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ISRAEL'S PLACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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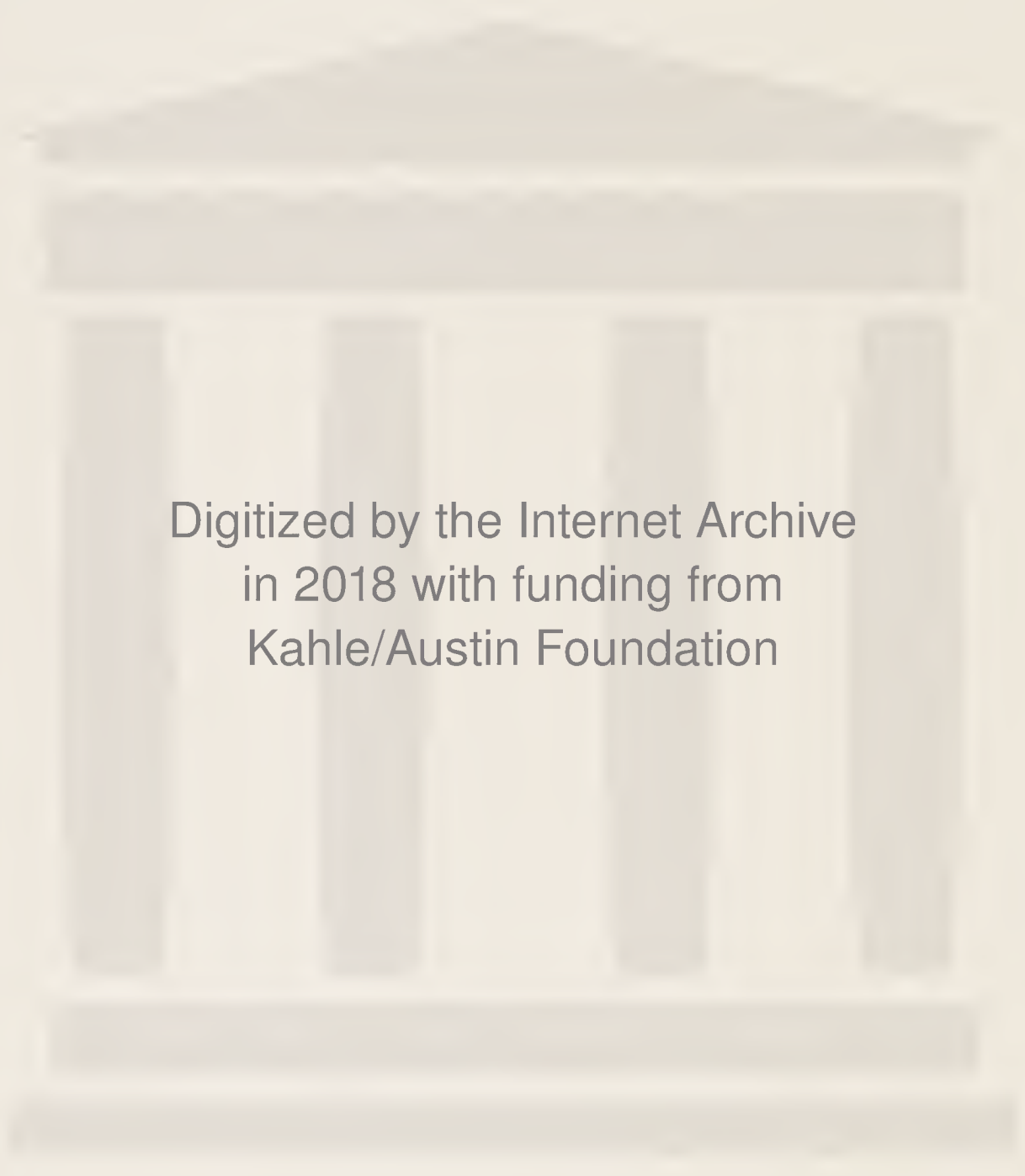
A PLURALIST PERSPECTIVE



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NISSIM REJWAN

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Israel's Place in the Middle East

ISRAEL'S

Place in the

Middle East

A Pluralist Perspective

Nissim Rejwan

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Preface

This book was many years in the making. It originated in a lecture I gave at the American Historical Association's Annual 1971 Program, held in New York in December of that year, and for which I chose the title, "Arab-Jewish Relations through the Ages: A Problem for the Historian."

As the reader will notice, throughout this book I have drawn heavily on the work of scholars and specialists in the various fields related to its subject matter. I am indebted to the authors and their publishers for the citations I used. All citations from Arabic and Hebrew sources are translated by me, unless otherwise stated.

Israel's Place in the Middle East consists of two parts, one setting the historical scene and the other dealing with recent developments and future prospects.

Part I, "The Jews and Their Neighbors," establishes the historical-cultural background. It deals with the course of Arab-Jewish relations in some detail from their beginnings in pre-Islamic times; analyzes Islam's attitude to the Jews, in theory and in reality; gives a comprehensive though concise survey of Judeo-Arabic culture; and shows how Jews who lived in the domain of Arabic Islam influenced and were influenced by the societies in which they lived without losing sight of or abandoning their own cultural or religious identity.

The last of the three chapters that make up Part I deals with the history of the Jews of Europe and their fortunes. Special emphasis is placed here on the long-standing effects that the respective experiences of these two divisions of Jewry—the Jews of Islam and the Jews of the Christian West—have had on the attitudes now at play in Israel vis-à-vis its neighbors.

Part II, "Israel as a Middle Eastern Country," traces the deeper roots of Jewry and of Israel in the region and provides a brief survey of certain Arab misconceptions about Israel, especially the claim that it is an alien creation and an intrusion in the Middle Eastern world. The idea, habitually pro-

pounded by Israel's leading spokespersons and politicians, that Israel is an integral part of Europe accidentally situated in the Middle East, is analyzed and likewise rejected on grounds of history, culture, religion, and demography.

Chapter 5, "Ideology, Politics, and Culture," traces the ideological and cultural roots of Israel and the ways in which they shaped its political stance, enumerates some of the hazards Israeli democracy faces, and surveys the ethnic cleavage and the impact it has had on the country's domestic and foreign policies and ultimately the future of its relations with the surrounding Arab world.

In the concluding chapter of Part II, "A Postnationalist Middle East," the declining fortunes of pan-Arabism are examined side by side with the radical changes Israeli society has undergone in the past three decades. The crucial problem of Israel's non-Jewish citizens is discussed in the context of the country's national identity. Finally, an attempt is made to confront the question of what kind of society Israel is: an exclusivist, nationalistic, ethnocentric Jewish entity, or an open society integrated in an open, pluralist Middle East.

Acknowledgments

In a sense this book can be said to represent a collective effort, because of the concepts and insights the author gained from generations of scholars and historians who tackled the variety of themes dealt with here. My sincere thanks are due to the living among these, and warm tributes to the memory of those who are no more among us.

During the past three years, while working as a research fellow at the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, I was able to put the finishing touches to this book, to get it properly prepared for publication, and to enjoy the hospitality and material help generously provided by the directors and staff of the institute.

Last but not least, I wish to thank my dear wife Rachel, who has always borne with me throughout the long years this and other writing projects of mine were undertaken and given their final shape.

PART I

The Jews and Their Neighbors

Who controls the past, controls the future.
Who controls the present, controls the past.

GEORGE ORWELL

Retrospect

Then and Now

It has been said that all history is contemporary history. However, to paraphrase a famous dictum of George Orwell's, some histories are more contemporary than others. In the same vein, one can add that although all historical truths are in need of constant restatement and reevaluation, at certain periods and in certain times certain historical truths are more in need of restatement than others. The present state of relations between Arabs and Jews calls for a methodical, consistent, and conscious restatement of the history of these relations through the ages, and for an earnest reexamination of the elements which the religiocultural traditions of Judaism and Islam have in common. The effects of four major wars in the space of three decades, coupled with the virtual evacuation, since 1949, of the Jewish communities from Muslim-Arab countries, make such a historical recapitulation essential if the present generation of Jews and Arabs is not to lose all perspective.

In his book *The Seed of Abraham: Jews and Arabs in Contact and Conflict*, Raphael Patai writes that in the past 150 years or so the subject of relations between Jews and Arabs, Judaism and Islam has attracted the attention of several of the greatest Jewish and other Arabists, each of them making important contributions to its elucidation. Nonetheless, he decided to write *The Seed of Abraham*.

His motivation, he adds, was twofold. First, "I felt that there were a number of chapters in the overall great story of Arab-Jewish symbiosis that had been tackled by none of my predecessors and that needed telling"; and second, "I wanted to connect the historical relations between the two peoples with the present situation in which, for the first time since the days of Muhammad, there is, in the midst of the many large and small Arab countries, a Jewish state with a sizable Arab minority in its population."¹

I would add another, no-less-valid justification for embarking on another account of the history of Arab-Jewish relations—namely that each generation has not only the right but also the obligation to restate and reinterpret its collective history for itself and in the light of its own specific needs and concerns. Indeed, if any subject has been in need of reinterpretation for the present generation of Jews and Arabs, it is the history of their peoples' relations in the past and especially the period in which a true cultural and even religious symbiosis was attained between the two cultures and the two faiths.

It is sad to reflect that Arab and Jewish men and women now under the age of sixty have spent all their adult lives in the atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and animosity which has dominated relations between the two peoples since the United Nations' General Assembly approved the Palestine Partition Plan on November 29, 1947. In the minds of these men and women, with probably very few exceptions, "Jew" and "Arab" stand in a kind of permanent, irreconcilable opposition to each other, representing two entirely different cultures, ways of life, temperaments, mentalities, sets of values, and aspirations. In certain Arab countries, small children are offered Arabic primers in which the history is told of how "the Jews" usurped the Arab land of Palestine and how they rendered a million fellow Arabs homeless and destitute. Overzealous Arab polemicists, propagandists, and newspaper and radio commentators often speak quite indiscriminately and rather muddleheadedly of "Jews," "Zionists," and "Israelis," of "World Jewry" and "International Zionism" as though they were interchangeable concepts. In Israeli schools and kindergartens, too, the designation "Arab" becomes almost a term of abuse, while Israeli society as a whole treats Arabs—citizens of Israel as well as those of neighboring countries—with reserve, suspicion, and very often with undisguised scorn and hostility.

This abnormal state of affairs did not much improve with the passage of years, although in the minds of many Israelis the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt tended to place the Egyptians apart so that they are no longer totally identified with "the Arabs." The general picture, however, remains largely unchanged throughout the five decades of Israel's existence. As fear engenders fear and as suspicion and hostility become reinforced and reciprocal, we continue to live through a phase of the conflict in which Arabs speak freely of "Jewish racism" while many Israelis still decry Arab and Muslim "anti-Semitism." There are Israelis today who seriously maintain that it is impossible for Arabs to be loyal citizens of Israel, "since they belong to another nationality." These Israelis tend to believe that it would have been

far more convenient had the Arabs of Israel (as well as those of the territories occupied in 1967) been somehow able to find their way out of the country and settle in neighboring Arab states “among their own people and in the midst of their Arab brethren.”

Fortunately, however, history has a long breath, and a few decades of Arab-Jewish conflict and strife are not as long and as decisive a period as they may seem to those of us who have lived through them. A brief glance at the history of Arab-Jewish relations, cultural contacts, and fruitful cooperation and interaction in the past may help us gain a more balanced perspective. Even though history may not be a safe guide for the future, such a perspective does seem to point to far-less-bleak prospects for Jewish-Arab coexistence and cooperation than the state of tension and mutual fears which continues to prevail between Israel and most of the neighboring Arab states.

Something of a breakthrough came, though, with the signing of the Oslo accord on September 13, 1993, which officially brought to an end the Palestinians’ refusal to recognize the very legitimacy of the state of Israel. The accord, concluded over thirteen years after the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel was signed (March 26, 1979), in fact opened the way for the establishment of relations with Morocco, Tunisia, and two of the Gulf states—Somalia and Jordan (this last being the second Arab state to sign a full-fledged peace treaty with Israel). It is notable that, even before that treaty was signed—indeed since shortly after the Six-Day War of June 1967—several Egyptian and Arab writers and opinion leaders, as well as official spokespersons, have been pointing to past periods of coexistence and cultural symbiosis between the two peoples. It is my hope that this book will contribute in some measure to a better and more peaceful future through a better and more balanced grasp of the past and a fresh look at the present.

The title I chose for this book sums up its central thesis: A perspective of Israel, not in confrontation with or in relation to the Middle East, but as an integral part thereof. Needless to say, such a development has until recently been more in the realm of hopes and wishful thinking than in anything like reality. Nevertheless, it is my contention that Israel can—and to a certain extent already has—become an integral part of the region and a natural addition to the Middle Eastern landscape.

Viewed from the perspective of history, culture, demography, and temperament, Israel, with a massive majority consisting of Jews hailing from the Middle East and North Africa and their descendants, the native-born Israelis of European and North American ancestry, and the Palestinian

Arabs who comprise some 17 percent of the population, can rightly be considered a normal Middle Eastern country. In an attempt to gauge the present position and future prospects of Israel both as a polity and as a society, I look for guidance to those periods of history in which Jews in their various habitations started to come into contact with other cultures and societies, absorb them, and intermix with them.

Jews and Arabs

Past and Present

History is on every occasion the record of that
which one age finds worthy of note in another.

JAKOB BURCKHARDT

In a book dealing with the shape of Arab-Jewish relations in times to come, a recapitulation of the history of these relations and of Jewish life under Islam is in order. Today, contemplating the current scene in the Middle East can be a somber experience. Here are two groups of people, the Jews and the Arabs, who for decades have been in the throes of a bitter conflict—both political and cultural, military and “national”—from which neither seems to know how to extricate itself.

Yet, as these things go, the history of Jews and Arabs and their relations through the ages is one of good neighborliness, peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and interaction. Historians, indeed, generally have chosen to speak of these relations in terms of a cultural symbiosis and have written in glowing terms of certain periods of Jewish life under Arabic Islam.

It has been argued, with a certain measure of justice, that whether true or false, objective or largely subjective, these historical observations and evaluations deal with something that is dead and gone, and they can have no real bearing on the persistent conflict between Israel and the Arabs. It is curious, however, that neither of the two parties to the conflict seems to want to let bygones be bygones; both sides keep harping on the past and often cite events long gone.

In recent years, and especially during the decades following the Six-Day War of June 1967, Arab writers and publicists, politicians and public figures have often gone out of their way to stress that relations between Arabs and Jews through the centuries have been harmonious and, on the whole,

amicable and that the attitude of Muslim Arabs to Jews has always been one of tolerance, cordial coexistence, and live-and-let-live.

A few representative samples of these pronouncements will be cited at the beginning of this chapter, followed by a brief sketch of the life and fortunes of the Jews of Islam, an examination of recent charges of “Arab anti-Semitism,” and a brief critical analysis of some of the historical and historiographical aspects of the subject.

Claims and Counterclaims

In an attempt to explain anti-Jewish statements often heard on Arab radio stations and printed in the Arab press, Anwar Nuseibeh, who was a noted East Jerusalem lawyer and former Jordanian defense minister before his death in 1986, said shortly after the Six-Day War:

The important thing to keep in mind is that statements of this kind, now frequently heard in the Arab world, are a new phenomenon—one originating in what the Arabs consider an injustice perpetrated against the Palestinians. The attitude of the Arabs everywhere is that, after this injustice has been rectified, there will be no reason whatever why Arabs and Jews cannot live side by side as friends, as neighbors, even as cousins. After all, the only period during which the Jews were expelled from Palestine was that of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. Jews lived here whenever Arabs lived here—and they were here again after the Arabs came back, following the departure of the Crusaders. I believe, therefore, that even when listening to [Ahmad] Shuqeiri’s pronouncements and the propaganda emanating from the Egyptians, the Syrians and the Jordanians, we must not lose sight of the nature of Arab history and what had actually happened in it.¹

In a book published in Cairo in 1969, noted political analyst and university lecturer Dr. Isma'il Sabri Abdullah deplores what he calls “the racial approach” to Israel based, in his words, “on the so-called *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and drawing many of its arguments from the Nazi morass.” It is, he adds, a view that stands in direct opposition to the values of Arabic civilization, which rose and flourished under the principle that faith and religious observance, rather than racial origins, are the only criteria by which a person’s worth shall be measured. The Arabs never considered Judaism a race, only one of the three revealed religions.

Abdullah then gives the historical facts as he knows them. The Jews, he writes, returned to Jerusalem when the Arabs conquered it, six centuries

after their expulsion by Titus. When the Crusaders invaded the city, they massacred its Muslims and expelled its Jews, but when Salah ed-Din took it back, the Jews promptly reentered it. In the Middle Ages, again, when Jews in Europe were being persecuted and forcibly confined to ghettos, Jewish thought bloomed in Arab lands. “The Jews,” Abdullah concludes, “lived among us, suffering when our society suffered and benefiting from its prosperity when it prospered. The Jews of the Arab lands spoke the language of the Arabs, whereas in Europe oppression drove them to adopt special vernaculars of their own, such as Yiddish and Ladino.”²

Musa Nasser (former Jordanian foreign minister and, until his death in 1971, director of the Bir Zeit College near Ramallah) deplored the fact that the current conflict between Arabs and Israelis had given rise in Israel to a strong desire to prevent any form of union among the Arabs, out of the belief that any such union would be detrimental to Israeli interests. He wrote:

Viewed superficially, this belief appears to have some justification. I personally believe, however, that were the Jews to reflect deeply on the subject—were they to delve objectively into their own history, take into account their true long-range interests, and look to the future in the light of the most cherished of their religious teachings—were they to do this, they would find that they do themselves a grave wrong if they continue to be guided by such sentiments. For they no doubt remember that they had lived in peace with the Arabs for hundreds of years, when these were at the height of their power and glory. They likewise must remember that the Arabs had never persecuted them but granted them complete freedom, and opened before them wide vistas of business and thought—and this while others engaged in oppressing them brutally and mercilessly. It is greatly to be regretted that ill-willed political propaganda has succeeded in distorting the Arabs’ lofty moral traits, including their boundless religious tolerance, thus inducing the Jews to view the Arabs as their enemies, whereas in fact they were their sole friends.³

Early in 1965, Ahmad Bahaeddine, then editor of the Cairo weekly *Al-Musawwar* and director of one of the largest semiofficial Egyptian publishing houses, Dar al-Hilal, deplored negative Arab reactions to the Second Vatican Council’s resolution, adopted late in 1964, exonerating the Jews from the murder of Christ. Bahaeddine started by pointing out that, while Christianity held the Jews responsible for Christ’s crucifixion, Islam not only refused to accept this version of the event but specifically denied it out of

hand. The Koran, he explained, specifically spells out that “They neither killed nor crucified him; they merely had an apparition.” Tracing the historical background, Bahaeddine asserted that the Arab area never knew the kind of racism which in Europe led to the rise of anti-Semitism. “In the first place,” he explained, this was “because the Arabs themselves are Semites, and secondly because the Koran did not accept the theory of Jesus’s crucifixion. In fact, if the Arabs nowadays find themselves the victims of a fanatical Zionist-Jewish aggression, they are thereby only paying the price of centuries of racial European bigotry which reached its peak with Hitler’s crimes in the middle of the twentieth century.”⁴

In his comprehensive and painstakingly researched study, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*, Mark R. Cohen cites passages from books by Arab scholars published in the early 1980s:

In a book on the history of the *dhimmis* [“Protected People”] in Iraq in the early Islamic era, Yuzbaki writes: “When the Arab conquest of Iraq and Persia took place, the Christians, Jews and some of the Zoroastrians welcomed them because they rescued them from the harshness of their former rulers [the Sassanians]. For Islam tolerated them by allowing them to enjoy religious freedom and relieved them of military service in exchange for payment of the poll tax [*jizya*]. This tolerance was a significant factor in the support given by the people of the conquered lands to the Muslim Arabs, and also in their acceptance of the Islamic religion with enthusiasm.”

...

Sallam Sallam, in a study of the history of the *dhimmis* in Egypt in the Fatimid period, writes: “The Protected People in Egypt witnessed a golden age in all aspects of life in a society governed by a spirit of love and harmony, and they benefited from the wonderful principle of religious tolerance under the shelter of the regime of the caliphs of the second Fatimid period and of the Ayyubid sultans.”

...

Salwa 'Ali Milad, editor of *Documents Concerning the Protected People during the Ottoman Period and their Historical Importance*: “Islam spread by virtue of its special traits and benevolent teachings, just as Arab tolerance was one of the factors that helped it to spread.

... The Arabs allowed the conquered people freedom of religion, just as the Muslims joined vigilance on behalf of their religion with a spirit of tolerance towards the adherents of other religions.”

...

Hussein Mu'nis, in *The World of Islam*: “They [the non-Muslims] were encompassed by Islam’s tolerance, tolerated by being safeguarded in their religion and in the continuity of their life within the Islamic community. . . . The Geniza documents confirm what we know, namely, that the Jews in Islamic-Arab lands lived in complete tolerance. . . . While they were experiencing harsh persecution in the West, compelled to live in quarters or ‘the ghetto,’ the Jews in Islamic lands lived in freedom, unfettered other than by the general system of regulations imposed upon them as ‘Protected People’ [*ahl al-dhimma*].”⁵

These are only a few of many examples of utterances made by Arab writers and historians on the subject of relations between Arabs and Jews in history. It is to be noted that the claims made in them are not new and that, in one form or another, they have been made by Arab observers and historians since the years preceding the establishment of Israel. In 1938, for instance, George Antonius wrote in his well-known history of the Arab nationalist movement: “In the Middle Ages and in modern times, and thanks mainly to the civilizing influence of Islam, Arab history remained remarkably free from instances of deliberate persecution and shows that some of the greatest achievements of the Jewish race were accomplished in the days of Arab power.”⁶

Opposing Positions

These and similar Arab claims naturally did not pass unnoticed or unanswered by Zionist writers and historians.⁷ Perhaps the classic reply to them came from the pen of the late Cecil Roth, who in 1946 dismissed them as presenting “a curious interpretation of Jewish history,” adding candidly that in the long run they were bound “to do us a great deal of harm.” Writing in the leading Zionist organ of the period, *New Palestine*, Roth wrote: “We are informed by these well-wishers how Jews and Moslems had lived side by side in perfect amity throughout the world from time immemorial, without being affected in the slightest by the religious animosities which were making Jewish life in Europe a nightmare, until the rise of Zionism. The latter, and that alone, we are told, has turned the tolerant

Arab against his Jewish neighbors. . . . Remove the menace of Jewish nationalism, we are informed, and the old conditions will return, and we will be treated again as we were throughout the ages as a happy band of brothers.” Tracing this version of Jewish history in Muslim lands partly to European Jewish historiography of the nineteenth century, Roth went on to present his own interpretation:

It must be realized in the first instance that Islam was essentially intolerant in theory, in a sense in which Christianity was not, and that at the beginning Mohammed himself had expelled or exterminated those Jewish tribes who had refused to accept his newfangled faith. Later on, when the initial impetus of fanaticism had exhausted itself, the Moslems imposed on their non-Islamic subjects a code of observance distinguishable from that then enforced against the Jews in the Christian world only by a somewhat greater manifestation of contempt: the wearing of a distinctive dress, the levy of a heavy poll tax, the prohibition to ride on horseback, and all the rest. . . . Nor should it be forgotten that the culmination of Jewish degradation in the Middle Ages, so unhappily revived in our own day—the badge of shame—was a Moslem, and not a Christian innovation.

Roth then offers a brief sketch of the fortunes of Jews under Arabic Islam. He deals first with “the laboratory-piece . . . for the thesis of Judeo-Arab amity and Islamic tolerance”—that is, the record of the Jews in Moorish Spain—and cites a number of cases in which Jews were persecuted, forcibly converted to Islam, and in other ways victimized. “But worse happened,” he asserts, “when the fanatical Almohades rose to power in North Africa and imposed Islam by force on the communities there which had once played such a great part in Jewish culture. . . . In 1146 they crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and introduced the same standards of intolerance into Spain.” Much the same phenomenon predominated elsewhere in the Islamic world: “sporadic favor interrupted by systematic persecution, which often attained what might be termed Occidental virulence.” In Egypt, in Mesopotamia, in Syria, in Morocco, in Yemen, and in Palestine itself, we are told, the lot of the Jews was fairly uniform—persecution, victimization, humiliation, and degradation. Roth concludes with these words:

The facts casually and unlabouriously assembled here are enough to show that in the past the Arabs did not prove themselves paragons of toleration toward the Jews, such as we are given to believe that they were. They were as subject as other men to unreasoning bouts of

xenophobia. Their religion was theoretically quite as intolerant as any other faith, though they may have been less logical and methodical in accepting its implications and putting them into practice. Moreover, whereas from the eighteenth century to the twentieth the condition of the Jews in Western Europe was greatly improved, this was by no means the case generally speaking in the Moslem world, except under the influence of external pressure.⁸

Cecil Roth was, of course, an internationally recognized authority on Jewish history. Yet what he in reality did in his article in *New Palestine* was first to depict a caricature of Arab claims and then proceed to demolish them on the strength of another, equally baseless, caricature of the facts. This is made rather easy by using the simple device of giving his own formulations, oversimplified to the point of absurdity, of the version presented by those who seek to emphasize the brighter side of Arab-Jewish relations—largely because such emphasis “will tend in the long run to do us a great deal of harm,” as Roth so disarmingly put it. Hence, it would seem, his unrealistic and patently unhistorical use of phrases such as “happy band of brothers,” “paragons of toleration,” living “in perfect amity throughout the world from time immemorial” without being affected “in the slightest” by religious animosities, and so on.

Needless to say, a historical thesis presented with so obviously selective an intent can easily be countered by an equally selective “antithesis.” In Arabic Islam’s long and highly uneven history it is easy, far too easy, to point to periods of religious intolerance and general material misery. The point is not that Jewish life under Arabic Islam was uniformly ideal or that it had not had its ups and downs. It is, rather, that such outbursts of intolerance and fanaticism (including the rise to power of the fanatical Berber sect of Almohades [*Al-Muwahhidun* in Arabic] in the first half of the twelfth century) were never directed only at Jews, or even at non-Muslims generally, but affected all the inhabitants—Muslims included. Similarly, during the long centuries of Islam’s decline and degradation, misfortune befell Muslims as well as non-Muslims. As protected minorities, moreover, Jews and Christians may have had to bear the brunt of the general misery.

As to “perfect amity,” “happy band of brothers,” “paragons of toleration,” and the other superlatives used by Roth, there never was room—and there is none today—for such bombastic language in depicting intergroup and interethnic relations. In approaching the subject of the Jews’ lot under Arabic Islam, one can, therefore, do no better and no more than compare it to their lot elsewhere (say, in Christian Europe) during the same time span.

Discussing this subject at some length in his monumental work on the social and religious history of the Jews, Salo Baron concludes that the status of the Jews in Islamic lands, compared with their conditions in other countries, was fairly satisfactory both in theory and in practice. Taking issue with Goitein's statement that "at the end of the Middle Ages the law governing the position of non-Moslems under Islam no longer diverged greatly from the attitude of the Catholic Church towards the Jews," Baron calls this conclusion "a sweeping generalization . . . unjustified even with regard to the Mamluk regime."

To begin with, Baron explains, "the mere fact of not being the sole minority, as Jews often were in Christian Europe, mitigated some of that oppressive feeling of living alone in a hostile world, which was to characterize so much of medieval Jewish thinking in Christian Europe. Nor must we lose sight of the fundamental difference that, under Islam, the Jews were never treated as *aliens*." Baron then remarks on "the absence of any large-scale expulsion of Jews [under Islam] from entire countries such as were time and again to interrupt the continuity of Jewish history in many European lands." In the troubled periods of Islam's decline, life generally was insecure, to be sure. However, Baron observes, "there was none of that feeling of personal insecurity which dominated the Medieval Jewish psyche in the West."⁹

Admittedly, the Middle Eastern, Moroccan, or Spanish Jew may have legitimately feared some sudden invasion or civil war.

But [Baron elaborates] he knew that he would then suffer not as a Jew, but together with other inhabitants of his locality, as if it had been struck by one of the recurrent earthquakes or famines. In peaceful times he was protected by law against personal assault almost on a par with the Moslem, and his average life expectancy was probably at least as high as his "believing" neighbor. His economic opportunities suffered only from relatively minor restrictions. . . . Like his Moslem confreres, he could traverse the vast expanse of the Moslem world in search of economic or intellectual benefits. The majority of Jews undoubtedly viewed all these disabilities and even the irksome humiliations as but a minor price they had to pay for their freedom of conscience and their ability to live an untrammelled Jewish life within the confines of their own community.¹⁰

On the vexed and often rather belabored subject of the Almohades and their reign of terror, it is worth citing here the recent findings of the Moroccan Jewish scholar David Corcos-Abulafia. Writing on the attitude of the

Almohadic rulers toward the Jews, he criticizes Solomon Munk, whose writings on the history of North African Jewry have had a decisive influence on successive generations of students of the subject. Munk's mistake, Corcos-Abulafia maintains, was to rely on eastern Arabic sources when he was dealing with events in the Arab west (Maghreb), rather than examine sources from the region itself. He notes that present-day historians have found that, with regard to events in the Maghreb, eastern (Mashriq) Arabic sources are largely unreliable, and he proceeds to demonstrate this point by examining the work of al-Dhahabi, a Damascus scholar, on which Munk has based much of his argument. Corcos-Abulafia finds that al-Dhahabi tended to overemphasize anti-Jewish polemics, wrongly regarding them as the mainspring of the attitude of the Almohadic rulers toward the Jews.

Reviewing some western (Maghreb) Arabic sources on the subject, and with the help of evidence gleaned from Arabic traditions from the Maghreb as well as Jewish sources, Corcos presents the following three conclusions:

1. There was a general atmosphere of terror in the al-Murabat cities conquered by the Almohades. It was because of these fears that Jews embraced Islam, not because of any consistent or declared policy of forced conversion adopted by the conquerors. The first Almohadic rulers continued to hold on to the traditional Muslim attitude with respect to non-Muslims.
2. A change for the worse came only in 1165, when the leader of the Jewish community of Fes was cruelly executed. This marked the beginning of a short period during which a policy of forced mass conversions was put into effect. It was at this time that the family of Maimonides decided to flee to the east.
3. With the death of the oppressive ruler, the situation of the Jews began to improve. In 1232, professing Jews were found in Marakesh, and some time later they gradually made their appearance in other cities of North Africa.¹¹

Another North African Jewish scholar and historian, André Chouraqui, writing about the Jews of his ancestral homeland, describes the twelfth-century Almohad persecution as being "of a passing nature." He attributes most pogroms against the Jews in the oppressive later Middle Ages to "lust and envy, rather than outbursts of hate." Further,

there was never any time in the Moslem Maghreb [when there was] a philosophy and tradition of anti-Semitism such as existed in Europe

from the Middle Ages down to modern times. . . . During most periods of history, the Jews of North Africa were happier than those in most parts of Europe, where they were the objects of unrelenting hate; such extreme sentiments did not exist in the Maghreb. The scorn that the adherents of the different faiths expressed for each other could not obliterate the strong bonds of a common source of inspiration and a way of life intimately shared.¹²

The life and fortunes of Jews under Ottoman rule have also often been depicted in glowing terms by contemporary Jews. Walter F. Weiker devotes a chapter of his book *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity* to this aspect of his subject; in it, he quotes the view of Salomon Rosanes, author of a five-volume history of the Jews of Turkey, that with their coming under Ottoman rule the Jews experienced “not only a change of dynasty, but a change of situation; they passed from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom.”

