systematic policy of intolerance towards pagan philosophy ever actually emerged within the Christian Roman Empire, some Christian positions are more inclined to intolerance than others, depending on their views of the constructive propaedeutic role that pagan literature and philosophy could play in understanding ultimate truth. Yet Boys-Stones reminds us that debates between the philosophical schools could be very heated indeed. For instance, the Platonist Atticus responds to Aristotle's criticism of Platonism by stating that Aristotle "could not understand the theory, since things so great, divine, and transcendent require a like faculty for their comprehension," whilst Numenius, another Platonist, opposes both the scepticism of the Academic school and the materialism of the Stoic school, accusing them of "betraying" Plato by dropping some of his beliefs, distorting others, and diverging from him through ignorance or even deliberately.

In the second chapter, entitled "John's Counter-Symposium: 'The Continuation of Dialogue' in Christianity—A Contrapuntal Reading of John's Gospel and Plato's *Symposium*," George van Kooten (Cambridge) responds to the view that the resistance of early Christianity to Graeco-Roman culture was so antithetical that the "sermon" was squarely placed over against dialogue and silenced it. He argues that early Christian writings testify to a continued discourse with the Graeco-Roman world and that this can already be seen in the New Testament writings. In his contribution, Van Kooten develops the thesis that the author of the Gospel of John engages in a sustained discourse with Plato's *Symposium*, to the point that his own gospel acquires the characteristics of the genre of "counter-symposia." John's Gospel resembles Plato's *Symposium* in both form and content, focusing on the topic of divine love—the shared theme of both writings. Van Kooten first discusses the sympotic genre in antiquity, arguing that this genre was particularly competitive, probably reflecting the actual character of many sympotic meetings in real life. Plato's *Symposium* met with approval and emulation as well as parody and criticism, responses that the ancient satirical writer Lucian nicely captures in the neologism "counter-banqueting" (ἀντισυμποσιάζειν): writing in response to Plato's *Symposium*. This partly emulative, partly polemical activity is subsequently traced in John's

Gospel. In his biography of Jesus, the author depicts his Johannine Christianity as the “supersession” of both Judaism and Hellenism in a way that resembles what George Boys-Stones in his chapter characterises as the technique of “subordination,” which is used in the polemics between the Greek philosophical schools. Making use of the narratives of Plato’s dialogues, John portrays Jesus as Socrates’s successor among the non-Greeks, thus subsuming Socrates and Jesus into one continuous discourse. Therefore, as a counterpart of Plato’s *Symposium*, John’s Gospel encompasses the whole spectrum of positioning itself as its equal and equivalent, but also as a supplement and an improvement. Borrowing a term from Edward Said, one could also understand John’s Gospel as a “contrapuntal” reading of Plato’s *Symposium*. This perspective allows us to recognise the ambiguity of an emerging subculture in relation to the dominant culture, the appropriation of which is marked by both congeniality and criticism, thus enabling a critical appropriation of the leading culture.

In a third chapter, entitled “Valentinian Protology and the Philosophical Debate Regarding the First Principles,” *Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta* (Groningen) is keen to stress that Gnostic thought is not simply “a parasite on orthodox Judaism or Christianity.” To the contrary, “Gnostics were important actors in the cultural context in which they lived, and the stature of their thought can only be properly understood as part and parcel of the ongoing discussion among philosophical and religious groups in the first centuries CE.” Consequently, Roig Lanzillotta argues that “their views cannot be taken as simple reactions,” but “that essential conceptual developments in both Christian and pagan worldviews were due to their innovative contributions.” He demonstrates this by contextualising Valentinian thought in the polemics between the philosophical schools, with particular attention to the topic of God’s relationship to the world. The Valentinians were responding to the Aristotelian, Epicurean, and Neo-Pythagorean critique of the Platonic God in the *Timaeus* and of the Stoic immanent deity; these depictions of a “technomorphic” creator God portray him as “grievously overworked.” Roig Lanzillotta argues that Valentinian Christians such as Ptolemy “tacitly and implicitly” side with these critics and resolve the issue by considering the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* not as the highest God, but as a lower creator God who created the lower realms of the world (the astral and earthly regions), and by equating him with the Christ–Logos who enacts the Father’s plan. In this way, Ptolemy’s solution prefigures the distinction that the Platonist philosopher Numenius makes between a genuinely divine intellect and a demiurgic intellect that brings the former’s plan into practice. Thus the Valentinians, according to Roig Lanzillotta, not only engaged in the contemporary debate about God’s relationship to the world, but also took the initiative in explaining how God interacted with the world.

