

Proceedings
of the
Seminar
on

**MUSLIM-JEWISH
RELATIONS
IN NORTH AFRICA**

Sponsored by the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton,
and the Academic Committee of the World Jewish
Congress (American Section), May 19, 1974, Princeton,
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P R E F A C E

The seminar on Muslim-Jewish Relations in North Africa, which the American Section's Academic Committee, whose Chairman is Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, co-sponsored with the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, N.J., was one of a series of meetings planned by us in an effort to reach out to the intellectual community at large.

The success of this particular seminar exceeded our most optimistic expectations. We found it particularly gratifying that we were brought into contact with many scholars of whose interest and expertise in this field we had been unaware.

Our thanks go to Professor Abraham L. Udovitch, Chairman of the Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University, and Drs. Carl Kaysen and Clifford Geertz of the Institute for Advanced Study.

We are of course deeply indebted to the speakers who gave so freely of their time and effort, particularly Professor S. D. Goitein of the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study.

The seminar would not have been possible without the unceasing labors of Professor Israel Singer, Consultant to the Academic Committee, and Miss Joy S. Abrahamsen who coordinated the Conference, put together the program, and saw this publication through the press.

Max Melamet

Executive Director, American Section
of the World Jewish Congress

PROGRAM

10:30 A.M. Registration and Coffee

11:00 A.M. *MORNING SESSION*

Chairman: Professor Abraham L. Udovitch, Princeton University

"The Origins and Historical Significance of North African Jewry"—

Professor S. D. Goitein, The Institute for Advanced Study

"Muslims and Jews in North Africa: Perceptions, Images, Stereotypes"—

Professor Norman Stillman, State University of New York at Binghamton

DISCUSSION

1:00 P.M. LUNCHEON

2:00 P.M. *AFTERNOON SESSION*

Chairman: Professor Clifford Geertz, The Institute for Advanced Study

"The Pact of 'Umar in North Africa: A Reappraisal of Muslim-Jewish Relations"—

Professor Jane Gerber, Lehman College, City University of New York

"The Jewish Community of Marrakesh: A Paradigm for Majority-Minority Relations"—

Dr. Richard Press, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.

DISCUSSION

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Prof. Morroe Berger	Princeton University
Prof. Nehama Rezler Bersohn	Princeton University
Dr. Baruch Bokser	University of California, Berkeley
Mark R. Cohen	Princeton University
Raphael Danziger	Princeton University
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Morris Fainerstein	Jewish Theological Seminary
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Mark Friedman	Columbia University
Prof. Clifford Geertz	Institute for Advanced Study
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Prof. S. D. Goitein	Institute for Advanced Study
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Richard Jones	Princeton University
Ruth Kaplan	Brandeis University
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Susan Keller	Princeton University
David Kotowitz	Brooklyn College (CUNY)

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Dr. Maurice L. Perlzweig	World Jewish Congress
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Jay Ticker	Columbia University
Prof. Abraham L. Udovitch	Princeton University

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Alan Weisbard
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Mrs. Lilianne Winn
Takeshi Yukawa

Yeshiva University
Columbia University
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Harvard University
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American Sephardi Federation
Princeton University

Seminar

on

**MUSLIM-JEWISH
RELATIONS
IN NORTH AFRICA**

Morning Session

CHAIRMAN—PROFESSOR ABRAHAM L. UDOVITCH, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY: This seminar is part of a series of meetings sponsored by the Academic Committee of the American Section of the World Jewish Congress in association with various academic institutions in the United States. Although the themes of these meetings have varied, they have combined elements of Jewish interest together with problems of general significance to members of the academic community at large—particularly those in the Humanities and Social Sciences. There is no doubt that the theme of our seminar today fits very well into this category.

As today's newspaper headlines make patently clear, the current focus of Muslim-Jewish relations is not in North Africa. However, since most of us in this room have happily chosen professions which are not directly influenced by newspaper headlines, we need not feel any regrets or remorse about concerning ourselves with Muslim-Jewish relations in the geographical context of North Africa.

There are several good reasons for choosing North Africa as a geographical context and Princeton as the place to discuss Muslim-Jewish relations in that particular area. The countries of North Africa have experienced a continuity of relationship and interaction between Muslims and Jews since the Islamic conquests of the seventh century. Unlike other parts of the Muslim World, in North Africa it was the Jews rather than Christians or Zoroastrians who have constituted the primary non-Muslim minority group ever since the advent of Islam in that part of the world. Muslim and Jewish sources are replete with a good deal of information about Muslim-Jewish relations in North Africa. The circumstances prevailing in North Africa have afforded greater possibilities to study this problem, especially in recent times. North Africa has been much more open, especially to social scientists, for the study of its society generally, including the problem which we are going to focus on today. Last but not

least, there is the comparatively large number of scholars who have interested themselves in this problem from a variety of perspectives, and some of the most prominent of these are located here in Princeton.