“The Jews,” Rosanes continues, “regarded the Turks not only as . . . masters of the country, but also as brothers in a religion close to their own. On their part, the Turks recognized the enmity that the Christians had for their religion, and liked the Jews, had confidence in them, and followed their recommendations on such things as circumcision, fasting, simplicity of prayer, and marital hygiene.”

Walter Weiker describes this account as being “only a little too ecstatic,” and he maintains that, in essence, it is identical with the conclusions reached by such authorities as Goitein, Rosenthal, Baron, and Bernard Lewis. Weiker further quotes this sultanic decree of 1609: “Since the protection of the Jewish and Christian minorities is ordered by God in the Qur'an, under my rule no one of them shall be harmed; their persons and properties will be fully protected so that they continue in peace their daily occupations. . . . Let it be known that those who act contrary to my order shall be punished without exception.”

With the onset of Ottoman nationalism in the nineteenth century—which Weiker shows was encouraged “on the part of both the Turkish and non-Turkish subjects of the empire”—Jews became increasingly aware that their welfare was becoming more closely linked to their relationship with Turkish society in areas such as economic growth, modern education, and loyalty to the state. The Turkish reformists were equally aware of this, and they showed willingness to reciprocate. Their most dramatic move, as described by Weiker, was “the offer to abolish the *jizya* (poll tax) in return for the minorities’ assuming equal liability with Muslims for military service.”

Curiously enough, this seemingly highly liberal offer “was refused by most Jews, though increasing numbers of them did serve voluntarily.”¹³

The Historical Record

Encounters between Jews and Arabs date back to before the rise of Islam. Indeed, as soon as a people called “the Arabs” makes its appearance in history, it has a connection of some kind with the people of Israel. The ties between the Israelites and their immediate southern neighbors are historically well established. According to Salo Baron, the first fully datable event of Israelite history, the battle of Karkara (853–852 B.C.E.), “involved . . . both King Ahab of Samria and King Jindibu, the Arabian, with his 1,000 camels.” Arab kings, mentioned in Jeremiah, began playing a major role in the destinies of Palestine during the Second Commonwealth, as their regime had displaced that of Edomites in Petra, and had begun fanning out into Transjordan. “The books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the works of Josephus are filled with references to petty Arab rulers, the Jewish historian no longer being able to distinguish them from the ancient Ammonites.”¹⁴

On the origin, extent, and broad human context of these encounters some historians go very far indeed. Alfred Guillaume, the eminent authority on Islam, indeed suggests that “the sons of 'Eber (the Hebrews) peopled the whole of the Arabian Peninsula”—and that Habiru, Hebrew, and Arab “are interrelated much more closely than might otherwise be supposed.”¹⁵ From a slightly different angle, J. A. Montgomery, in his book *Arabia and the Bible*, asserts that “not from the wisdom of Egyptian, Babylonian or Greek civilizations come our Western religions, but out of Arabia.”¹⁶

Shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 105 C.E., when Rome incorporated Arabia into the imperial structure, contacts between Jews and Arabs intensified even further. Finally about the year 358, “the entire area between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean was united with Palestine, probably for Christian as well as administrative reasons, and thereforth appeared in the records as the province of *Palaestina Tertia*.”

The closeness of relations between the two peoples is evidenced by the fact that, centuries before Muhammad, Jews began to settle all over the Peninsula. “We may,” writes Baron, “leave in abeyance the question raised by widespread Arab legends connecting the first Jewish settlers with Moses’s alleged banishment of some of his disobedient followers during his war with Amalek . . . and with David’s reputed military exploits in the vicinity of Medina.” More definite, he adds, “is Josephus’s report about Herod’s 500 Jewish soldiers accompanying Aelius Gallus’s ill-fated expedi-

tion to southern Arabia in 25–24 B.C.E. This contingent, like that of the Nabateans, was probably used to facilitate through its knowledge of roads and its contacts with the local population, rather than merely to augment Roman manpower. It is now clear, too, that up to the sixth century the Jewish tribes altogether dominated Yathrib (Medina). These tribes, numbering about twenty, are mentioned in later Arabic literature and included Banu Zaghura, Banu Nadhir, Banu Quraiza, and Banu Qainuqa, who between them at one time occupied fifty-nine strongholds and practically the entire fertile countryside.” It was inevitable that such prosperous settlements should attract outsiders. “By slow infiltration several Arab tribes drifted into Medina and its vicinity, and were hospitably received by the Jewish farmers. By the sixth century, these new arrivals . . . eventually prevailed over their hosts.”¹⁷

Nevertheless, Muhammad still found vigorous Jewish tribes in and around that center of northern Arabia, probably constituting the majority of the settled population. Of course, they were not all of Jewish extraction. In large part, they were descended from Arab proselytes—as indicated, for example, in the remarkable story of the Banu Hishna in Teima. These arrivals “were prevented by the Jews,” says al-Bakrin, “from entering their fort as long as they professed another religion, and only when they embraced Judaism were they admitted.”¹⁸

The contribution made by these Arabian Jews in the material, cultural, and spiritual fields were important and lasting. The Jews of Yathrib, Khairbar, and Teima, particularly, “seem to have pioneered in introducing advanced methods of irrigation and cultivation of the soil. They also developed new arts and crafts from metal work and dyeing and the production of fine jewelry, and taught the neighboring tribes more advanced methods of exchanging goods and money.” In fact, “during the few generations of Jewish control, the focal northern areas were raised almost to the high level of the southern civilization, which had long earned for Hiyara and vicinity the Roman designation of Arabia Felix.” However, “as soon as the Jews were all but eliminated from northern Arabia by Muhammad’s sword, the whole countryside elapsed into its former backwardness.”

The Arabian Jews’ contribution in the cultural sphere was no less significant. Along with the art of writing, they also, consciously or unwittingly, communicated to their neighbors certain rudiments of their religious and ethical outlook. Always captivated by their effective storytelling, Arabs used to foregather in Jewish and Christian inns and listen to the exploits of one or another biblical hero. These stories may not have clung too closely to the biblical narratives, but were often adorned with all the embroideries

of the later Aggadah or the creations of the storyteller's own fertile imagination. In the minds of the Arab listeners and, sometimes, of the Jews themselves, these old and new ingredients soon blended into an indistinguishable whole. "Much more than the few merchant-travellers from Mecca and Himyara, the Jewish settlers thus kept alive the links between the ancient Arabian traditions and the more advanced intellectual heritage of the Syro-Palestinian and Babylonian centers." By the time their predominance waned following the appearance of Muhammad, the Arabian Jews "had injected enough of their restless quest of religious values into the tribes of both the Peninsula and the borderlands between Persia and Byzantium to help prepare the ground for a new effervescence of religious and cultural creativity."¹⁹

This interaction between Jews and Arabs was not confined to the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. Large-scale commercial relations between Arabia and Palestine go back to the days of Solomon, and many books of the Old Testament show that the connection was steadily maintained until the seventh century, when Peninsula Arabs, under the triumphant banner of Islam, were to overrun the whole of the Levant. Though his emergence and rise to power was to be inextricably connected with the decline of Jewish predominance in the Peninsula, Muhammad (571–632) had originally set out to win the Jews of Arabia over to his new faith. For this reason, he adopted many of their religious beliefs, customs, and practices. The depth of the impression made by these Jews on the Prophet's mind is easily discernible in most of the chapters of the Koran: The uncompromising monotheism, the insistence on formal prayers, fasting and almsgiving, the adoption of the Day of Atonement, and the introduction of dietary laws (such as the prohibition of swine flesh).

When one turns from the Koran proper to the religious rules and laws that make up the body of the *Shari'a*, one finds that the rules prescribed in the Koran are often translated into everyday practices virtually identical to those laid down in the Law of Moses as it had been developed, expanded, and articulated in the Talmud. Many students of Judaism and Islam have remarked on the astonishing similarity between the content and form of the Talmud and the Hadith (the body of the traditions as to what the Prophet said and did, and on which all laws and rules not formally articulated in the Koran are theoretically based). Like the Talmud in respect of Judaism, the Hadith is an authoritative exposition of Islam—and the more deeply the two sources are explored and studied, the plainer the similarity becomes, despite some superficial differences. The effect of Judaism on the new religion was indeed so profound that, in the words of Professor

Guillaume, it has become “impossible to determine the limits of the latter except in the categories of the former.”²⁰

Physically and materially, the lot of the Arabian Jews in the early years of Islam was, on the whole, not an unhappy one—with the exception of a brief later period of rift and hostility. For when Muhammad discovered that the Jews refused to accept him and acknowledge his mission, he turned his fury against them and proceeded to persecute and expel them from Arabia. This policy was followed for a brief period by some of Muhammad’s first successors; but, as Isidore Epstein writes, before long these rulers’ inherited fanaticism “gave way to almost boundless toleration.” They eventually saw in the Jews a people much akin to them in race and religion; and they also found that they could be of great use to them in the consolidation of their world conquests. Their control of commerce, especially foreign trade; their contacts with fellow Jews everywhere; and the knowledge of Hebrew made them indispensable as interpreters and mediators for the new and energetic conquerors.²¹

Thus, whenever the Crescent had hegemony, the lot of the Jews began to improve. This was especially the case in Palestine and in Egypt, where the Byzantine rulers had interfered not only in the economic and social life of the Jews but also in the internal affairs of the synagogue and its services. In Babylonia, which was still the heart of the Jewish diaspora, and where the Jews enjoyed a privileged existence, the onset of Islam served only to increase their influence and augment their position. There, in the Islamic capital, Baghdad, the secular authority of the Prince of the Captivity, also known as *Resh Galuta* and Exilarch, was revived and clothed with renewed magnificence, while the spiritual authority remained vested in the *Geonim*, the heads of the two major Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumbeditha. The institution of the Geonate, which was regarded by Jews all over the world as the highest authority in all religious matters, became so prominent in Jewish life during the first five centuries of Islam that these are labeled in Jewish history as “the Geonic period.”²²

Social scientists, in their works on the roots of Nazism and anti-Semitism, also sometimes dwelt on this phenomenon. Cohen cites from some of these works. In a paper titled “Anti-Semitism: Challenge to Christian Culture,” Carl J. Friedrich invokes the expulsion of Jews from Christian Spain in 1492 and the counterexample of Islam:

An interesting contrast between the religious intolerance of Western Christian culture at that time and the relative tolerance of the Muhammadan culture of the Muslims occurred: when, following the brutal persecution of the Jews in Spain, many went to the Levant, the

tolerant treatment given by the Ottoman Muslims to these persecuted Jews, as well as Christians, elicited the curiosity of political writers. In his political satires the post-Machiavellian Boccacini has Bodin punished for commending the tolerance of the Turks.²³

In *Essays on Antisemitism*, first published in 1942 (reprinted in 1946), Samuel Rosenblatt writes in a paper titled “The Jews and Islam”: “No study of antisemitism can be complete that does not pay some attention to the position of the Jews under Islam.” His conclusions highlight the “comparative tolerance” of Islam as opposed to Christianity, asserting that the religion of Islam did not play a role in anti-Jewish incidents and attitudes in the past. Rather, these resulted from “political expediency or economic rivalry.”²⁴

The Myth of “Arab Anti-Semitism”

In recent years—and especially after the rise and growth of Islamic fundamentalism—it has become customary for Israeli and Western observers to speak of Islam and Judaism as two irreconcilable faiths and of Jewish life under Islam as a continuous record of unrelieved persecution, humiliation, and murder. Talk has also become common of “Arab anti-Semitism.” However, both as a concept and as a practical proposition, anti-Semitism is both elusive and complex, and no consensus exists among scholars as to the two most elementary starting points for any serious study of the phenomenon—namely, its definition and its genesis. Leon Poliakov, in his definitive four-volume *History*, attempts no systematic definition of anti-Semitism; however, he describes it as “an effective *sui generis* attitude of the gentiles regarding the Jews, an endemic hatred pregnant with explosive outbursts, reducing the children of Israel to pariah status and exposing them, as traditional scapegoats, to numberless and endless massacres.”²⁵

Writing on anti-Semitism in pagan antiquity, Poliakov touches on the subject of dating its beginnings. May we, he asks, infer the existence of a generalized anti-Semitism during the period of the Roman Empire? His answer is that “the Jewish question” as a whole does not seem to have had more than secondary importance in those times; yet he cautiously avoids making a definite judgment, preferring, as he puts it, “to establish our investigation on more positive bases.” He makes it quite clear that what in antiquity was nothing more than normal xenophobia developed into what we have come to know as anti-Semitism only after the establishment of the Christian Church.

Poliakov observes that in pagan antiquity one finds none of those collec-

tive emotional reactions that subsequently would render the lot of the Jews so hard and so precarious; that the Roman Empire in pagan times knew no “state anti-Semitism,” despite the frequency and violence of Jewish insurrections; and that, in fact, the attention of contemporaries, especially of the “intellectuals,” oscillated between aversion to Jewish “exclusiveness” and an attraction to the monotheistic religion (as evidenced by the success of Jewish proselytism). It was not, in fact, until the beginning of the third century that the thesis of the divine punishment of the Jews—which was to become a basis of anti-Semitism proper—was coherently formulated. In this connection, Poliakov cites a passage from Origen’s *Contra Celsum*: “We may now assert in utter confidence that the Jews will not return to their earlier situation, for they have committed the most abominable of crimes, in forming this conspiracy against the Saviour of the human race. . . . Hence the city where Jesus suffered was necessarily destroyed, the Jewish nation was driven from its country, and another people was called by God to the blessed election.” From this “theological anti-Semitism,” whose beginnings were discernible in the later Gospels, was to emerge that set of prejudices, superstitious fears, bizarre libels, and massacres which have been the hallmarks of anti-Semitism.

Poliakov draws an instructive comparison between the respective lots of Jews living under Christendom and those living under Islam. His first volume is devoted to “the Jews known as Ashkenazim, whose history has been confined to Christian territories, down to their emancipation”; the second volume deals with “the Jews who have lived by turns in Christian and in Moslem territories (Sephardic Jews), or exclusively in Moslem countries.” After setting the scene, in the first volume, by discussing anti-Semitism from late antiquity to the late Middle Ages, Poliakov goes on to show how the Crusades were to add a new popular venom to the original theological variety of the rash; how the favorable status of the Jews in the Carolingian Empire was whittled away; how the calamities and depressions of the fourteenth century added economic motives to the various religious and cultural ones; and how the Jews’ own reactions to persecutions—the “collective trauma” which left an indelible stamp on the Jewish mentality—invited even greater Christian animosity. He surveys in detail the situation in France, England, Germany, Poland, and Russia and devotes a section to an analysis of Luther’s approach to the subject and his various anti-Jewish theses.

Turning to the Jews who lived in Muslim lands, Poliakov examines the fortunes of three Jewish colonies that were destined, each in its own way, to play leading roles over the centuries—namely, the Jews of Mesopotamia, of North Africa, and of Spain. His analysis of Islam’s attitude to Jews and to

Judaism constitutes the core of this survey and is worth summarizing briefly here. Islam, to begin with, disputed both Judaism's and Christianity's descent from Abraham, whom the Koran depicts as an apostle of God; nonetheless, the degree to which Muhammad showed his respect for each of them was remarkable. Poliakov quotes from the Koran to show that Islam proclaimed both freedom of conscience and the inalienable right of "the People of the Book" (the Jews and the Christians) to worship the Eternal in their own, admittedly imperfect, fashions. What, then, about the Koranic injunction: "Kill the infidels wherever you find them; take them, lay siege to them"—in a word, the Holy War, the *jihad*? "Certainly," Poliakov points out, "that too is in the Koran; but these imprecations and this violence were expressly reserved for the polytheists, for the Arab idolaters who refused to accept the theocratic order instituted by the Prophet for his people. . . . Muhammad was merciless towards these wrongdoers whose opposition endangered his work." For the rest, "Islam is a religion of tolerance above all."²⁶

Further enlarging on this theme, Poliakov writes: "Nothing could be farther from the truth than the traditional conventions that depict Islam as shattering all resistance by fire and steel. On the whole, it is a religion to the measure of man, taking his limits and weaknesses into account." He quotes with approval the judgment of a great Orientalist, Snouk Hurgronje: "There is in Islam something interreligious," and he concludes with this observation: "The gentle precepts of Christ preside at the birth of the most combative, the most intransigent civilization that human history has ever known, while the warlike teachings of Muhammad gave rise to a more open and more reconciliatory society. For it is true, once again, that where too much is demanded of man, he is subjected to astonishing temptations, and that he who tries too hard to play the angel, plays the beast."²⁷

This, however, is all in the realm of theory. Touching on "practice," Poliakov observes that the theology of Islam was developed chiefly in Baghdad, "that is, in that Mesopotamia which for centuries was the fortress of Jewish tradition." Jews who had converted to Islam helped determine the form and methods of that faith, and in addition to the obvious similarities in construction between the Talmud and the Hadith, the religious folklore of the first centuries of Islam was abundantly fed by Jewish sources: Those legends, known in the Koran under the significant title of *Israiliyyat*, have remained popular to this day. From this and a wealth of other sources, Poliakov draws the following conclusion concerning relations between Judaism and Islam and how they differed from those which prevailed between Jews and Christians in the same period of history: "In addition to affinities of language and culture," he writes, "the religious

teaching itself of Islam made cohabitation with the Jews easy to the point where it was hard to avoid the conclusion that there was nothing incompatible between the two religions and that one could belong to both at the same time.”²⁸

Unfounded as they may be, however, current claims about Jewish life under Islam, Islam’s attitude to the Jews, and “Arab anti-Semitism” have in no small part been provoked by the recklessness and ignorance of contemporary Arab propagandists and professional demagogues in their pronouncements about Israel. A prominent Arab thinker and teacher once coined the term *‘ilm al-Nakba*, which translated literally means “the science of catastrophe” or, better still, “catastrophology.” It refers, of course, to the study of the Palestine problem which, after 1948, Arab writers and publicists labeled “the catastrophe.” The term was first used by Constantine Zureiq, Professor Emeritus of History at the American University of Beirut and author of the now-classic *Ma’na al-Nakba* (The meaning of the disaster) which, published shortly after the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948, set out to analyze the moral of the Arabs’ defeat in that war and the practical conclusions to be drawn from that defeat.

Among the lessons that Zureiq believed the Arabs ought to learn from the events of 1948 was that the struggle against Zionism “will not be won in a single battle but will require a long drawn-out and protracted war.” To put it briefly, he wrote, “this war will not lead to the victory of the Arabs as long as they remain in their present condition. The most they will be able to accomplish under the circumstances is . . . to protect as much of the Arab being as possible. The road to final and complete victory lies in a fundamental change in the situation of the Arabs and in a complete transformation of their modes of thought, action, and life.” He then enumerated four “steps” that the Arabs must take if they were to attain the transformation he considers essential for defeating Zionism. The third of these steps he formulated thus: “The mind must be organized and systematized by training in the positive and empirical sciences . . . keeping as far as possible from benumbing fancy and insubstantial romanticism.”²⁹

That progress in this particular field of the Arab transformation has been rather scant is a fact to which Zureiq himself has attested. In March 1966, the Syrian cultural monthly *Al-Ma'rifa* published an article by Zureiq in which he lamented that, while applying what he called “the scientific method” when dealing with even their least significant affairs, the Arabs do not see the need for such treatment when they confront their most crucial problems and affairs, problems affecting their future as well as their present.³⁰

Zureiq was, of course, not alone in noting this failing. A year after his article appeared—and one month before the Six-Day War—Abdel Karim Abul Nasr, reviewing a number of Arabic publications dealing with the Palestine problem, complained that eighteen years after “the disaster” and after hundreds of books and studies had been published and tens of writers and authors made their reputations writing on Palestine and the challenge it poses for the Arabs, no works of substance have yet appeared on the subject. He speaks of three types of such works—the literary, the historiographical, and the “political.” This last category of books, he finds, are “pervaded by a propagandistic approach and lack the balanced scholarly spirit which must obtain in the study of a problem such as that of Palestine.”³¹

“Seekers of Nationalist Identity Cards”

Anyone who has any degree of familiarity with the Arabic “literature of the disaster” will readily agree with Abul Nasr’s evaluation. Moreover, cutting across all three types of books he analyzes, one can discern another kind of literary effort. I refer to the scores of books and tracts produced during the 1950s and 1960s by official, semiofficial, and private Arab publishing concerns that specialized in “anti-Israel” propaganda but in reality offered the Arab public an assortment of some of the worst, most “authentic,” and cheapest anti-Semitic diatribes and slanders available. These publications—many of them containing either the full text or some general summary of the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—have, with the passage of time, become so numerous that they often seem to be copied one from the other with no serious attempt at improvisation or commentary. Apart from some that, using certain Koranic versions of prophetic Old Testament railings against the people of Israel, try to trace anti-Semitic sentiments back to Islam’s earliest days, all that these books offered were poor translations or adaptations from standard European anti-Semitic texts and tracts.

Several factors may be said to have accounted for this outburst of what has been termed “Arab anti-Semitism.” First, there was the sense of utter frustration and helplessness which Arabs generally felt vis-à-vis Israel and the Zionist movement. Then there was the difficulty—by no means confined to non-Jews—of defining the precise relationship between the state of Israel and Zionism on the one hand and Jewry and Judaism on the other. Furthermore, we must take into consideration the impact of Christian thinking on the authors of these books. This impact took two main forms. Some of the writers of these anti-Semitic tracts are themselves Christians

raised on these teachings, while others came under their spell through the predominantly Western training most of them received and the literature they used.

Far more important—and constituting a singularly deep paradox in itself—is the fact that these would-be anti-Zionist propagandists seemed simply to have run head-on into a trap: They became victims of the very doctrine they boasted of combating—namely, the equation of Zionism and the state of Israel with Judaism and the Jewish people. The result was that, instead of a “science of catastrophe” of the kind Zureiq demanded, we now possess in Arabic a fairly voluminous body of straight anti-Semitic literature borrowed lock, stock, and barrel from old and recent obscure works in German, French, Russian, and English. Whether this body of work belongs to the “literary,” the “historiographical,” or the “political” category is immaterial; what is certain is that it belongs to that same cheap intellectual-literary-political peddling (to use Abul Nasr’s telling phrase) in which “seekers of nationalist identity cards” engaged.

Even more deplorable than this “tactical” failure on their part was the Arabs’ total lack of historical perspective. If we take as valid the thesis that the collective consciousness and political behavior of human groups are decisively influenced by their respective historical experiences and political cultures, we will readily find that the very concept of anti-Semitism, with its various historical and cultural connotations, is foreign to the culture and to the religious tradition of Arabic Islam.

During the crisis of May–June 1967 there was talk in Israel about the danger of “another Auschwitz” and of an impending “genocide.” From the point of view both of the nature of some Arab pronouncements and the recent traumatic experience of European Jewry, these fears were perhaps natural and understandable. Viewed in anything like a correct historical perspective, however, the idea of an “Arab Auschwitz” is an absurdity. Auschwitz and similar anti-Jewish horrors of World War II would have been unthinkable without the strong and uninterrupted anti-Semitic strain in the Christian tradition and culture of the West. And to the extent that this is so, the Holocaust of the 1940s in Europe must be seen as a culmination of the history of the Christian West’s attitude to its Jews. Neither their religious culture nor their historical record lends credence to the claim that the Muslim Arabs of today are capable of the kind of historical consummation that was given expression in Auschwitz and other Nazi extermination camps.

Writing about the status of the non-Muslim minorities—the “Protected People,” or *dhimmis*—during the “classical centuries” of the Middle Ages,

the distinguished Islamic historian Claude Cahen compared their treatment to the experience of the Jews in medieval Christendom. "There is nothing in medieval Islam which could specifically be called anti-Semitism," he wrote, adding: "Objectivity requires us to attempt a *comparison* between Christian and Muslim intolerance, which have partial resemblances and partial differences. Islam has, in spite of many upsets, shown more toleration than Europe toward the Jews who remained in Muslim lands."³²

Jewish historians, too, have often noted certain comparative facts. Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson properly cautioned in his book *On Jewish History in the Middle Ages* that Maimonides's condemnation of Islam in the "Epistle to Yemen" should be understood in the context of the harsh persecutions of the twelfth century and that, furthermore, one may say he was insufficiently aware of the status of the Jews in Christian lands or did not pay attention to this when he wrote the letter. "The legal and security situation of the Jews in the Muslim countries," Ben-Sasson continued, "was generally better than in Christendom, because in the former Jews were not the sole 'infidels,' because in comparison to the Christians, Jews were less dangerous and more loyal to the Muslim regime, and because the rapidity and territorial scope of the Muslim conquests imposed upon them a reduction in persecution and a granting of greater possibility for the survival of members of other faiths in their lands."³³

Muslim-Arab writers and historians writing on this subject usually insist on comparing the respective attitudes of Islam and Christianity toward the Jews. To cite only one example, the Egyptian Islamic scholar Abdul Fattah 'Ashoor, in a paper read at the Fourth Conference of the Academy of Islamic Research at Al-Ahzar University in 1968, writes: "It may be sufficiently evident that Jews throughout history received no better or kinder treatment than that of Muslims. The egoism and greed of Jews subjected them to persecution by the Romans in early times and by various peoples of Christian Europe in the Middle Ages. They found in Muslims—as Jewish writers themselves admit—merciful brothers who regarded them as fellow believers and did not allow religious differences [to] affect their treatment or attitude toward them. Spain provides a clear example of the big difference in the treatment of Jews by Muslims and Christians."³⁴

As Mark Cohen notes, Arabic books on Jewish or non-Muslim life under medieval Islam overwhelmingly favor what he terms "the myth of Islamic tolerance," which, he writes, "is directed as much at the Christian minorities as at the Jews." A scholarly legal study by a lecturer in Islamic law at Baghdad University cites the widespread employment of non-Muslim "Protected People" in Islamic government as a sign of Islam's unprec-

edented tolerance. Qasim 'Abduh Qasim, a historian at Egypt's Zagazig University, in a paper entitled "The Jews of Egypt from the Islamic Conquest to the Ottoman Invasion," credits Islamic "tolerance" for the freedom and prosperity enjoyed by Egyptian Jewry in the Middle Ages, and draws on recent Jewish scholarship—especially that dealing with the Egyptian Jewish florescence under the Fatimids (well documented in the Cairo Geniza)—to strengthen his case for Islam's liberal treatment of the Jews.³⁵

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, in his 1977 book *Non-Muslims in Islamic Society*, devotes a chapter to refuting challenges to the notion of Muslim toleration, based on allegedly oppressive practices such as the poll tax and discriminatory differentiation in dress. A chapter entitled "Comparison" glorifies Islamic toleration by contrasting it with the intolerance shown by other religions in the past and in our own time—for example, the oppression of Muslims in Christian countries and in the Soviet Union, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and the persecution of Christians by other Christians throughout history. Qaradawi's book is aimed at "both Muslim and non-Muslim readers in order to introduce them to this important subject, which has been distorted and misrepresented by some non-Muslim writers."³⁶

In this connection, Cohen cites the case of a comprehensive volume purported to be "an analysis and chronology of 1,900 years of anti-Semitic attitudes and practices" but whose editors relegate the discussion of Islam to a brief section at the end of their book. In introducing *The Causes and Effects of Anti-Semitism: The Dimensions of a Prejudice* (New York, 1978), the compilers, Paul E. Grosser and Edwin G. Halperin, explain that the reason for this was twofold: First, Muslim anti-Jewishness was "qualitatively and quantitatively distinct from the anti-Semitism of the Christian/Western World"; and second, the Jew, "for the most part [was] protected by law from assault almost on a par with his neighbors." In a note to the introduction, they add: "There is general agreement among historians that the golden age of the Islamic Empire was also a golden age for Jews living under Islamic rule. Jewish historians, Arab historians specializing in Jewish or Arabic history, and other general historians share this view."³⁷

There is no denying, however, the existence of a clear strain of "authentic" anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic sentiments in certain recent Arab pronouncements and publications. It is also true that the source and background of these utterances are traceable to a period preceding the actual conflict in Palestine. Sylvia G. Haim, a noted student of modern Muslim-Arab intellectual history, has found that the first anti-Semitic book in Arabic was a free translation of a work by a French writer, one Georges Corneilhan, entitled *Juifs et Opportunistes: Le Judaïsme en Egypte et en*

Syrie. This Arabic translation was published in Beirut in 1893, and the author-translator was almost certainly an Eastern Christian by the name of Najib al-Haj. (It is anyway “difficult to believe,” Haim states, “that a Muslim would have written such a book in the nineteenth century.”) At least one subsequent anti-Semitic tract and two Arabic renderings of the *Protocols* were done by Eastern Christian writers and publicists from Lebanon.

In contrast to the Eastern Christians, Haim found, Muslim writings at the beginning of the twentieth century remained unaffected by the anti-Semitic polemics engendered by the Dreyfus affair in France. Indeed, she adds, “the most influential of [Muslim writers] denounced the racialism manifest in Europe.” A Muslim periodical like *Al-Manar*—founded and edited by Muhammad Rashid Rida, one of the leading lights of Islamic modernism—actually denounced the anti-Semitism that had come to the surface in Europe in the wake of the Dreyfus trial. Writing in the first issue of his periodical, Rida argued that anti-Semitism was not a movement based on religious differences “but an instance of racial fanaticism and envious hatred.” He also deplored that this “disease,” as he called it, had “contaminated some Egyptian newspapers that ought to know better.”

While in subsequent writings Rida sometimes imputed to the Jews some of the faults with which they are usually charged, and spoke of the wealth of the Jews, their manners, their treacherous relations with the Prophet, and the like, he nevertheless “proudly claims the Jews as fellow Orientals in order to support his contention that the latter are not by nature hostile to progress.” *Al-Manar* had a long life under Rida’s leadership—up to the mid-1930s; but even when he wrote on the Palestine issue, Rida exhibited cool judgment. Commenting on the disturbances of 1929, for instance, “he compares the qualities of the Jews and their strength with the number and strength of the Arabs who are, according to him, more proficient in warfare and agriculture.”

After citing more recent examples of anti-Jewish writings in Arabic, Haim concludes that the influence of Europe was necessary before anti-Semitism could gain body and substance and become acceptable in Arabic areas.

The flow of anti-Semitic doctrine from Europe did not originate in one country nor was it confined to a single decade. In the nineteenth century it emanated from France at the time of the Dreyfus affair and, for obvious reasons, the Eastern Christians became the agents through whom the doctrine was propagated. In the 1930s and during

the Second World War, however, Nazi propaganda penetrated into all sections of the Arabic-speaking populations. Influential Muslims gave anti-Semitic doctrine greater currency by their writings and speeches; so that today after the Palestine events of 1948 the doctrine seems more popular than it ever was before.³⁸

Christianity's Inroads

The peculiar anti-Jewish tone of early Islam—a phenomenon which must be distinguished from anti-Semitism—may well have its origins in Christian influences. A Muslim folktale about Muhammad relates that, when the Prophet was a boy, one of his uncles used to take him along on his trade journeys to the north. One day near the Syrian town Bostra, on the way back to Mecca, the uncle's caravan passed by the cell of a Christian monk called Bahira, who invited the party to a feast, showing special interest in the boy. He had a long talk with him, then looked at the lad's back and spotted a mark between his shoulders, which he recognized as a seal of prophethood. As he bade the party farewell, so the story goes, Bahira said to the uncle, "Go back home with your nephew and keep an eye on him; if the Jews see him and get to know what I know about him, they will certainly do him harm, for he is going to be a very big man."³⁹

This, of course, is only a tale that has no basis in fact. Its anti-Jewish tenor, moreover, makes every impression of having been insinuated at a later stage, possibly when the political struggle between Muhammad and his followers on the one hand and the Jews of Medina and their Arab allies on the other was at its height. Yet the fact that the story's quite irrelevant aside at "the Jews" should have been made to come out of the mouth of a Christian is itself highly revealing. The pagan Arabs of Mecca and Medina of those days (circa 600) had nothing against the Jews as such; on the contrary, many of the Jews of Arabia were Arabs who had embraced the Jewish faith. Muhammad's subsequent quarrel with the Jews was purely economic and political in character and had no trace of what is known as anti-Semitism. In contrast, the Christians by that time had established a firm anti-Semitic tradition.

