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**Maimonides and the Merchants: Jewish Law and Society in the Medieval Islamic World**  

Monday, November 5, 2018  
6:00—7:30pm  
Oxford Road Building, Presentation Room  
Emory University  

The advent of Islam in the seventh century brought profound economic changes to the Middle East and to the Jews living there. The Talmud, completed before the rise of Islam and written in and for a predominantly agrarian society, was in many ways ill-equipped for the new economy and Jewish legal authorities had to adapt and respond to the new conditions, challenges and opportunities. In the early Islamic period, the Babylonian Geonim made accommodations through their responsa, through occasional *taqqanot* (new laws), and especially by applying the concept that custom can serve as a source of law. In the *Mishneh Torah*, his comprehensive collection of Jewish law, Moses Maimonides (1138-1204) made his own efforts to update the halakha through codification. This included modification of and innovation in the sparse commercial law of the Talmud. Professor Cohen will discuss the main argument of his recent book, *Maimonides and the Merchants: Jewish Law and Society in the Medieval Islamic World* (2017), namely that, like the Geonim before him, Maimonides wished to provide Jewish merchants an alternative and comparable forum to the Islamic legal system and thereby shore up an important cornerstone of communal autonomy.

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