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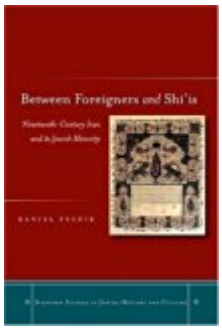
Daniel Tsadik. *Between Foreigners and Shi'is: Nineteenth-Century Iran and Its Jewish Minority.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. xxi + 295 pp. $60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-5458-3.



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One of the greatest challenges any scholar of Iranian Jewry may encounter is the need to either find new sources or offer a radically different reading of the existing scholarship and sources. Daniel Tsadik addresses this issue, maintaining that "one can hardly speak of diverse approaches, different schools of historiography, or even major debates among the few scholars who address Iranian Jewry's recent past" (p. 1). Indeed, the existing historiography portrays a rather forlorn picture of the Jewish existence in Iran, composed of endless persecution and a myriad of traumatic events. The challenge that Tsadik takes head on, then, is to provide a balanced account not only of the innumerable ordeals Jews experienced in nineteenth-century Iran, but also of what happened in the intervals between these persecutory events. In so doing, Tsadik recaptures the history of their everyday life, along with that of the Muslim majority and other minority communities. This approach makes significant departure from the existing scholarship, and is thus praiseworthy.

The field of Iranian Jewry has been highly problematic. As Haggai Ram explains, Jewish Iranian history has been continuously written from within the Zionist paradigm. Much of the scholarship regarding the Iranian Jewry was written by Israelis, or Jews of Iranian descent with connection to Israel, some of whom wrote from personal experience, and rarely from Iran. While this scholarship provides important information about some aspects of Jewish life in Iran, it often looks at the community as an isolated entity in the Iranian sphere, that came in touch with no one (with the exception of pogroms), that did not affect anyone, or that was not inspired by anyone. Therefore, much of the scholarly work is embedded with Zionist perceptions, which is manifested through the belief that "the Jewish state is the only place where non-European Jews could escape a bitter fate."[1] Because of this, at times these writers fail to acknowledge facts and stories that do not comport with the Jewish Zionist paradigm of history. Tsadik's primary objective is to lay the foundation for a new approach to the

study of Iranian Jewry. The focus of much of the existing literature has been the extent to which anti-Jewish outbreaks shaped Jewish life in Iran, and Jews' relationships with the rulers. Within this context, Tsadik eschews the laboratory-like conditions under which this Iranian Jewry has been studied, i.e., supposedly isolated from their surroundings: as he rightly observes, "the Jews did not exist in their own universe, separated from Iranian soil and society" (p. 3).

The book consists of five core chapters that chronologically depict the Jewish community's everyday life in Iran throughout the nineteenth century. The first chapter discusses Shi'i legal attitudes toward Jews. Based on the premise that Shi'i religious law affects daily life, Tsadik closely examines how Jews were viewed in the eyes of the law, and how prominent was the role of clerics and religious commentators throughout the country. This chapter is valuable to any discussion about Shi'ite approaches toward minorities and ***dhimmah*** (people of the book) communities. The discussion weaves together various subjects: marriage and inheritance, food and commerce, (im)purity and punishment, and more. Tsadik also reveals here how the law was eventually implemented. By doing so, he adds new information to a well-known fact, namely, that the implementation of religious law varied from shah to shah, and resulted from many sources, such as the strength/weakness of the central government, the relative influence of the clergy, international events, and so on.

In the following four chapters, Tsadik demonstrates that one cannot talk about ***the*** "Jewish community" in Iran. Rather, one must acknowledge the different Jewish populations in the country as well as their different experiences. Different communities did not experience the same pressures simultaneously. Times of tranquility for the community in Tehran, were unstable for the community of Mashhad; prosperous times for the Isfahani community were traumatic for the community in Barfurushi, and so on.

