BOOK REVIEW

JEWISH SOCIETIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST: COMMUNITY, CULTURE, AND AUTHORITY, *by Shlomo Deshen and Walter P. Zenner* (editors). New York: University Press of America, 1982. 321 pages.

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The volume includes fifteen papers, dealing with the traditional Jewish societies of the Middle East. It is necessary to emphasize "traditional" since the editors have set themselves the task of assembling material about a world that is past. In the authors' own words, the objective of the book is to gather "studies that describe the life and culture of Jews in the traditional Middle East, which no more exists" (p.iii).

The introduction by Zenner and Deshen is comprehensive and clearly presents the editors' methodological and substantive intentions. The articles that follow live up, on the whole, to the promise of the introduction. They deal with various aspects of traditional Jewish life – Jewish tradition and religion, internal community relations and relations with the external non-Jewish political context, and family and kinship relations.

Chapters Two and Three provide contrasting overviews of the similarities and differences between Middle Eastern and European Jewries. Katz emphasizes the similarity of "traditional" Jewish societies. He is particularly concerned with the concept of a traditional society, and shows how this concept is applicable to both Middle Eastern and European Jewry.

Sharot, on the other hand, emphasizes the cultural, situational and social differences between the experiences of different Jewish communities. These differences can be measured along several well-defined dimensions. The first three chapters comprise a well-rounded and thorough introduction to the problems and issues inherent in the subject matter.

The articles by Meyers and Shokeid deal with a critical aspect of Jewish life in traditional societies: the relationship between Jews and the population in whose midst they lived. While Meyers provides an overview of Jewish-Muslim relations in Morocco, and discusses variations in the relationship pattern, Shokeid discussed the specific experiences of emigrants from one town in a Berber area (actually dealing mainly with those who immigrated to Israel). The former residents' perception of their relationship with their former neighbors and patrons includes experiences of both conflict and peaceful coexistence. In other words, the absolute models which present Jewish-Muslim relations as wholly harmonious or wholly conflictual and violent must be modified to include the varieties of experience lived by the people themselves.

The article by Deshen on Southern Tunisia focuses largely on a different issue; the internal relations of a traditional Jewish community. The title is somewhat misleading, since rather than dealing with the social structure in its entirely, Deshen concentrates on formal institutional relations in the community. One significant item that emerges from the description, is that "traditional" societies are not static. The Djerban community undergoes a gradual process of change, of increased bureaucratization during the period discussed by Deshen. Unfortunately, the determinants of this process are not clarified by the author.

Continuing the North African theme, Goldberg discusses the qualities that make a good community leader in a Tripolitanian community. He compares these required qualities with those exhibited by a leader of the same community in Israel and concludes that there is a great similarity between the two positions and their prerequisites.

Zenner's two articles describe the external and internal relations of the Syrian-Jewish community. Relations with several non-Jewish communities seem to have determined the community's external political choices and internal way of life. Besides the relationship with the superordinate Ottoman authorities, Jews had to deal with representatives of European powers, the Arab majority, and representatives of other ethnic communities in Syria, all maneuvering frantically for access to a variety of economic resources. The internal life of the community was also affected by these struggles and the clash between traditional values held by *musta'arib* Jews (whose families had long been settled in Syria) and the Frankish Jews, who arrived in the eighteenth century from Europe.

The chapter by Goitein is the earliest study in the volume. It was originally published in 1953, and the language used and some of the assumptions – particularly those about Israeli society – that underlie the author's comparisons, seem inappropriate in light of thirty years of hindsight. Moreover, it seems that some of the analytic claims made by the author are not sufficiently supported by the data he presents. Nonetheless, the author's intention to provide a starting point for the study of Jewish education in Yemen is well-served. One could perhaps wonder if that study was carried out elsewhere. A more detailed discussion of the variations from the pattern is desirable.

The following chapter also deals with Yemen, this time from the point of view of a historian. Tobi is concerned with demonstrating, mainly from documentary sources, the preeminent authority displayed by the community of San'a in the preceding two-hundred years. He also touches lightly on the reasons for this preeminence, which are not unconnected to the political prominence of the town of San'a as the Imam's capital.

Two chapters, by Feitelson and Shai, deal with Kurdish Jews. The paper by Feitelson is rather shallow, and fails to provide more than a general ethnographic overview of Kurdish Jewish life. Shai's paper modifies the homogenous view suggested by Feitelson and she demonstrates, on the basis of textual analysis of songs, the conflicts inherent in the authoritarian lifestyle adopted by the Jews from their Kurdish neighbors.

Loeb's paper on synagogue behavior in Iran discusses the influence of Persian values on the behavior of the synagogue goers, who are restricted from competing for prestige outside the community, but who carry on their struggles for prestige in the idiom of the Persian majority. Thus we find that the Persian definition of "polite formal behav-

ior" is the framework in which such struggles take place. Together with Goldberg's chapter on Tripolitanian Jewry, it provides some information about an issue only touched upon in this volume: to what degree are the practices, style, interaction of a Jewish community affected by those of the non-Jewish majority? This issue surfaces peripherally in many of the papers in this volume, though there is no comprehensive or detailed discussion of it in context.

The final paper by Glazer appears to me to be inappropriate. It deals with the contemporary Turkish Jewish community, which is decidedly non-traditional. Most of the community, particularly the poorer members, have left Turkey for Israel and elsewhere. The remaining upper middle class display no particular "traditional" characteristics. On the contrary, it appears that they are well-integrated into the culture of the majority, and cannot furnish any insight into traditional practice.

There is, to my mind, one major lack in this volume. No article deals with the traditional society of the Jews of Palestine before the Zionist movement. The Holy Land was a magnet for Jews from both Middle Eastern and European societies. Middle Eastern and European-derived communities co-existed for several centuries, and examination of the differences and similarities between them would have been instructive. The Holy Land served as a crossroads where Jews from different cultural backgrounds could meet and interact. What were the relationships between the different communities? How did they influence one another? To what degree did their "traditional" views blend or clash?

On the whole, the volume is well-presented, and the articles cover as broad and as varied a range of material as could be expected. Since it is apparently intended by the editors as a source for teaching texts, it also includes an annotated list of recommended readings which should serve as an aid for both the student and the teacher.