The final chapters in this section challenge some common views that have been extrapolated from particular historiographies of early Christianity in its relation to its Jewish and pagan contexts. Given that much urgent attention has been duly paid to the phenomenon of early Christian polemics against the Jews, it is relevant to raise the question of whether the reverse phenomenon, early Jewish polemics against the Christians, was absent in antiquity. In a contribution under the title “Celsus’s Jew and Jewish Anti-Christian Counter-Narrative: Evidence of an Important Form of Polemic in Jewish-Christian Disputation,” *James Carleton Paget* (Cambridge) discusses the anti-Christian criticism expounded by an anonymous Jew who is used as an authoritative informant in the anti-Christian polemics of the Platonist philosopher Celsus in his *True Word* around 180 CE. Although there is otherwise no known Jewish evidence of a Jewish counterpart to the Christian *Adversus Judaeos* tradition before the Rabbinic period (in the sense of a Jewish *Adversus Christianos* literature paralleling the widespread phenomenon of pagan anti-Christian literature), Carleton Paget regards the anti-Christian polemic of “Celsus’s Jew” (as he is known) as authentic and therefore as “the first unambiguous example of a pagan showing knowledge of Jewish association with Christians and exploiting this fact for his own purposes.” Celsus’s Jew’s criticism is levelled against both Jesus and his followers, and focuses primarily on Jesus’s alleged divinity, arguing that the biographical details of his life are incompatible with his supposed divine origins and demonstrate that he could not be the divine Logos. Celsus’s Jew appears to be familiar with and polemicising against Christian gospels (in particular against the gospels of Matthew and John), inverting their accounts of Jesus’s life in a kind of popular “counter-narrative” and mixing them with “pre-existing, polemically oriented stories about Jesus.” In this way, he creates a “biographical calumny” that attacks Jesus’s character and actions rather than his ideas, with the principal purpose of showing “that there is a striking disjunction between the claims made for Jesus’s divinity and the reality of his life.” Interestingly, this Jew also inscribes his critique of Jesus in a broader comparison with the (demi-)gods of Greek myths, from which Jesus emerges unfavourably. The continued existence of such a genre of comprehensive counter-narratives about Jesus seems confirmed in passages from Justin, Tertullian, Lactantius, and possibly in the fourth-century *Martyrdom of Conon*, according to which, during the persecution of the Christians under the emperor Decius (249–51 CE), a group of Jews presented a Roman governor with critical accounts of the life of Jesus. According to Carleton Paget, this kind of *ad hominem* counter-narrative polemics probably constituted the earliest phase of Jewish-Christian polemics, before the rise of the counter-exegesis

and counter-argument that came into favour in the Christian *Anti Judaeos* polemics. The contexts in which such polemical counter-narratives emerged and functioned are probably shaped by direct disputations between Jews and Christian Jews, in which the former tried to prevent the latter from abandoning their ancestral law and deserting them “for another name and another life”—the stated intention of Celsus’s Jew. In these situations, *ad hominem* attacks on the founder of the Christian movement were considered more effective than counter-exegetical strategies. In this way, Carleton Paget contributes to a fuller understanding of Jewish-Christian polemics in antiquity.

A similar historiographical check is performed by *Robbert van den Berg* (Leiden) in a chapter entitled “The Emperor Julian, *Against the Cynic Heraclius* (*Oration 7*): A Polemic about Myths,” which focuses on the emergence of early Christian intolerance at the end of the fourth century CE. In 380 CE, as a result of Emperor Theodosius I’s Edict of Thessalonica, “Catholic” Christianity (i.e., the type of Christianity that accorded with the Council of Nicaea, which took place in 325 CE) became the state religion of the Roman Empire, after it had first been allowed as a licit religion alongside other, pagan religions in the Edict of Milan in 313 CE. But how does the figure of the ex-Christian Roman emperor Julian (reigned 361–63 CE) fit into this context? Amidst what is regularly seen as an epochal turn from Roman persecutions of Christians towards Christian intolerance, Julian has often been perceived as the last strong tower of Roman tolerance. But how did this emperor, who also issued the so-called School Edict (362 CE) that excluded Christian professors from teaching classical literature and philosophy, actually behave towards the pagan philosophies that he himself, as an adherent of pagan Neoplatonism, did not favour?