Accounts of the lives of Jews in Iran come from various interesting, and mostly unique, sources: European travelers and diplomats, correspondence between Iranian Jews and prominent leaders (both Jewish and non-Jewish) abroad, memoirs, writings by senior clerics, and others. The different perspectives allow Tsadik to draw a nuanced picture of Jewish life in Iran. A significant part of his study is a comparison between Iranian Jews and other minorities that shared d***himmah*** status (Armenians, Nestorians, Zoroastrians). Tsaqik eloquently demonstrates that Jews were not persecuted because of their faith per se, but because of their position within the Muslim majority. Their position, Tsadik says, was not different from the position of other minorities, such as the Nestorian Christians in the Hamadan case (p. 54).

A recurring theme in the book is the minorities' entanglement in the consolidation of the Iranian (proto-) national identity. Every measure that the central government took regarding minorities was implemented with an eye to Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Every minority group had one or more international patrons, i.e., the Armenians enjoyed Russian protection, Britain and France supported the rest of the Christian groups, and the Jewish community utilized institutions like Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU), as well as British Jewish philanthropists like Sir Moses Montefiore, to kindle a sense of responsibility among European Jews for their Iranian brethren. At times, this patronage network helped to relieve some of the pressures on these minority groups, by letting the shah and other senior officials know that their country would be measured by its treatment of the minorities, in accordance with European standards. This meant that should Iran aim to be considered "a part of the civilized world" it must meet the European demands regarding the equal

treatment of all subjects, based on civil law (pp. 58-59).

Their relationship with foreign powers did not always benefit the minorities. In 1877 Nasir al-Din Shah delegated the issues of minorities to his foreign affairs minister in order to address the minorities' needs efficiently, and in response to the intensive advocacy of the European powers on behalf of the Iranian minorities. For the Jews, this move constituted a significant reform since it made the government accountable for everything that happened. According to the AIU bulletin, "The minister for foreign affairs--in constant contact with the European ministries--would not be able to evade investigating and explaining these cases, which are exclusively under his authority" (pp. 105-106). The immediate consequences, however, were different than initially expected. Shortly after the implementation of this reform Jews were increasingly identified "with foreign peoples by the Iranian public and the government apparatus, rather than linking them with their own compatriots, thereby facilitating their segregation." Thus this well-intentioned step providing yet another reason for the majority to see Jews as "non-Iranians" (pp. 106-107).

The book contradicts many accepted presumptions relating to the persecution of and libels against Jews. The book shows that persecution did take place by depicting some of the predicaments Jews throughout Iran experienced at certain times, but it did not stem solely from anti-Jewish sentiment. Tsadik points to other, mundane factors, such as financial disputes, marginalization due to their minority status, and tensions between neighboring communities (p. 101). Also, his narrative rejects the premise that the clergy acted as one group, inveighing against Jews and actively promoting persecution. The author notes several instances in which clerics not only opposed the ill treatment of Jews, but also actively fought against it.

Along with the frequent attempts by Nasir al-Din to show Europe the progress of Iran, Jews received numerous opportunities to integrate into the social, political, and economic life of the country. Jews were employed in the highest ranks of the National Bank establishment and with enterprises expanding commercial ties with Europe. There were tensions around these issues, but usually the community overcame local difficulties. One of the most astounding examples of the government's efforts to ease pressure on minorities occurred when the government manipulated the 'ulama by telling them that unless they complied with this campaign, European powers would invade Iran in order to protect their clients and the 'ulama would be blamed. Tsadik skillfully integrates a wide range of sources, written in Persian, English, Hebrew, and French. On a few occasions, he juxtaposes narratives with two or more sources, and thus lets the reader get the fuller picture. However, Tsadik does not overtly evaluate the authenticity of the sources, leaving the reader to determine alone which narrative he finds more reliable.

Between Foreigners and Shi'is is highly relevant to two fields of study: Iranian history and Middle East Jewish history. Regarding Iranian history, the book adds dimensions previously neglected about the role of the central government and the ability of the shah to implement his policy throughout the entire territory under his control; proximity to Europe and relations with European powers; and the integration of minorities in the Iranian national story. In the field of Jewish history it reveals the close associations of Iranian Jews with their European co-religionists, as well as with the Baghdadi Jewish community.

Note

[1]. Haggai Ram, *Iranophobia: The Logic of an Israeli Obsession* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 101.

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