

Editorial

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One of the challenges of comparative scholarship is to overcome compartmentalisations brought about by disciplinary boundaries. Muslim, Jewish, Christian or Zoroastrian Studies, Natural Sciences or Humanities – these are the starting points from which the authors of our winter volume rise to this challenge in different ways.

In our thematic section, the focus lies largely on the Near East/Middle East during the reign of the Abbasid caliphate from 7th to the 13th century CE and on the exchange of knowledge between figures who belong to different religious traditions. How did early Islamic intellectuals and rulers depict and deal with Zoroastrian high priests? How did a Christian patriarch integrate Muslim theology in his expositions? Which religious affiliation seemed worth including in an encyclopaedia on scientific collaboration and publications by a Baghdad bookseller? The articles in this thematic section take a close look at the way in which an »other« (religion) is employed in a variety of texts and contexts. They are supplemented by two project reports which highlight the efforts undertaken to make interpersonal ties and dependencies of this era visible.

In our stand-alone section, Humanities interact with the Natural Sciences. This line of enquiry has gained momentum in Medieval Studies, for instance, in environmental studies and climate research, in the use of archaeogenetics to find out more about population history or about the spread of diseases, or in the history of medieval science. In this expanding field, we do not only gain new perspectives on past events, but can also ask new questions in all disciplines involved, and gradually overcome the many challenges on the way towards integrated transdisciplinary research. Our stand-alone article showcases how this can be done by taking readers of all disciplines on a riveting tour of volcanic eruptions, celestial phenomena and their consequences in the 8th and 9th centuries CE as witnessed by manuscripts, coins, tree rings and ice-cores.