Van den Berg demonstrates how Julian performed his polemics by focusing on Julian’s oration against the Cynic philosopher Heraclius in response to a now-lost oration that Heraclius delivered in Constantinople in 362 CE. He does so with the aid of a model of polemical discourse developed by Jürgen Stenzel, who emphasises the aggressive, public nature of polemics and differentiates between the polemical subject, the polemical object, the polemical theme, and the audience, whom the subject tries to convince of the importance of the theme as well as of the justifiable disapproval of the object. Following Jürgen Stenzel, Van den Berg stresses “the role of values in philosophical polemics.” According to Stenzel, a polemical theme “has to be controversial and an abundant source of energy for aggression, so it has to be able to activate intensely held values.” As another recipient of Stenzel’s insight, André Laks, emphasises, “Philosophical polemics’ (as distinct from philosophical argumentation) enter the philosophical scene when ultimate convictions are at

stake.”<sup>4</sup> In his contribution, Van den Berg demonstrates how Julian’s response to Heraclius advertises his own religious-philosophical program and engages in two polemics at once: first, a polemic with the Cynic Heraclius, and second (and simultaneously), a polemic with his own Christian opponents by proxy.

In his polemics, Julian follows a well-established strategy of philosophical polemics that Van den Berg deduces from the following examples, in which Platonic philosophers respond to harsh, polemical, slanderous attacks on Plato by Epicureans, rhetoricians, and sophists. Van den Berg refers to a public reading of texts written by the Epicurean Colotes and a provocative public interpretation of Plato’s *Symposium* by the rhetorician Diophanes. Whilst Colotes attacks Plato in order to establish the superiority of Epicurus, Diophanes deliberately misuses Plato for his own unethical cause, with both antagonists prompting those Platonists in the audience who felt most offended to ask other philosophers to respond on their behalf, showing that Colotes and Diophanes were merely fake philosophers because “they completely dissociate themselves from the entire philosophical tradition.” Platonists such as Numenius, Plutarch, and Porphyry describe such polemics between the philosophical schools in the language of a “Homeric battle,” in which “Homeric warriors” come to the defence of a good cause. Similarly, Julian, when confronted with the polemical critique of the Cynic Heraclius in a public meeting, decides to engage in a polemical exchange with him because the Cynic blasphemes against the gods. Julian tries to frame him as a finance-driven fake philosopher and as a shrewd, wandering Christian monk who lives on alms. By rendering Heraclius a fake Cynic philosopher, to be distinguished from the original Cynics, Julian prevents Christians from seeing his polemics against Heraclius as an example of the disharmony that characterised the relations between the philosophical schools, at least according to Christians such as Eusebius of Caesarea. As Van den Berg puts it, Julian’s “polemics with Heraclius is not a duel between two pagan philosophers, but one between a champion of the Greek philosophical tradition and someone who, like the Christians, has placed himself outside of that tradition.” In his response to Heraclius’s oration, Julian alludes to the argument that Plato develops in books II and III of his *Republic*—the need for state control over literature. In this way, Van den Berg concludes, the emperor warns the intellectuals and orators in his empire that “it will not suffice merely to pay lip service

4 Jürgen Stenzel, “Rhetorischer Manichäismus. Vorschläge zu einer Theorie der Polemik,” in *Formen und Formgeschichte des Streitens. Der Literaturstreit*, ed. Franz J. Worstbrock and Helmut Koopman (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986), 3–11, here 6; André Laks, “The Continuation of Philosophy by Other Means?” in *Strategies of Polemics in Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ed. Sharon Weisser and Naly Thaler (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 16–30, here 26.

to some version of Greek philosophy and pagan mythology to win his favour, as Heraclius may have hoped,” but that “they should aim for a purified version of Greek literature and philosophy. If not, they are no better than the Christians, with whom Julian associates Heraclius.”

Taking this into account, it may be interesting to consider Julian’s exclusion of Christians from a common discourse, aggravated by his School Edict, as one of the reasons behind post-Julian Christians wishing to elevate their religion from its pre-Julian status as a licit religion (313 CE) to that of the official state religion of the Roman Empire (380 CE).

#### 4 Discourses between Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Greeks

The fourth section of this volume is concerned with discourses between Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Greeks in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. In a chapter entitled “Qur’anic Anti-Jewish Polemics,” Reuven Firestone (Los Angeles) discusses the large number of references to Jews and their ancestors, the Israelites, in the Qur’an. It demonstrates the important status Jews held in the region from which the Qur’an emerged in late antiquity. The Qur’an expresses a clear ambivalence towards Jews. In some contexts it expresses admiration and esteem. More often, however, the Qur’an is highly critical of Jews. In order to truly understand and appreciate the anti-Jewish polemic of the Qur’an, the Qur’an’s views of Jews need to be examined in relation to its positions towards other communities that contested its self-proclaimed status as a divinely revealed text. Moreover, the Qur’an’s views of Jews must be observed historically in relation to the emergence of the Qur’an in late antiquity, and phenomenologically in reference to the emergence of Scripture and the birth of religion in general. Firestone focuses on this last aspect. The Qur’an’s appearance as a divine disclosure, occurring after the closure of Jewish and Christian scriptural canons, represents a criticism of prior Scriptures and the religious communities and practices those prior Scriptures authorise. In other words, the very existence of the Qur’an is a polemical statement. Moreover, the polemics in emergent Scripture also derive from attacks by members of established religions. Firestone surveys several categories of critique levelled against the new prophet and his message, to which the Qur’an seems to be responding: i) Jewish rejection of the new revelation; ii) Jewish criticism of the new revelation; iii) Jewish rejection and undermining of the authority of the prophet; and iv) Jewish criticism of new religious practices. Some new religious movements do indeed succeed in establishing new religions. When this occurs, they remain forever threatening to the authority of previously established religions.

Earlier scriptural monotheisms therefore continue to disparage newer religions even after they become established. The newer religions, in turn, carry within their sacred Scriptures the institutional memory of those early attacks and their own defensive reactions in the form of invective directed against their accusers. As a result, the hostility becomes embedded in both religions' worldviews, as it is eternalised in theology, ritual, law, and practice. Thus, Firestone emphasises, Qur'anic anti-Jewish polemics cannot be properly understood without taking into account the historical and phenomenological context of their origin. Given the phenomenology of religious emergence, it should not be surprising that religious resentment, fear, and prejudice is so difficult to transcend.

In "Christian-Muslim (In)tolerance? Islam and Muslims according to Early Christian Arabic Texts," *Clare Wilde* (Groningen) discusses the situation of Christians living under Muslim rule. In order to gain proper insight into their situation, it is important to look at previous legislation in the region, as well as at the literary genre and theological orientation of Christian literature in Arabic. She focuses on two different types of Christian Arabic writings from the early Islamic period (the ninth century): one in the form of a letter, the other framed as a debate text. Christians had been in power prior to Muslim rule, and their writings reflect a desire for a return to their former glory, either in this world or the next. Moreover, despite numerous allusions to social disadvantages, Christian Arabic texts depict benevolent Muslims, particularly Muslim officials. At the same time, Christian Arabic texts also contain disrespectful remarks about Islam, the Qur'an, Muhammad, Muslims, Jews, and others with whom they disagree. Finally, in addition to being reduced to a subordinate status by the Islamic state, Christians themselves were also intolerant of the errors of Islam, and of Muslims, and of Jews—not just in their literary productions, but also in their attempted regulation of cross-communal interactions. Their refusal to recognise the truth claims of other religious communities did have consequences for those who wished to transgress the communal borders—consequences such as excommunication or refusal of marriage. The refusal to accept (as true) the beliefs and practices of others was not restricted to a rejection of the religion of the ruling elites; it also extended to the religion of their own peers with the same socio-political status.

