

A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day
edited by Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora.
Princeton University Press 2013.

As the Middle East continues to implode, and the situation between Israel and Palestine, and between Jewish and Muslim Israelis continues to worsen, so that some commentators are talking of a new holy war, this magnificent and massive book from PUP is an essential guide to the history of the relationship between Islam and Judaism.

The book is divided into four subject areas: The Middle Ages, The Modern World, The Present and Transversalities. The editors see a threefold function to their work, as charged by those who commissioned it, to educate, to provide scholarly analysis and to give political background. In their introduction to the book and explanation of its scope it is clear that they were at all times aware of the background against which the book was being prepared, a background of increasing darkness where relations between Jews and Muslims had reached a dead end and where the connections of the past, some very positive, had been shunted to the back of a deep background.

What A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations does is consider not just country by country inter-relationships, but takes a global view, something which, in this inter-connected age, is absolutely vital. It does not shy away from awkward subjects nor exclude those of a lighter nature. It is copiously illustrated and annotated, has a bibliography that would take a lifetime to work through, and is interspersed throughout with mini-essays marked Nota Bene or Counterpoint.

The final section, Transversalities, is the one whose contents are the least immediately obvious. It contains essays on the ways in which Jewish and Muslim intellectual lives intersected, and how the two faiths influenced each other in various Muslim countries where there was a significant Jewish minority.

A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations is an essential book for anyone who seeks truly to understand the history and context of modern relationships between the two descendants of Abraham.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh