



Title page of *Kitāb irshād al-ḥayārā ilā taḥrīm istikhdam al-yahūd wa-l-naṣārā* ('A book of guidance for the confused, forbidding the employment of the Christian and the Jews'). Bibliothèque Nationale de Tunisie 9798, folio 21. Copying completed in 1028 AH/1609 CE.

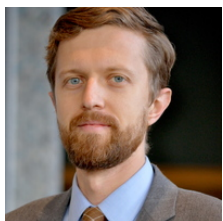


Detail of a Coptic scribe from *Description de l'Égypte* (Paris: Impr. impériale, 1809-1828), vol. 2, plate K.

On the Ethics of Studying Hate Speech: The Case of Medieval Arabic Polemics

Tuesday, February 4
4:00PM – 5:30PM
Royce 306

"Hate speech" is as contested as it is distressingly common in contemporary public discourse. It poses dilemmas that extend beyond political and legal debates about how it should be regulated. For professional historians—particularly scholars of religion in its historical dimensions—it also raises questions of classification and academic ethics. Is "hate speech" an accurate and useful term to use in describing and analyzing discourses of the past, especially the distant past? What ethical or social responsibilities do scholars have when dealing with such discourses? Answering these and related questions requires that we test both the limits of academic objectivity and the factors that lie behind scholars' decisions to study particular subjects in the first place. This presentation will explore these fraught issues through the lens of the speaker's work on medieval and early-modern Arabic religious polemics. These texts, most of which were composed between the twelfth and the fourteenth century in Egypt and Syria, but which had long afterlives, drew on the Islamic scholarly heritage in order to marginalize and exclude non-Muslims from public life. The presentation will pose and wrestle with with the questions of whether and how they should be published, studied, and situated in present-day discussions.



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