Our first presentation will be by Professor S. D. Goitein, a member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Professor Emeritus of Islamic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and Professor Emeritus of the Hebrew University where he served as Director for many years at the School of Oriental and African Studies. I need not introduce Professor Goitein any further except to say that in the annals of modern scholarship I don't think that there is any other scholar as distinguished who has devoted his attention to the question of Muslim-Jewish relations in a variety of contexts.—Professor Goitein.

THE ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NORTH AFRICAN JEWRY

S. D. GOITEIN

The Institute for Advanced Study

I understand you expect me to make some general introductory remarks about North Africa and the origin and historical role of its Jewry.

In a nutshell, the main characteristic of this sector of Jewish history was this, that a layer of economically stronger and educationally more advanced immigrants, superimposed itself on an existing local nucleus, partly mingled with it, became Maghrebi, and then radiated out into other Jewish regions fertilizing them. This happened in the eleventh century, the century of Rabbēnū Hananel, R. Nissim, and R. Isaac Alfasi (the RIF), when North Africa partly became the physical and spiritual heir of Babylonia and excelled in Jewish learning, which was then transmitted to Muslim Spain and Christian Europe. It happened again in the fifteenth century when immigrants from Spain, and later from Italy, settled in North Africa, putting new life into the existing Jewish community, while their descendants moved eastwards populating Ottoman Turkey, and, in particular, Eretz-Israel. When I took up residence in Haifa in 1923, I found that the original stock of the Jewish population there was Maghrebi. This trend of North African Jewish history reflects the general character of the area.

It is a commonplace to say that North Africa, that is the modern states of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, was an area of expansion. Again and again that region was conquered by expanding nations, which, after having established themselves there, used it as their base for further expansion. Tyre on the Lebanese coast was a great and proud maritime city, as is so strikingly described in Isaiah, ch. 23, and Ezekiel, ch. 27. But the Phoenicians never attained power in the eastern part of the Mediterranean comparable to that secured by their colony Carthage in the western half. The reason for the difference was that the *hinterland* of Carthage was far more spacious and far richer than that of Tyre. Tyre was a middleman—as Ezekiel in his dirge so impressively describes, whereas Carthage was a queen. By challenging land-bound and agricultural Rome and forcing it to transform itself into a seapower, Carthage and its North African empire set into motion a historical process which ultimately led to the unification of the Western world.

The Romans, unlike the Phoenicians, had no reason to settle in North Africa, at least not in considerable numbers. North Africa served Rome as a granary, which provided their city with wheat and oil. Roman manors, or *latifundia*, were found all over the eight provinces or so into which North Africa was finally divided, with the result that this agricultural economy also sustained a flourishing urban civilization whose remarkable remnants still evoke the admiration of the visitor. I need only mention Lebda on the Libyan coast, the birthplace of the Roman emperor Septimius Severus; el-Djem (Thysdus) in the ancient province of Africa, where an amphitheater seating 60,000 spectators still rises out of the desert; or Volubilis, Oulili, Morocco, where Caracalla's arch of triumph recalls Roman grandeur and the graceful bronze figure of the laurel-clad ephēbus shows Hellenistic art at its very best. By supplying Rome during half a millennium of imperial rule, North Africa contributed much to the maintenance of the *pax Romana*, the peace guaranteed by Rome's power, whatever that was worth.

When the Arabs occupied North Africa, they immediately used it as a base for further expansion. From there they conquered Spain and Sicily and attacked southern Italy and other European countries. The great majority of the Muslim invaders of Spain at the beginning of the eighth century were Berbers, but the high command was Arab. And all the Muslim principalities arising in North Africa in the eighth through the tenth centuries were founded by foreigners: Arabs and Persians. In

Morocco, the Idrisids, (descendants of 'Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad), around the year 800 founded the city of Fez (Fās), so prominent in Jewish history; then, in the central Maghreb, the sectarian Kharidjite principality of Ibn Rustem, a Persian, founder of the city of Tāhert, also harbored a Jewish community (around 780); thirdly, and most important for Jewish history, in Qayrawān, then the capital of what is today approximately Tunisia, there ruled during the entire ninth century the Aghlabids, originally Arabs from Khorasan (Iran), a glorious dynasty of amirs, that is, governors who were practically independent, and excelled, in addition to military prowess, in the works of peace and in their dedication to Islamic religion and Arabic literature. In that region, Tunisia, and in that period, the ninth century, North African Islamic civilization was formed and developed that character which it has retained with minor changes up to the present day, or, rather, the threshold of modern times.

