Indexing a Shared Knowledge Culture from Many Perspectives: The *Historical Index of the Medieval Middle East* (HIMME) as a Tool for Researching Diversity

Thomas A. Carlson and Jessica S. Mutter*

The medieval Middle East, at the crossroads of Africa and Eurasia, included more distinct yet intersecting literary traditions in more languages than any other part of the premodern world. While several of these literary traditions were religiously demarcated, others such as Arabic and Persian were multireligious written cultures. Despite this, the religious diversity of this region is often conceptualized as separate communities who sometimes interacted. Religion was certainly a socially relevant category employed by medieval people to organize their world, and yet people from every religion wrote about the same government, the same society, and largely the same culture, a culture expressed in religious multiplicity. A new digital research project has developed a reference tool (the *Historical Index of the Medieval Middle East*, HIMME) to demonstrate the shared culture and society of the diverse medieval Middle East. It provides a union index to selected primary sources in Arabic, Armenian, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Persian, and Syriac, indexing the people, places, and practices mentioned in each literary tradition. The result is that someone interested in, for example, the famous counter-Crusader Saladin (Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn) can search a database and discover relevant primary sources in unexpected languages such as Syriac as well as the expected Arabic and Latin sources, while the later conqueror Timur Lenk is also mentioned in Greek and Armenian texts that might easily be missed. This article offers an overview of the research tool (published on August 1, 2021), and a discussion of its scope, as well as suggestions for how it might be used to research Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the medieval Middle East.

*Keywords: digital humanities, diversity, multilingualism, Middle East, Arabic, Armenian, Syriac, Persian, Greek, Hebrew*

*Correspondence details: Thomas A. Carlson (corresponding author), Oklahoma State University, 101 Social Sciences and Humanities, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, USA, thomas.a.carlson@okstate.edu; Jessica S. Mutter, independent scholar, jmutter@uchicago.edu.*

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We may start with a 900-year-old murder mystery which was just solved last year. In 1129 CE, as the influence of Ismāʿīlī Shiism was growing in Damascus and the Crusaders were at the gates, the vizier who favored this new faction was killed, on the orders of the atabeg Tāj al-Mulūk Būrī himself. But to whom did the ruler entrust this murder? The Arabic historians Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn al-Qalānisī mention the murder but do not name the perpetrator. But a Syriac source, the chronicle of Michael the Syrian, in fact directly identifies the murderer, even if unfortunately the name has been corrupted by Syriac scribes into »Sūj al-Dawla bar Šūfī«. The name mystified the French and English translators of Michael's text, but it is still recognizable as a deformation of the name given elsewhere by Ibn al-Qalānisī as Mufarrij Abū l-Dhuwād Ibn Ṣūfī. While this is a small detail, comparing Arabic historical sources with a Syriac chronicle sheds light on the deadly urban politics in Burid Damascus under threat from a Crusader army. This has so far been missed by Islamic historians, whereas Syriacists have not usually evinced much interest in the political history embedded in this source. These divergences reflect modern scholarly frameworks rather than medieval realities, because in twelfth-century Damascus one might have heard Arabic, Greek, Turkish, multiple varieties of Aramaic, and probably also Kurdish, Armenian, Persian, and Latin.

Examples could be multiplied. Byzantinists interested in the imperial navy will find descriptions of reactions to the navy around the Eastern Mediterranean in the Persian travel account of Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Judaicists will find additional evidence for Fatimid-Jewish connections in the same author’s account of an eleventh-century Jewish jewel merchant named Abū Saʿīd working for the Fatimid caliph. Crusader historians interested in Saladin (Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn) will find relevant citations in Michael’s Syriac chronicle, while Timurid historians will find abundant material in the Greek history of Chalkokondyles and in Armenian colophons translated into English by Sanjian. The medieval Middle East was very linguistically diverse.