That anti-Semitism had its deepest roots in the teachings of the Christian Church is a universally acknowledged fact of history. In 1965, Catholic priest and scholar Edward H. Flannery published *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Anti-Semitism*. In a review of the book, James Parkes deplored Flannery's attempt to date the emergence of anti-Semitism to before the rise of the Christian Church, "thereby blandly, but utterly

falsely, denying the distortion of a normal xenophobia into the unique sin of anti-Semitism by the Christian Church. . . . It is an obviously false perspective,” Parkes added, “to trace papal action back to the Christian emperors. Both papal action and that of the Christian emperors arise out of the Christian theological picture.”⁴⁰

That anti-Jewish sentiments continue even today to be fed by Christian beliefs and prejudices is again an undisputed fact. Some years ago, the results of a large-scale study on “Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism,” prepared by the University of California’s Survey Research Center, showed that 45 percent of people in the United States with anti-Semitic attitudes “have a religious basis for their prejudice.” In their report, the university’s sociologists refute “the comfortable and complacent view” that anti-Semitism is no longer a real problem in America, adding that it is “exceedingly common in all religious bodies.” The survey’s findings were so “surprising” that the national chairman of the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith—the body that financed the study—declared that “we were entirely unprepared to find the religious roots of anti-Semitism so potent and so widespread in modern society.” This verges on the naive. For the truth is that there has never been a break in the anti-Semitic line which leads from the beginning of the denigration of Judaism in the formative period of Christian history, the exclusion of Jews from civic equality in the period of the church’s first triumph in the fourth century, through the horrors and massacres of the Middle Ages, to the death camps of Hitler in our century.

Anti-Semitism, then, is an exclusively Christian phenomenon and, as such, a predominantly Western one. It is therefore both historically wrong and morally inexcusable to try to apply the term to non-Christian and non-Western societies. This is far more than a semantic problem. A people’s character, attitudes, and way of seeing and reacting to things are determined largely by its collective historical experience and its culture. The basic error of those who speak of “Arab anti-Semitism” is that they overlook the crucial yet quite elementary fact that neither the history nor the culture of the Muslim Arabs betrays anything even remotely approaching the anti-Jewish venom or actions to which we have been accustomed by the Christian West and which we have come to call “anti-Semitism.” It is true that the story of the Jewish communities living under Islam has been a miserable one for well over five centuries; but the lot of the Muslim peasant and laborer has by no means been better. “Both have been victims of a culture which became stagnated. But neither the Jewish nor Christian communities were humiliated, persecuted, expelled, or murdered, on such

baseless charges as caused the deaths of tens of thousands of Jews in Medieval Christendom.”⁴¹

A fundamental difference between the attitudes of Christianity and Islam to Jews and Judaism is to be found in their different approaches to the Old Testament. Islam claimed the great prophets of the Old Testament as the precursors of Muhammad but did not deny that they were Jews (though it changed the land promised to Abraham from Palestine to Mecca), and it did not attempt to incorporate the whole of the Jewish Scripture into its own sacred writings. “The Koran was not a ‘new’ testament to be added to an accepted ‘old’ testament, but an entirely fresh, total and final revelation, which surpassed and superseded the Scriptures—true in their way—of Jew and Christian alike. Hence [in Islam] there is none of the deformation of Jewish history which is so conspicuous a part of the Christian tradition.” It would not have mattered had the church claimed the *whole* of the Old Testament, “if it had seen in its very objective pictures of human failings a record of its ancestors, if it had taken to its own bosom and led on its own conscience the denunciations of the prophets.” But the spokesmen of the church did not do so. “They claimed only all the heroes and virtuous characters of the Scriptures; they allocated to themselves only the promises and the praise of the Scriptures. And to the Jews they allocated only all the villains and idolaters, only all the threats and denunciations.”⁴²

All this, moreover, was done by individuals who believed in the divine authority of every word they quoted, so that this horrible depiction of the Jews was offered as God’s own description of the Jewish people. “And they preached this sedulously in every writing and from every pulpit throughout the breadth of Christendom Sunday by Sunday, century by century. . . . It is no wonder that ordinary Christians came at last to believe that the Jews were children of the Devil vowed to their destruction, and to act on that belief.”⁴³

Nor is it surprising that, as recently as the spring of 1966, Bishop Luigi Carli, of Sequi, Italy, wrote that Judaism as a religion remains “condemned by God” because of its rejection of Jesus. (Fifteen centuries ago, Archbishop Ambrose of Milan made a similar statement, an eloquent testimony to the continuity of the church’s anti-Semitism. At Callinicum, in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, a mob led by the local bishop burned the synagogues. After the emperor punished the bishop for this violation of public order, Ambrose publicly refused the sacrament to the emperor until he rescinded his sentence against the bishop, asking contemptuously: Who minded if the synagogue, a miserable hovel, a home of insanity and unbe-

lief which God Himself had condemned, was destroyed—"God whom they have insulted or Christ whom they have crucified?")⁴⁴

The Cultural Dimension

So much for the religiohistorical roots of anti-Semitism. If we delve a little further, we come across another, perhaps even more decisive, aspect of its genesis—namely, the cultural one. For in addition to their conviction that the Jews were literally "children and emissaries of the Devil" intent on the destruction of Christendom, Christians found the Jews guilty of the further crime of being "different," strange people with strange, incomprehensible ways and customs. Here again, one can point to a fundamental difference between the attitudes of Islam and Christianity to the Jews. The culture of the Mediterranean world—which was rapidly adopted and assimilated by Islam—is an essentially cosmopolitan one, accommodating a rich variety of peoples, cultures, and ways of life; and the Jews, being part of that world to start with, presented nothing strange or incomprehensible to its inhabitants.

This was not so in the predominantly rural societies of Central and Northern Europe; there, Jewish life and customs appeared completely foreign. And in becoming conscious of Jews, the average European became conscious that they were mysteriously different. Language, religion, writing—all could be endowed with the terror of the unknown, once there were other reasons for hating and fearing those who exhibited them.⁴⁵

It can thus safely be argued that anti-Semitism, as we have come to know it, had its origin in the religion and cultural traditions of the Christian West. Those Israelis who speak of "Arab anti-Semitism" and decry its scope and dangers show only how crucially their own European background and the historical experience of European Jewries have conditioned their reactions. For the truth is that the age-old anti-Semitic tradition of Christian Europe has resulted in a certain set of attitudes and reactions among the Jews who lived and grew up in its various lands. This, in itself, is only natural; but it plainly cannot justify the "grafting" of anti-Semitism onto a religion and a cultural tradition such as those of Islam, to which this concept is fundamentally alien.

There is another, no-less-crucial aspect to this problem. The long-standing struggle between Zionist Jew and nationalist Arab has, unlike the Christian-Jewish controversy, been a strictly political one, having nothing whatever to do with Judaism, whether as a religion, a culture, or an ethnic identity. Jewry's long experience of life under Islam and under Christendom shows conclusively that this has always been the main differ-

ence between these two religions' respective attitudes to the Jews. For Christianity, the very fact of *being* Jewish constitutes something of a crime. "To be a Jew is an offence, but it is nevertheless not punishable by a Christian"—this is the definition of a Jew given in the *Summa Angelica* of Angelus de Clavasio, a theological dictionary published in Lyons, France, in 1519, which was widely accepted as an authoritative exposition of Christian theology in the period just preceding the Reformation.

Joel Carmichael presents a fairly balanced perspective of this aspect of the subject in *The Satanizing of the Jews: Origin and Development of Mystical Anti-Semitism*. Anti-Semitism, he argues, is unique "because of its source, its intensity, its duration." Moreover, while anti-Semitism contains elements in common with other forms of xenophobia, in the case of the Jews, these elements "are given special potency by the mystical dimension that identifies the Jews with a concept beyond themselves."

This is the dimension that Carmichael considers to be the root of "mystical anti-Semitism," which has lent "a special tincture" to the fate of the Jews. "This outsize dimension," according to Carmichael, "is to be found in Christian theology—though it was to be transferred . . . to pseudo-scientific theories of 'racism' that began to proliferate in the last third of the nineteenth century."⁴⁶

Carmichael traces the roots of mystical anti-Semitism back to the teachings of the Christian Church. "In the universe framed by Christian theology," he writes, "the concepts of 'Jews' and 'Christians' have an undeniable balance that, while statistically absurd, reflects the fundamental theme of Christianity—the world of God and the world of the Devil. Since the Jews have not accepted the Christian God, they have *ipso facto* been arrayed alongside the Devil in Christendom."⁴⁷

Carmichael's depiction of the image of the Jew in the minds of Christians in the Middle Ages is most telling. On one hand, he writes, a real-life Jew was "a person dressed oddly but looking, after all, human, speaking one's own language, dealing with one in all everyday concerns and activities, buying, selling, building, treating patients, and behaving humanly in the very act of practicing curious customs." On the other hand, "this same person could embody an idea—the idea of being, in reality, not a human being at all but somehow occultly powerful, an emanation of the Devil, murderer of God, Christ killer, and so on."

It is this strange transfiguration of human beings that makes it obvious that mystical anti-Semitism "has nothing to do with the Jews." For the fact is that, even after the world of theology had been, "as it might have seemed," shattered, and religious faith had been virtually lost, "the secular

imagination of many Christians could still regard the Jews as weird, alien, and horrifying.”⁴⁸

Carmichael traces the migration of the concepts of mystical anti-Semitism through Christendom to the Nazi era and Auschwitz. He then addresses contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism and the more sensitive aspects of his subject: Israel, the way the Christian West deals with it, and Arab attitudes toward Israel and the Jews. As he explains, “The difficulty inherent in the assessment of anti-Semitism today is heightened by the varied reactions to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, some of which . . . camouflage a potent strand of traditional mystical anti-Semitism.”

Carmichael is aware, however, that “It would be preposterous to say that all opposition to Israel is motivated by anti-Semitism.” For a particularly striking example, he chooses the case of Arab hostility to Israel. This hostility, he asserts, is a prize example of collective enmity independent of mystical anti-Semitism, at least in the case of Muslim Arabs. Despite the second-class status of Jews in traditional Islam, he explains, “Islam has no theory of anti-Semitism. The role assigned the Jews is not sinister. The odium is not theological. . . . Hence there is no place in Islam for the Jew as the personification of primordial evil; without the Incarnation, without the Universal God counterposed to the Universe of Satan, there is no cosmology to serve as framework for the Satanic role of the Jews.”

“The hostility of Muslim Arabs to Israel today,” he concludes, “however ferocious, is not a form of mystical anti-Semitism. Its theological root is merely the conviction that Jews *should* be subject to Islam—like everyone else; the Jews are not *special*. . . . When Muslims meet Jews, they do not see anything eerie, supernatural, behind their appearance; they do not regard them as freakish or strange. For Muslims, Jews are not leading a secret life—running the world on behalf of Satan. The mysterious odium that has had fateful effects on the Jews in Christendom throughout the centuries is entirely absent from the Muslim world.”⁴⁹

“Mystical” or otherwise, however, the anti-Semitic strain in the culture and thought of the Christian West continued through the Lutheran Reformation (which was characterized by fierce anti-Jewish polemics), the period of “higher criticism” of the Old Testament, and the rationalist theology of the Enlightenment. Later, after emancipating itself from theology, German philosophy preserved almost intact the Lutheran position on the Jewish question. Kant characterized the Jews as “a nation of swindlers” and called their religion a “superstition.” For Hegel, the infinite spirit has no place in the dungeon of the Jewish soul, selfishly enclosed upon itself,

and he felt that the fate of the Jewish people, like that of Macbeth, deserved no pity. Fichte, being more “consistent,” maintained that no good could ever come of the Jews, whom he described as simply incorrigible—“except if their heads were to be cut off and replaced by non-Jewish ones.”⁵⁰

Islam and the Jews: Theory and Reality

Islam’s attitude to Jews and Judaism never had anything like the strongly felt hatred and the ingrained venom which characterized the pronouncements of the Christian churches. For Islam, being Jewish or Christian was a forgivable sort of perversity rather than an “offense.” The People of the Book (*ahl al-kitab*), which is how the Koran described the Jews, were not regarded by Muslims as nonbelievers, since they shared with them the belief in one God. But they were not regarded as true believers either, because they failed to acknowledge the mission of Muhammad and did not accept the Koran as divine revelation. Consequently, these “scripturaries,” while allowed to live in the Islamic state unmolested, were granted this privilege on condition that they pay the *jizya* and accept the status defined in treaties and charters as that of *dhimmi*. However, as a protected minority, the *dhimmis* were exempted from payment of *zakat*, the tax imposed on Muslims as one of Islam’s five precepts or “pillars.” In this way, the *jizya* may be seen not as a levy of penalty for religious nonconformity but as a kind of substitute for *zakat*. No less significant is the fact that the *dhimmis* were supposed to pay this special poll tax also as a levy on their exemption from taking part in the wars of the Muslims.

Here it may be pointed out that, in principle, Muhammad did not consider the Arabian Jews as a nation, *umma*, separate from their Muslim neighbors. The famous Treaty of Medina was signed before the heightening of tension between Muhammad and the Jews caused by their refusal to accept his mission; it was concluded circa 625 with the tribes of 'Aws and Khazraj, and the Jews adhered to it as a party. This treaty provided that the various Jewish tribes “form a nation (*umma*) with the believers,” and that they would have their religion and the Muslims would have their own. This particular provision in the Treaty of Medina is of special historical and constitutional significance, making the document much more than a mere treaty. In *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, Majid Khadduri calls it “a constitution for the Islamic state in its embryonic stage.” In accordance with its provisions, a kind of confederation was established between the Arab and Jewish tribes, with the state of Medina taking the lead and the prominent position. This, Khadduri adds, was achieved through the provi-

sion that, while each Jewish tribe constituted “a nation with the believers,” the Jewish tribes as a whole were not seen as forming a nation by themselves.”⁵¹

Two Koranic verses are often cited—usually out of context—as proof of Islam’s ingrained hatred of Jews. The first occurs in Sura IX, *Repentance*, and reads: “Fight against such of those to whom the Scriptures were given as believe neither in Allah nor the Last Day, who do not forbid what Allah and his apostle have forbidden, and do not embrace the true faith until they pay tribute out of hand and are utterly subdued.” The second verse is taken from Sura V, *The Table Spread*: “Believers! Choose not for friends those who received the Scripture before you, and of the disbelievers, as make a jest and sport of your prayers.”

In both of these texts, the reference is either to unbelievers (i.e., idolaters) or to those of the People of the Book who, despite having been given God’s word in their respective Scriptures, continue to believe in neither God nor the Day of Judgment—or who make a jest and a pastime of the Muslims’ prayers. The reference, in both cases, is not to Jews and Christians *qua* Jews and Christians but to those who do not believe in one God and in the Day of Judgment, whether they be Jews, Christians, or idolaters who refuse to embrace Islam.

The rules governing relations between Muslims and *ahl al-kitab* derive from the Koran and the Hadith (oral tradition), and partly from local traditions and practices. These included certain disabilities, to be sure; but practice differed considerably from the jurist’s exposition of the law, the degree of rigidity or tolerance depending largely on the whims and moods of the rulers and their officials. There is evidence, for example, that both sides tended at times to ignore and even violate the law with regard to the employment of non-Muslims in government, the payment of *jizya*, and the building of synagogues and churches. On the whole, however, the People of the Book were tolerantly treated under Islam at a time when religious differences were far more decisive in the Christian West. In the Islamic domain, Jews and Christians were granted a large measure of self-rule, each community being left to be governed by its own religious head, who was responsible to the Muslim ruler.⁵²

As the power of Arabic Islam spread and as it began to come into contact with more peoples and civilizations, the degree of its religious tolerance became more pronounced. During the Abbassid period, Jews and Christians often held important financial, clerical, and professional positions. Except during the reigns of Harun al-Rashid and al-Mutawakkil, when they were made to suffer under stringent regulations, the Jews fared

fairly well. In 985, the Arab chronicler al-Maqdisi found that most of the money changers and bankers in Syria were Jews, while most of the clerks and physicians were Christians. Under several caliphs, we read of more than one Jew in the capital and the provinces assuming responsible state positions. In Baghdad itself the Jews maintained a good-sized, flourishing community. Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, who visited the community in 1169, found in it ten rabbinical schools and twenty-three synagogues; he depicts in glowing colors the high esteem in which the head of the Babylonian Jews was held as a descendant of David and “Prince of the Captivity,” *Resh Galuta*.

There is, however, a good deal of ambiguity about Islam’s attitude to non-Muslims. As Goitein has pointed out, the Koran contained two diametrically opposed views on this, as on some other vital matters—a fact, he asserts, “to be explained by the spiritual and political history of the Prophet Muhammad and his young community.” This is a point well worth examining, however briefly. “Unlike Christianity,” writes Goitein, “which originated in opposition to its mother religion and therefore negated its right of existence, Islam came into being in defiance of paganism and through self-identification with the People of the Book. . . . This is the root of that primitive universalism—the belief that monotheistic religions were essentially one—which pervades the early parts of the Koran, and as a consequence of which Islamic law recognized in principle the right of existence to other monotheistic religions.”⁵³

What happened subsequently was that Muhammad soon discovered that he could not maintain his claim to prophethood without establishing a church of his own, demanding for itself exclusive authority, just as the various Christian denominations and the synagogue had done before. “Moreover, Muhammad obtained by military and political means what he had failed to achieve by the power of his preachings: He crushed Arabian paganism, only to discover that the great world around him still remained to be conquered. The last ten years of Muhammad’s life were marked by incessant warfare, a fact which left an indelible imprint on the character of Islamic religion, for the larger part of the Koran originated during this latter period.”

The result was that at the end of his life Muhammad called on his followers: “Fight until religion everywhere belongs to God”—God in this particular case meaning Islam. Consequently, Islamic law divided the world into two domains: *dar al-Islam*, the region under Islam’s rule, and *dar al-harb*, the domain of war. Thus, in theory, no Islamic state is allowed to make peace with a non-Muslim power. The most that is religiously per-

missible is an armistice of short duration: according to some schools, two years; according to others, up to ten years. As far as Christians and Jews are concerned, they have to pay the *jizya*, a kind of ransom money for the right to live in peace as Christians and Jews. These non-Muslim believers in one God are, however, to be kept in submission in order to demonstrate that Islam is the true and dominant religion.

However, while Muslim scholars and lawmakers created a long list of discriminatory laws to put this submission into effect, the actual application of these laws differed from time to time and from place to place, depending on the prevailing socioeconomic and spiritual conditions. Earlier in this section, we dwelt on some aspects of this divorce between theory and practice in Islam's treatment of Jews and Christians living in its domain. The fall of Baghdad to the Mongol hordes in 1258 was followed by a period of decline and stagnation from which Arabic Islam and its non-Muslim subjects did not manage to emerge until the turn of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, under Ottoman Islam, which by the beginning of the sixteenth century dominated Syria and Egypt, the conditions under which the Jews were permitted to live contrasted so strikingly with those imposed on their coreligionists in various parts of Christendom that the fifteenth century witnessed a large influx of European Jews into the Sultan's dominions. During the first half of that century, persecutions had occurred in Bohemia, Austria, and Poland, and, at about this time, two German rabbis who sought and secured refuge in the Ottoman Empire wrote a letter to their community extolling the beauties and advantages of their new home.

But it was the measures taken against the Jews in Spain, culminating in their expulsion in 1492, that gave the greatest momentum to this migration. The Jews who chose to settle in the various parts of the empire found their surroundings rather congenial, and they, in turn, contributed greatly to the flowering of Ottoman civilization. The Ottoman Muslims favored the Jews against their Christian subjects, as the latter were already being suspected of regarding the powers of Christendom with undue sympathy and support. Marranos, who in Christian Spain had embraced Christianity to escape persecution or death, abandoned their disguise and returned to Judaism. Istanbul soon came to harbor the largest Jewish community in the whole of Europe, while Salonika became a predominantly Jewish city. The degree of the Jews' integration into the life of Ottoman Islam was such, indeed, that two notable non-Jewish students of modern Islam found that there has been, in their words, "something sympathetic to the Jewish nature in the culture of Islam," since "from the rise of the Caliphate till the abolition of the ghettos in Europe the most flourishing centers of Jewish life

were to be found in Muslim countries: in Iraq during the Abbassid period, in Spain throughout the period of Moorish domination, and thereafter in the Ottoman Empire.”⁵⁴

It is of interest to note here that, as far as Palestine is concerned, the right of Jews to “return” to live in this small area of land was accepted by all the successive Muslim rulers from the Muslim conquest to the end of the nineteenth century, when Zionist settlement there became entangled in European *weltpolitik*. Gibb and Bowen relate how, when the Jews of Europe “learned of the paradisiacal life awaiting them in Turkey” and many of them set out for (Ottoman) Palestine, it was not the Muslims who objected but the Franciscans of Jerusalem, “who talked the Pope into forbidding the Venetians to carry Jewish passengers to the Holy Land.” This was not the first time Jerusalem Christians tried to prevail on Muslim rulers to ban Jews from living in the city. A similar attempt was made first when the second Caliph, Omar, entered Jerusalem at the time of its conquest by the Muslim army in the seventh century, and again when Salah ed-Din drove out the Crusaders in the twelfth. On both of these occasions, the Christian patriarch of the city tried to persuade the Muslim conquerors to prevent Jews from living in or (as in the latter case) returning to Jerusalem after they had been expelled from it by the Christians. Both Omar and Salah ed-Din refused to heed their pleas.⁵⁵

In Palestine

It may be useful, at this point, to turn to the subject of Jewish life in Muslim Palestine in a much later period. At the turn of the eighteenth century, the Jewish community in Jerusalem experienced a growth in numbers at an inordinate rate. The main reason for this growth was the special attraction Jerusalem held for Jews throughout the diaspora. One factor accounting for this increase is, of course, the centrality of Jerusalem for Judaism and the yearning for Jerusalem with which the Jewish liturgy is so redolent. According to a recent study by Tudor Parfitt, however, the startling increase in Jewish immigration to Jerusalem in the nineteenth century took place “not because the attraction of Jerusalem as the holy city grew, but because political and other factors made such immigration increasingly possible.”⁵⁶

It must be emphasized here, however, that the lot of the Jews of Jerusalem, irrespective of their number, was far from being an easy one. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the community was “small and oppressed.” In 1799, when it was feared that Napoleon would turn his troops against Jerusalem, a wave of hostility against the Jews started, on the

ground that they were in league with the foreign invaders. After Napoleon withdrew his army from Palestine following its failure before the walls of Acre, the situation of the Jews improved but little. "The community suffered continually from the extortions of the Pasha of Jerusalem which further exacerbated the grinding poverty of the community."⁵⁷

Nevertheless, the Jerusalem community continued to grow in numbers. The greatest growth took place in the 1870s, when some estimates put the number at thirteen thousand. What is more, the annual immigration of between twelve and fifteen hundred was such that, by the year 1882, the Jewish population of Jerusalem was somewhere between fifteen and twenty thousand—out of a total population of between thirty and forty thousand.

Parfitt presents a detailed and workmanlike exposition of the status of the *dhimmis* (Jews, Christians, Sabeans, and Persian Zoroastrians) in general and of the Jews in particular. He points out that the most important aspect of that status was the measure of religious toleration shown by the Muslim government to the *dhimmis*. In nineteenth-century Palestine, he adds, such tolerance was "a consistent part of the relationship between the Ottoman authorities and the Jews." He quotes European travelers as remarking on "the perfect religious freedom" that prevailed under the rule of Sulayman Pasha and later. One of these travelers, J. Wilson, is quoted as saying that "entire freedom of worship . . . is now accorded to [the Jews] and they are left to manage their own internal affairs without interference from any other quarter."⁵⁸

Parfitt also touches on the subject of "Muslim anti-Semitism." He writes:

It had been argued with justification that Christian dogma is at the root of much Christian anti-Semitism. Can the same be said of Muslim anti-Semitism? Certainly the Quran contains verses directed against the Jews and the early relations between the Prophet Muhammad and the Jews of Medina were not such as to dispose the Prophet's disciples to incline favourably towards the Jews. . . . But although the Quran and the traditions of Islam can be used for political ends to invoke deep religious hatred of Jews . . . into the violent hatred that flared up in Jerusalem in 1799 and 1834, in Tiberias in 1934, and in Safed in 1799 and 1934, the reasons for these outbreaks were quite different.⁵⁹

No single factor can be said to have been at the root of this animosity. Apart from the fact that many Muslims and Christians in Palestine viewed Jews "with a certain superstitious awe," there was also what Parfitt terms

“the underlying xenophobia of the Muslims of Palestine,” expressed at the time in a general dislike of all foreigners, whoever they might be, and a feeling that in times of difficulty the Jews were “likely to be in league with the enemy.”

Summing up this point in his discussion, Parfitt writes, “The Jews were disliked because they were Jews; they were also disliked because they were, often as not, foreigners, in the sense that they spoke another language, had different customs, beliefs and so on. At times of tension . . . this dislike turned into hatred,” especially during invasions or wars in which the Ottoman Empire was involved.

On their part, the Jews who were living in the four holy cities of Palestine—Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, and Tiberias—“did not feel that they were living in an administrative area of the Ottoman Empire. They lived in *Eretz Yisrael*.” As Wilson, quoted by Parfitt, wrote, “They connect the place with persons and events . . . they live in the past.” The lives of many of these Jews were encompassed by the physical boundaries of the Jewish Quarter and the intellectual boundaries of the Talmud. “Thus, in the same way as a crude sort of anti-Semitism formed the basis of the Muslim and Christian Arab’s view of the Jews, so a crude stylization of the Arab fashioned the attitude of the Jews towards the Arabs. In Hebrew books and newspapers of the period the most usual designation of the Arabs was ‘Ishmaelites’ . . . those who bought Joseph as a slave, the enemies of Gideon; they were negative figures in the Bible and, as Arabs, were still viewed as such.”⁶⁰

Parfitt’s account ends with the early 1880s. In the course of the three decades that followed, the Arabs of Palestine were to be made aware of the political ambitions of the Zionists. As he explained in a concluding paragraph, “The fears that were thus generated were converted by the traditional alchemy into the highly complicated and violent hostility that marked the attitude of Arab to Jew in the years to come.”⁶¹

By way of conclusion, a word of caution is in order: If such was roughly the record of Arabic Islam in its dealings with Jews and Judaism, it must be pointed out that the picture has not been uniformly so rosy and that instances of religious intolerance toward and discriminatory treatment of Jews under Islam are by no means difficult to find. This point is of special relevance at a time in which, following a reawakening of interest in the history of Arab-Jewish relations among Jewish writers and intellectuals, certain interested circles have been trying to “counter” talk of a Judeo-Arabic tradition or symbiosis by digging up scattered pieces of evidence to show that Islam is essentially intolerant, that Muhammad himself was responsible for expelling and exterminating those Arabian Jews who refused

to embrace the new faith, and that Muslims' contempt for Jews was even greater and more deep-seated than that manifested by Christians.

History, Historiography, and the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

The contrast between Christian enmity and Muslim tolerance toward the Jews is nowhere more emphasized than in the writings of Jews, especially since their expulsion from Spain in 1492. In fact, after the expulsion, Muslim Turkey was to become a haven for the Jews—not only those from Spain but many who were to flee from Christian persecution in Central and Eastern Europe.

This was reflected in the writing of Jewish historians. Heinrich Graetz, the most prominent nineteenth-century Jewish historian, stresses this point in his famed *History of the Jews*:

Wearied with contemplating the miserable plight of the Jews in their ancient home and in the countries of Europe and fatigued by the constant sight of fanatical oppression in Christendom, the eyes of the observer rest with gladness upon their situation in the Arabian Peninsula. Here the sons of Judah were free to raise their heads, and did not need to look about them with fear and humiliation, lest the ecclesiastical wrath be discharged upon them, or the secular power overwhelm them. Here they were not shut out from the paths of honor, nor excluded from the privileges of state, but, untrammelled, were allowed to develop their powers in the midst of a free, simple and talented people, to show their manly courage, to compete for the gifts of fame, and with practiced hand to measure swords with their antagonists.⁶²

Citing Graetz and a number of other Jewish historians, Mark Cohen writes that, in its nineteenth-century context, “the myth of the interfaith utopia” was used as an attempt “to achieve an important political end, to challenge supposedly liberal Christian Europe to make good on its promise of political equality and unfettered professional and cultural opportunities for Jews.” First, he adds, if medieval Muslims could have so tolerated the Jews that a Samuel ibn Nagrela (d. 1056) could rise to the vizierate of the Spanish Muslim state of Granada, or a Maimonides to a respected position among Muslim intellectuals, “could not modern Europeans grant Jews the rights and privileges promised them in the aftermath of the French Revolution?” Second, “did not the Christian world owe this to the Jews, to compensate for its history of cruelty toward the Jews?” Third, “just as Jews in

Spain (and elsewhere in the Muslim world) benefiting from liberal treatment, had benefited Arab society, so would the Jews of modern Europe, if treated with equality, contribute to European civilization.”⁶³

Where does all this lead us, and how relevant is it to the subject at hand? Plainly, the purely historical argument, for what it is, seems quite incapable of resolution, as indeed all such arguments are. According to Cecil Roth, as we have seen, “Islam was essentially intolerant in theory, in a sense in which Christianity was not.” Saul Friedman, another historian writing almost a quarter-century later, points out that, “while less widely known than the persecutions sustained in Germany, Poland, or Spain, attacks on Jews in the Islamic world have consistently taken place since the time of Muhammad.” “Looked at in a broad historical perspective,” Friedman concludes, “the massacres perpetrated against Jews in England in the thirteenth century, in Poland in the seventeenth century, in Germany by the Crusaders, and in Russia after 1881, all might be construed as ‘episodic’ and therefore not representative of any deep-seated animosity among Europeans for the Jews.”⁶⁴

Earlier in this chapter, we saw how neither Roth’s statement nor sweeping generalizations of the kind made by Friedman can stand the test of serious scrutiny. The fact, however, remains that such caricatures of the history of Jews under Islam continue to be disseminated by scholars as well as by interested publicists and ideologues. Indeed, all discussion of relations between Jews and Muslims—whether dealing with the immediate present, the distant past, or the remote future—is beset by the most burning emotions and by highly charged sensitivities. In their eagerness to repudiate the generally accepted version of these relations (a version which, it is worthwhile pointing out, originates not in Muslim books of history but with Jewish historians and Orientalists in nineteenth-century Europe), certain partisan students of the Middle East conflict today seem to go out of their way to show that, far from being the record of harmonious coexistence it is often claimed to be, the story of Jewish-Muslim relations since the time of Muhammad was “a sorry array of conquest, massacre, subjection, spoilation in goods and women and children, contempt, expulsion—[and] even the yellow badge . . . [which was] an original contribution to international discrimination.”⁶⁵

Informed by a fervor seldom encountered in scholarly discourse, some of these latter-day historians have gone so far as to question even the motives of those European-Jewish scholars of the past century who virtually founded modern Oriental and Arabic studies and managed to unearth the impressive legacy of Judeo-Arabic culture, a culture that was undeniably

an outcome of a long and symbiotic encounter between Muslims and Jews. One of these students (Alroy, whose opinions were just quoted) takes a remark made by Bernard Lewis completely out of context and submits it as proof that the Jew in nineteenth-century Western society, rejected by his Christian neighbors and told that he was a Semite, an Asiatic, and an Oriental, “looked to other Semites and other Orientals for comfort. . . . The obvious choice was Islam.” Having thus seized on the idea—it is further claimed—our disillusioned post-Emancipation European Jew “romanticized [Islam]; became its ardent partisan; idealized it . . . and in the process distorted the past of his relation to Muslims to a dream.”⁶⁶

This latter sentiment is purported to be based on quotations taken from Lewis’s essay, “The Pro-Islamic Jews,” first published in 1968 in the American Jewish quarterly *Judaism*. However, as we shall see presently, the quotations are taken completely out of context. Curiously, however, Lewis’s own attitude to the subject seems since to have undergone some change. In 1974, he delivered a series of lectures at Yeshiva University in New York, of which a central part was devoted to the way present-day Muslim-Arab scholars and historians tend to view Arabic Islam’s treatment of non-Muslim communities living in its domain. One of the qualities which these historians “particularly delighted in ascribing to Spanish Islam,” Lewis asserts in these lectures, was “the virtue of tolerance.” He goes on to say:

The myth of Spanish Islamic tolerance in itself provides an interesting example of the dangers and ambiguities of historiography. First there is the question of what precisely the word means. . . . If tolerance means the absence of persecution then, on the whole, Spanish Islam was a tolerant society and it is not surprising that the European liberal historians of the early nineteenth century, contrasting it with the practice of Medieval Europe or even of the Europe of their own day, were able in good faith to describe it as tolerant. If, however, tolerance means the absence of discrimination, then Spanish Islam never was nor pretended nor claimed to be tolerant.⁶⁷

Lewis does not tell us precisely at what point in history and in what societies “tolerance,” in the sense of a total absence of discrimination, was practiced. However, he speaks of medieval Europe, and even of nineteenth-century Europe, as a place where that brand of pure tolerance was *not* practiced. Thus, he seems to be judging one society and one epoch of history by the standards of another when he persists in speaking of “the myth of Spanish Islamic tolerance.” This is because if that tolerance is a myth, it

is a myth only by virtue of Lewis's own recent and somewhat novel definition of the term "tolerance." By the standards then prevailing—and they are plainly the only ones by which a historian is entitled to pass judgment—Spanish Islamic tolerance was no myth but a reality of which present-day Muslim Arabs are fully justified in reminding their contemporaries.

But it is not only contemporary Arab historians that Bernard Lewis takes to task. "The myth of Spanish Islamic tolerance," he asserts, "was fostered particularly by Jewish scholars, who used it as a stick with which to beat their Christian neighbors." Here, interestingly enough, Lewis refers us to his 1968 essay cited above. However, the suggestion that nineteenth-century Jewish scholars invented "the myth of Spanish Islamic tolerance" from scratch is not made in that essay. Instead, we find the following passage in its concluding paragraph:

Gratitude, sentiment, fellow-feeling—all play their part in the growth of pro-Muslim sentiments among Jews. But underlying them all there was something more powerful—an affinity of religious culture which made it possible for Jews, even emancipated, liberal West European Jews, to achieve an immediate and intuitive understanding of Islam. It is fashionable today to speak of a Judeo-Christian tradition. One could as justly speak of a Judeo-Islamic tradition, for the Muslim religion, like Christianity, is closely related to its Jewish forerunner. . . . The same word, *din*, means religion in Arabic, law in Hebrew. . . . A Hebraist could learn Arabic, a Talmudist understand the *Shari'a*, with greater ease and with greater sympathy than his Protestant or Catholic colleagues.

In the same essay, moreover, Lewis even speaks of Muslim tolerance in general without qualifications. "In medieval Spain," he writes, "there had indeed been a great age of Jewish creativity, which owed much to Muslim tolerance; in modern Turkey many Jews, fleeing from Christian persecution, had found a new home under Muslim rule. . . . In medieval Spain, at least so it appeared, there had been a degree of social and cultural communication between Jew and Gentile such as was impossible in medieval Christendom, and was just becoming possible, against many obstacles, in Europe" of the early nineteenth century.⁶⁸

Tolerance, then, is a highly relative concept, and the only sensible way of gauging the extent of tolerance in a given society or culture in a given age is to compare it with that prevailing in other societies and cultures in the same period. Judged by this criterion, "Spanish Islamic tolerance" turns

out to be much less of a myth than Lewis would have us believe, and the fact that contemporary Muslim scholars and “historians” now use it for their own doubtful purposes should not affect our balanced judgment. As an illustration of the abuses of historiography in our own time, Lewis cites an example from the work of a Muslim scholar, a Pakistani, which he calls “the ultimate in absurdity.” And, indeed, it turns out to be quite absurd; all we learn from it, however, is that the only plausible conclusion one could draw from the whole debate is that, while Jewish life in Muslim Spain—and under Islam generally—was not exactly the idyllic paradise some would want us to believe, it was far from the veritable hell that was the Jews’ consistent lot under Christendom.

Another, and final, conclusion concerns history and the uses to which history sometimes is put. Lewis remarks, wisely enough, that Ranke’s famous injunction to historians to write history “like it really was” is neither as simple nor as easy as it sounds. “What happened, what we recall, what we recover, what we relate,” he explains, “are often sadly different, and the answers to our questions may be both difficult to seek and painful to find. The temptation is often overwhelmingly strong to tell it, not as it really was, but as we would wish it to have been.”⁶⁹

Precisely! This being the case, however, those Muslim Arabs—historians and laymen alike—who today harp on their people’s tolerant treatment of the Jews who came under their rule in the past, as well as those who make the rather novel claim that, being Semites themselves, the Arabs cannot be accused of anti-Semitic sentiments, cannot and should not be randomly contradicted, if only because their particular version of Muslim-Jewish relations in the past contains the makings of a self-fulfilling prophecy. To impede such a beneficial process is plainly in no one’s interest. Moreover, considering the admittedly insurmountable difficulty of telling it “like it really was,” it is obvious that such a course is not likely to serve even the academic cause of pursuing historical truth.

William I. Thomas, one of the pioneers of American sociology, laid it down that if people “define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” Paraphrasing this famous theorem, one could say about history and historiography that if a group or a people chooses to interpret its history in a certain manner, the result most likely would be that members of that group or people would behave in a manner consistent with that interpretation. And it is really of very little practical significance whether this interpretation is based on history vaguely remembered, rewritten, recovered, distorted, invented, or—unlikeliest of all—“as it really was.”

Jews and Arabs

The Cultural Heritage

Someone said: "The dead writers are remote from us because we *know* so much more than they did." Precisely, and they are that which we know.

T. S. ELIOT

Encounters and intercultural influences between Jews and Arabs date back to pre-Islamic times, but it was in the Middle Ages that the meeting between Jews and Muslim Arabs took place that was to produce the most interesting, fruitful, and durable results. In Spain, where Jews had lived for centuries, their lot had been unhappy; the Christian Visigothic kings were harsh and merciless. When the Muslims came to the Iberian Peninsula early in the eighth century, not only did they bring the Jews of Spain relief from their oppressors but—in the words of Isidore Epstein—"also encouraged among them a culture which in richness and depth is comparable to the best produced by any people at any time."¹

The majority of the Jewish people at that time came under Arab rule, and the long and brilliant period of Arab-Jewish symbiosis began—a period that has been described as the most flourishing in Jewish history, and whose significance for the Jews and for Judaism to this day cannot be exaggerated. In his book *Judaism and Islam*, the Cambridge historian and Orientalist Erwin Rosenthal states, "the Talmudic age apart, there is perhaps no more formative or positive period in our long and chequered history than that under the empire of Islam from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean."²

This chapter is devoted to an overall survey of some aspects of this transformation—the growth and scope of Judeo-Arabic, Jewish philosophy, and Jewish literary output; the ways in which these were influenced and some-

times shaped by the surrounding Muslim-Arab cultural renaissance; and the works of Maimonides as reflected in contemporary Arabic works on philosophy and theology.

A Formative Period

During the four centuries in which Arab invaders ruled Spain, their cultural, artistic, and commercial activities turned the country into by far the most enlightened in Europe. Jewish and general history books speak with awe about Cordova, the capital of the Umayyad caliphs, which became a magnificent seat of culture, with lakes and parks, glittering palaces and mosques.

But the splendor was not all material. The court attracted and lavishly patronized poets and philosophers, literary figures, and scientists. The Jews responded wholeheartedly, throwing themselves and their talents eagerly into the general culture and drawing from it inspiration to revive their own language and culture. Thus the flickering light of Jewish culture in the East was rekindled in the West. And when the great Babylonian center finally crumbled, Jewish cultural hegemony passed on to the Jews of Muslim Spain, to be maintained and nurtured by them for half a millennium.

The late Eliyahu Ashtor—a leading expert on the subject and author of the three-volume history, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*—notes that in the eleventh century, scholars who were steeped in Jewish lore and familiar with all areas of Jewish literature “lived in every Jewish community on the Iberian Peninsula.” Throughout the entire first half of that century, he adds, “the leaders and rabbis of the Spanish Jewish communities maintained close contacts with the Near Eastern academies—particularly with the eminent heads of the Talmud schools in Iraq,” sending contributions to them and seeking guidance from them in legal and religious matters. During the second half of the eleventh century, when the level of scholarship at the Babylonian academies began to show clear signs of decline, Jewish scholars in Muslim Spain were already attaining high degrees of learning.³

Works produced by Jewish writers in Muslim Spain at this stage, Ashtor states, demonstrate to how large a degree the Jewish intellectuals were rooted in Arabic culture. “The profound influence of Arabic literature,” he adds, “is conspicuous in the ennobled type of Jew found in many of their works who is both loyal to the heritage of his forebears and permeated with the general culture.”⁴

In fields other than literature, the degree of interaction and mutual influence was even greater. “Within the area of the exact sciences,” Ashtor

writes, “the contact between Jewish and Arabic scholars developed into collaboration.” Treatises by Jewish scholars on the natural sciences all derived from the classical works of the Arabs. “The calculation of the ‘cycles’ in the Jewish calendar drawn by Hasan b. Mar Hasan, the Jewish astronomer from Cordova, was made in accordance with the system of the renowned Arab astronomer al-Battani. In the eleventh century, quite a number of Jewish intellectuals from Spain were astronomers, and all of them depended upon the tables and studies of the Arabs.”⁵

Another example Ashtor cites of interaction in the cultural sphere is the study of Hebrew grammar, in which Jewish intellectuals in Muslim Spain showed great interest. “Just as the Arabs ascribed much importance to a perfect knowledge of their language, including all its rules and principles, and just as they would discuss its problems at their gatherings, so did the Jewish intellectuals concern themselves seriously with the structure of the language of the Bible.” They discussed questions of Hebrew grammar and philological interpretations of biblical verses, and any innovations that some Arab philologist brought forth prompted them to do the same for their own language.

Jewish intellectuals interested in questions of philosophy and who devoted themselves to philosophical meditation also abounded in the communities of eleventh-century Spain. “They too followed in the footsteps of the Arabs—poring over books available to Arab philosophers and discussing the problems that engaged them.” According to one tradition Ashtor cites, the prominent Jewish leader and benefactor Samuel the Nagid, who was also a poet, inquired of the Gaon Rabbi Hai of Iraq whether it was permissible and worthwhile to engage in philosophy. According to this story, the Rabbi’s response was negative. Whether this story is authentic or only apocryphal, Ashtor asserts that many of the Jewish intellectuals in the cities of Spain in that period were influenced by philosophical views, and this provoked against them the wrath of the fundamentalists. “Some of these intellectuals freely professed religious scepticism,” Ashtor reports, “whereas others attempted to strike a compromise between the conclusions of the philosophers and religious belief, which is based on belief in divine revelation.” Here, too, the influence of their Arab neighbors and fellow intellectuals was evident.

Ashtor writes, referring to this group of Jewish intellectuals and philosophy students, whose members sought to reconcile reason and faith: “It was the ideal of the latter group to reconcile Arabo-Spanish science with Judaism, by basing Jewish thought on the systems of the philosophers and the cultural creations of the Jews on the principles of Arabic writers and schol-

ars. In short, they sought to develop a Jewish culture that would dovetail with the great syncretic Arabic culture.” In carrying over ideas, concepts, and points of view from the world of Arabic thought to Jewish literature, these intellectuals “succeeded for the most part in choosing those conceptual elements that harmonized with the Jewish spirit—consequently retaining their spiritual identity and producing works of distinction.”⁶

According to Ashtor, however, the influence of Arab culture on the intellectual life of the Jews in Muslim Spain expressed itself primarily in the development of Hebrew poetry, whose level “mounted ever higher from one generation to another until it scaled the very heights of artistic creativity.” As it was for the Arabs, so too did poetry become for the Jews the most beautiful means of expression in all things relating to etiquette and personal sentiments. “Even a rabbinical scholar who wrote his colleague a letter would append some verse composed by him or would intersperse rhymes throughout the letter.” Apart from their aesthetic and sentimental value, the poems composed by the Jews of Muslim Spain also filled an important role in the social consciousness of the upper strata of the Jewish society, as “they demonstrated that Hebrew was no less eminent than other languages and that it could also be employed to express the sentiments and desires of the people of that era.”⁷

Ashtor’s conclusions and estimates are shared by all the Jewish historians and scholars who have written about the subject. In *Jewish History: An Essay in the Philosophy of History*, Simon Dubnow depicts this period of Jewish history in glowing terms. The five centuries starting with the rise of Arabic-Jewish civilization in Spain and ending with the banishment of the Jews, Dubnow writes, ended the monotony, isolation, and exclusiveness formerly prevailing in Jewish national life, both in its external and internal relations. For the first time, he explains, a considerable portion of the Jewish people “enjoyed the possibility of thinking.” The eleventh and twelfth centuries marked “the meridian on the intellectual development of Medieval Judaism. . . . The amalgamation, on Spanish soil, of Jewish culture with Arabic culture bore rich intellectual results, more lasting and fruitful than the union of Jewish and Hellenic cultures in Alexandria.”⁸

Nor did this “amalgamation” or symbiosis carry with it any danger of what today we call assimilation. The Jews of Muslim Spain, with the help of Jewish scholars hailing from the famous Iraqi academies, adopted the language of the Muslim conquerors and with it, inevitably, many of their patterns of thought and ideas. Nevertheless, as Rosenthal points out, “despite all assimilation to Muslim ways of thought, the Jews under Islam maintained, even enriched, their distinctive character as Jews with a vigour

and determination hitherto unknown.”⁹ Dubnow reaches the same conclusions. “The Jews,” he writes, “entered all sorts of careers: by the side of influential and cultivated statesmen such as Hasdai ibn Shaprut and Samuel Hanagid stood a brilliant group of grammarians, poets and philosophers, like Yonah ibn Ganach, Solomon ibn Gabirol and Moses ben Ezra. The philosophic-critical scepticism of Abraham ben Ezra coexisted in peace and harmony with the philosophic-poetic enthusiasm of Judah Halevi.” The study of medicine, mathematics, and astronomy, too, went hand in hand with the study of the Talmud. “Unusual breadth and fullness of the spiritual life is the distinction of the epoch.”¹⁰

In this unprecedentedly congenial environment, the Jews of Muslim Spain—like the Babylonian Jews before them—were able to embark on a great enterprise: namely, to define and describe Judaism with a clarity and force previously unknown in the history of the Jewish people. As Rosenthal has put it, “The basic tenets of Judaism, its formative concepts and ideas, were combined into a system intended to sustain the Jews, to demonstrate their distinctiveness, to secure survival and instill hope and the expectancy of redemption. The form of this exposition was largely borrowed from Muslim theology and religious philosophy. Even the newly-developing codification of the *Halachah* and the *Responsa* literature of the Geonim owe their form to Muslim patterns.”¹¹

“Sephardic Mystique”?

The fractious and durable nature of the Jewish-Muslim encounter in Spain, the lands of North Africa, Egypt, and the lands of the Arab East has been attested to by contemporary as well as nineteenth-century Jewish scholars and Orientalists. Hava Lazarus-Yafe has made the significant point that the integrative, symbiotic encounter between Jews and Muslims is not quite unique in Jewish history; the same kind of process took place in other encounters that Jews have had with non-Jews in other periods and other places. She was, of course, referring mainly to the long and fruitful encounter between Jewry and the civilization and culture of the West, in Central and Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century and in North America in our own day.

However, in the concluding remarks to the same lecture (“On the Character of Judeo-Arabic Culture,” delivered in 1973) Lazarus-Yafe asserts: “Judeo-Arabic culture should not be approached as though it comprised only Jewish works written in Arabic; these should be viewed as the fruit of an integral Jewish-Islamic culture produced by Jews who lived in the shade of Islam, spoke Arabic, and were influenced deeply not merely by this or

that field of Islamic culture—such as Islamic philosophy—but by Islam as a faith, with all that the term connotes in its broadest sense. Only in this way can we come to know and understand our rich literature which was produced during that period.”¹²

One more point is worth stressing here: The “amalgamation,” symbiosis, collaboration and interaction of which Dubnow, Rosenthal and Ashtor speak were by no means confined to intellectual and literary pursuits. Ashtor relates, quoting contemporary sources, that the Jews of Cordova actively participated in the long struggle for dominance between the ruling factions of Muslims, which took place in the middle of the eleventh century. “During that period,” he adds, “the Jews in the Spanish states believed that they had a share in Spain’s destiny. They did not regard themselves as wayfarers or aliens and therefore took part in all the conflicts and intrigues among the rulers and the various factions. In the eleventh century the Jewish community of Cordova was one of the most important in Andalusia. The Jews were deeply and actively involved in the affairs of the city, as were their brethren in other cities of Muslim Spain.”¹³

It is worth noting here, however, that in recent years some have subjected this version of the Jewish-Muslim cultural symbiosis in Muslim Spain to critical scrutiny, with one of the “revisionists” speaking of what he termed “the Sephardic mystique.” In a paper titled “Medieval Jewish Studies: Toward an Anthropological History of the Jews,” Ivan Marcus writes regretfully of what he perceives as a shift in American Jewish studies, which is “fostering renewed interest in things medieval, a hunger for premodern roots and values partly channelled into academic pursuits.” The Jewish academic world, Marcus adds, has not been immune to these trends. In Jewish scholarship since the early nineteenth-century beginnings of *judische Wissenschaft*, he reminds his listeners, medieval Jewish studies have taken primacy of place.

“This preference for what I have referred to as the Sephardic Mystique,” Marcus adds, “has colored Jewish culture and medieval Jewish scholarship to this day. It is reflected, for example, in the extraordinary number of conferences held to mark the 850th anniversary of the traditional birth date of the avatar of the Sephardic mystique—Maimonides; and it will be even more noticeable in the conferences, volumes, and exhibitions that are being planned to mark the year 1992, the five hundredth anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Christian Spain.”

“Granted,” Marcus goes on to argue, “that Maimonides and medieval Spanish Jewry were of extraordinary historical importance, the degree of their present cultural significance says as much about those who celebrate

it as it does about the past. Clearly the Sephardic Mystique is alive and well and is meeting contemporary needs for collective celebration and identification with the Spanish-Jewish past, real and imagined.”¹⁴

To this central theme in Marcus’s argument, Hava Tirosh-Rothschild sought first to expound her notion of the Sephardic Mystique, which she said stood for three different, though related, phenomena:

1. An exaggerated preoccupation of Jewish scholars with Sephardic Jewry at the expense of Ashkenazic Jewry.
2. A mistaken periodization of Jewish history in which the expulsion from Spain looms large as a major turning point in Jewish history.
3. A fascination with the rationalist and secularist sensibilities of the Sephardic courtier class resulting from its high degree of acculturation in Muslim society.

“All three components of the Sephardic Mystique,” according to Tirosh-Rothschild’s reading of it, “reflect a pro-Sephardic bias among Jewish historians, inadvertently revealing overt assimilationist and reformist tendencies. The preoccupation with Sephardic Jewry is alleged to have created a myth of a golden age that never was, and a misconception of medieval Jewry as a monolithic and unanimously traditional society.”¹⁵

Tirosh-Rothschild’s response to these reservations can only be summarized briefly here. First, she argues, the preoccupation with Sephardic Jewry has been occasioned by the simple fact that from the seventh to the twelfth century the bulk of world Jewry resided in the geographic area from Baghdad to Cordova, “and that this Jewry had benefitted from the material advances and cultural creativity of Muslim civilization.” Second, this scholarly preoccupation with Sephardic Jewry resulted partly from the discovery of the Cairo Geniza, an event that has revolutionized medieval Jewish studies. A third objective factor that might have contributed to scholarly interest in Oriental Jewry is “the rise of Israel as a leading center in medieval Jewish studies.”¹⁶

In Israel, too, there has been an immense surge of studies devoted to the land of Israel, in whose study philology, economic history, political history, art history, demography and archeology are integrated “for the express purpose of reconstructing the vibrant Jewish Land of Israel.”

To the extent, then, that there is a mystique in modern scholarship of the Jewish Middle Ages, “it is not Sephardic but Zionist, a focus on the centrality of the Land of Israel in the national history of the Jews.” “To the best of my knowledge,” Tirosh-Rothschild concludes, “there has not been a pro-

Sephardic bias among Israeli scholars of medieval Jewry. . . . I suggest that perhaps the Zionist outlook underlies the periodization of Jewish history in which the Expulsion from Spain marks the end of the Middle Ages. This periodization has been given an almost canonical status by [Gershom] Scholem's reconstruction of Jewish history. I concur with Marcus's probing analysis of Scholem's reconstruction and its impact on younger generations of Jewish historians, but I fail to see it as a Sephardic Mystique."¹⁷

Muslim Bible Criticism

How mutual were these Muslim-Jewish influences? What, for example, did Muslim theologians and historians know about the Old Testament other than the rather fragmentary accounts given in the Koran? In other words, did these Muslim scholars engage in what has come to be known as "Bible criticism"?

In its broadest sense, biblical criticism as we know it today is the process of applying to the books and texts of the Jewish Bible certain techniques generally used in examining many kinds of literary writings, in an attempt to establish such aspects of them as their original wording, the manner and date of their composition, their sources, authorship, revisions of their texts, and a number of others.

This endeavor in all its forms is generally associated with nineteenth-century Christian students of the Old Testament (principally Wellhausen and Graf). However, Hava Lazarus-Yafe in her book *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* shows that Muslim medieval authors developed "a kind of Bible criticism very close in nature and detail both to earlier pre-Islamic Bible criticism and to the beginnings of later scholarly European Bible criticism." She also shows how these Muslim writings on the Bible, and the use their authors made of biblical texts, may have influenced early Western critical Bible studies.¹⁸

The attitude of Muslim authors to the Old Testament and to its study differed markedly from those of medieval Christian authors, who "concentrated mainly on the typological interpretation of the commonly shared divine text of the Bible." Meanwhile, their Muslim contemporaries "put the Biblical text itself, and its ways of transmission, to polemical scrutiny, believing that it had been falsified or tampered with." It was thus that an "almost scholarly" Muslim critical study of the Old Testament, as well as of the New Testament, came about.

In these "almost scholarly" critical studies, Muslim authors used four somewhat contradictory and overlapping arguments—falsification (*tah-rif*), abrogation (*naskh*), lack of reliable transmission (*tawatur*), and Bible

exegesis. Only three of these four arguments are based directly on charges made in the Koran, while the most scholarly one—the lack of *tawatur*—has no clear Koranic basis. This is not to say that the three Koran-based arguments were not enlarged upon and elaborated by later Muslim authors; they were—especially by the Spaniard ibn Hazm (d. 1064) and the Jewish convert to Islam Samau'al al-Maghribi (d. 1175).¹⁹

The charge of falsification is set forth by ibn Hazm in three main arguments. They are:

- *Chronological and geographical inaccuracies:* Ibn Hazm sets out to prove that not all of the four streams that come out of Eden (Genesis 2) could have branched off from the same river in Eden and that their routes and the details about the lands they encompass are inaccurate. Also, the number of years the text allots to early biblical personalities cannot be reconciled with one another and with the chronology of other biblical events, such as the flood.
- *Theological impossibilities:* Citing such verses from the Bible as “We shall make mankind in our image, similar to us” and “Man has become like one of us—in the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 7:26, 3:22), ibn Hazm expresses horror and calls them “Jewish lies.” It is as if, he adds, there were many gods with God, and as if man could become one of them.
- *Preposterous behavior:* Ibn Hazm confessed his complete inability to understand how anyone could believe the stories of fornication and whoredom inserted into the most important genealogies of the Bible; these stories, he believed, cast shadows on the moral behavior of Israelite prophets and kings and their forebears and showed obvious disrespect for what should have been their distinguished pedigree. He expresses his horror at the story of Lot; mentions Abraham’s marriage to his half-sister Sara; cites Jacob’s sleeping with Leah, mistaking her for her sister Rachel and thus begetting their sons in sin; and a number of other similar cases of “preposterous behavior.”²⁰

One more point about Muslim Bible exegesis is worth mentioning here. Like the Christians before them (and probably under the influence of Christian converts), Muslim polemicists against the Bible make use of the text as a prophecy of the coming of Muhammad and the rise of Islam. However, as Lazarus-Yafe adds, this never became as important to Islam as

the typological and allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament was for Christians.

One of the problems medieval Muslim polemicists and interpreters encountered—and which inevitably has made the study of Muslim Bible criticism especially difficult—is the unavailability of or the lack of access to any kind of authoritative Arabic translation of the texts. This was why, rather than perusing and comparing different translations of the Bible, Muslim authors of the time consulted Jews and Christians orally “and received different ad hoc translations of specific verses, even from the same person.”²¹

Judeo-Arabic: Origins, Influence on Hebrew

Although no Jewish literary or philosophical works in Arabic written prior to the ninth century have been preserved, it is almost certain that many urban Jewish populations spoke Arabic as far back as the seventh century—that is, as soon as they came under Islam’s rule following the great Arab conquests. By the tenth and eleventh centuries, Arabic became the language of Jewish writers throughout the Muslim-Arab empire extending from Spain to Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. In his fascinating introduction to the translation of Bahya ibn Paquda’s *Duties of the Heart*, Judah ibn Tibbon, the doyen of Hebrew translators from Arabic, asserts that most of the Geonim under Islam in Babylonia, Palestine, and Persia spoke Arabic. “Most of the commentaries they wrote on the Bible, the Mishnah and the Talmud,” he reported, “they wrote in Arabic, as they did with other works, as well as with their *responsa*, for all the people understood the language.”²²

The readiness of the Jews under Arabic Islam to adopt Arabic as the language of their prose writings has led many modern scholars to wonder how Hebrew and Aramaic were so rapidly superseded by Arabic even in works dealing with the most sacred matters of Judaism—why, for example, Maimonides wrote most of his theological works in Arabic: *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* (The book of prescriptions), *Hakdamot la-Mishnah* (Introductions to the Mishnah), *Shemonah Perakim* (Eight chapters), among others. Joshua Blau, the author of an erudite study on Judeo-Arabic, touches on this subject in passing, concluding (as Abraham Halkin has also demonstrated) that two factors were at work here in addition to the author’s desire to reach the widest possible audience. These were: (1) the inadequacy of Hebrew as a vehicle for religiophilosophical and other sci-

entific writings and (2) the fact that the Jews considered Arabic to be their genuine and natural language, and consequently nothing seemed to them to be more natural and effortless than to employ it in their religious and other writings.

Origins and Background

What sort of language was Judeo-Arabic, and where did it originate? There are no conclusive data as to the origins of Judeo-Arabic literature. According to both Zunz and Steinschneider, two eminent students of Judeo-Arabic culture, this literature originated in Babylonia, spread to Palestine and Syria, and eventually encompassed the other countries of the Arab-Muslim empire—Egypt, North Africa, and Spain. Joshua Blau devotes the first chapter of *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judeo-Arabic* to the origins and characteristics of “Middle Arabic,” which he maintains is the linguistic result of the great Arab conquests of the seventh century. This Middle Arabic, he suggests, constitutes the missing link between classical and modern Arabic dialects. Yet he himself admits that “were it not for extra-linguistic considerations, we might forgo the term ‘Middle Arabic’ and speak only of Modern Arabic, perhaps designating the period after the Arab conquests as the older epoch of Modern Arabic.”

Blau asserts, nevertheless, that Middle Arabic and Modern Arabic have quite a different cultural significance. “Middle Arabic,” he explains, “is usually transmitted in literary texts, mingled, as a rule, with classical elements and often very important culturally, whereas Modern Arabic, as a rule culturally inferior, has not produced literature in the true sense of the word.” Blau here seems to be speaking of Modern Arabic vernaculars, as contrasted with written Middle Arabic. Yet there is a written Modern Arabic which has produced “literature in the true sense of the word,” whether culturally “important” or “inferior.”²³

The truth, however, is that written Modern Arabic is hardly distinguishable from written Middle Arabic in any significant sense, while both still attest to a remarkable continuity with classical Arabic. This continuity is, of course, attributable almost solely to the enduring influence of the Koran, the Muslims’ holy book. It is perhaps worth noting here that such continuity is not encountered in any other language spoken today, with the significant exception of Hebrew, which has also been preserved almost intact thanks to its being the language of the Jewish Scriptures.

This point has considerable bearing on the nature and style of Judeo-Arabic. While, originally, the Jewish-Arabic authors aimed at writing in classical Arabic, “it was deficiency in mastering classical Arabic that gave

rise to a Judeo-Arabic literature teeming with Middle Arabic elements,” according to Blau. However, this does not seem to be borne out by the style and syntax of Judeo-Arabic as it has been preserved in the works of Jewish-Arabic authors from Saadia Gaon (892–942) to Maimonides. These works were written in neither classical nor Middle Arabic, but simply in the Arabic that all Arabic-writing authors used at the time, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. This point is indirectly confirmed by Blau in a footnote, where he writes that his statement concerning the Jewish-Arabic authors’ deficiency in mastering classical Arabic “applies to Christian and even to Muslim Middle Arabic as well.”²⁴

One cannot help wondering, therefore, why Blau speaks of “three main types” of Judeo-Arabic: “some kind of classical Arabic with Middle Arabic admixture,” “semi-classical Middle Arabic,” and “some kind of ‘classitized’ Middle Arabic.” He states that what he terms “some kind of classical Arabic with Middle Arabic admixture” was “chiefly used, it seems, whenever the Jews were addressing a public which included non-Jews, but often also for works intended for the Jewish community only, and even in purely religious texts.” Citing Maimonides’ works as illustration, Blau explains that the scholar employed a language categorized as “classical Arabic with Middle Arabic admixture.” Maimonides used this language, Blau explains, “not only in his medical writings, designed for the general public, but also in his comprehensive philosophical work, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, addressed to a narrow circle from which Muslims were originally excluded, and in his commentary on the Mishnah, a work restricted, owing to its contents, to the Jewish community.” This, of course, tends to undermine the basis on which Blau builds his fine distinctions between three types of Judeo-Arabic, each presumably addressed to a specific public or serving a specific purpose.²⁵

All this, however, does not imply that a specific Judeo-Arabic language did not exist. What it suggests is that we must look for that language’s distinguishing characteristics mainly outside the purely linguistic sphere. Later in his treatise, Blau does this to advantage. He contends that three characteristics of the Middle Arabic of the Jews entitle us to speak of a separate Judeo-Arabic language clearly distinct from all other forms of Middle Arabic. These are:

1. The Jewish flavor of the topics dealt with.
2. The almost universal presence of Hebrew elements.
3. The employment of the Hebrew script.

In addition, there are indications that the writers of Judeo-Arabic them-

selves felt that they were writing in a separate language. Blau suggests that, although it probably originated in the writers' inability to master classical Arabic and its complex grammar, Judeo-Arabic came to be regarded in the course of time as a literary language in its own right, "employed even by authors who were themselves competent to some degree in classical Arabic." Thus, we come to the conclusion that even though Judeo-Arabic was not in itself very different from the Middle Arabic of Muslims and Christians, "the writings of Jewish authors addressing a Jewish audience must be accorded the status of a language."²⁶

To sum up, the Arabic that the Jews of the Muslim-Arab empire in the Middle Ages wrote, and which they used in all their varied intellectual pursuits, was the same Middle Arabic used by their Muslim and Christian colleagues. It was, as Goitein points out, "Arabic as developed in the post-classical period." The deviations from the ancient models of Arabic style found in Judeo-Arabic literature were, thus, "not due to a specific Jewish idiom, but to the stage of development reached in the latter Middle Ages, a change more conspicuous in Jewish literature because the Jewish writers who used Hebrew characters felt themselves less bound by the classical models than the Muslims."²⁷

It is difficult to establish precisely when Arabic became the language of the majority of the Jewish people then living in the various lands of the Muslim-Arab empire. According to Goitein, the process was completed by the year 1000, but this did not, however, affect the status of Hebrew as a second and literary language. In fact, the most remarkable aspect of the Jews' adoption of Arabic and their integration into Muslim-Arabic culture was that the almost universal use of Arabic not only failed to affect adversely the position of Hebrew, but actually served to revive and enrich it and, to a considerable extent, make it what it is today. The Jewish-Arab symbiosis in its linguistic aspect led to an unprecedented revival of the Hebrew language in all branches of language study.

Influence on Hebrew

The implications of the acquisition by Jews of Arabic as the language of their writings in almost all fields of intellectual and literary activity were far-reaching, and its impact was lasting. Adopting Arabic at a time when the Arabs had already developed a national literature and a comprehensive religious terminology, it was inevitable that the Jews should acquire, together with the language, Arab ways of thinking, Arabic literary forms, and even Muslim religious notions. In the words of Professor Goitein, "Arabic was used by Jews for all kinds of literary activities, not only for

scientific and other secular purposes but for expounding and translating the Bible or the Mishnah, for theological and philosophical treatises, for discussing Jewish law and ritual, and also for the study of Hebrew grammar and lexicography,” all of which was to influence profoundly their habits of thought and world outlook.²⁸

In connection with this last field of intellectual endeavor, it is worth pointing to one particularly curious aspect of Jewish cultural history. Prior to their encounter with Muslim-Arab culture, the Jews somewhat inexplicably failed to develop a system of Hebrew grammar and lexicography, even when conditions for such a creative effort seemed ideal—for example, in the time of the Mishnah, when the nucleus of the Jewish people was still firmly rooted in its native soil. “Why,” Goitein asks, “did the Jews wait for the Arabs to give them the impetus to study their own language”—especially considering the Jews’ innate proficiency in this field and the fine work subsequently done by medieval Jewish philologists?

The explanation resides, in large part, in the fact of the encounter with the Arabs itself. That encounter with a people whose devotion to their language is proverbial “directed the Jewish mind to a field of activity for which, as it was subsequently proved, it was particularly gifted, and which bore its mature first fruits to the benefit of the national language of the Jewish people itself.”²⁹ As Rosenthal observes, “without the existence of a well-developed science of the Arabic language which largely arose in connection with the exegesis of the Koran, Hebrew linguistics could hardly have been cultivated.” In terminology and arrangement, in the treatment of problems, and in the solution of difficulties, he points out, “the Jews were dependent on Arab grammarians.”³⁰

It is generally assumed that this revival of the Hebrew language started with the extremely interesting history of the translation of the Jewish Bible into Arabic. Originally, according to Goitein, the reason for this activity “was not so much that Hebrew was no longer understood”; rather, it was an endeavor “to provide by these translations—which had the character of explanatory free renderings—an authoritative interpretation of the text, in particular in theological matters.” This is why the most famous of the classical translations, which superseded all the others in popular usage—that of Saadia Gaon—was called by him *Tafsir* (Commentary). The study of the Jewish Bible also led to the study of its language in general. “Writing in Arabic and using Arabic methods and terminology, Jewish scholars assiduously explored and described the Hebrew of the Bible and soon also that of the Mishnah or post-Biblical Hebrew. For the first time Hebrew pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary were scientifically treated and, so to

speak, brought under control. Thus Hebrew became a disciplined and well-organized means of expression under the influence of Arabic.”³¹

There is no doubt that this revival of Hebrew under the influence of Arabic—and during the peak of Arabic’s hegemony—can be attributed to the obvious affinity between the two languages. As Goitein points out, it was then a commonplace among both Jewish and Arab scholars that Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic were basically one and the same language. To be sure, many Jews felt that it was no honor for Hebrew to be treated as part of the same family as Arabic and Aramaic, but the more sober-minded scholars were in agreement on this point. Maimonides believed unqualifiedly that Arabic “is certainly Hebrew somewhat corrupted,” as he wrote in a letter to his translator, Samuel ibn Tibbon. Elsewhere he asserts that for anyone who knows both languages, Hebrew and Arabic “are undoubtedly one language, while Aramaic is somewhat akin to them.” Judah Halevi, in *The Book of the Kuzari*, also speaks of Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic as related and similar languages and suggests that Abraham’s mother tongue was Aramaic—adding, however, that Abraham knew Hebrew as a sacred language.³²

It was perhaps in the field of translation that Hebrew was most visibly enriched, and benefited the most, through its symbiotic encounter with Arabic. It already has been mentioned that Arabic was a far richer and more advanced instrument for philosophical and scientific writing than Hebrew. In an instructive introduction to his translation of ibn Paquda’s *Duties of the Heart*, Judah ibn Tibbon writes candidly and at length on the subject of Arabic and Hebrew in general, and on the problems of translating Arabic works into Hebrew in particular.

Explaining why the Geonim in Babylonia and in Islamic lands wrote in Arabic, he adds: “They did it because it was the language people understood, and also because it is an adequate and rich language for every subject and for every need, for every speaker and every author; its expression is direct, lucid and capable of saying just what is wanted much better than can be done in Hebrew, of which we possess only what has been preserved in Scripture and which is insufficient for the needs of a speaker. It is simply impossible to express the thoughts of our hearts succinctly and adequately in Hebrew, as we can in Arabic—which is adequate, elegant and available to those who know it.”³³

Judah ibn Tibbon was not alone in stressing this point. In their respective Hebrew translations of Maimonides’ *Guide*, both Samuel ibn Tibbon and Judah al-Harizi supply glossaries of “foreign words” used in their Hebrew renderings. The former explained that he was compelled to do so

because Hebrew was limited and because works on demonstrated sciences do not exist among the Jews, “so those foreign words employed by peoples who possess those particular sciences are not found in our language.”

Even a superficial perusal of the words included in these two glossaries would show the extent to which Hebrew was enriched by those translations. Today it may sound incredible, but the glossary of “foreign words” appended by al-Harizi includes such now-common Hebrew words as *eikhut* (quality), *efshar* (possible), *amiti* (true), *dibbah* (libel), *ha-regashim* (the senses), *meyuhhad* (unique), *safeq* (doubt), *kaddur* (ball), *kefirah* (heresy), *naggar* (carpenter), and dozens of other words that today’s Hebrew reader would not find “foreign” at all. At the conclusion of his famous commentary on the Song of Songs, Abraham ibn Ezra also deplores the poverty of Hebrew, drawing some consolation, however, from the fact that Hebrew and Arabic “are very akin to each other.”³⁴

Some modern scholars (for example, Abraham Halkin in his paper “The Judeo-Islamic Age”) rightly reject the thesis that the inadequacy of Hebrew was the reason why Jewish writers and philosophers in the Middle Ages preferred Arabic. They point out that Hebrew could, and actually did, do the work of Arabic when the necessity arose—for example, when Arabic works were translated into Hebrew, either contemporaneously or shortly after their authors’ death. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the extensive work of translation from Arabic into Hebrew during the Golden Age of Judeo-Arabic culture contributed greatly toward the creation of modern Hebrew—so much so, indeed, that a whole style of Hebrew writing and syntax has come to be called after the Tibbonides, who undertook the bulk of Hebrew translation in their day.³⁵

An idea of the intellectual fertility that characterized the period of Arab-Jewish cultural interaction during the Middle Ages and its lasting significance for Jewish thought may be gleaned from the fact that, in the mid-1960s, a mass-circulation Israeli daily offered its readers what it called “the treasury of Jewish thought.” This “treasury” included six major works of Jewish philosophy, all written between the years 1050 and 1428 in Spain, and all but one in Arabic. Although it may be somewhat exaggerated to present these works as *the* treasury of Jewish thought, they remain the most representative body of philosophical and speculative work from a period justly considered the most fruitful and creative in Jewry’s long history. The treasury included works by Solomon ibn Gabirol, Bahya ibn Paquda, Judah Halevi, Moses ibn Maimon, and Joseph Albo.³⁶

Only a fleeting impression can be given here of the scope and character of these works in order to indicate the extent of the mutual influences at

work in the creation of the Judeo-Arabic culture of the Middle Ages. During this period of Arab-Jewish symbiosis, Charles Singer explains, “it happened that certain non-Jewish schools of Arabian philosophers had strong affinities with Jewish thought, and deeply affected and were affected by Jewish thinkers. . . . Many Jewish philosophical works were intended not only for Jews but for the larger Arabic-speaking public, and were widely read throughout the Arabic-speaking world.”³⁷ With the exception of Albo’s work, which was written in Hebrew, these remarks apply to all the works included in our “treasury.”

A few words may be in order here about the transfer of the center of Jewish learning from Iraq to Muslim-Arab Spain. The story is told that during the reign of the Umayyad Caliph Abdel Rahman III in Cordova (912–961), a vessel from the East was seized by the caliph’s admiral. The ship, which was headed for Spain, carried among others a Babylonian Jewish family of three—Moses ibn Enoch, his wife, and their young son. Fearing dishonor, the mother threw herself into the sea, while the boy and his father were taken captive and brought to Cordova, where they were ransomed by the influential Jewish community there.

Moses ibn Enoch, one of the most learned teachers at the famous Babylonian academy of Sura, had been sent on a fund-raising mission to Jewish centers in Spain and North Africa. He came to Spain at an opportune moment; the Western caliphs were eager to see their Jewish subjects become independent of the hegemony of Eastern Jewish learning and to stop sending funds to the lands of their archenemies, the Eastern caliphs. Accordingly, with the help of Hasdai ibn Shaprut, a cultured Jew who was the caliph’s trusted adviser, Moses ibn Enoch was installed as the head of the Talmudic school in Cordova. With his appointment and with the help of Nunash ben Labrat, another Babylonian scholar, Jewish literature and philosophy entered a new era lasting almost five centuries. During this period, Spanish Jewish philosophers, men of letters, and grammarians produced such a rich and varied body of writing that it came to be known as the Golden Age of Jewish literature or culture. It is, thus, no coincidence that all the works included in that “treasury of Jewish thought” should have been written during this period.

Two books on the Judeo-Arabic of the Babylonian Jews and on the Judeo-Arabic literature of the period, published by leading Israeli scholars in the early 1980s, are worth mentioning briefly here. Yehuda Ratzabi’s *Otzar Ha-Lashon Ha-'Ivrit Be-Tafsir Rav Saadia Gaon* (Treasury of Hebrew in the Tafsir of Rabbi Saadia Gaon)³⁸ deals with the great Talmudic scholar’s Arabic rendering of the Torah and a number of books from the

Prophets and the Writings. Saadia, known to the Arabs as Sa'd ibn Yusuf al-Fayyumi, was born in Egypt in 892 (or, according to new evidence, in 882) but lived and worked in Iraq from his early twenties; he died there in 942. Considered to be the first Hebrew grammarian and lexicographer as well as a theologian and philosopher of the first order, Saadia's works include the above-mentioned Arabic translations from the Bible, to all of which he gave the title *Kitab al-Tafsir* (Book of interpretation). In his book, Ratzabi collects and classifies the main Arabic words and terms used in the *Tafsir*, gives their meanings and the Hebrew from which they were rendered, and traces their use in various older texts.

In his introduction, Ratzabi enumerates some of the advantages of this procedure. One of these is that it points out the errors of various editors and printers of the work; another is the historical information it gives about the evolution of the meanings of those terms and words; a third is the help it renders in gauging the proximity of the language used in the translation to classical Arabic. Last but not least, such a study helps us determine the nature of the Arabic spoken by the Jews of the Muslim empire, for whose benefit the *Tafsir* was undertaken.³⁹

Nearly 50 of the 276 pages of texts given in Joshua Blau's *Ha-Sifrut Ha-'Arabit Ha-Yehudit: Perakim Nivharim* (Judeo-Arabic literature: Selected writings)⁴⁰ are allotted to Saadia's works, including generous excerpts from his translation of the book of Genesis. Copiously annotated, and with short introductions to the selections from each of the authors whose works are cited, the volume gives excerpts from the works of the leading Judeo-Arabic writers from a period extending nearly five centuries—Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Qirqisani, Al-Fasi, Yefet ben 'Ali (Abul Hasan 'Ali), Yehuda ibn Qureish, Yona ibn Jinah (Abul Walid Marwan), Abu Ibrahim Ishaq (ibn Barun), Bahya ibn Paquda, Musa ibn Maimun (Maimonides), and others.

Four Jewish Philosophers

In chronological order, ibn Gabirol's two works come first among the great works of Jewish philosophy produced in Muslim Spain. *Mekor Hayyim* (*Fons Vitae* in its Latin version) was written during the first half of the eleventh century in Arabic; but, unlike subsequent works by Spanish-Jewish philosophers and literary figures of the period, it was never translated into Hebrew (though a Hebrew summary was prepared by Shem Tov Falaquera in the thirteenth century). The current Hebrew text is a translation from a Latin translation rendered about a century before Falaquera at the

request of Raymond, Archbishop of Toledo, who was not aware that its author was a Jew, since by this time the author of *Mekor Hayyim* was regarded alternately as a Muslim and as a Christian, and the Christian scholastics of the thirteenth century made him their own and studied his work diligently. Only in the middle of the nineteenth century was *Fons Vitae* (whose author's name had been corrupted into Avencebrol or Avincebron) discovered to be the work of none other than the famous Jewish poet, Solomon ibn Gabirol.

This strange circumstance is indicative of a very significant phenomenon—and will also help us understand why *Fons Vitae*, and ibn Gabirol's philosophy in general, were so neglected by the Jews of his day. It is clear that a work that made it possible for its author to be regarded a Muslim or even a Christian could not have contained many indications of a Jewish background or outlook. In fact, *Mekor Hayyim* does not contain a single biblical verse or Talmudic saying, and its author nowhere in the work tries to reconcile his philosophical views with his religious faith (as Maimonides, for one, was to do later).

The truth seems to be that ibn Gabirol took his religious convictions so much for granted that he did not see any necessity of reconciling them with philosophy. This later led Abraham ibn Daud (author of *Emunah Ramah* [The exulted faith]) to criticize ibn Gabirol for his failure to take a Jewish attitude, accusing him of holding views that were actually dangerous to Judaism. With *Tikkun Middot Hanefesh*, however, ibn Gabirol was far more fortunate with his Jewish colleagues, though the book itself is far less important than *Mekor*. This is because *Tikkun* (whose Arabic title is *Kitab Islah al-Akhlaq*) was a popular book dealing with manners and morals and included numerous quotations from the Bible.⁴¹

Although very little is known about the life of Bahya ibn Paquda, it is fairly certain that his masterpiece, *Hovot Halevavot* (Duties of the heart), was written sometime between 1100 and 1150. Like *Mekor Hayyim*, which preceded it by half a century, it was written in Arabic, as *Kitab al-Hidaya ila Farayidh al-Qulub*. Research has established that many passages in the book are practically identical in content and expression to similar ideas found in the works of the great Muslim philosopher and mystic, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali (1058–1111).

The book's thesis is based on a distinction made by Muslim theologians between ceremony or observance (known as “visible wisdom” and “duties of the limbs”) on one hand, and inward intention, attitude, and feeling (known as “hidden wisdom” and “duties of the heart”) on the other. This

distinction is hinted at in Isaiah's recurring complaint that while the people were diligent in bringing sacrifices, celebrating the festivals and offering prayers, their hands were full of blood (Isa. 1:11–17). Ibn Paquda explains that, while people are very interested in finding out and studying the precepts pertaining to bodily actions (the "visible wisdom") and how they should be observed, they seldom inquire into the manner in which the second category of precepts, those pertaining to the "hidden wisdom" or the duties of the heart, ought to be carried out.

What, he asks, are the precepts of this second division, affecting our thoughts and feelings? For instance, we may mention the precept of believing in the unity of God. Do we really know what it means and what it implies? Or, for another example, the precept of trust in God: Do we fully realize what it means? Or take again the question of carrying out an action with sincerity: Do we take the trouble of analyzing what sincerity means, and have we ever tried to find out how it is possible to do a deed without mingling therein any secondary insincere thoughts? When we speak of the fear of God or the love of God, have we ever thought out what these concepts truly involve?

To such problems Bahya devotes his treatise, and the crowning merit of the work is that he deals with these questions in an orderly and precise manner, so that each thought stands out with the utmost definition and clarity. Thus, readers, after perusing the book a few times, obtain such a clear scale by which to judge their own virtue, or lack of it, and such an unmistakable idea as to where their thoughts and attitudes require improvement, that it is almost impossible to study the work without making at least some spiritual progress.

The book is divided into ten parts, and each part into chapters. Part I deals with various aspects of the unity of God and how this concept may be fixed in our hearts so that all our actions reflect this belief. Part II is devoted to the various facts of nature from which the mind may discern God's purpose in nature and apprehend God's divine goodness, which spreads out its bounty to every living creature.

Part III of *Duties of the Heart* deals with the purpose of prayer and why one should serve God. Part IV deals with hope and trust in God, in what direction one should hope and trust and how one should guard against making hope and trust a pretext for inaction. It is remarkable how human beings, when facing their material problems, in which they should exercise trust in God, are apt to forsake confiding in Him, relying instead on their own exertions. Yet in spiritual matters, comprising just those fields in

which individuals are most certain to benefit by their exertions, they are content to sit back contentedly and justify their inaction by attributing it to a trust in the Almighty.

Part V of Bahya's work is devoted to the purification of motives in all actions. Here the author shows a remarkable knowledge of human psychology and guides the reader through some amazing labyrinths of the human heart. He personifies the resistance of human nature to perfection and calls it the *yetzer* (urge); he then surveys the manifold arguments that the *yetzer* uses to lead human beings astray and prevent them from ever seriously undertaking the great ascent toward spiritual perfection.

In Part VI of his work, Bahya deals with humility and what it consists of and differentiates it from false modesty. In this part, too, he shows a deep insight into human psychology, and we become convinced that human activities are motivated by pride and ambition to such an extent that, if we were to eliminate these motives, psychic energy would be liberated which could then be directed to noble ends. Repentance, or the freeing of the character from the evil influence of past wrong deeds, is dealt with in Part VII.

The last three parts are meant only for the advanced student who had already made considerable progress. Part VIII deals with the keeping of a continuous, conscious account of all one's thoughts and actions. In this part, there is an interesting passage in which Bahya asserts that in spiritual progress individuals may come to a point beyond which their natural abilities refuse to carry them, but, if they continue their efforts, new powers will be vouchsafed to them to ascend even higher. He compares such individuals to a mathematician or geometrician who, faced by an exceedingly difficult problem, suddenly, after repeated efforts, is blessed with a wonderful new vision so transcendent that it is almost similar to the power of prophecy, and this great insight often enables the mathematician to solve what was before definitely beyond his or her ordinary powers. Part IX deals with the conscious, deliberate withdrawal from worldly desires. This leads to the tenth and final part of the work, which deals with the love of God.

In certain ways, *Duties of the Heart* resembles ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae*, especially in its breadth of outlook and liberality of approach. It has been demonstrated, for instance, that among the quotations from sages of other nations and religions which ibn Paquda cites, there are some attributed by Muslims to Jesus and his disciples, to Muhammad and his companions, and to a number of Muslim ascetics and Sufis. Rabbi Solomon David Sassoon, on one of whose lectures the above summary of ibn Paquda's work is based, remarks on the fact that the whole work is "characterized

by an extraordinary maturity of thought, gentleness of spirit, and a deeply logical method of arrangement down to the smallest detail.”

With Judah Halevi's *Kitab al-Hijja wal-Dalil fi Nasr al-Din al-Dhalil* (Book of the Kuzari), we approach a new and novel phase in Jewish religious writing. A poet first and foremost, Halevi makes no secret of his disdain for philosophers, maintaining that Greek wisdom “has no fruits, but only flowers.” His book, a classic defense of Judaism, is in the form of a dialogue between the king of the Khazars, ready to relinquish paganism, and the Jewish teacher whom he summons upon discovering that Christians and Muslims alike base their appeal ultimately on the Jewish Scriptures.

Halevi's was not the kind of intellect whose curiosity was unsatisfied until matters were proved in logical terms. For him, reason—good enough in mathematics and physics—was not adequate in matters related to the truths of Judaism and the nature of God. God and the Jewish people are not simply facts to be known and understood; they are living entities to be known, to be devoted to, to be loved. This knowledge is not open to everyone; it is open only to those who by birth and tradition belong to the family of the prophets, who have a personal knowledge of God, and who belong to the land of Israel, where God revealed Himself.

Despite the fact that Halevi speaks with the voice of a proud Jewish nationalist, however, his antiphilosophical attitude has much in common with that of al-Ghazzali, from whom there is no doubt that he drew his inspiration—as David Kaufman shows in his monumental history of Jewish religious thought. In both Halevi and al-Ghazzali we find, on one hand, open skepticism in respect of the powers of human reason and, on the other, a deep and personally experienced religious sense. But there is one significant difference: Halevi defended a persecuted race and a despised faith not merely against the philosophers but also against the more powerful professors of other religions.

Maimonides, too, found it necessary to defend Judaism against the assaults of rational philosophy, and his book *Guide for the Perplexed* (Dalalat al-Ha'irin in Arabic; Moreh Hanevokhim in Hebrew) stands out as the highest monument to this defense. However, all resemblance between Halevi and Moses ben Maimon ends there. For while the Jew inside of Halevi was to be defended against the philosopher *outside of* him, in Maimonides' case it was the Jew in him who was to be defended against the philosopher *in* him.

A confirmed Aristotelian, Maimonides undertook to find and demonstrate a reason for every precept and commandment of the law (Torah). In

this, he shows himself to be an opponent of all mysticism, sentimentality, and arbitrariness. With him, reason is paramount. The intellect determines the will, and not even God's will may be arbitrary. There is a reason for everything that He wills. We may not in every case succeed in finding a reason where God Himself did not choose to tell us; but a reason there always is, and our endeavor to discover it should be commended rather than condemned. In the theological system that Maimonides so superbly develops in the *Guide*, the age-old process of welding Hellenic wisdom and the Judaic faith—a process begun in Alexandria with Philo, continued in Baghdad by Saadia Gaon, and maintained in Toledo by Abraham ibn Daud—was completed.

Joseph Albo's *Sefer Ha 'Ikkarim* (The book of roots) is little more than a review of the problems that occupied his predecessors—especially Maimonides, from whose writings he benefited greatly. It must be added, however, that philosophy as such was not Albo's forte, nor was it his main interest. It was religion that he investigated. His work, completed in 1428, distinguishes between fundamental dogmas (roots), without which Judaism is unthinkable; derivative beliefs (secondary roots), which follow from fundamental dogmas and a denial of which involves a denial of that in which they are rooted; and, finally, beliefs, which, though obligatory upon the Jews, are merely subsidiary (branches).

It is interesting, and rather revealing, that among these "branches" Albo includes a belief in the Messiah, claiming that it is not central in Judaism. This weakening of emphasis upon the Messianic doctrine (a weakening of which we find no trace in the work of Maimonides) was a concession to Christianity—a concession, it will be noted, the like of which no Jewish thinker under Islam felt called upon to make or to contemplate. Something was taking place in Judaism: For the first time, the Jews were being called upon not merely to justify but to underplay and even revise some aspects of their faith. Judaism's Dark Ages were at hand.

A Literary Transformation

Beginning with the first decades of the ninth century, the bulk of the literary output produced by Jews in the extensive Muslim-Arab empire, including works on religion and ritual, were written in Arabic. But there was one significant exception: Their poetry was generally composed in Hebrew. However, as Goitein has so keenly put it, "the most perfect expression of Jewish-Arab symbiosis is not found in the Arabic literature of the Jews, but

in the Hebrew poetry created in Muslim countries, particularly in Spain.” This applies especially to religious poetry, which Goitein calls “our most precious heritage from Hebrew-Arab Spain.”⁴²

The reasons why Jewish verse, unlike prose, was written in Hebrew are difficult to establish. Abraham Halkin maintains that the tradition established by liturgy, beginning with the Palestinian initiators who never thought of introducing a foreign language into the divine services, undoubtedly played its part in deciding later poets to continue in Hebrew even for their secular compositions. There is, however, another reason which Halkin considers more immediate. “Poetry among the Arabs,” he writes, “served the purpose of displaying the beauties of their language, and they strove to emulate one another in elegance of style and extravagance of metaphor. The finest example of elegance of style was believed by them . . . to exist in the Koran. At this, the Jews balked. Their pride in their own language and in their own Bible not only restrained them from displaying the beauties of Arabic and its master-work (the Koran) but also impelled them to do for Hebrew as their neighbors did for their tongue.”⁴³

To illustrate this sentiment, Halkin cites the interesting case of Judah al-Harizi and his motives for writing *Tahkemoni*. In his introduction to this famous work, al-Harizi writes: “When I saw the work of al-Hariri [an Arab poet from Basra, Iraq, who excelled in a special type of poetic composition known as *maqama*, which al-Harizi emulated in *Tahkemoni*] the heavens of my joy were rolled together and the rivulets of my mourning flowed, because every nation is concerned for its speech and avoids sinning against its tongue, whereas our tongue which was a delight to every eye is considered a brother of Cain. . . . Therefore, I compiled this book in order to display the force of the sacred tongue to the holy people.” In this introduction, al-Harizi further informs us that initially he had translated al-Hariri’s *maqamat* into Hebrew, but then he realized that he had “acted foolishly and sinfully by forsaking our book of eloquence and undertaking to translate a book belonging to others.” Hence, we are told, he applied himself to the task of creating a similar composition in Hebrew. Incidentally, Goitein considers al-Harizi’s rendering of al-Hariri’s *maqamat* into Hebrew to be “the greatest linguistic feat ever performed [in Hebrew].”⁴⁴

Whether or not al-Harizi’s case is typical of the other Judeo-Arab poets of his time, however, the influence of Arabic language and literature on medieval Hebrew poetry remains decisive. True, one can read and respond to the work of such poets as Samuel Hanagid, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Moses ibn Ezra, and Judah Halevi without knowing anything about the Arabic

language; but it is precisely because Arabic influences on these poets and their work is so subtle, and their absorption in Arab-Muslim culture so complete, that these influences appear all the more significant and vital.

However, there were apparent as well as subtle influences. Of the former, the most significant was the introduction into Hebrew poetry of nonreligious themes. Jewish literature and thought before the Islamic age were, almost without exception, an uninterrupted flow of sacred writings and their poetic interpretation. There was no place in them for the profane and the secular. Contact with the culture of Arabic Islam changed all of this. In the words of Halkin: "It is a testimony to the profound influence of environment that, beginning with the tenth century, Hebrew poetry and literary prose of a non-religious character underwent an intense development. And it is a further testimony to environment that this new phenomenon caused no surprise or criticism."⁴⁵

The reasons for this literary transformation are not hard to find. Life under Islam, especially in Spain, made new demands on the poets. Many Jews became fond of worldly pleasures; they learned to appreciate the charm of music, the grace of the dance. They participated in drinking bouts, they conversed with women, they joined in literary discussions. They were stimulated by Muslim poets, by their themes, and by their literary forms. "All of these experiences," Halkin writes, "encouraged the development of a secular poetry. It did not replace religious poetry, but grew alongside it. But the standards and characteristics of secular verse influenced liturgical composition."

That these secular influences did not affect their religious beliefs or attitudes is attested to by the fact that nearly all the Jewish poets of Spain wrote religious as well as secular verse. In both, however, the effect of the Islamic environment is clearly discernible. Halkin has analyzed one facet of this influence:

Whereas the Palestinian and Babylonian poets, with their successors in France and Germany, speak mostly anonymously for their people, their counterparts in Spain speak in their own names. The former treat of Israel's plight, hopes, sinfulness, and her pleas for God's mercy, with no desire to assert themselves. . . . In the Spanish poets, on the contrary, the personal note is very much in evidence. They compose religious lyrics which are a direct expression of their feelings toward God and so bear the stamp of a particular religious experience. Even when their themes are the national [Jewish] ones they share with their brethren in Christian lands, their treatment of them is their own. . . . So it is not difficult in the case of an anonymous

liturgical verse to determine whether it is the product of the Islamic or the Christian environment.⁴⁶

It is not within the scope of this brief survey to dwell on the various themes and motifs that the Hebrew poets of Spain borrowed from their Arab-Muslim neighbors. It is noteworthy, however, that the same themes that run through the Arabic models—though not all of them—were taken over by the Hebrew poets. Goitein explains that the Jewish poets' aim was to express in Hebrew "the ideas which were regarded by existing contemporary society as proper for poetical formulation," and he furnishes one highly instructive example. Since the times of the Song of Songs, he points out, the hair of the beloved had always been described as black as a raven, as dark as the night. Though this latter simile is developed by Judah Halevi in one of his beautifully constructed poems, his lady normally has "golden hair" (*tzahov* in Hebrew, which may be red or auburn). Thus, while passionately admiring her glowing cheeks which, so to speak, lent their color to her hair, he sings:

She was like the sun, making red, in her rising,
The clouds of dawn with the flame of her light.

In another poem, Halevi similarly sees the perfection of beauty in that golden hair. Goitein comments:

Now Sephardi girls, i.e., girls from the Jewish community which originated in Spain, often are endowed with particularly lustrous auburn hair. In addition, even in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, Jews were described as having hair of such a color (*subb*, which is the same word as the Hebrew *tzahob* or *sahob*). Thus it is perfectly feasible that Judah Halevi's mistress—if he had one at all—had such coloring. We know, too, that some of Halevi's Arab compatriots also used to attribute to their mistresses that particular charm. Thus it is more than likely that it was the simile of the sun and the golden clouds, rather than a lady with golden hair herself, that enchanted the poet—as well as his audience.⁴⁷

It is also highly instructive, though by no means surprising, that the leading work dealing with the theory of Hebrew poetry, a book by Moses ibn Ezra, was written in Arabic and not in the language with which it deals. An interesting reflection on the widely different outlooks on poetry and its functions held respectively by Jews under Islam and Jews in Christian lands is the fact, noted by Goitein, that while other Judeo-Arabic books dealing with theoretical subjects (the Hebrew language, philosophy, and even as-

tronomy and mathematics) were eagerly sought after by the Jews living in Christian Europe and translated into Hebrew for their benefit, no Hebrew translation of ibn Ezra's *Ars Poetica* is known from the Middle Ages. "What is clear from this example," Goitein comments, "is that Hebrew poetry in Spain was a product of Arab-Muslim civilization."⁴⁸

On the Good Life

This point may need some elaboration. Jews, of course, had always composed verse; but before the onset of Islam and the establishment of the Arab empire, Jewish literature as a whole and Jewish poetry in particular were an uninterrupted flow of sacred writings (the poems being largely interpretations of these writings), and there was no place in them for profane or secular themes. Contact with the culture of Arabic Islam changed all this.

Raymond Scheindlin writes that he wanted his book *Wine, Women, and Death: Medieval Hebrew Poets on the Good Life* to serve "as a reminder that Jews can assimilate the values and styles of the outside world without betraying their historic responsibility to their people, and by doing so may even contribute to the future genuinely Jewish achievements of enduring worth."

One way in which the Jewish poets and writers of Muslim Spain achieved this, Scheindlin suggests, is by synthesizing Arabic literary tradition with their Jewish literary heritage, thus "creating almost overnight a new Hebrew literature that derived many of its concerns, principles, images, and even rhythms from Arabic." In this process, they adapted Hebrew verse to the rhythmic patterns of Arabic, developed a formal rhetorical style for official correspondence, compiled Hebrew dictionaries, pioneered the study of Hebrew grammar, and "bestowed on the Bible, in addition to its traditional role as the source of religious authority, the new role of literary classic."⁴⁹

They also began to write secular poetry. Scheindlin's book contains thirty-one poems grouped into the three categories of the title: wine, which includes poems describing or meditating on wine parties; women, including poems of love and desire; and death, including reflective poems on the brevity of life and kindred themes. There are surprises at every turn. Who, for example, would have thought Judah Halevi capable of such playfulness:

Ofra does her laundry with my tears
And spread it out before her beauty's rays.

With my two eyes she needs no flowing well;
Nor sun needs she: Her face provides the blaze.”⁵⁰

But the surrounding Arabic-Muslim culture was to influence not only the Spanish Hebrew poets’ love and wine poetry and songs but also the liturgical poetry they composed and into which they managed to introduce the various conventions of secular poetry and even the image of the gazelle, frequently used as a simile or epithet for the beloved. One sample, a poem by Moses ibn Ezra, is given here in Scheindlin’s translation:

Why does my lover rage and tyrannize me,
While my heart
Bends like a reed to him?
Has he forgotten how I followed him in lust
Through desert wastes?
But now I call and he is still.
And though he kill me, yet in him I hope,
And though he hide,
I turn my face to him.
The master loves his slave for evermore.
That cannot change,
For how can gold go dim?⁵¹

It has already been suggested that it was the religious poetry of the Spanish Jews which is of universal and permanent value—and it is precisely here that the contribution of Arabic literature and of Muslim-Arab culture was valuable. According to Goitein, “the most important contribution of Arabic literature toward the development of Hebrew religious poetry does not consist in the provision of actual models, or even in the formal elements, but in the spirit which pervaded Islamic civilization as a whole and which enabled the Jews within it to develop an intensive, completely harmonious spiritual life of their own. Muslim philosophy and theology, pietism and mysticism, through their Jewish counterparts, are mirrored in the Hebrew poetry of the Middle Ages.”⁵²

The result was perfect: “The Hebrew poet could draw in full measure from a civilization which was closely akin to his own, while at the same time cherishing a strong transcendental belief in the mission of Israel.”⁵³

Maimonides and His Works

The theological and philosophical works of Moses Maimonides are universally acknowledged as representing the crowning achievement of the great

epoch of Jewish-Arab symbiosis in the Middle Ages. After his death, religious philosophical thinking in general and Jewish philosophy in particular were reduced to something in the nature of a commentary on his work. The *Guide* practically closed the circle of philosophical speculation and reflection. The problems Maimonides posed in this work were taken up again and again by his successors, who like him sought to establish the unity of religion and philosophy, though not always along the same lines. This process, which continued for three centuries, was entirely dominated by Maimonides and his work. According to Professor Julius Guttman, Maimonides' work "not only laid the foundation for subsequent philosophic inquiries, but actually influenced them by its continued vitality and immediate relevance. Discussions of the problems that he raised continued beyond the Middle Ages, sometimes by critical development of his position, at other times by radical opposition to it, but always with reference to him."⁵⁴

Maimonides' influence extended beyond Judaism. The founders of Christian Aristotelianism, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, found that he had shown the way to a system of theistic Aristotelianism, and traces of his influence on Christian philosophy can be followed right into the first centuries of the modern era.⁵⁵

One point about Maimonides' work that deserves particular attention is the extent to which it actually influenced Muslim-Arab thought. According to Goitein, *The Guide for the Perplexed* is a great monument of Jewish-Arab symbiosis "not merely because it is written in Arabic by an original Jewish thinker and *was studied by Arabs*, but because it developed and conveyed to large sections of the Jewish people ideas which had so long occupied the Arab mind."⁵⁶ It has been pointed out, however, that, since their Arabic was written in Hebrew characters, the works of the great Jewish writers of Arab Spain could not have been studied by Muslim Arabs; that Maimonides was hardly known among the Arabs; and that, in fact, there was no real intellectual dialogue between the Jews and the Arabs of those days.

This raises the question as to whether—and how—the various cultural, linguistic, and literary influences between Arabs and Jews in Muslim Spain were reflected in works of theology and philosophy written by Muslims in the Middle Ages. Rather little is known today on this subject, although a few Arab authors do make references to such effect. One of the more interesting of these comes in a most unexpected context. Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Tusi al-Shafi'i, better known as al-Ghazzali, was born in Tus in Khurasan in 1058 and is considered the most original thinker Islam has

ever produced and its greatest theologian. Ibn Taymiyya, himself a great Muslim theologian and philosopher, makes the interesting statement that al-Ghazzali was to the Muslims what Maimonides was to the Jews.

The point is of considerable interest here. Ibn Taymiyya compares the two religious thinkers “in commingling the dicta of the prophets with the philosophers and allegorically interpreting the former according to the latter.” And this is precisely where both al-Ghazzali and Maimonides were to be subjected to criticism on grounds of inconsistency in their attempt to reconcile reason with revelation. Both were to be accused of contradictions and lack of logic, and in certain cases of dishonesty. In *Studies in Al-Ghazzali*, Lazarus-Yafe comments on this point. “It is only us,” she asserts, “living in the twentieth century, who find it hard to accept [al-Ghazzali’s] somewhat naive combination of religious faith and free reasoning.”⁵⁷

Also worthy of note here are references to Jews and Christians in al-Ghazzali’s writing—a subject seldom touched upon by scholars dealing with his work. The references made by al-Ghazzali and quoted by Lazarus-Yafe are not of much help on this point, since the great Muslim thinker never directly dealt with either Judaism or Christianity. Nor did he, as many of his peers tended to do, engage in polemics against these or any other faiths. His references, therefore, were either made in passing or somewhat carelessly worded. When he asserts, for instance, that a *dhimmi* [Jew or Christian] “is like a Muslim in everything which relates to the prohibition of hurting him,” because Islamic law “protects his honor just as it protects his life and property,” al-Ghazzali is merely reiterating standard Muslim dogma concerning the “People of the Book.”⁵⁸

“One of the Philosophers of Islam”

Various explanations have been advanced as to why the great Jewish writers of Muslim Spain chose to write in Arabic. Suggestions include that it was in order to reach the masses; or because they found it easier to express themselves in Arabic than in Hebrew; or simply because, as Abraham Halkin asserts, “in view of the extensive adjustment of the Jews under Islam, and the degree to which they identified themselves with its culture, nothing was more natural than that they should use in their writings the language which served them in every other need.” But the question of why they wrote Arabic in Hebrew characters has been fairly definitely settled, at least with regard to Maimonides’ *Guide*. The generally agreed-upon explanation is that Maimonides wanted his book to be read only by Jews, as he feared that his attacks on the *Mutakallimun*, the *Mu'tazala*, and the *Ash'ariyya* would cause him trouble.

This device did not work, however, “because the great demand for the book on the part of non-Jews led to its being copied in Arabic script—so that Samuel ibn Tibbon, when engaged in translating the work into Hebrew, found it useful to consult copies of it transcribed in Arabic characters.” Other evidence cited to prove that the *Guide* was widely known among Muslim scholars includes the following: Rashid abu el-Kheir, the Egyptian scholar, reproduced passages from the work in his book *Tirīaq al-Qulub* (Opium of the hearts). Yosef Caspi, in his *Kovetz Igrot Harembam* (A collection of Maimonides’ epistles), asserts that Muslim religious savants in the Maghreb used to gather to listen to Jewish scholars reading chapters from Maimonides’ work. Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Tabrizi, the thirteenth-century Muslim scholar, wrote a lengthy commentary on certain chapters of the *Guide*; these commentaries were rendered into Hebrew in 1556 by Ishaq al-Qurtubi (Isaac the Cordovan). In addition, al-Maqrizi, the Arab historian, mentions Maimonides and his *Guide* in his standard history, *Kitab al-Khitat*.⁵⁹

Salomon Pines, Maimonides’ translator into English and a great authority on the literature of the Jews of Muslim Spain, has found that although most manuscripts of the *Guide* are written in Hebrew characters, some have always been available in Arabic script. What is more, he writes, there is evidence to show that the work was read and commented upon by some Muslim authors. In this connection, he cites al-Tabrizi, who devotes his commentary to the twenty-five premises (*muqaddimat*) listed at the beginning of the second part of the work. Pines comments:

Al-Tabrizi probably lived in the thirteenth century; however, one of the arguments put forward by M. Steinschneider in favour of this chronological view does not seem to hold water. According to Steinschneider, it is difficult to believe that at a later period a Muslim would have written about Maimonides. Against this assertion we may set the fact that Ahmad ibn Taymiyya, who died in 1328, less than eighty years before the death of ibn Khaldun [in 1406], refers to Maimonides at least twice. One of these references does not necessarily indicate knowledge of Maimonides’ doctrinal position, but the other seems to prove that ibn Taymiyya was aware of at least one of the main positions maintained by Maimonides in the debate in which he engaged with the orthodox Aristotelians.⁶⁰

Pines points out that the gist of ibn Taymiyya’s latter commentary—namely, that the temporal creation of the world cannot be demonstrated by rational arguments—is one of the conclusions reached by Maimonides in

discussing the problem in the *Guide*. Accordingly, it seems probable that ibn Taymiyya had some knowledge of the work. Pines also writes: "Ibn Taymiyya seems to have been very well-read in philosophical and cognate writings; but ibn Khaldun was also familiar with many of these texts. In view of the fact that ibn Taymiyya had knowledge of the *Guide*, there is no reason to deny the possibility that ibn Khaldun read this work or part of it. The fact that the former lived three quarters of a century before the latter does not seem relevant in this context; for it can be taken as certain that already when ibn Taymiyya composed his works the controversies aroused by the *Guide* definitely belonged to the past as far as the Muslim intellectual milieux were concerned."

This being the case, Pines believes it is probable that ibn Khaldun, reading ibn Taymiyya's work, "found the text dealing with the effects of life in the desert on the Children of Israel so well-accorded with one of his main contentions that he decided, *prenant son bien ou il le trouvait*, to adapt Maimonides' proposition to his own purposes." It is worth noting here that ibn Taymiyya was born in 1263, was educated in Damascus, and lived for seven years in Egypt, the country in which ibn Khaldun (who was born in 1332) gave his *Muqaddima* its final shape. It is quite probable that manuscripts of the *Guide* were more readily available in Egypt, where the book had been written, than elsewhere in the Muslim-Arab world.⁶¹

On the subject of Maimonides' place in the Islamic cultural heritage, one may quote Sheikh Mustafa Abdel Raziq, late professor of Islamic philosophy at the Egyptian University, who wrote the introduction to Yisrael Ben-Zeev's book on Maimonides.⁶² This prominent Egyptian scholar and Islamist writes: "Abu 'Omran Musa ibn Maimun [Maimonides] is especially worthy of study because he was the greatest Jewish philosopher of those days. . . . In fact, I consider him and his colleagues to be philosophers of Islam. As I said in an address which I delivered in the Opera House [at a gathering held in Cairo to commemorate the seven hundredth anniversary of Maimonides' death] on April 1, 1935, Abu 'Omran Musa ibn Maimun is one of the philosophers of Islam, because all those who, in the domain of Islam, engaged in that kind of theoretical study have long since been called philosophers of Islam, whether Muslims or non-Muslims'."⁶³

"Paradoxical Life-Style"

Another aspect of Maimonides' life and personality has often been discussed by students of the period. One of these, Steven Harvey of Baltimore Hebrew College, in a paper entitled "Maimonides in the Sultan's Palace," remarks on what he calls Maimonides' "paradoxical life-style," combining

as it did solitary contemplation and an intense communal involvement. As he puts it, “The same thinker who taught that the true human perfection and the ultimate end of man is only achieved through solitude and isolation . . . himself lived an unceasingly active and incredibly public life as private and court physician, business man, and Jewish communal leader, judge, and rabbi—a life which afforded little time for food and sleep, let alone the privacy requisite for contemplation and the intellectual worship of God.”⁶⁴

Maimonides was not the only member of his generation of prominent Jews in Muslim Spain to live “a profound paradox” or to give the impression of vacillating between the position of philosopher and that of *mutakallim* and theologian. According to Ross Brann, the author of *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Ambiguity and Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain*, the courtier-rabbis of the Hebrew “Golden Age” were, on one hand, “deeply attached to Jewish tradition and meticulous in their observance of Jewish law,” and, on the other hand, “they were aficionados of Arabic *paideia* [cultural education] in Hebrew dress.”

This fierce conflict of posture and motive, according to Brann, made these courtier-rabbis “a most improbable breed of literati and an even more unlikely brand of clerics.” “How is it,” he asks, “that an entire class of rabbinic scholars could have come to embrace Arabic rhetoric and style to the point of composing bacchic Hebrew wine songs or, more remarkably, lyrical songs of love for beloved ‘gazelles,’ male as well as female?”

Brann explains how Arabization, as distinct from Islamization, brought about the wholesale abandonment by Near Eastern Jewry of Aramaic, the language of Talmudic Judaism, for Arabic, and how this process, completed in the tenth century, “ushered the Jews of Near Eastern lands into the flourishing cultural and intellectual framework of classical Islamic civilization.” It was thus that, from the Iberian peninsula to the Iranian plateau, Jewish communities came to employ a distinctive form of Arabic, “Judeo-Arabic,” as their spoken language and the linguistic medium for most of their written transactions and literary compositions. This linguistic transformation, Brann writes, “was so pervasive that even manifestly religious literature such as biblical and talmudic commentaries, theological treatises, legal documents from rabbinical courts, and rabbinic responses were written in Judeo-Arabic.”⁶⁵

From this, of course, the road was not long to the kind of cultural ambiguity that characterized our “compunctious poet.”

Europe's Dark Legacy

Of all the tyrannies on human kind
The worst is that which persecutes the mind.

JOHN DRYDEN

As the nineteenth century was drawing to a close, Israel Abrahams, the eminent Anglo-Jewish scholar and historian, published a book entitled *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*. In his introduction, Abrahams made the interesting point that the expression “Middle Ages,” as applied to the inner life of the Jews, had little or no relevance. “There was,” he explained, “neither more nor less medievalism about Jewish life in the ninth than there was in the fourteenth century.” If medievalism implied moral servitude to a church and material servitude to a polity, he added, “the Jews had no opportunity for the latter and no inclination for the former.” The synagogue was the center of life, but it was not the custodian of thought. “If Judaism ever came to exercise a tyranny over the Jewish mind, it did so not in the middle ages at all, but in the middle of the sixteenth century. A revolt against medievalism such as occurred in Europe during and at the close of the Renaissance may be said to have marked Jewish life [only] towards the close of the eighteenth century.”¹

Paradoxical as it may sound, this absence of medievalism from Jewish life is quite consistent with the fact that medievalism produced lasting effects on the Jews, on whom the old feudal mores left traces that endured long after Europe had grown to modern ways. For the fact, as Abrahams asserts, is that “as Europe emerges from the medieval period, the Jews pass more and more emphatically into a special relation with the government: Instead of becoming a part of the general population, as the Jews had often been in the earlier centuries of the Christian era, they are thrust out of the general life into a distinct category.”

To illustrate his point, Abrahams cited a current event:

In Russia today, the Jews are subjected to special, distinctive legislation similar to the one under which Jews groaned everywhere from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries. At the moment of writing, news comes to hand of a promised amelioration of the circumstances of the Russian Jews. "It is generally understood," says the Odessa correspondent of the *Daily News* for July 4, 1896, "that this latest opening of the Russo-Hebrew question is chiefly due to the generous and sympathetic instincts of the young empress." Here, then, we have the old medieval position reproduced. The chattel of the ruler; the Jews had no room for hope but in the ruler's clemency and humanity.²

Various aspects of the life of the Jews of Christendom are dealt with in this chapter, which seeks in the main to bring out the sharp contrasts between the respective fortunes of the Jews of the Christian West and those of their coreligionists who lived in the domain of Arabic Islam.

Voluntary and Compulsory Ghettos: Jews as Transients

The persistent "medievalism" of Jewish life, of which Israel Abrahams speaks and which survived all over Europe up to the era of the French Revolution and, in certain centers of Jewish settlement, up to our own century, was not confined to matters related to the Jews' position vis-à-vis the Gentile rulers of the day. It also contributed to the circumstance that from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries the Jews fell under a subservience to rabbinical authority and custom which can only be described as medieval.

In explaining this phenomenon, Abrahams rejects the generalization that the Jews of the Middle Ages were what the Middle Ages made them. In truth, he writes, the effect of external pressure was negative rather than positive. "The Jews," he explains, "suffered more from the dispiriting calms of life within the ghetto than from the passionate storms of death that raged without it. The antisocial crusade of the medieval Church against the Jews did more than slay its thousands. It deprived the Jews of the very conditions necessary for the full development of their genius."³

Elaborating on this last point, Abrahams continues:

The Jewish nature does not produce its rarest fruits in a Jewish environment. I am far from asserting that Judaism is a force so feeble that its children sink into decay so soon as they are robbed of the influence

of forces foreign to itself. But it was ancient Alexandria that produced Philo, medieval Spain Maimonides, modern Amsterdam Spinoza. The ghetto had its freaks, but the men just named were not born in ghettos, and how should it be otherwise? The Jew who should influence the world could not arise in the absence of a world to influence. . . . The defects of the Jewish character prove this as well as its virtues. Most of its defects are the result either of isolation, or of reaction after isolation.⁴

A certain ambiguity surrounding the meaning of the word *ghetto* has resulted in some confusion about the origin and history of the institution. Cecil Roth, for instance, speaks of the ghetto as having its origins in the fact that religious and social solidarity, reinforced by Gentile hostility, made Jews to gather in one street or quarter. This tendency, he says, was known throughout history, from ancient Alexandria on, and it received a powerful impetus when the Third Lateran Council in 1179 forbade Jews and Christians to dwell together. This, however, is only partially true. The era of the ghetto proper begins with the sixteenth century, though compulsory ghettos were known in Spain and Italy in the fifteenth.⁵

Voluntary and Compulsory Ghettos

Jews, it is true, tended to live in separate parts of the cities in both Eastern and Western lands. But the difference between a voluntary congregation of Jews in certain quarters and their compulsory ghettoization is of course vast and of the highest importance historically. "The *voluntary* congregation of Jews in certain parts of the towns, due to the needs of communal organization, was very common by the thirteenth century," writes Abrahams, "but the distinction one achieves is not the distinction that is thrust on one." Some facts connected with the Roman ghetto and the Spanish *juderias* will make clearer the difference between a voluntary and a compulsory massing of Jewish inhabitants in one particular part of a town, he maintains:

In 1555, when Paul III established the ill-omened ghetto in Rome, there were very few Jewish families resident anywhere else than in the . . . Jewish quarter on the left bank of the Tiber. But though few Jews dwelt elsewhere, many of the noblest Christians resided in the very heart of the Jewish quarter. Stately palaces and churches stood in the near neighborhood of the synagogues, and the Roman Christians held free and friendly intercourse with their Jewish fellow inhabitants. When, however, the ghetto was formally constituted, churches

and palaces were gradually removed or divided from the contamination of the neighboring Jewish abodes by huge and menacing walls.⁶

In Spain, similarly, the ghetto was at first “rather a privilege than a disability, and sometimes was claimed by the Jews as a right when its demolition was threatened.” In 1412, the ordinances of Valladolid took on a more oppressive and persecuting tone, and all Jews and Moors were ordered to dwell within separate enclosures. “But though the Jews of Castile were only granted a term of eight days within which to transfer themselves to their separate enclosures, and though menaces were held out of corporal punishment and confiscation of property should any Jew or Moor be found outside these enclosures after the eight days had passed, only six months later the ordinance at Cifuentes had to repeat the same injunction, this time fixing the period of grace at a full year. In this ordinance we meet with the familiar ghetto arrangement, afterwards common all over Europe, by which the town appointed two officials as gate-keepers of the Jewry.”

Thus, besides being a place where Jews as a separate cultural group could obtain freedom from hostile criticism and where they could observe their religious and communal obligations more conveniently for themselves, the voluntary ghetto was also an administrative device. On one hand, it facilitated the community’s social control over its members and made tax collection much easier; on the other, it enabled medieval authorities to supervise all strangers and noncitizens. Gradually, however, what originally had been a convenient administrative and communal device became an instrument of compulsory social segregation. One of the decisions of the Cortes of Toledo in 1480, convened after the union of the crowns of Aragon and Castile, reads as follows: “As great injury and inconvenience result from the constant society of Jews and Moors being intermixed with Christians, we ordain and command that all Jews and Moors of every city, town and place in these our kingdoms . . . shall have their distinct Jewries and Mooreries by themselves, and not reside intermixed with Christians, nor have enclosures together with them.”⁷

Abrahams comments that herein lies the real atrocity of the institution of the ghetto. It was a device actually to separate Jews from Christians. “The old protective motive is abandoned, the theory and practice of social ostracism begins, and after the fifteenth century we find no pretence that the ghetto was instituted on behalf of the Jews. It was occasionally a protection, no doubt; the ghetto gates sometimes rolled back outbursts of popular cruelty, and saved the Jews from massacre. But oftener it had the very opposite effect, for when bigots wanted their Jews to kill, they knew where to find them *en masse*.”⁸

Jews as Transients

The decision of the Cortes of Toledo of 1480 speaks of “the constant society” of Jews and Moors (Muslims) being “intermixed with Christians” and having “enclosures together with them.” These references show conclusively that, at least in the Iberian Peninsula, the attempt to isolate the Jews had failed completely. It is, in fact, remarkable how the position of the Jews of Europe was to deteriorate with the passage of the centuries rather than improve. For, according to Louis Wirth, compared with what was to happen to them between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries, “the lot of the Jews in Europe during the first thousand years of the Christian era was bearable if not ideal.” Before the Christian era, the Jews were not settled anywhere in Europe in any considerable numbers, except in Rome, where they are known to have resided during the first century B.C.E. When the Roman general Pompey entered Jerusalem, he carried a number of its Jews back to Rome, thus increasing the existing Jewish colony there. Again, Titus deported thousands of Jews to the Western Roman provinces; many of them were put to work in the Sardinian mines.⁹

In Spain, the earliest authentic indication of Jewish settlement comes from the apostle Paul, who in his Epistle to the Romans addresses the Jews as follows: “Whosoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you. . . . I will come to you into Spain.” There is evidence of the presence of Jews in England before the Norman Conquest, and the early presence of Jews in the Christian lands of the West has been adduced from the numerous decrees passed by church councils affecting them. The settlement of Jews in France is placed as early as the second century. According to one tradition, the Jews of southern Germany were descendants of the soldiers who had sacked Jerusalem and who had selected beautiful Jewish women as their portion of the spoils, carried them to their quarters to the Rhine and the Main, and there consorted with them. Their children, reared as Jews by their mothers, founded the Jewish communities between Worms and Mayence. This tradition may be apocryphal; nonetheless, around the eleventh century, Jews were found in considerable numbers in the various trading centers of western and southern Germany, such as Cologne, Ratisbon, Mayence, Worms, and Nuremberg.¹⁰

During this early period, Jews in European lands led a fairly precarious existence. Wirth writes:

The uncertainty of life during the Dark Ages, particularly for strangers, made the Jew a nomad, and has earned for him the epithet “Wandering Jew.” Mobility and adaptability to strange and constantly shifting conditions were the chief qualities required for survival. The

Jewish traditions of this period are full of tales of suffering and adventure, of heroic exploits, and of shrewd dealings with none too friendly neighbors and rulers. . . . Leading a life of uncertainty, the Jews were scarcely more than transients in Western Europe during the darker centuries of the Middle Ages, regarding their settlements, such as they were, as mere stopping-places on a road that led they knew not where.¹¹

But the worst was yet to come. As the eleventh century was coming to an end, Christian Europe was seized by a feverish drive to recover the Holy Land and its sacred places from the “Muslim infidel.” Pilgrims returning from Palestine had spread word about the sacrilege perpetrated by Muslims there, their desecration of Christian shrines and holy places, and the barbarous treatment they meted out to the pilgrims. The result was Pope Urban II’s call to Christians to wage a holy war against the Muslims and rescue Palestine from them. The call was made in November 1095, and the First Crusade was launched a year later.

Gradually and almost inevitably, the passions aroused by the Crusades against the Muslims were soon turned against the Jews as well, and certain Christian leaders openly avowed that the blood of Christ should be avenged in the blood of the Jews. “From the Crusaders’ point of view,” Cecil Roth writes, “it was supremely illogical to leave older and even more bitter opponents of the Christian faith undisturbed, perhaps even profiting from their holy venture, while they themselves went to risk their lives and their substance in battle against the Saracens.”¹²

In consequence, the First Crusade started already in Europe: Before they were to set foot on the Holy Land the Crusaders performed a number of sizable massacres against the Jews. A “preliminary” outbreak in Lorraine resulted in the slaughter of twenty-two members of the Jewish community of Metz. On one Sabbath in May 1096, the synagogue of Speyer was surrounded and attacked. Two weeks later, the Crusaders, with the connivance of the burghers, attacked at Worms. “A few of the weakest saved themselves by submitting to baptism. The rest, with the exception of those who found refuge in the Bishop’s palace, or died at their own hands, were put to death almost to a man. A week later, the episcopal palace itself was surrounded, and those who had sought protection in it were exterminated.”

Scenes of a similar nature were enacted at one Jewish center after another all along the Rhine Valley, and in 1097, when the main body of the Crusaders, under Godfrey de Bouillon, fought their way into Jerusalem, the campaign against the Jews reached its climax. “The steep streets of the

Holy City ran with blood; and all the Jews, whether Rabbinite or Karaite, were driven into one of the synagogues, which was then set on fire. The reckless slaughter marked the end of the Jewish connection with their former capital for many centuries to come.”¹³

The events of the First Crusade were to set a pattern. Not only were the Second (1146) and the Third (1189) Crusades marked by the same anti-Jewish outbreaks, this time reaching France and even England; the pattern was to govern Jewish-Christian relations in Europe almost without interruption until the middle of the twentieth century. Compared with the persistent, organized, and “ideological” violence which started with the First Crusade, anti-Jewish persecution during the first ten centuries of the Christian era was sporadic and mild. Moreover, as Wirth has pointed out, the whole status of the Jew underwent a change. “Up to that time the Jews were free individuals, on the whole, and lived generally on friendly, and sometimes even on intimate, terms with their neighbors of other faiths. . . . The spectacular mass movements accompanying the Crusades upset the settled life of medieval Europe. Suddenly the population became aware of the strangers in their midst. It needed but little stimulation to transform these strangers into enemies, especially at a time when a scapegoat was needed.”

But the transformation was to take yet another form. In their predicament, the Jews had to turn to someone for protection, and they turned to the emperors and popes. “They became the servants of the chamber (*servi camerae*) and acquired formal and impersonal *rights*, which assured them of status in a society in which every member of the population had a fixed place. The medieval serf was tied to his lord, the tenant to the land which he tilled, the craftsman to his guild. Only the Jew’s place in this world was not definitely fixed. He was a stranger, but he lived on terms of intimacy with his neighbors.” The Jew needed rights not as person but as a utility; personal relationships are not based on rights, and Jews wanted their relationships regulated and formalized. Hence, the institution of *servi camerae*, which came into general use in Europe in the thirteenth century.

But although the Jews considered it a privilege to buy the sovereign’s protection at a rather high price, their new status was of no lasting value. The Jews were seeking status and security while the rulers looked upon them as mere sources of revenue. One of these rulers, Emperor Rupert, in 1407 commanded that the Jews be not too heavily burdened, lest they be forced to emigrate and the cities consequently suffer a reduction in income. In 1480, Frederick III commanded that the Jews of Ratisbon be treated in such a manner that they might restore their fortunes in five years to an

extent sufficient to enable them to pay the emperor ten thousand gulden. The Jews, in effect, thus became the tax collectors of the rulers, since the necessity of having to pay this tribute affected the prices they charged for goods they sold or services they were rendering to the population at large.¹⁴

Virtually a Commodity

It was through this relationship to the government that the Jews were to become virtually a commodity. The emperor, when in financial stresses, often found it expedient to sell the privilege of protecting the Jews (which meant to tax them) to some prince or churchman. "This right of keeping or holding the Jews that the emperor was free to sell to local authorities or individuals, much as a city nowadays sells a street-car franchise, implied, of course, that the status of the Jews was a precarious one. They were not citizens—not even men—in the eyes of the law, but rather were taxable property. . . . This status did not change in fundamental respects until about the era of the French Revolution."¹⁵

Thus, what the Jews had sought as a privilege was soon to become a measure forced upon them; by the end of the fifteenth century, the ghetto became the legal, compulsory dwelling place of the Jews of Europe. Ghettos were to be found in every city where there was a Jewish community. The reasons advanced for confining the Jews to ghettos were usually both religious and cultural. The ecclesiastical synod held in Breslau in 1266, for example, offered this formulation: "Since the land of Poland is a new acquisition in the body of Christianity, lest perchance the Christian people be, on this account, the more easily infected with the superstition and depraved morals of the Jews dwelling among them, we command that the Jews dwelling in this province of Gnesen shall not live among the Christians, but shall have their houses near or next to one another in some sequestered part of the state or town, so that their dwelling place shall be separated from the common dwelling place of the Christians by a hedge, a wall, or a ditch."¹⁶

Another church decree, referring to "the serious danger to body and mind" that may be incurred by the faithful from contacts with Jews, stated: "That too great converse with [the Jews] may be avoided, they shall be compelled to live in certain places in the cities and towns, separated from the dwelling place of the Christians, and as far from the churches as possible."

Yet another decree read: "We strenuously demand of the rulers that they shall designate in the different cities a certain place in which Jews shall live

apart from Christians. And if Jews have houses of their own [in other parts of the city] they shall command them to be sold to Christians within six months, in actuality and not by any pretended contract.”

However, in trying to avoid “the serious danger to body and mind” said to be entailed by living in proximity with Jews, the Christian Church was to subject the Jews themselves to precisely such dangers. The ghettos in which these Jews were closeted were generally walled in, some having only one gate. At sunset, the Jews had to be locked within the ghetto walls or suffer severe punishment. Generally, they were not permitted to appear in the streets outside the ghetto walls on Sundays and on important Christian holidays. What was worse, the fact that the authorities often refused to grant the Jews more space than originally had been designated for the ghetto resulted in overcrowding when its population grew. “Besides the isolation which the ghettos more or less effected,” writes one historian of the period, “the most serious effect of the new persecution was the terrible overcrowding that necessarily followed from herding thousands of Jews in confined spaces. The Jewish population grew, but the ghettos remained practically unchanged. . . . Hence even when the localities in which the ghettos were constructed were not slums, they rapidly became so. Sometimes the Jewish quarter, as in Cologne in the thirteenth century, was the narrowest part of the town, and was even called the ‘Narrow Street’.”¹⁷

Even within these narrow walls, however, the Jews had no security. Not infrequently, they were expelled from their ghettos, as happened in Vienna in 1670 and in Prague in 1744–45. The latter expulsion took place during the wars of the Austrian succession, when Maria Theresa ordered the Jews to leave Bohemia on the ground that they were “fallen into disgrace.” The decree was revoked under pressure of the powers; but the Jews, being ignorant of the revocation, petitioned for admission on payment of an annual tax. They paid the tax until 1846.

In Russia and Poland: The Ghetto's Lasting Imprint

The Jews' position in Russia and other East European lands was no less dismal than that which prevailed in the countries of Central and Western Europe. As far back as the first century B.C.E., Jewish communities were established in Kerch, west of the Straits that connect the Black Sea, as well as in Anapa and, further north, in Olbia at the mouth of the Dnieper. These Jews, who spoke Greek, must have come at a still earlier period from Asia Minor; they possessed a fully developed communal organization, including

houses of worship. In the fourth century, when the northern shore of the Black Sea passed under the sway of the Christianized Byzantine Empire, the Jews started to move northward.

In the eighth century, the Jewish population on both sides of the Straits—in Crimea as well as in the Caucasus—increased considerably. Beginning with the First Crusade, but especially after the Second and Third, when conditions in Germany became increasingly intolerable for Jews, the stream of Jewish emigration poured into the border provinces of Poland: Cracow, Pozen, Calisz, Silesia.

During the period when Poland was split up into a number of principalities, the Jews were protected against mob violence by the princes. The death and the devastation wrought by the Tartar invasion, starting in 1241, made it necessary to invite settlers from Germany, and no distinction was made between Jews and Christians.

At first, the rulers, with an eye on the economic needs of the country, refused to let themselves be swayed by the narrow-minded attitude of the church synods and councils; this was to attract more Jewish immigration from Germany. Casimir the Great (1333–1370), especially, displayed an atypically liberal attitude. He placed under the jurisdiction of the crown all lawsuits between Jews and Christians, since the municipal magistrate proved hostile to the Jews; he granted Jews access to the municipal bathing establishments alongside of Christians; and he granted them the privilege of free movement throughout the country and of unrestricted domicile in any of the cities or villages.

Moreover, it was made lawful for the Jews to rent or mortgage estates of the nobility, with provisions for enforced settling of debts and foreclosure. The motive of all these enactments, however—as Margolis and Marx make it clear in their *History*—was the medieval theory that the Jews were the property of the crown. “It was their business to be moneyed men so that at all times they might be ready to supply the treasury with funds.”¹⁸

With the growth of ecclesiastical power under Casimir’s successors, Louis of Hungary (1370–1383) and Vladislav II (1386–1434), persecutions of the Jews began in earnest. In 1399, when the Archbishop of Pozen instituted proceedings against the Jews of his province, alleging that they had procured and desecrated three hosts from the Dominican Church, the rabbi and thirteen elders of the community were roasted alive, and a fine was imposed on the Jews of the city; this fine was extorted by the Dominicans, year in year out, until the eighteenth century. In 1407, at Eastertime, a priest in Cracow spread a rumor that the Jews had slain a Christian child. The Jewish quarter was immediately attacked, many Jews were killed and

their children baptized, property was looted, and dwellings were set on fire.

On a higher level of legitimacy, the Synod of Calisz in 1420 reenacted all the anti-Jewish ordinances and regulations passed at the Synod of Breslau. But John I (1492–1501) was to establish the first Jewish ghetto in Poland. A fire broke out in Cracow in 1494, destroying a good part of the city. Alleging falsely that the Jews had caused the misfortune, the raging populace soon attacked them, and they were accordingly driven from the city. At this point, the king ordered the Jews to take up their residence in a separate suburb, which continued as a Jewish ghetto until 1868.¹⁹

The three partitions of Poland made Russia heir to the largest and most compact Jewish community in Europe. From the outset, the policy of the Czarist government was to keep the Jewish population strictly confined to the newly acquired western provinces and to prevent its spreading to the outer parts of the Russian empire. Accordingly, an order was issued in 1771 confining the Jews to the so-called Pale of Settlement—although even within its boundaries an attempt was made to narrow the scope of Jewish economic activity. Under Paul I (1796–1801), following growing unrest among the Christian merchants and small burghers as well as the nobility, official investigations were set in motion.

The marshals of the nobility throughout the southwestern provinces placed the blame for the evil state of the peasantry on the Jewish tavern keepers—when in reality the landed aristocrats were merely trying to maintain a monopoly over the manufacture and sale of spirits. They also desired to break the internal Jewish organization so as to bring about the complete absorption of Jews into the rest of the population. Friesel, the governor of Vilna, was himself convinced that the root of the evil lay in the outlandishness of Jewish religious customs.

In 1800, Derzhavin, poet and senator, placed before the Czar an elaborate memorandum aimed, he said, “at curbing the avaricious pursuits of the Jews” and their transformation into an element “useful to the government.” Derzhavin was satisfied that he had hit upon a plan whereby “the stubborn and cunning tribe might be set to right.” The Jews, he suggested, should be made to adopt family names and register under the four categories of merchants, urban burghers, rural burghers, and agricultural settlers. A special Christian official, the plan further envisaged, should be charged with supervising the affairs of the Jews and their transformation.²⁰

The ordering of the religious life should be in the hands of the separate synagogues, with their rabbis and schoolmen, under a supreme ecclesiastical tribunal in the capital of the empire. The Jewish population should be

evenly distributed over the various parts of White Russia and the surplus transferred to other provinces. Jews were to be forbidden to keep Christian domestics, or to participate in city government. They must abandon “their distinct dress and peculiar speech.”

Jewish children might go to their own religious schools up to the age of twelve; thereafter they must attend the public schools run by the state. A government printing office should publish Jewish religious books “with philosophic annotations.” It was to be an enlightenment bestowed from above, and the emperor was urged to follow the gospel commandment, “Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you.”

In 1804, a statute approved by Alexander I, Paul I’s successor, aimed firmly at keeping the Jews out of Russia proper and confining them to thirteen “governments” or provinces—five of Lithuania and White Russia, five of the Ukraine or Little Russia, and three of New Russia. In addition, if in the future Jewish agriculturists should arise, they might settle in the eastern “governments,” Astrakhan and the Caucasus. On the economic side, Jews should henceforth be forbidden to lease lands or keep taverns in the villages. They might, however, buy unoccupied lands or settle on crown lands in order to till the soil.

“Thus,” write Margolis and Marx, “while a small number of agriculturists would be created, hundreds of thousands of Jews were meanwhile deprived of means of support. Manufacturers and artisans were exempted from the double tax; merchants and burghers were just tolerated. All Jews belonging to these categories might sojourn temporarily in the interior governments on special passports issued by the governors of their own districts.”

Rabbis and communal elders were to be elected for terms of three years, subject to ratification by the governors. The rabbis were to look after religious matters and exercise jurisdiction only in matters of religion, but without the right of pronouncing the ban. “The communal bodies (*kahals*) were charged with responsibility for the regular payment of the state taxes. Free access was granted to the public schools, both elementary and higher; the Jews might also open schools of their own, with one of the three languages, Russian, Polish and German, as obligatory. It was incumbent upon the rabbis and the lay leaders to acquire proficiency in any one of these languages to the extent of being able to write and speak it.”²¹

Although Derzhavin’s elaborate blueprint for amalgamating the Jews with the general population had been virtually shelved, it was to make another appearance exactly half a century later, albeit in a different garb.

During the first ten years of the reign of Alexander II (1855–1881), the Jews of Russia began to think that they were nearing the dawn of better days. The age limit for recruits to the Russian army was made the same for Jews and Christians, though some disqualifications still persisted.

However, “if there was at all a definite policy amid such vacillation, it meant fusing Jews and Russians along cultural lines; the attempt to bring about religious sameness had been given up as hopeless. The Jews were to be ‘Russified’ and privileges were granted to those who were ready for the process.” The new regulations were meant to give these “fortunates” maximum encouragement. The inner provinces of the empire were opened for permanent residence to merchants of the highest class, to graduates of universities, and to mechanics.²²

As Margolis and Marx explain, “Wealth, education, and skill were welcome enough in furtherance of the industrial development of the country and as helpful in certain parts of the military machine. The Jewish capitalists supplied money and material for the construction of railroads, Jewish physicians and surgeons were needed in the army and in civilian life. The law of 1864 made it possible for Jews to be admitted to the legal profession and in rare cases even to a judicial career.” This, however, did not serve to ameliorate the lot of the great mass of Russian Jews who, “without means to pay the high merchants’ licenses or to afford costly education, remained penned up within the dense Pale, unable to advance economically.”

Thus, while a few hundred found their way to secondary and higher educational institutions, “hundreds of thousands frequented the old-fashioned schools [*cheder* and *yeshiva*] against which the government battled to no purpose until at length it left them in peace. Nor was the government able to drive out the old-style rabbis; in the end the two rabbinical seminaries were transformed into teachers’ institutes to supply teachers for the Jewish crown schools.”²³

By the second half of the nineteenth century, when elsewhere a new era seemed to be dawning for the Jews, the lot of East European Jewries remained deplorable. Successive waves of pogroms, coupled with new anti-Jewish legislation, were to result in mass emigration to the New World on one hand and the emergence of nationalistic doctrines among Jews on the other. The anti-Semitism of the pan-movements, especially those of the Germans and the Slavs, was to result in that acute disillusionment which made the Jewish *maskilim* (enlightened) of Eastern and Central Europe turn inward in a search for new secular premises on which to erect their own distinctive nationalist movement.

The Ghetto's Lasting Imprint

The Pale of Settlement, which during its century and a half of existence had somewhat shifting boundaries, in 1905 comprised the following fifteen districts: Bessarabia, Vilna, Vitebsk, Volhynia, Grodno, Yckaterinoslav, Kovno, Minsk, Moghilef, Podolia, Poltava, Taurida, Kherson, Chernigov, and Kiev. In a sense, the Pale represents a ghetto within a ghetto. What were the effects of these long centuries of ghetto existence and oppression on the life, attitudes, and behavior of the Jews? Louis Wirth, one of the founders of American sociology and himself a Jew of Central European extraction, writes that, to the sociologist, "the ghetto is more than a chapter in the cultural history of man . . . [It] represents a study in human nature. It reveals the varied and subtle motives that lead men to act as they do."²⁴

"The ghetto," Wirth adds, "is not only a physical fact; it is also a state of mind. The laws that regulated the conduct of Jews and Christians are merely the external forms to which, in the subjective side, there correspond the attitudes of social distance and of self- and group-consciousness. The hostilities and outbreaks of violence with which ghetto history is replete represent the friction and the conflicts to which the living of diverse cultural groups gives rise."

The numerous taboos and restrictions that encumbered the behavior of Jew and Christian toward each other are to be regarded, writes Wirth, "not merely as the fortuitous and arbitrary decisions of members of either group, but rather as physical expressions of the social distance that was emerging out of a conflict relationship. . . . What we seek to find in the ghetto, finally, is the extent to which isolation has shaped the character of the Jew and the nature of his social life."²⁵

Some of the ways in which ghetto life has influenced the Jews' attitudes are of great relevance to their life, outlook, and actions, even after they were finally to leave the ghetto walls. "While [the Jew's] contacts with the outside world were categoric and abstract," Wirth notes, "within his own community he was at home. Here he could relax from the etiquette and the formalism by which his conduct in the Gentile world was regulated. The ghetto offered liberation."

For a Jew of the ghetto, the world at large was cold and strange, his (or her) contact with it being confined to abstract and rational discourse. "But within the ghetto he felt free. His contacts with his fellow Jews were warm, spontaneous and intimate. . . . Within the inner circle of his own tribal group he received that appreciation, sympathy and understanding which the larger world could not offer. In his own community . . . he was a person

with status, as over against his formal position in the world outside. . . . As ghetto barriers crystallized and his life was lived more and more removed from the rest of the world, the solidarity of his own little community was enhanced until it became strictly divorced from the larger world without.”²⁶

However, the voluntary ghetto marked merely the beginning of a long process of isolation which did not reach its fullest development until the voluntary ghetto had been superseded by the compulsory ghetto. In this latter ghetto, as David Philipson—quoted by Wirth—has observed, the solution at last had been found: The Jew was effectually excluded. “The Christians would no longer be corrupted or contaminated by the close proximity of the followers of ‘Jewish superstition and perfidy’.”²⁷

This lasted for four centuries. “As we today removed the victims of a pestilence far away from the inhabited portions of our cities, so the Jews were cut off by the walls of the ghetto as though stricken with some loathsome disease that might carry misery and death unto others.” Here Philipson quotes an unidentified writer who, speaking of the sixteenth century, says: “Stone walls arose in all places wherein Jews dwelt, shutting off their quarters like pest-houses; the ghetto had become epidemic.”

In an eloquent comment, Philipson adds: “What a picture the ghetto recalls! The narrow, gloomy streets, with the houses towering high on either side; the sunlight rarely streaming in; situated in the worst slums of the city; shut off by gates, barred and bolted every night with chains and locks, none permitted to enter or depart from sundown to sunrise.”²⁸

This dark and rather oppressive atmosphere did not fail to leave its lasting imprint on the spiritual and mental life of those who had to live through it. According to psychologist Abraham Meyerson—also cited by Wirth—life in the ghetto was not only unwholesome physically, but also unwholesome mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. Living in constant dread of massacre, exposed to ridicule, degradation, and more-sinister disaster, the community developed an apprehensiveness and acquired a lower threshold for fear stimuli.²⁹

Referring to another aspect of this influence, Maurice Fishberg writes: “It is not the body which marks the Jew; it is his soul. In other words, the type is social or psychic . . . Centuries of confinement in the ghetto, social ostracism, ceaseless suffering under the ban of abuse and persecution have been instrumental in producing a characteristic psychic type which manifests itself in his cast of countenance which is considered as peculiarly ‘Jewish’. The ghetto face is purely psychic, just like the actor’s, the soldier’s, the minister’s face.”

Fishberg, a psychologist, also speaks of the social effects on Jews of their

forced and prolonged sojourn in the ghetto. "Isolation," he writes, "which has been called by Darwin the cornerstone of breeders, is more effective in engendering social types than ethnic types; in man isolation is seen to be mostly of two kinds, geographical and social, and it was mostly social isolation which was operative in molding the Jew as we meet him today."³⁰

It is notable, however, that the devices created to keep Jews apart at the same time made them crave the contacts that were made taboo for them. Thus living on the periphery of two worlds, and not fully in either, Jews developed that keen sense of self-consciousness that is often expressed in awkwardness and lack of poise when in the company of strangers. The Jew, Wirth notes, is "either shy or self-effacing, or he overcompensates in the direction of aggressiveness. In either case he is seldom himself. He finds himself haunted by loneliness in the outer world, and when he returns to his familial hearth he is restless and anxious to escape."³¹

However, Jews were tied to this ritual not through the relative isolation of their social life, but through the ties of sentiment on which this ritual rested. The Jew's life, Wirth explains, "was full and real only where the values to which he was accustomed were dominant. The Jew is not merely a product of his past social life, but his character is constantly being recreated along the old pattern because his past experience has so indelibly impressed upon him the value of his heritage that he inevitably sets to work to shape his environment to conform to his accustomed pattern."³²

The intellectual effects of life in the ghetto on individual Jews—and on East European Judaism in general—were as profound as its social ones. The fact that during the major part of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and practically the whole of the nineteenth century the overwhelming majority of Jewry was confined to the ghettos of Central and East European cities served only to make these effects more enduring. "When the rest of the world about them has already outgrown feudalism," Wirth writes, "the Jews were still living in a social milieu whose patterns had been cut by the feudal order. While the Jews were, on the one hand, spared the effects of the ecclesiastical morass of the Christian Church of the Middle Ages, they built up an intolerable medieval theology of their own which governed conduct and restricted thought."³³

Naturally, too, shut off from all contact with the world at large, the Jew within the walls of the ghetto failed to respond to the general culture and to what was taking place in that sphere. In Philipson's words: "Learning, certainly, there always was, and learning was held in the highest respect; but it was the learning of the ancients, the Talmud and rabbinical dialectics."³⁴

These studies sharpened the mind, and later, when emancipation came, the Jewish intellect, exercised for centuries in this dialectical training school, readily mastered the difficulties of the various branches of learning in the universities. "But in the ghetto, notably in Germany and the countries of Eastern Europe, this terrible, systematic exclusion of the Jews . . . contracted the mind and prevented all cultivation of learning outside of Jewish studies."³⁵

Jews East and West

The divorce of Jewry from what went on in the intellectual life of the outside world naturally created a yawning gap between medieval life at large and the Jewish aspect of that life. To quote Abrahams again:

As the Middle Ages closed for the rest of Europe the material horizon of the Jews narrowed. Prejudice and proscription robbed them of the attractions of public life and threw them within themselves to find their happiness in their own idealized hopes. But the fancies on which they fed were not of the kind that expand the imagination. . . . Judaism became more mystical as Europe became more rational; it clasped its cloak tighter as the sun burned warmer. The Renaissance, which drew half its inspiration from Hebraism, left the Jews untouched on the artistic side. The Protestant Reformation, which took its life-blood from a rational Hebraism, left the Jews unaffected on the moral side.³⁶

It is important to stress here the fact that Jewish life in the Middle Ages, and after, was by no means identical or uniform in the various countries in which Jews lived. Nor did Jews always live in isolation, physical or intellectual, from the surrounding Gentile world. In fact, until the beginning of the sixteenth century, Jews were never cut off for long from the general life around them. On the contrary, as Abrahams points out, "their interests were wider than those of their environment, for they had the exceptional interest of a common religion destitute of a political center." There occurred, however, a change in point of view between Jewish life in the Middle Ages proper and in the sixteenth and following centuries.

This change, says Abrahams, is well represented in that unique literary phenomenon, the rabbinical correspondence. "The Geonim of Persia," he writes—clearly referring to Babylonia—"who swayed Judaism during the seventh to the eleventh century, and their spiritual successors the Rabbis of

North Africa and Spain, carried on a worldwide correspondence. The answers (Responsa) which they made to questions addressed to them constitute one of the most fertile sources for Jewish life in the Middle Ages.”

In contrast, the answers furnished by the later French and German Jews are far more local. “Meir of Rothenberg was probably a greater man with a greater mind than some of his Spanish contemporaries, but the latter corresponded with a far wider circle of Jews.” True, the codification of Jewish law was inaugurated by Spanish Jews in the “Golden Age,” but the code that finally came to be the accepted guide of Judaism was the work of the sixteenth century.³⁷

The point that Abrahams is making here is clear if somewhat convoluted. “Codification,” he writes, “implies suppression of local variation, but in the Responses of later French and German Rabbis there is already far less heterogeneity of habits than in the Responsa of the Spanish Jews, and certainly of the Geonim.” And this is quite natural. If your horizon is narrow, you regard your own conduct as the only normal or praiseworthy scheme of life. “Hence, without any conscious resolve to suppress varying customs, these were as a matter of fact much contracted by the local tendencies of the great French Rabbis who became the authority for all Judaism from the fourteenth century onwards.”³⁸

The contrast, however, was by no means confined to the respective Rabbinical Responsa. In a previous chapter, we noted how Joseph Albo found himself impelled, toward the middle of the fifteenth century, to make a rather significant concession to the Christian Church by asserting that belief in the coming of the Messiah was not central in Judaism. It is important to note that this almost open attempt to justify their religion vis-à-vis the Gentile world was unknown to Jews who lived under Arabic Islam. Nor did these Jews ever feel constrained to express daring thoughts on philosophy and theology, even when—as in the case of Maimonides’s *Guide*—these could be construed as casting aspersions on the dominant religion.

In this respect, and largely for this reason, the philosophical works of Maimonides were unequaled. “For rationalistic clarity and breadth of view,” to quote Simon Dubnow, “no counterpart to the religio-philosophic doctrine which [Maimonides] formulated can be found in the whole extent of Medieval literature. . . . It is reason mitigated by faith, and faith regulated by reason. In the darkness of the Middle Ages, when the Roman Church impregnated religion with the crudest superstitions . . . the truly majestic spectacle is presented of a philosophy declaring war on superstition, and setting out to purify the religious notions of the people.”³⁹

There was, in fact, a fundamental difference between the state of the

Jews of the Middle Ages who lived under Arabic Islam and that of those who lived in the lands of Christian Europe. For while their coreligionists in Spain and North Africa on the whole enjoyed peace and relative freedom, the Jews of Christendom stood upon volcanic soil, “every moment threatening to swallow them up.” Exposed constantly to persecution, these Jews “lived more or less isolated and devoted themselves to one-sided though intense intellectual activity.”

Under such circumstances and with their horizons “as narrow as the streets of the ghettos in which they were penned,” not a breath of the glorious spiritual flowering of the Jews of Muslim Spain reached the Jews of Christendom. On the contrary. “The Crusades clearly showed the Jews of France and Germany what sentiments their neighbors cherished toward them,” Dubnow notes. “They were the first returns which Christianity paid the Jewish people for its old-time teaching of religion.”⁴⁰

In the countries of Christendom, Dubnow continues, the Jewish spirit again withdrew from the outer world. “In lieu of an ibn Ezra or a Maimonides, we have Yehuda he-Hassid and Eliezer of Worms, with their mystical books of devotion . . . filled with pietistic reflections on the other world, and in which the earth figures as ‘a vale of tears’.” The Tossafists, the school of commentators succeeding Rashi, “by their petty quibbling and hair-splitting casuistry, made the Talmudic books more intricate and less intelligible.” Poetry likewise took on the dismal hue of the environment. “Instead of the varied lyrical notes of ibn Gabirol and Halevi, . . . there now fall upon our ear the melancholy, heart-rending strains of synagogue poetry, the harrowing outcries that forced themselves from the oppressed bosoms of the hunted people, the prayerful lamentations that so often shook the crumbling walls of the medieval synagogue at the very moment when, full of worshippers, they were fired by the inhuman Crusaders.”⁴¹

While trying to grasp the facts of this era of Jewish history and to understand in contemporary terms their meaning and lessons, one cannot but note this sharp contrast between the fortunes of those two Jewries—the forerunners of what has come to be known as the Sephardim (Spanish Jews) and the Ashkenazim (German Jews). Once more we can quote from the work of Simon Dubnow, the historian of the Jews of Russia and Poland and the author of a general history of the Jews, who was murdered by the Nazis during World War II. Speaking of the Jews of Christendom, Dubnow wonders: “Was it conceivable that the horrors—the rivers of blood, the groans of massacred communities, the serried ranks of martyrs, the ever-haunting fear of the morrow—should fail to leave traces in the character of

Judaism? The Jewish people realized its immediate danger. It convulsively held fast to its precious relics, clung to the pillars of its religion, which it regarded as the only asylum. The Jewish spirit again withdrew from the outside world.”⁴²

The remarkable thing about this atmosphere, in which the Jews of Christian Europe were driven into their own innermost selves and had to withdraw from the outside world, is that its impact has proved surprisingly enduring. In an essay on the origins of the state of Israel, Isaiah Berlin refers to this phenomenon in connection with the Jews of Russia and Poland. As a result of political and social persecution, he writes, these Jews remained within their medieval shell and developed a kind of internal structure of their own. “If one finds difficulty in conceiving what life was like in the Middle Ages in Europe,” he adds, “I think that the life of a truly religious Jewish small town in Western Russia, even as late as 1890 or 1900, probably bears a closer analogy to it than any other modern community anywhere.”⁴³

A Tale of Three Emancipated Jews

If we go further to the west in Christian Europe, to the Germany of the postemancipation period, for instance, we find that the position of the Jews there did not differ much from what it was in the east of the continent. Writing about the situation in Germany in his own days, considerably before the rise of Nazism, Robert Weltsch reports: “It was considered tactless or outright hostile to say of someone that he was a Jew, and naturally every Jew avoided doing so in polite company. . . . If the word ‘Jew’ had really shrunk to a mere invective without any positive content it seemed more proper not to use it.”⁴⁴

Some historians and analysts of the German-Jewish situation in modern times nevertheless speak of a meaningful “dialogue” between Germans and Jews, a dialogue which they say goes back to the early 1870s. One of these is George Mosse, an internationally acknowledged authority, who is convinced that both those who claim that such a dialogue never took place and those who believe that Jews had a large space in which to become Germans “seem to have missed the most important fact about this dialogue.” The fact, according to Mosse, is that the German-Jewish dialogue became, “in a truly unprecedented fashion, an integral part of the European intellectual tradition, in spite of its apparent failure after the Nazi seizure of power.” The dialogue, he writes further, “not only served as a

unique heritage for the Jews themselves and for intellectuals all over Europe, but also became part of the German-Jewish identity, infiltrating to some extent most aspects of Jewish life in Germany.”⁴⁵

However, granted this was roughly so, the nature of that dialogue and the actual content of the “German-Jewish identity” Mosse mentions are by no means clear, either from his own writings or from those of others. On the nature of the dialogue and the reason why it had such great attraction for German Jewry and for others, later, who lived long after the end of the dialogue, Mosse is content to assert that the answer to such questions “transcends the specifically Jewish and German: it lies in the search for a personal identity beyond religion and nationality.” This, of course, tells us little if anything about the dialogue and its nature. Moreover, seeking a personal identity *beyond religion and nationality* in a country like Germany in the period from 1871 to 1933 was a pipe dream if ever there was one.⁴⁶

The trouble (or rather one of a long series of troubles) was that Jewish identity itself, in Mosse’s own words, “had to be redefined, as Jewish emancipation led to Jewish assimilation.” Perhaps such a redefinition “did not mean a rejection of that [Jewish] identity,” and German Jews were, for the most part, fully aware of their Jewish origins. The difficulty, however, is that Jewish identity is not easily given to “redefining.” The point that Mosse says is “often asserted in retrospect” (but which he does not accept)—namely, that such a redefinition was tantamount to a rejection of Jewish identity—obviously cannot be so easily dismissed.

According to Mosse, the German-Jewish dialogue nevertheless “did take place, and in it the Jews came to exemplify a German-Jewish tradition which at one time had provided the space for Germans and Jews to meet in friendship.”⁴⁷ However, on the strength of evidence provided by Mosse himself and other observers of that particular scene, all that can be said about this space and this friendship is that what the Jews of postemancipation Germany had was a monologue rather than a meaningful dialogue.

That the record, on the whole, is as pathetic as it is disheartening is illustrated in an example supplied by Mosse. As late as the year 1933, when the *Kulturbund Deutscher Juden* was established as a result of the Jews’ exclusion from German cultural life, its director, Julius Rab, explicitly denied that the Jews wanted to erect their own ghetto walls through this cultural organization. Elaborating, he came up with this touching explanation. “We do not,” he declared, “want to cultivate a one-dimensional Jew-

ish culture but the grand German culture whose soil nourished us: for this culture represents the most dignified approach to all that is human, an integral part of Jewishness.”⁴⁸

In a monograph on Richard Wagner’s anti-Semitism, Jacob Katz cites the case of a fairly large number of Jews whom that musical genius and his wife, Cosima, condescended to receive and have dealings with—Wagner’s so-called “exceptional Jews.” These included Joseph Joachim, the gifted composer, who once asked with anxiety, at the presentation of one of his compositions, whether Wagner “would be able to note anything Jewish in the work”; Karl Tausig, the radiant, precocious youngster whose great musical gifts Wagner recognized and whom he kept in his company (an association so embarrassing to the master that he grew extremely apologetic about it, writing his wife once in explanation that Tausig’s father was “an honest Bohemian, thoroughly Christian”); and Joseph Rubinstein, who wrote Wagner in 1872 lamenting, “I am a Jew. For you, that says everything. All those characteristics noticeable in the present-day Jews I too possessed.”⁴⁹

Belaboring a Nonproblem

Some scholars have tried to draw an analogy between the German-Jewish relationship in modern times and the Jewish-Muslim symbiosis in the Middle Ages, suggesting that the two were of equal scope and significance. Goitein, who was at home with both, emphatically disputes this attempt, asserting that none of the creations of the Jewish authors writing in German or conceived under the impact of modern Western civilization has reached all parts of the Jewish people or influenced the personal inner life of every Jew to such a profound degree as did those of the great Jewish writers who belonged to the medieval civilization of Arabic Islam.

The reason for this difference Goitein considers self-evident. “Modern Western civilization,” he writes, “like the ancient civilization of the Greeks, is essentially at variance with the religious culture of the Jewish people. Islam, however, is of the very flesh and bone of Judaism. . . . Therefore, Judaism could draw freely and copiously from Muslim civilization and, at the same time, preserve its independence and integrity far more completely than it was able to do in the modern world or in the Hellenistic society of Alexandria.”⁵⁰

As an illustration of this disparity, Goitein compares the utterances of Jewish authors of the Middle Ages about Islam and the Arabs with those of the European Jewish thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

about surrounding cultures. For instance, in his *Germanism and Judaism*, Hermann Cohen sets out to “justify” Judaism by regarding it as essentially identical with the highest attainments of German thinking. In contrast, most of the Jewish authors of the Middle Ages who wrote in Arabic “never had the slightest doubt about the absolute superiority of Judaism.”⁵¹

Hermann Cohen was born in Germany in 1842 and died there in 1918. The trials and tribulations of three of his prominent Jewish contemporaries provide an excellent illustration of this lack of confidence in the validity of one's faith; they also shed much light on another salient feature of modern European Jewish history, a phenomenon that one American Jewish scholar and historian has chosen to call “the Jewish presence.” In a book carrying that title and published in New York in 1976, Lucy S. Dawidowics explains that by the phrase “Jewish presence” she means “the preoccupation of Jews with themselves and with their Jewishness” as well as “the space that Jews occupy in the minds of non-Jews and the ambience that Jews have created in the non-Jewish world.”⁵²

Leaving the part of “ambience” aside, one is still left puzzling over this alleged preoccupation of Jews with themselves and with their Jewishness. To what Jews was Dawidowics referring? And at what stage of their history or of that of Jewry as a whole did these Jews begin to spend their time in this dismal fashion? It is fairly obvious (though Dawidowics does not so specify) that the only Jews thus plagued by preoccupation with their Jewishness were the so-called “sons of the Enlightenment,” who for reasons best known to themselves and to resolve problems peculiar to their situation, sought virtually to transform Judaism when they failed to be received as equals in a hostile German world.