Let me immediately add that the culture of North African Jewry, as it remained alive up to the very end and still is glimmering in Israel and probably elsewhere, was molded in that region, Tunisia, but somewhat later, in the eleventh century, as I shall presently explain. At that time a foreign dynasty, more powerful than those preceding it, had taken root on North African soil, the Fatimids. The Fatimids claimed to be descendants of Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, and aspired to the caliphate. North Africa was for them only a springboard for the conquest of the rest of the Muslim world. For sixty years they tried in vain to take Egypt. Finally, in 969, and with the aid of the Berber people of the Ketāma, they succeeded. Egypt and the adjacent countries, including Palestine, were occupied by Fatimid troops. Subsequently the Fatimids abandoned North Africa and moved to their newly founded residence of Cairo.

With the departure of the Fatimids a new period in North African history began: that of the Berber kingdoms. But before considering this, we must pause for a moment and ask ourselves: did the North African epic of conquest and subsequent expansion based on the human and other resources of the country apply also to *spiritual* history? It did. Christianity was of course imported into North Africa; how far this occurred in the wake of the Jewish settlements there, we shall probably never know, for the Semitic names found in the Christian catacombs might have been of Punic (Phoenician) rather than Jewish origin. Anyhow, North African soil produced an expounder of Christian

faith and thought who was second only to Saint Paul. I am referring, of course, to Saint Augustine (354-430), the author of the *Confessions* and the *City of God*, whose work is a living force in the Church all over the world up till the present day.

As to Islam, I have already made mention of its efflorescence under the Aghlabids of Tunisia in the ninth century. The principality of the Aghlabids was swallowed up by the Shi'ite Fatimids. But that particular brand of Islam, that combination of rigid orthodox practice, religious learning, and mystical pietism often paired with occultism, which was developed during that Aghlabid century, became standard not only in North Africa, where it was paramount, but far beyond the confines of that area.

Finally, when the Christian reconquest of Spain drove many Muslims out of the Iberian peninsula, North Africa profited from the losses of Muslim Spain. In 1377, Ibn Khaldun, scion of such an emigrant family, which had settled in the city of Tunis, wrote his famous *Muqaddima*, or *Prolegomena* to his history of the Arabs and Berbers, in which he tried to find the laws governing the history of peoples, as far as he knew it. This very comprehensive book of socio-economic and political theory is one of the most original works written by an Islamic author. The reader receives indeed the impression that the *Muqaddima* belongs to its period, the Renaissance, rather than its culture, Islam. Anyhow, we see that it is North Africa which produced by the hand of a scion of immigrants one of the great books of all times.

To revert to the Berber kingdoms, the Berbers are a strong and fierce race, but, like the Kurds in the Muslim East, seem to lack the faculty of forming a national state. What happened after the disappearance of the Fatimids was this: Berber peoples, inspired by a religious idea and led by gifted military leaders, conquered North Africa and from there expanded into Spain. I am referring to the Almoravids, al-Murābiṭūn, of the eleventh, and to the Almohads, al-Muwahhīdūn, of the twelfth century. The religious policies of the former were detrimental to the Jewish communities, those of the latter were bent on their destruction. We shall come back to these grave developments later.

After the dissolution of the Almohad empire in the thirteenth century, Berber successor states sprang up all over North Africa. In 1377 Ibn Khaldun wrote: "The realm of the Arabs has come to an end, now the North is ruled by the Franks (the

Europeans), the West by the Berbers, and the East by the Turks." The great philosopher of history could not foresee the future. The Berbers were unable to create anything of endurance. The Ottoman Turks took most of North Africa, albeit in a very loose fashion. Only Morocco remained an independent kingdom. But the rulers of Morocco commanded allegiance only of a limited part of their country. Most of the inland belonged to independent tribes, led by sheikhs who were also heads of pietist fraternities or were connected with such religious heads, while the port cities either were dominated by a European power or by Barbary pirates. This unruly state of the area finally led to direct annexation or to a state of protectorate by France (Algeria 1830; Tunisia 1881; Morocco 1912—Spain occupied a small part, the coastal area north of the Rif) and Italy (Libya 1911). The European occupation, especially in Algeria and Tunisia was of great significance for the Jewish population. In our own time, after World War II, all these countries have become independent states with the consequence that the history of North African Jewry is coming practically to its end.

This was a remarkable and influential part of Jewish history, which has attracted growing interest of late, probably also owing to the influx into Israel and France of so many immigrants from that region. I assume you are familiar with André Chouraqui's *Les Juifs de l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris, 1952), which appeared also in an English translation. I am happy to inform you that the English version of *A History of the Jews of North Africa* by H. Z. Hirschberg, vol. I, should be on the market soon. The Hebrew version of this book, which promises to become the standard work on the subject, appeared in two volumes in 1965, but the third volume, which was planned to contain the rich cultural history of the last four centuries, has never appeared. Meanwhile, Professor Haim Zafrani of Paris has published the first part of a book *La vie intellectuelle juive au Maroc de la fin du 15e au début du 20e siècle*, Paris, 1972. Dr. Hirschberg's English version is not only updated, but more conveniently organized than the Hebrew one, and it is only to be hoped that the subsequent volumes will follow in the not too distant future.