In the next chapter, entitled "The Intolerance of Rationalism: The Case of al-Jāhiz in Ninth-Century Baghdad," *Paul L. Heck* (Washington, DC) discusses the institution of the Inquisition by the caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–33 CE) in the last year of his reign. The goal of this institution was to test the religious scholars and juridical authorities of the realm and to verify that they were in line with the caliph's position that the Qur'an was created rather than uncreated. These

two theological positions were deeply rooted in different religious experiences that resulted in two conflicting visions of how the community of Muslims should be ordered. Those who defended the position that the Qur'an was created exalted scholastic argumentation of a philosophical kind in its theological approach, making that understanding of religious experience more deployable as an emblem of political order. The others—those who viewed the Qur'an as uncreated—can be characterised as promulgating a pious and even mystical encounter with the body of God that lent itself to a view of religious community apart from the political order under the caliphal aegis. The Inquisition is an example of what Heck calls political intolerance, in which the ruling power seeks to eliminate certain ideas and the communities that adhere to them. The intention of the Inquisition was not to advance the common welfare or maintain order, but to eliminate theological ideas that the ruling elite found philosophically distasteful and even considered a disgrace to Islam. The scholar al-Jāhīz (d. 869) supported the Inquisition because its goal reflected his goal of establishing a clear method for ascertaining theological truths. Al-Jāhīz's intolerance was rationalist in its claim to be based upon the sound workings of human rationality, in alignment with philosophical assumptions about what all humans should recognise as true. This shows that intolerance is not necessarily characteristic of the irrational masses. Al-Jāhīz's intolerance was rooted in the rationalist pretensions of the ruling elite.

In the last chapter in this section, "The Law of Justice (*ṣarīʿat al-ʿadl*) and the Law of Grace (*ṣarīʿat al-faḍl*) in Medieval Muslim-Christian Polemics," *Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella* (Rome) discusses Paul of Antioch, the Melkite Bishop of Sidon, who wrote an apology for Christianity in Arabic around the year 1200. His argument regarding two types of revealed law (the law of justice and the law of grace) challenged his Muslim readers to reflect in turn on their own understandings of religious history—that is, to think theologically of Islam alongside other monotheistic traditions and to respond to his implicit question: What does Muḥammad's prophetic message bring to those to whom the divine Word had already been addressed? The Muslim respondents to Paul of Antioch's *Letter to the Muslim Friend*—al-Qarāfi, Ibn Taymiyya, and al-Dimašqī—specifically addressed this argument. The differences between their responses are subtle and significant, and could be considered different expressions of an Islamic theology, each asserting Islam's superiority over Christianity. These figures show, as does Paul of Antioch, that medieval Muslim-Christian polemics deserve the attention not only of historians, but also of theologians and, more generally, of anyone interested in the complex processes of religious thinking and identity formation, which also takes shape in moments of contradistinction from other religious groups.



## 5 A Modern Cinematic Reflection

A final contribution to the volume offers a modern cinematic reflection on the theme of intolerance. In “Writing History with Lightning: D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* and the Imagined Past,” James Oleson (Auckland) studies the feature film *Intolerance*, produced by D. W. Griffith and premiered in 1916, slightly more than a century ago, and argues that it is “a film that also deserves to be studied more widely—by historians, political scientists, philosophers, and theologians.” According to Oleson, the imagery of *Intolerance* is important because it shaped—and still shapes—popular understandings of ecclesiastical and secular struggles for power. An epic on a hitherto unprecedented scale, the film was a commercial failure, bankrupting its production company and ruining its director financially. Today, however, Griffith’s silent epic is considered to be one of the greatest films ever made. With a runtime of approximately three hours, *Intolerance* recounts four interrelated stories: the fall of Babylon (539 BCE), the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (27 CE), the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre (1572 CE), and a fictional representation of the Ludlow Massacre (1914 CE) and its unintended consequences. These four threads are depicted in a radically nonlinear manner, linked via more than fifty transitions, and are unified by the visual refrain of an eternal mother rocking a cradle. By drawing on cross-cultural examples from Babylon, Jerusalem, Paris, and the modern American metropolis, the film shows that even well-intended reforms which are undertaken for the “betterment” of society are characterised by a tension between (in)tolerance and love that is, eventually, reminiscent of the classical, perennial tension between justice and mercy. Throughout human history, Griffith warns, a host of evils (intended and unintended) has been unleashed through our intolerance of others.

The cross-cultural and inclusive approach we have taken in this volume permits us to propose the following insights, some of which may be counter-intuitive. It seems that the difference between debate and polemics is perhaps not so significant as one might assume. Polemics, after all, may also be read as indications that ultimate values are at stake. In that sense, polemics are the emotional side of contested values. Techniques of “othering”—which, as anthropologists have noted, forge a dualism between “the opponents” and one’s own “in-group”—may be at work in such polemics, but several contributions to this volume have shown that in this “othering,” one also criticises (members of) one’s own community. The “*polémique extérieure*” is always also an implicit “*polémique intérieure*.” We have seen how, in the case of the critique of child sacrifice, it is not only the current practice of other religions, but also

the earlier developmental stages of one's own religious practice that are condemned. Moreover, we have seen how this kind of polemics, in one way or another, helps cultures develop further—in this case leading to the eventual abrogation of child sacrifice. Generally, polemics seem to have a negative connotation, but they also perform positive functions.

Intolerance seems more straightforwardly negative than polemics. Historically speaking, it is rather interesting to note where intolerance is found. Its occurrence is not limited to monotheisms, but it is also widespread in polytheistic milieus. In many contexts, religious intolerance appears to be a justification of politics through religious means. Rather counter-intuitively, intolerance is also found in democratic institutions, as the case of Socrates's trial makes clear. This insight might become less surprising as we note similar clashes between democracies and science, and between populist majorities and minorities within democratic societies in the modern era. As one of the contributions has shown, the rationalist pretensions of the ruling elite can also be politicised and become totalitarian; they can be employed to eliminate particular ideas and the communities that adhere to them.

A pressing question seems to be whether tolerance is something that can only be granted by and expected from the majority culture. But this would let minority cultures off the hook. Or can they, in some sense, be asked to show their "respect" for particular majority views whilst, within this discourse, negotiating freedom for their own values and concerns? This might convince the current majority that the empowerment of minorities would not simply result in turning the tables of intolerance. Several contributions to this volume seem to confirm the importance of minorities being fluent in the dominant discourses and able to develop their contrapuntal lines of thought within a common cultural discourse. Perhaps we can infer from this that such a common discourse would flourish best in a context in which all the cultural actors also paid attention to the values on which all the interlocutors agree, even if these values are anchored in different argumentations and distinct world-views. There might then be polemics regarding the subordination or deflation of each other's actual arguments, but at the same time, particular values would also be highlighted as common objectives, whilst the other's arguments could be recognised as (at least) propaedeutically valuable in these ongoing critical debates.

The ambiguities of critical encounters are nicely illustrated in the image of the late-antique mosaic that accompanies this introduction and is also displayed on the front cover of the volume. We are greatly indebted to our colleague Professor Jodi Magness (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and her husband, the photographer Jim Haberman, for granting us the right to



FIGURE 0.1 Encounter between Jews and Greeks (“The Elephant Mosaic Panel” in the Synagogue at Huqoq, Galilee, early 5th century CE)  
PHOTO CREDIT: JIM HABERMAN, © JODI MAGNESS

use their photo of one of the late-antique mosaics in the Synagogue at Huqoq, which Professor Magness and her team discovered in 2013–2014. This image (see Figure 0.1) illustrates our subject matter so well. Now known as “The Elephant Mosaic” and dating from the early fifth century CE, this panel depicts an encounter between Jews and Greeks—perhaps the respectful affirmation of the Jewish god by Alexander the Great (cf. Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 11.325–339, as according to Jodi Magness herself), or perhaps the Maccabean Revolt against Antiochus IV Epiphanes (the topic of Peter Franz Mittag’s contribution to this volume), among other interpretations.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the precise identity of the figures in the panel and the nature of their encounter (whether peaceable or rather more hostile), it impressively portrays the tension between debate and power in cross-cultural encounters in antiquity.

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5 For the official publication of this mosaic and an exploration of various interpretive possibilities, see Karen Britt and Ra’anan S. Boustán, *The Elephant Mosaic Panel in the Synagogue at Huqoq: Official Publication and Initial Interpretations* (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 106; Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2017). Cf. also Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, “Introduction to a Range of Interpretations of the Elephant Mosaic Panel at Huqoq,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 31 (2018): 506–508. For its interpretation with regard to Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Maccabean Revolt, see esp. Janine Balty, “La ‘mosaïque à l’éléphant’ de Huqoq: un document très convoité et d’interprétation controversée,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 31 (2018): 509–12.

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*Jacques van Ruiten*

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