This linguistic plurality extended also to writing, as the medieval Middle East was probably home to more simultaneous literary traditions in more languages than any other part of the premodern world. These literary traditions in Arabic, Aramaic, Armenian, Coptic, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Persian, Syriac, and eventually also Turkish present both a challenge and an opportunity to historians of the medieval Middle East. They present the opportunity to triangulate, to find evidence pertaining to the same people, places, society, and culture, from more viewpoints — and more diverse ones — than are typically available in most parts of the medieval world. But they are also a challenge because, for example, many scholars do not read both Arabic and Greek, and those who do almost never read both Persian and Armenian as well. Even if a scholar is open to consulting additional sources in different languages,

3 Thanks to Paul Cobb via Twitter for help identifying the murderer.
5 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Book of Travels, ed. Thackston, 74–75.
7 Chalkokondyles, Histories, ed. Kaldellis; Sanjian, Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts.
reference works are almost always limited to sources in a particular language, or perhaps two, so it is difficult for an Arabist even to know what relevant sources might exist in, say, Armenian or Greek, and hard for a Byzantinist to know which emperors are mentioned in Arabic sources. Hence the study of the medieval Middle East has tended to follow confessional and linguistic boundaries shaped by graduate training. The siloing of research according to linguistic and confessional boundaries is also reflected in digital initiatives on the medieval Middle East. Digital tools in Islamic studies have proliferated in recent years, allowing scholars to access texts more easily than ever before, but challenges remain. Even tools like al-Maktaba al-Shamela are limited to the Arabic language, for example, while the Onomasticon Arabicum defined its scope to exclude non-Muslim names in Arabic (although some were included). But this scholarly self-segregation would not be necessary if a mechanism could be found to connect researchers to the resources of unfamiliar linguistic traditions, without first requiring them to learn the languages and master the reference works.

One attempt to connect researchers to unfamiliar resources of interest to them is the **Historical Index of the Medieval Middle East** (HIMME), an expanding research tool recently published with support from the US National Endowment for the Humanities. The idea is simple: scholars should be able to search for what interests them and thereby find relevant primary sources regardless of language. By providing index entries for persons and groups, for places, and for social or cultural practices ranging from political titles to jizya to fasting during Ramadan, HIMME enables researchers to find additional evidence spanning the breadth of medieval Middle Eastern languages, as well as its geography and chronology. HIMME’s intended scope includes any text authored in or about the Middle East, North Africa, and al-Andalus between 600 and 1500, extending to references to earlier persons and places beyond this region found in texts authored within the medieval Middle East.

Of course, the entire corpus of medieval Middle Eastern textual sources far exceeds what any individual researcher or modest team can accomplish in several lifetimes. This project is the product of teamwork, but even so, a total prosopography and geographical gazetteer for the medieval Middle East is not feasible. Thus, while anticipating future expansion, the project has prioritized sources based on several criteria. First, the project prefers sources representing as broad a range of languages as possible, to visually display the linguistic diversity of the medieval Middle East. Secondly, the project prioritized sources that are not already being used to their full potential by scholars; we do not need another project to tell us what is in al-Ṭabarī’s *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-muluk*, because scholars of Islamic history already know to look there. But not everyone would think to check the geographical dictionary of Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī for historical as well as geographical information, yet they would likely find some rich material were they to do so. Thirdly, sources were prioritized based on their anticipated ability to speak across the confessional and linguistic boundaries that presently divide scholarly subfields. Fourth, sources that have been translated into English were preferred since

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8 The core research team consisted of Thomas A. Carlson (PI), postdoctoral researchers Liran Yadgar, Margaret Gaida, and Jessica S. Mutter, and undergraduate research assistants McKenzie Cady and Laurel Kenner. Additional contributions were made by Evan Willford, Josh Kuch, and Mary Papadopoulos. Computer programming was done by Winona Salesky, Thomas A. Carlson, and an anonymous programmer.
they are accessible to a broader range of scholars, although exceptions were made for some sources (such as Yaqūt’s geographical dictionary). Finally, for a two-year project building infrastructure, it was necessary to begin with sources for which digital indices have already been prepared. The laborious process of generating a new index to a substantial textual source was not possible within the confines of this phase.

Based on these criteria, nine sources were selected to be integrated into HIMME’s initial publication. Several of them are travel accounts: From the eleventh century, there is the Persian travel account of Naṣīr-i Khusraw, who traveled from Central Asia to Egypt and Arabia and back, giving us a detailed description of Fatimid Egypt as well as of the Armenian and Kurdish highlands along his route.9 A Jewish traveler from Spain, Benjamin of Tudela, left a Hebrew account of his travels, including references to Abbasid court ceremonial and Seljuk politics.10 A group of four Frankish pilgrim texts by Burchard of Mount Sion, Riccoldo da Monte Croce, Odoric da Pordenone, and Wilbrand of Oldenburg provide Crusader and post-Crusader perspectives on not only Palestine, but also Syria and Egypt (and in some cases further east).11 Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s Arabic travel account is the broadest description of the world from the medieval period, but also provides descriptions of late Byzantine Constantinople and Anatolia under the beylik period that are especially important.12 When compared to sources originating from within the Middle East, all these travelers shared certain preoccupations and perpetuated certain misunderstandings. Travelers, more than local sources, were apt to describe local customs, because the practitioners regarded them as unremarkable, and travelers’ characterizations of politics often misunderstood the long-term dynamics, alliances, and feuds, while providing modern scholars with an invaluable snapshot often less tainted by later anachronism.

By contrast, local sources were often more inclined to narrative history and recording local lore. The earliest source used in HIMME is a ninth-century Arabic apocalyptic text, the Kitāb al-Fitan by Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, which was chosen because it contains a surprising number of references to early Byzantine emperors as well as Umayyad caliphs.13 The second largest source included so far is the universal chronicle of Michael the Syrian, which describes in Syriac the reigns of Byzantine emperors, Abbasid and Fatimid caliphs, Turkish sultans, Armenian princes, and Frankish Crusaders, in addition to giving us the gossip on his own Syriac Christian community.14 There is a complete French translation, and a recently published English translation of the final 150 years, covered in this source. The largest source in

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9 Naṣīr-i Khusraw, Book of Travels, ed. Thackston.
10 Benjamin of Tudela, Itinerary, ed. Adler.
11 Laurent (ed.), Peregrinatores Medii Aevi Quatuor.
HIMME is the complete Arabic geographical dictionary, the *Mu’jam al-buldān* of Yaqt al-Ḥamawī, which was made available through the Open Islamicate Texts Initiative. Though most of its entries are brief, some give detailed historical and political information, including details about individual Crusader kings such as Andrew of Hungary, the cities in Frankish hands or under Muslim rule at the time, and indeed one of the very earliest Arabic references to the Mongol conqueror Chingiz Khan, who was still alive when this source was being written. Both Michael the Syrian and Yaqt also provide extensive information relevant to the study of the medieval reception of knowledge about the ancient world. A collection of Armenian colophons (notes at the end of manuscripts that usually say who copied this text, for whom, and why) is among the only available sources for the late Ilkhanid and post-Mongol periods, the reign of the Qaraqoyunlu Türkmen dynasty and the early Aqqoyunlu Türkmen. Finally, Chalkokondyles wrote a late fifteenth century Greek history of the rise of the Ottoman household, which also provides extensive information on Timur and his successors. The Armenian colophons resemble the travel accounts in usually providing a snapshot of knowledge (or rumors) from a particular time, although they are also more geographically limited, while Chalkokondyles provided a survey of the state of the late medieval Mediterranean in light of the previous century of history.

From these sources, HIMME provides an index including over 40,000 entries for persons and groups, places, and practices. The numbers of entries taken from each source is shown in Table 1. These are not the sources that scholars in the various subfields of medieval Middle Eastern history would be inclined to check first, which is the point: HIMME is designed to provide new, perhaps surprising references on research topics, ones that might alter the study of those topics in unforeseen ways.

