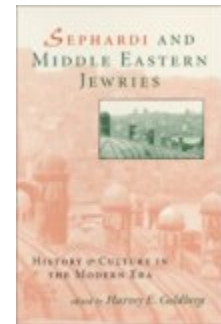


Harvey E. Goldberg, ed. *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. xv + 346 pp. \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21041-8; \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-33013-0.

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## Modernization Among the Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries

This volume is an outgrowth of a conference on “Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewry in Modern Times” which took place January 1991 in Herzliya Pituah, Israel. It is an inter-disciplinary work by historians, anthropologists and social scientists. The book is divided into three parts including a comprehensive introduction by Harvey E. Goldberg, which surveys the general trends and developments within the Middle Eastern Jewish communities during the era of modernization.

Part I includes five essays which discuss the external forces impinging upon Middle Eastern Jewish communities during the era of westernization and point out trends and forms of responses to these pressures. Many essays argue that modernization in the Jewish communities of the Middle East took different forms and followed a different pace from that of European Jewry, causing neither a breach within the Jewish community nor a movement for complete secularization. Furthermore, these Jewish communities were not pressured to assimilate into the wider Muslim society—a pressure which led to dissolution in the case of the European Jewish communities.

Norman Stillman regards modernization as the starting point of a variety of processes that transformed the Jews and their Muslim neighbors and eventually led to the mass migration of oriental Jews to Israel. Daniel Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit offer a new interpretation to the process of modernization of Middle Eastern Jewry through their study of the Jewish community of Es-

saouira (Mogador) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They observe that tradition and modernity should not be seen as “two dichotomous forces, in which tradition is the point of departure and modernization the end result” (p. 101). Western education did not cause complete secularization and European protection did not the Jews to feel alienated from their Moroccan identity. The history of the community should be defined “by the interplay and accommodation of external and internal social forces” (p. 114).

Part II contains six case studies documenting the Middle Eastern Jewish communities’ responses to modernization and growing influence of the West. Authors point out similarities and dissimilarities to parallel developments among European Jews. Of special interest is an article by Zvi Zohar that explains the relative flexibility towards modernization as demonstrated by Eastern Rabbis such as Rabbi Uziel of Jerusalem who approved of allowing suffrage to women. Their flexibility was, according to Zohar, partly due to the lack of pressure by reform Judaism, which adapted itself to more open interpretations of the Halacha. Yaron Tsur and Harvey Goldberg discuss in their articles various aspects of the Haskala movement in North Africa.

The three articles in Part III discuss local languages used by Jewish communities in the Middle East: Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Spanish and Persian. Research on these speech communities, as shown in this section, is critical

to a comprehension of the internal dynamics of the communities during the era of modernization.

Part IV includes four articles by anthropologists and psycho-sociologists that analyze attempts to capture the history of these Jewish communities and their relations with the Muslim neighbors. Most intriguing is a study by Yoram Bilu and Andre Levy about the ambivalent concept of Jewish-Muslim relations in Oulad Mansour (Morocco), as commemorated by Jews who immigrated from there to Israel.

Finally, the book contains two appendices, one which shows a population graph and table showing the rise and decline of the Middle Eastern Jewry during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and a second which lists major world centers for Middle Eastern Jews as of the

1980s (the first being Israel with, 1,800,000 or two-thirds of all Middle Eastern Jews and the second being France with 12 percent.

In conclusion, this is a stimulating book treating a variety of topics and offering new approaches to the process of modernization of the Jewish communities in the modern Middle East. It is recommended for all those who are interested in the study of Jews in the Middle East, or in the challenges of modernization to minority groups in general.

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