We have already stressed the fact that Jewish history in North Africa followed the general pattern of North African history of immigration, settlement, and subsequent expansion. But that pattern was crisscrossed and blurred by another trait, cruel persecutions and repeated attempts at outright annihila-

tion. Many religions and shades of religions followed and fought each other with utmost ferocity on the soil of North Africa. Let me give you one example. The saintly Saḥnūn, author of the Māliki code of law *al-Mudawwana*, which is for the western Muslim world what the *Mishne Torah* of Maimonides is for Judaism, had his predecessor slowly beaten to death because he did not accept the dogma that the Koran was eternal, that means, coexistent with God, but believed that it was created, that is, came into being under the circumstances evident in the book itself. If a scholar and pious man could act in such a way against a coreligionist and colleague because of theological differences—and similar instances could be adduced from the entire stretch of North African history—what treatment could be expected by a religious minority whose tenets and practices always were at variance with those of the environment. The article "Morocco" in the new *Encyclopaedia Judaica* reveals indeed an interminable history of cruel sufferings.

Persecutions are the reason why we are unable to say anything substantial about the character and cultural achievements of the Jewish settlements in North Africa during the Roman and Christian periods. As late a writer as Jerome (Hieronymus, d. 420) mentions in one of his letters that an uninterrupted chain of Jewish settlements stretched from Mauritania, approximately Morocco today, through "Africa" (as Tunisia was called in those days), Egypt, and Eretz Israel to far away India. As far as North Africa is concerned, this statement is confirmed by archaeological findings and literary references. From Sala near Rabat on the Atlantic coast and Volubilis in Morocco, throughout Algeria, Tunisia and Libya up to Cyrenaica, that is, eastern Libya, such evidence exists, and not only for larger cities, such as Carthage and Berenike, today Benghazi, but also smaller places such as Naro, today Hammam Lif, in Tunisia, whose lovely synagogue mosaic has been known for over 90 years.

Our sources show that in Roman, as in later Islamic times, the North African Jews were in close contact with their coreligionists in Italy, inasmuch as many of them were engaged in the export, or, rather, in the transport of grain to Rome, where Jews were active on the receiving end. It seems also that Jews had an important share in the *production* of grain. The delightfully told story of bishop Synesius about the Jewish skipper who during a terrible storm on a Friday night was prepared to take action only when he was convinced that the life of his passengers was really in danger, shows us, on the one hand, that

they were meticulously observant, and even learned, for that skipper, as Synesius humorously describes, sat down during the storm and studied the Torah. The Talmud mentions indeed a number of scholars who lived in, or came from Carthage.

All this, however, does not add up to very much. Judaism could not flourish in North Africa in Roman times, because its base, Cyrenaica, that is, eastern Libya, was liquidated in the war of annihilation which was waged against it in the last year of the emperor Trajan and the first of Hadrian (116-117). We do not know exactly the circumstances which brought about that terrible war, but its consequences are evident enough. With no strong base in Cyrenaica, no populous Jewish settlement of the rest of North Africa was possible at that early time. Still, in the course of the centuries the Jews took part in the general prosperity, although we are not able to put our finger anywhere on specific, noteworthy achievements, material or spiritual. There might have been such achievements, but if there were any, they were obliterated by subsequent persecutions. In 533, Belisarius, the great general of Justinian, wrested North Africa from the Germanic kingdom of the Vandals. This was not only a war of conquest, the fulfillment of the dream of restoring the *imperium Romanum*, but for Justinian this was also a religious war. North Africa was replete with heresies, the ruling Vandals and many others held beliefs and tenets other than those approved by the Byzantine emperor. The *novella* 37 of the year 535 outlawed all religions other than the Catholic faith, including the Jewish religion, and ordered the closing of their houses of worship or, rather, their conversion into churches. This *novella* referred specifically to North Africa, as if this area was singled out for religious intolerance. As we learn from the historian Procopius, who accompanied Belisarius on his campaign, this decree was carried out even with regard to an old and venerable synagogue allegedly built in the time of King Solomon. But Judaism did not entirely disappear from North Africa, for several emperors succeeding Justinian had the opportunity to issue edicts with regard to Jews.

With the termination of Byzantine rule and the advent of the Arabs, a blackout of about 150 years occurred in the West as it did in the East. It was a frightful and bloody period. The fanciful stories about the Kāhina, the allegedly Jewish Berber queen who successfully fought the Arabs, are later fiction; the sooner we discard them the better. As to Jewish Berbers in general, there is no reason to distrust the reports about judaizing