Table 1. Sources included in HIMME’s initial publication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Century CE</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>English translation?</th>
<th>No. of persons*</th>
<th>No. of places</th>
<th>No. of practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nu‘aym b. Hammād</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>�วาṣir-i Khusraw</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin of Tudela</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael the Syrian</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Syriac</td>
<td>Partial (plus complete French)</td>
<td>5,039</td>
<td>1,568</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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16 Khach’ikyan, *XIV Dari Hayeren Dzeragreri Hishatabaranner*; Khach’ikyan, *XV Dari Hayeren Dzeragreri Hishatabaranner*; Sanjian, Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts.
18 HIMME provides citations to text editions – and, where possible, translations – but was unable to link directly to each cited text due to the facts that most cited sources remain within copyright and are not online in a format where particular pages could be addressed.
Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī 13th Arabic N 12,006 14,815 15

Frankish pilgrims 13th-14th Latin Partial 310 526 33

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 14th Arabic Y 1,581 1,201 926

Armenian colophons 14th-15th Armenian Y 897 483 164

Chalkokondyles 15th Greek Y 489 460 82

Total** 9th-15th 7 20,356 18,283 1,646

* Includes groups.

** Note that the numbers in the last three columns cannot simply be added to arrive at a total, because some persons and many places occur in more than one, even several, sources. For example, Baghdad is mentioned in all these sources.

For example, HIMME has an entry for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.19 As seen in the screenshot below (Figure 1), he is mentioned in several primary sources in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Persian, and Syriac. Thus, if a scholar or perhaps a student or a curious member of the general public wanted to know what medieval authors had to say about ʿAlī, they could search for him in HIMME and find a number of different references to him. They would learn about when each event occurred (in this case, the life of ʿAlī), as well as when each author wrote his text (Figure 2). Therefore, in addition to finding individual citations relevant to ʿAlī, researchers can study the way ʿAlī is portrayed in medieval texts and how that portrayal changes over time. For example, one might ask how the Mongol conquest of parts of the Middle East changed historical perspectives on ʿAlī and his legacy, and scholars might be surprised to find that they can explore these changes using Syriac sources as well as Arabic ones.

Figure 1: HIMME entry for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib

19 Carlson et al., ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, medievalmideast.org/person/7442.
What about slightly less famous figures? HIMME has an entry for the qāḍī Yahyā b. Aktham (Figure 3), who was qāḍī al-quḍāt under the Abbasid caliphs al-Maʾmūn and al-Mutawakkil. He was mentioned by both Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī, in Arabic, and Michael the Syrian, in Syriac. A scholar looking for references to him might be surprised to find a Syriac source from several centuries after his death that mentions him, and indeed Michael is here indebted to Dionysius of Tell-Māḥrē, a contemporary of Yahyā, for his information. This reference might provide a valuable, contrasting perspective to the Arabic sources she might otherwise have consulted.

Yahyā’s entry in HIMME provides his name as attested in Arabic and Syriac with transliterations of each, as well as an abstract with basic information and links to both the code for his page and other online sources of information. All HIMME entries also contain a temporal model, which visualizes the mediation of knowledge about this entity to the present, by plotting on a temporal field what is known about the date(s) of the event(s) contained.
in the primary sources, as well as when the primary sources were written, when they were
copied into the earliest extant manuscript, and the publication date of the edition used by
HIMME. The model for Yaḥyā (Figure 4) has the date of an event that mentions him in the
chronicle of Michael the Syrian, represented in dark blue, which is several centuries earlier
than the date range in which Michael actually wrote his text, represented in light blue. The
dark orange circle represents the date of the earliest extant manuscript, and the light orange
circle represents the publication date of the edition used by HIMME. The same identifying
dates are represented for Yāqūt’s entry on Yahyā, though Yāqūt did not provide a date for him,
and so all HIMME can confirm is that the reference occurs sometime before Yāqūt wrote his
text. This uncertainty is represented by a dotted line to the left of the text’s publication date,
and the semicircle represents the last year in the range of dates in which Yāqūt was writing.

![Figure 4: Temporal model for Yaḥyā b. Aktham](image)

Nathan Gibson’s project on Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a’s biographical dictionary of physicians prompt-
ed one of us to ask: How many physicians are in HIMME’s sources? At present there are at
least 20, listed in Table 2. These include a very early brief reference to Avicenna (Ibn Sinā)
by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who was discussing the famous doctor within a decade of his death.
Michael the Syrian mentioned the famous ninth-century caliphal physician Bukhtīshū’, and
Ibn Buṭlān was used as a source by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. Interestingly, Benjamin of Tudela
names a Jewish physician from Egypt who was a court doctor in Constantinople, as well as
the head of the Jewish community in Egypt before Maimonides, a physician named also by
Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a.21

21 Carlson and Yadgar, Rabbi Solomon Hamitsri, medievalmideast.org/person/14459.
### Table 2. List of physicians included in HIMME’s initial publication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Century</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hippocrates</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>5th-4th BCE</td>
<td>Pagan</td>
<td>Michael the Syrian, Yaqūt al-Ḥamawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erasistratus</td>
<td>Alexandria</td>
<td>3rd BCE</td>
<td>Pagan</td>
<td>Michael the Syrian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galen</td>
<td>Pergamon</td>
<td>3rd CE</td>
<td>Pagan</td>
<td>Yaqūt al-Ḥamawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergius of Rēshʿaynā</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>6th CE</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Michael the Syrian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibn Uthāl</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>7th CE</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saʿīd</td>
<td>Mosul</td>
<td>c. 700 CE</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Yaqūt al-Ḥamawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bukhtishūʿ</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
<td>9th CE</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Michael the Syrian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
<td>9th CE</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Michael the Syrian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ishāq al-Mutaṭabbib</td>
<td>Kairouan</td>
<td>9th CE</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Yaqūt al-Ḥamawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahyā b. Jarīr al-Takriti</td>
<td>Tikrit (Takrit)?</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Yaqūt al-Ḥamawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avicenna (Ibn Sinā)</td>
<td>Northern Iran</td>
<td>11th CE</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Nāsir-i Khusraw, Yaqūt al-Ḥamawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibn Buṭlān</td>
<td>Baghdad, Egypt</td>
<td>11th CE</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Yaqūt al-Ḥamawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abū Muʿādh ʿAbdān</td>
<td>Tus (Ṭūs)</td>
<td>12th CE</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Yaqūt al-Ḥamawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abū Saʿīd</td>
<td>Eastern Anatolia</td>
<td>12th CE</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Michael the Syrian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibn al-Tilmidh</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
<td>12th CE</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Michael the Syrian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nethanel Hibat Allâh</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>12th CE</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Benjamin of Tudela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Ha-Miṣri</td>
<td>Constantinople</td>
<td>12th CE</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Benjamin of Tudela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zedekiah</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>12th CE</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Benjamin of Tudela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unnamed</td>
<td>Western Anatolia</td>
<td>14th CE</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Ibn Baṭṭūta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amīrtovlatʿ</td>
<td>Amasya, Istanbul</td>
<td>15th CE</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Armenian colophons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among other examples of HIMME entries, the caliph al-Mahdī received a great deal of attention from the indexed sources, including six mentions by Yaqūt al-Ḥamawi, five mentions by Michael the Syrian, five mentions by Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, and several even as late as Ibn Baṭṭūta.\(^2\) Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qīṭī was used as a source by Ibn Abī Usaybīʿa, and also by Yaqūt al-Ḥamawi, and he also is mentioned by Ibn Baṭṭūta’s travel account.\(^2\) Yaqūt also included

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22 Carlson et al., al-Mahdī b. al-Manṣūr, medievalmideast.org/person/11600.
six references to mobeds.\footnote{Carlson, Mobeds, medievalmideast.org/practice/699.} Michael the Syrian also refers to magi at least ten times, not all of which are pre-Islamic.\footnote{Carlson et al., Magi, medievalmideast.org/practice/486.} It was also interesting to find that, despite popular misconceptions that Constantinople was renamed Istanbul by the Ottomans after their capture of the city in 1453, Nāṣir-i Khusraw used both names already in the eleventh century; the »new« name of the city had been mentioned even earlier, in al-Maṣʿūdi’s tenth-century Arabic text Kitāb al-tanbih wa-l-ishrāf.\footnote{Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Book of Travels, ed. Thackston, 54; al-Maṣʿūdi, Kitāb al-tanbih, ed. de Goeje, 139. Thanks to Sean Anthony for the reference to al-Maṣʿūdi’s work.} Byzantinists might also be interested to know that 67 Byzantine emperors and empresses between Justinian I (r. 527-565) and Constantine XI, the last Byzantine emperor in 1453, have records in HIMME, and 13 occur in multiple sources.

These are just a few examples, out of thousands. HIMME will be useful for a variety of potential users, including established scholars in medieval Middle Eastern history, scholars in adjacent fields, students researching topics related to the medieval Middle East, and even the interested general public. The project expands the potential base of sources that any given user can access by providing information that might have been overlooked or unusable due to linguistic, confessional, or disciplinary boundaries. Many of the sources in HIMME contain entries for people and places outside of the Near East or from before the medieval period, providing medieval Middle Eastern perspectives on what was »known« about historical persons, places, and phenomena from other eras and geographic regions. This resource will therefore be useful to scholars in medieval Middle Eastern studies as well as medieval European, South Asian, East Asian, and African studies. HIMME can enrich scholarship on the medieval Middle East and beyond it by promoting broader conversations among scholars of the medieval world. Moving forward, HIMME can be expanded to include additional sources, either indexing the entirety of a work or providing individual citations. Contributions from HIMME users are warmly welcomed and may be submitted to the corresponding author of this report. As HIMME grows, its usefulness will increase for discovering polyglot evidence and demonstrating the inseparability of medieval Middle Eastern literary traditions.

What HIMME proposes is a radical reorientation of the scholarly categorization of textual primary sources that we have inherited. Scholars have categorized medieval Middle Eastern sources first by religion (Muslim, Christian, Jewish), and within those categories by language, so that Carl Brockelmann’s large Geschichde der arabischen Litteratur included Islamic sciences but excluded texts written by Jews and Christians unless they were on »secular subjects.« Georg Graf supplemented this reference work with a separate Geschichde der christlichen arabischen Literatur, creating the false impression that »Christian Arabic« is an exclusively religious literary tradition separate from »Arabic« simpliciter. The evidence of medieval texts such as Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa’s biographical dictionary shows that Jews, Christians, and Muslims participated in the same Arabic literary tradition.\footnote{See, for example, Carlson, »The garden of the reasonable«.} Many of them also participated in non-Arabic literary traditions at the same time, whether Avicenna in Persian, Maimonides in Hebrew, or Ibn al-Tilmīdh in Syriac, demonstrating that all of the literary traditions of the medieval Middle East inhabited the same world with overlapping social and cultural contents.
For the early Islamic period before the Abbasid revolution, the paucity of Arabic sources has persuaded Islamicists since the 1970s of the value of consulting sources across the breadth of different linguistic traditions, but the more abundantly supplied later periods may likewise benefit from imitating this method. Islamicists have much to learn from texts authored by Christians, Byzantinists can learn much from texts authored by Muslims, and both will find useful materials in Jewish sources. Even when there are abundant Arabic literary sources, it may be a Syriac source that names the murderer.

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