Denied entry into the societies in which they found themselves, indeed failing to gain admittance even as apostates, some of these unhappy souls took to brooding over their misfortune. In a variety of desperate attempts, some sought to change the very nature of Judaism, trying to bestow on their fellow Jews a new “identity”; others opted out of the faith completely. But the majority wanted to have it both ways: to remain “Jewish” at the same time as they strove to “modernize” Judaism beyond recognition.

It is the sum-total of these persistent endeavors that one must take Lucy Dawidowics to mean by the seemingly obsessive preoccupation of Jews with what was in effect a nonproblem—namely, their identity and the nature of Judaism and Jewishness. It cannot be considered accidental or even coincidental that the first part of *The Jewish Presence* is taken up largely by a survey of the lives, thoughts, and fortunes of two Central European Jews

who illustrate in a truly remarkable way the point that is being made here. The two Jews in question are the composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) and Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929).⁵³

Born in Vienna's Jewish quarter, Schoenberg indeed must have been obsessively preoccupied with himself and with his Jewishness. His father, Samuel, a shopkeeper, had come from Pressburg, described as "the stronghold of Jewish orthodoxy in Hungary." Until the father's death in 1889, when Arnold was fifteen, the family continued to observe the Jewish holidays. In 1898, however, at the age of twenty-four, Schoenberg became a Lutheran, to the great shock of his family. Although the exact reasons for his conversion are unknown, Dawidowics accepts the theory that it was "prompted by cultural rather than by religious motives."

When Hitler came to power and after the Reichstag passed the notorious Enabling Acts, giving the Nazis the power to enact any legislation at will, the Jews were driven by Nazi law from their positions in government and cultural institutions. Schoenberg, who in the meantime had managed to come up in the country's cultural life, was accordingly dismissed from his post at the Prussian Academy of Arts, and he left Berlin for the United States. En route to his new home, in a simple ceremony at the Liberal Synagogue in Paris, Schoenberg was "readmitted to the Jewish community," his two witnesses being Marc Chagall and David Marianoff, Albert Einstein's son-in-law.

Thirty-five years a Lutheran, Schoenberg was still capable of writing to a friend, in October 1933: "As you have doubtless realized, my return to the Jewish religion took place long ago and is indeed demonstrated in some of my published work . . . and in [the opera] *Moses and Aaron*." In Dawidowics's own words, Schoenberg himself "considered his return to Judaism to be a political rather than a religious act."

It will be noted that religion here plays no role whatsoever: Having converted to Christianity out of "cultural rather than religious motives," Schoenberg now deftly "returned to Judaism" in what was a political rather than a religious act!

That the simple act of conversion was not enough—not politically, culturally, or even religiously—was a lesson that Franz Rosenzweig was to learn before it was too late. But his problem—his preoccupation with himself and with his Jewishness—was in no way less acute than Schoenberg's. One evening in July 1913, at the age of twenty-six, Rosenzweig indeed had a "decisive conversation" with a friend, a convert to Christianity. As a result, he decided to become a Christian himself, having come to the con-

clusion that, in the reconstructed world depicted by his friend, “there seemed to me to be no room for Judaism.”

However, a chance attendance at Yom Kippur services in an orthodox synagogue in Berlin shortly afterward made Rosenzweig change his mind. In that synagogue, it would appear, he “encountered a Judaism he had never known, a faith that transformed him.” Not only did he find his way back, but he was to immerse himself in the study of Judaism and become one of the prominent Jewish thinkers of his time.⁵⁴

“Entrance Ticket to European Culture”

Another case of a crisis of identity is supplied by Karl Kraus's life. It is difficult to imagine a time and a set of circumstances, both public and personal, more peculiar than those in which Kraus grew up. He was born in 1874 in northern Bohemia, the youngest son of a Jewish paper manufacturer, and he was three years old when his family moved to Vienna, the capital of the Austrian half of the Habsburg Monarchy, also known as Austria-Hungary. A sprawling dynastic empire inhabited by a multitude of nationalities, the Habsburg domain suffered from confusion and disorientation of every description: fifteen officially recognized languages (not counting Yiddish); an eccentric dual system of government dividing responsibilities between Vienna and Budapest according to a complicated scheme; retarded industrial development; a predominantly rural and Catholic population; and an autocratic regime led by an octogenarian emperor.

“So acute was the crisis of political identity,” writes Edward Timms, in *Karl Kraus: Apocalyptic Satirist*, “that the Austrian half did not even have an official name, but was known constitutionally as ‘the kingdoms and territories represented in the Reichsrat’. The name *Austria* was commonly used to denote not the provinces of the modern republic, but an enormous sweep of territory stretching from the ghettos of Galicia to the minarets of Sarajevo.” No wonder Kraus was to coin a famously prophetic phrase to describe the Habsburg conglomerate—namely “an experimental station for the end of the world.”⁵⁵

The anomalies of his habitat served to enhance Kraus's creativity, making him what Erich Heller terms “the first European satirist since Swift.” On a less personal level, too, the ideological confusion and the acute crisis of identity were further compounded by the presence of a Jewish community which—as a result of successive waves of migration from other parts of the Empire—formed nearly 10 percent of the population of Vienna.

Nor were the Jews of the capital a homogeneous cultural entity. "The Jewish community itself was riven by faction," Timms writes. "Westernized Jews felt alienated by the beards and kaftans of recent arrivals from the eastern provinces. Assimilationists were affronted by the increasingly strident propaganda for Zionism. . . . The Jewish population of Vienna experienced a crisis of Austrian identity in its most acute form." Indeed, he adds, Kraus's own self-definition as a satirist "must be seen as a response to this dilemma." Like other leading Jewish intellectuals of the day, he sought personal salvation by converting to Catholicism. "But he was to find that the society in which he lived denied all possibility of stable affiliation."⁵⁶

Kraus's dominant concern was language, which he once called "the crystallized tradition of the spirit of man." Timms expresses this near-obsession of his subject: "Kraus seems to have longed for a more logical universe in which good style would have guaranteed truthful content. His arguments echo Lichtenberg's dream of a grammar so strict that it would preclude the expression of falsehood. But the world in which he lived came nearer to Orwell's nightmare of a language so systematically perverted that it virtually precluded candor."

But even more instructive is the record of Kraus's dilemma as a baptized Jew. Brought up in the Jewish faith, Kraus, at the age of twenty-five, formally renounced his religious allegiance. Twelve years later, in 1911, he was received into the Catholic Church. In 1923, however, he again formally renounced his religion. Emphatic though Kraus's attempts were to discard his Jewish identity, it would be an oversimplification to associate this eagerness with the notion of "Jewish self-hatred." Timms, for instance, prefers to attribute them to what he terms "the desire to liberate the self from compromising affiliations."

The preponderance of men of Jewish origin in the commercial and financial life of Vienna, on the stock exchange, and in journalism, he explains, had led to the notion of Jewish identity becoming contaminated by mercantile and opportunistic values. "All the more reason for Kraus, the sworn opponent of those values, to distance himself from the Jewish community and assert the distinctness of his own identity." The problem, however, "was how to achieve this without endorsing the arguments of anti-Semitism."⁵⁷

Be that as it may, it is noteworthy that Kraus never said much in public about his conversion to Catholicism. Timms, indeed, considers the step as "perhaps the most surprising event of [Kraus's] whole career," since it occurred at a time when he was still campaigning with unremitting vigor

against the repressive Christian attitude toward sexuality. In *Die Fackel*, the satirical periodical that Kraus edited between 1899 and 1936, there were few signs of a reorientation following his 1911 baptism. As Timms writes, “It is hard to imagine a body of writing more unchristian in tone than Kraus’s work of the years 1911–1936. It includes some of his most vituperative polemics. The commitment to the Christian faith remained a private matter and imposed no constraints on the satirist.” Only in 1922, when he was on the point of leaving the Catholic Church, did Kraus finally disclose to his readers that he had been baptized.

Like all the other bizarre things experienced by Jews of his generation in Central and Eastern Europe, Kraus’s conversion—and his attitude to his Jewishness—can be understood only in the context of what was happening in those “great times.” Timms makes a convincing case that Kraus’s conversion was virtually just an instance of what can be termed “Catholic chic,” and he mentions Paul Claudel’s eloquent affirmation of Christianity as a defense against secular modernism.

However, side by side with such inducements, other factors inhibited Kraus from openly embracing Catholicism with the fervor of a Claudel or a Peguy. Chief among these were his Jewish origins. “He found himself trapped in a paradox,” Timms explains. “Becoming a Catholic was the surest way of setting a seal upon his decision to renounce his Jewish heritage. But openly to announce his conversion would have exposed him to the charge of having changed his faith for opportunistic reasons. Too many German Jews before him had converted to Christianity in order to advance their careers.”

Timms cites the case of Heine, who had become a Lutheran in the hope of gaining professional advantages. Baptism, in Heine’s famous phrase, was the “entrance ticket to European culture.” In Habsburg Austria, the pressure on Jews to accept baptism was even more intense. “Mahler would never have become director of the Vienna Opera if he had not changed his faith. But the ‘baptized Jew’ soon became a target for opprobrium, from Jewish as well as anti-Semitic quarters.”⁵⁸

Kraus obviously tried to skirt this dilemma as best he could; he almost succeeded. He also happened to die in 1936, thus escaping by a mere few years the tragic fate that awaited the Jews of Europe—religious, secular, and baptized alike.

Between them, the trials and tribulations of Arnold Schoenberg, Karl Kraus, and Franz Rosenzweig point to an important twofold moral: First, the pressures exerted by Western society on the Jews—especially in Central

and Eastern Europe—led many personally and intellectually ambitious members of the Jewish communities there to seek fulfillment outside of their religion and their community. Second, and far more important, a diluted, “modernized” version of Judaism—a mere caricature, to which Schoenberg, Rosenzweig, and Kraus were heirs—could not have been expected to help its followers withstand such enormous pressures.

PART II

Israel as a Middle Eastern Country

Prophecy is many times the principal cause
of the events foretold.

THOMAS HOBBS

The Deeper Roots of Israel

Jews, Turks, Infidels and Heretics.

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER (THIRD COLLECT FOR GOOD FRIDAY)

The Israeli-Arab conflict is commonly depicted as a struggle between two “nations,” the Arabs and the Jews, for the same strip of land. However, although the Arab-versus-Jew formula has been made to take on almost transcendental dimensions, it can hardly stand the test of history, ethnography, anthropology, or sociology.

To be sure, Jews who lived in Arab countries since (and, in certain cases, long before) the Arabs appeared on the scene never lost sight of their distinctive identity as Jews. But they were *Arab Jews*. They spoke; wrote their various literary, philosophical, and theological works; and sang their songs in Arabic. They had the manners and appearance of their Muslim-Arab neighbors, and they acquired many of the mental habits, mores, literary forms, and worldviews of Arabs. Moreover, when they referred to those neighbors, they called them not “Arabs” but “Ishmaelites” or “Muslims.”

It is noteworthy that not only the Jews themselves and their Muslim-Arab neighbors but the Christian West as a whole habitually identified the Jew as the friend and ally of the Muslim, as will be seen from the first section of this chapter. The discussion also will investigate the deeper roots of Israel in the Middle East and review critically certain Arab misconceptions about Israel and its culture.

Jews, Arabs, and Semites

The affinity between the Jews and their Muslim neighbors has deep roots in the affinity, among others, between Judaism and Islam. As A. N. Poliakov has noted in an essay on Arab and Jewish culture, Maimonides—a foremost

figure in medieval Arab science as well as Judaism—concluded his description of the ideal Jewish commonwealth with a note which subsequently was deleted by later Western censors. In that note, Maimonides proclaimed that Muhammad's activity was, "for Israel, a way towards the Messianic king."

For Maimonides, in fact, the appearance of Islam marked the beginning of the Arabs' return to the Abrahamite monotheist culture (which he identified with Judaism) as well as a stage in the world expansion of that culture. In the work Poliak cites, Maimonides emphasized that the Muslims were not heathens and that the Abrahamite ethnic mark of circumcision was to unite the Arabs with the Jews. He also expected a union of the Arabic-speaking countries (with an emphasis on Egypt, where he dwelt) with the Holy Land. And he often arranged Jewish laws in a manner recalling contemporary institutions in those countries.¹

Maimonides' whole approach to Judaism and his view of its attitude to non-Jews—who, in his own age and world, were Muslims—were remarkable for their open-mindedness and liberality. A brief but eloquent and highly instructive statement of this attitude can be found in a letter Maimonides wrote to a convert to Judaism who was made to feel out of place among, and somewhat inferior to, Jews "by blood," and who brought his trouble before the master. Maimonides' response epitomizes his whole conception of Judaism, its attitude to strangers, and its function in the education of both Jews and non-Jews.²

"Thou hast asked about the blessings and the prayers," Maimonides wrote to the recent convert, "and whether thou shouldst say 'Our God and the God of our fathers' and 'Who sanctified us with His Commandments,' and 'Who separated us and chose us,' and 'Who gave our fathers an inheritance' and 'brought us up from the land of Egypt,' and 'didst work miracles for our fathers,' and the rest of the traditional allocutions. Thou shouldst use them all and change nothing but shouldst pray as any born Jew, whether thou prayest in private or whether thou ledest the congregation in prayer."

Maimonides then goes on to explain the situation in more detail:

The root of the matter is that our father Abraham taught the whole people and instructed them and made them acquainted with the religion of truth and the uniqueness of God, and spurned idolatry and destroyed its worship and brought many under the wings of the Divine Presence and taught them and instructed them and ordered his children and household after him to keep the way of God, as it is

written in the Law, “For I had known him to the end that he may command his children and his household after him that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement.” Therefore every stranger who joins us to the end of time, and everyone who recognizes the unity of God as taught in the Scripture, is a disciple of Abraham our father; and they are all of them members of his household and he it is who brought them to the right path.

Maimonides writes the convert in conclusion:

And therefore, thou art to say “our God and the God of our fathers” because Abraham is thy father; . . . there is no difference between us and thee in anything. Thou mayest certainly say in thy prayers “Who hast chosen us,” “Who has given us the Law,” and “Who has separated us,” because He hast indeed chosen thee and separated thee from the peoples and given thee the Law; for the Law is given alike to us and to the stranger, as it is written, “O congregation, there is one statute for ye and for the stranger that dwelleth among ye”; “an everlasting statute for your generations, alike for ye and for the stranger before the Lord”; “one Law and one judgement is there for ye and for the stranger who sojourneth with ye.”

Know this: Our fathers who went up from Egypt were, in Egypt, idolaters for the most part: they had mixed with the nations and had learned of their ways, until God sent Moses our teacher and brought them under the wings of the Divine Presence, us and the strangers together, and gave us all one statute. Let not then thy descent to be light in thine eyes. If our descent is from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, thy descent is from God Himself; and so it is expressly stated in the Book of Isaiah: “One shall say, I am the Lord’s; another shall call himself by the name of Jacob.”³

Commenting on this last sentence, Leon Roth notes that a reconciliation between particularism and universalism “could hardly be more nobly suggested or more neatly fathered on a Biblical text.” He explains:

All men alike are called to the Divine Presence, and it is the Jews’ function, as it is the purpose of the Bible, to help them on the way; but “any man born into the world,” whether Jew or not, can dedicate himself to “stand before God,” and he is then “sanctified with the sanctity of the holy of holies.” And so Maimonides refused to call either Christianity or Islam heathen. They are stages in the upward

movement of humanity and as such to be welcomed and given their place. Thus we do not find in Maimonides, as we do in his predecessor and anti-type, the poet-philosopher Judah Halevi, the conception of an exclusive connection between religion and the Jewish people, or between religion and Palestine, or between such religious phenomena as prophecy and the geographical conditions of Palestine. Judaism for him is not a product of "race" or an inheritance of "blood," nor is it bound up exclusively with any one people or any one soil.⁴

Elsewhere in this book, I have examined in some detail the respective attitudes toward the Jews of Christianity and Islam, and the way these attitudes, in turn, were to affect the Jews' lives and influence their general outlooks and temperaments. Maimonides's attitudes were no doubt decisively influenced by the society in which he lived and especially the kind of relationship then prevailing between the Jews and their neighbors. By all accounts, this was a unique relationship, especially when compared to the one prevailing in Europe at that time.

Historians have characterized this period of cooperation and interaction between Jews and Muslims as representing a "symbiosis," something that Jewry never managed to have with any of the cultures with which it came into contact. The reason for this, according to Goitein, was that whereas modern Western civilization, like the ancient civilization of the Greeks, is essentially at variance with Judaism, "Islam is of the flesh and bone of Judaism." It is, so to speak, a recast, an enlargement of the latter, just as Arabic is closely related to Hebrew. "Never," Goitein concludes, "has Judaism encountered such a close and fructuous symbiosis as that [which it had] with the medieval civilization of Arab Islam."⁵

It is noteworthy that this affinity between Jews (*all* Jews, not only "Arab Jews") and Muslims has, until comparatively recently, been considered almost axiomatic throughout the Christian West. A curious historical episode may be cited here. When Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield), then prime minister of England, returned home from the Congress of Berlin of 1878, he saw his achievement as having saved Turkey from dismemberment by the victorious Russians, thus preserving both the peace of Europe and the interests of Britain. His opponents, however, would have none of this; they accused him of bringing shame and strife to his country by pursuing policies that were both harmful and wrong. Among other things, they asserted that he was applying a Jewish, not an English, policy and was subordinating British interests to Jewish (or Hebrew or Semitic) sentiments and interests.

Disraeli's detractors regarded his pro-Turkish policies as "Jewish" because they felt that, as a Jew, he was bound to rally automatically to the Turkish side. A Jew, even a baptized Jew, they argued, remained an Oriental, and therefore, in the struggle over the Eastern Question, Disraeli's loyalties were necessarily with Asia against Europe, with Islam against Christendom. T. P. O'Connor, one of Disraeli's critics and a Liberal member of Parliament, put it quite succinctly. "People living within the same frontiers, speaking the same language, professing the same creed, with exactly the same interests," he said, "have held the most opposite views upon this Russo-Turkish question. . . . But here are the Jews, dispersed over every part of the globe, speaking different tongues, divided in nearly every sympathy—separated, in fact, by everything that can separate men, except the one point of race—all united in their feelings on this great contest!"

For many ages, he added, "there has been among large sections of the Jews the strongest sympathy with the Mohammedan peoples. . . . In the time of the Crusaders, the Jews were the friends who aided the Mohammedans in keeping back the tide of Christian invasion which was floating against the East, and in Spain the Jews were the constant friends and allies of the Moorish against the Christian inhabitants of the country. [Disraeli's] general view then upon this question of Turkey is that as a Jew he is a kinsman of the Turk, and that, as a Jew, he feels bound to make common cause with the Turk against the Christian."⁶

Again, in an 1877 book on Ottoman power in Europe, the historian M. A. Freeman wrote: "No one wishes to place the Jew, whether Jew by birth or by religion, under any disability as compared with the European Christian. But it will not do to have the policies of England, the welfare of Europe, sacrificed to Hebrew sentiment. The danger is no imaginary one. Every one must have marked that the one subject on which Lord Beaconsfield, through his whole career, has been in earnest has been whatever touched his own people." Lord Beaconsfield, he added, "is the active friend of the Turk. . . . Throughout the East, the Turk and the Jew are leagued against the Christian. . . . Throughout Europe, the most friendly Turkish part of the press is largely in Jewish hands. It may be assumed everywhere, with the smallest class of exceptions, that the Jew is the friend of the Turk and the enemy of the Christian."⁷

While this may sound anti-Semitic in tone and content, the belief in the "Semitism" of Disraeli's Eastern policy went far beyond anything that was even remotely akin to anti-Semitism. "I have a strong suspicion," Gladstone told the Duke of Argyll, "that Dizzy's crypto-Judaism has to do with his policy. The Jews of the East *bitterly* hate the Christians, who have not

always used them well.” As late as 1924, in a paper which Sir James Headlam-Morely wrote as historical adviser to the Foreign Office, he remarked that Disraeli “in his sympathies . . . was consistently a Jew and a Zionist. . . . Not without reason did his enemies publicly attribute his Near Eastern policy to his ‘Semitic instincts’. . . . The conviction can scarcely be avoided that the charge contained part of the truth, and that if ‘Semitic sympathies’ be added we get yet nearer to Disraeli’s inner personal motives.”⁸

Commenting on these and on similar appraisals of Disraeli’s Eastern policies, which he quotes in his essay, Bernard Lewis concedes that like many great statesmen Disraeli “may well have been affected, in his mature attitudes and decisions, by the formative influences of his youth.” Disraeli’s pride in his Jewishness is well known, Lewis notes. “Disraeli,” he adds, “*was* an admirer of Islam, of the Persians and Turks as well as the Arabs, and in his youth he had even thought of joining the Turkish army as a volunteer. Moreover, his pro-Turkish sentiments were connected with his vestigial Jewishness, and are typical of a good deal of Jewish opinion at the time.”⁹

Strictly speaking, however, Disraeli’s sentimental Semitism cannot explain his pro-Turkish feelings. First, “Disraeli’s racialism—his obsession with race in general and the Jewish race in particular—owes more to his Christian education than to his Jewish ancestry, and has no parallel in the writings of authentic Jews of the time. It was in Christian Europe that the great racial myths, with the accompanying rejection of ‘inferior stocks,’ had begun to influence ideas and events. Disraeli’s hymns, or rather fugues, on the theme of Jewish power and Jewish glory are no more than inverted anti-Jewish stereotypes, with as little foundation in reality as their originals.”

Second, as Disraeli’s biographer Buckle remarked in what must be considered the last word on this fascinating subject, if Disraeli in his Eastern policy had really been guided by racial feeling, “the race which that feeling would have led him to support would have been . . . the Arab, and not the Turk.”¹⁰

Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East

Irrespective of how unfounded it might be in history and in ethnicity, the antithetical opposition of “Jew” and “Arab” is currently so widespread that an attempt to build a case for Arab-Jewish coexistence on past experience and religiocultural affinities may seem as cavalier as it is futile. How-

ever, as things stand today, a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of a polarized ethnic-nationalist rivalry does not seem feasible. It is in the nature of pan-movements that they cannot coexist or coextend on the same strip of territory, and both Zionism and pan-Arabism have made it absolutely clear that they consider Palestine their exclusive collective property. To make things even more unwieldy, no responsible Zionist leader so far has convincingly denied the charge—made by Arabs and others throughout the years—that Israel was behaving as an alien creation, a foreign growth in the body of the Arab world.

It is often argued that, prior to the rise of the new-type Arab nationalist, the Arabs did not resist Zionist plans and designs; witness the famous Feisal-Weizmann “agreement” of 1919 and Feisal’s reference to the Jews as “our Jewish cousins.” Yet the Zionists, for reasons over which they admittedly had no absolute control, failed to answer to the specifications of the *Arab* concept of “cousin.” A candid observer with strong Zionist sympathies writes, “A product of Europe and its civilization, Zionism was caught up in the notion of the superiority of Western, i.e., European, civilization. This notion caused the Zionists—and the Jews as a whole—to look down upon the Arabs and their ancient culture. . . . The Jews came to Palestine with the determination to make the country an outpost of Western civilization and to ‘civilize the Arab nations’. The unequivocal cultural identification of the Yishuv with the West . . . disabused the Arabs of the hope, expressed by Feisal, that the Jewish ‘cousins’ were *cousins* by Arab definition.”¹¹

The conflict between Jew and Arab over Palestine, though originally mainly political in character, had thus taken on an added, cultural dimension. It is this latter aspect of the problem that makes a quest for the deeper roots of Arab-Jewish life and coexistence in this part of the world so essential and relevant at this juncture.

The scope and importance of Arab-Jewish relations and coexistence through the ages have been discussed in some detail in earlier chapters. The continuous Jewish presence in Palestine since time immemorial constitutes another important facet of our subject. Toward the conclusion of his book *A History of the Jewish People*, James Parkes devotes a few paragraphs to what he calls “the new Jewry of Israel.” By the second decade of Israel’s independence, he notes, certain patterns are beginning to emerge. “Of the Jews born abroad,” he explains, “half have an Islamic and not a European background. Their birth-rate is higher than that of the Europeans, but their future position in the state is still something of an enigma though, with their children, they already form a majority of the Jewish population.”

Parkes writes that the Sabras, native-born Israelis of European parents, are “demonstratively not interested in Diaspora history,” and that it will probably be two or three generations before they really begin to feel themselves part of the worldwide and trimillennial history. This isolation of the Sabras from Jewish history has the justification, according to Parkes, that Israelis are concerned with their new and contemporary problems, in which the diaspora cannot help them. Their future depends on their “relationship with the Arab world, and [their] ability to shape the policy of an independent government, relating itself to the rival ideologies of all the continents.” Independence has thus confronted the Sabras with totally new issues, Parkes points out—and concludes: “It is a good thing that [the Sabra] feels withdrawn and out of sympathy with a history whose very complexity overwhelms him.”¹²

Yet while the Sabra needs time to acquire new perspective and “cannot be hurried,” Israel remains geographically where it has always been. It seems that, totally new as the issues confronting the Israeli may appear to be, their resolution in no small measure depends on the Israeli’s success, first of all, in placing his or her present position in the perspective of that Jewish history whose complexity seems so overwhelming and, second, in attaining a working relationship with the surrounding Arab world. It is a remarkable tribute to James Parkes’s memory, his moral standing, and his searching mind that he should have contributed so much to a clarification of both these fateful aspects of Israel’s current dilemma.

There are two central theses in Parkes’s writings on this subject. The first concerns the roots of Israel and the continuity of Jewish life in the Middle East, while the second focuses on relations between Israel and the surrounding Arab world. The two issues are uniquely interconnected. As early as mid-1948, Parkes was able to write that although history shows that the emergence of the new state of Israel is a natural process and that it is not the artificial creation its enemies make it out to be, it cannot be simply a repetition of the old. “Jewry,” he wrote, “has to take into account the emergence of Christianity and Islam, as permanent factors in the new picture of the Holy Land, and find a creative relationship with them. That a bi-national state proved impossible was not the fault of the Jews; but there will be no peace in Palestine until there is reconciliation between Jewish and Arab needs.”¹³

Before such a reconciliation can be attained, however, there was need for a moral-intellectual articulation of the problem, and Parkes attempted just such a task. In his 1954 book *End of an Exile*, he sets out to show that “far more was involved in Zionism than just a nineteenth century Jewish form of nationalism.” This he does by examining five “roots” of Israel, which he

considers deeply embedded in the experience of the Jewish people as a whole.

The first and deepest of these roots is Judaism, as the religion of a community. Just as contemporary secularism cannot undo the influence of Christianity in the formation of European civilization over the past millennium, Parkes explains, “so secularist Zionism cannot alter the fact that the deepest root from which the State of Israel has sprung is the Jewish religion.” For the nature of Judaism is such that, in all their wanderings, individual Jews were conscious that they were members of a single people, and that the fulfillment of their own individual destiny was inextricably bound up with the safety and restoration of their people. These Jews would not have understood had they been asked whether that people constituted a religious or a national community. Even though many of those who created the modern Zionist movement were in reaction against the orthodoxy of their day, they inherited to the full this deep feeling for the whole people which orthodoxy had implanted in them.

The second root of Israel is the Messianic hope, intimately connected ever since the destruction of the Jewish state with the expectation of a return to the promised land. This hope of return finds expression every year in the Passover service celebrated in every Jewish home. There, in the commemoration of the deliverance from Egypt, each generation associates itself with those who ate the bitter bread of exile in the land of the Pharaohs; and each generation feels that it participated in the great journey to the promised land as the last words of the festival service echo in the heart of each family: “Next year in Jerusalem.”

The third root of the modern state of Israel, Parkes continues, is Jewish history itself, and the long experience of dispersion, insecurity, and inequality under the rule of both Christianity and Islam, as well as the shattering disillusion which followed the high hopes of complete emancipation in nineteenth-century Europe. But it was not only the Jews of Europe who were to suffer this disillusionment. “In the heyday of nineteenth-century European optimism,” Parkes notes, “it seemed possible to the members of the Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Anglo-Jewish Association that it was but a matter of time before the ancient and miserably depressed Jewries of the East would benefit from the general rise in the standard of living and education.” In the French possessions of Africa, Jews were beginning to taste the joys and responsibilities of citizenship. In Egypt, Jews benefited from the security of a British administration. Elsewhere schools were springing up; progress and prosperity seemed just around the corner. However, even before 1914, “the rising nationalisms of the Eastern peoples revealed how unsubstantial some of these dreams were likely to prove, and

greater knowledge showed how little basic change was taking place within the miserable quarters in which most Jews lived under the stagnation of Muslim rule.”

The fourth root of modern Israel is the continuity of Jewish life in Palestine through the ages. Though the number of Jewish inhabitants has constantly varied since Roman times, this has been because of circumstances outside Jewish control and not because Jews themselves had lost interest in their “promised land.” But on the whole, it may be said that the number of Jews inhabiting Palestine was always as large as possible in light of conditions existing at the time.

The fifth and last root of Israel that Parkes enumerates is the relation of Palestine Jewry to the Jewish world. This, he writes, is of even greater significance than the continued physical presence in Palestine of a Jewish community; for, on four critical occasions in Jewish history, this community played a role that no other Jewry—however great its numbers, its power, or its intellectual eminence—can claim to have paralleled.

These occasions were when, at four moments in its troubled passage through the last two thousand years, Jewish life found itself with but the narrowest margin separating it from final destruction. The first was the destruction of the Temple, when Jewry’s political institutions were abolished, its religious practices proscribed, and it was itself challenged from within by the increasing power of emerging Christianity.

The second such occasion was when Turkish invasions destroyed the prosperity and stability of the Baghdad caliphate, at a time when Babylonian Jewry was the center of the Jewish world and had no visible successors either elsewhere in Muslim lands or in Europe. The third occasion arose when two centuries of persecution, expulsion, and the destruction of their centers of learning culminated in the tragedies of the double expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 and 1496—again with no successor in sight.

The final occasion was when Czarist persecution changed the whole face of Jewry and when the wave of modern anti-Semitism culminated in the death camps of Hitler’s Europe. On all these fateful occasions, it was the Jewish center in Palestine that held fast and prevented the threatening ultimate extinction of Jewish life and the Jewish religion.

As Parkes points out, the existence and statement of these roots has an immeasurable relevance to Israel’s position in the area and the role it is destined to play in it. For Israel should be capable of playing a very important role in the Middle East, though this will be possible only if the breach between it and the Arab states is healed. This role, however, is not the

rather grandiose one that Israeli propaganda sometimes envisages. “The rescue of the Arab countries from their material and spiritual disorder,” Parkes is careful to remind us, “must be primarily their own affair, and the extent to which the West can help is limited by Arab pride and suspicion. Israel certainly can do nothing.” But in an Arab world which was moving forward toward a juster society, it could play a part. To suggest that it is Israel’s destiny to *lead* the Middle East into a better way of life is to exaggerate to the point of absurdity. “But to suggest that the interaction of an Eastern-Western Israel with the rest of the Middle East would increase the general progress and security of the region is neither exaggerated nor absurd,” Parkes asserts.

What stands between Israel and this possibility, so desirable for its own development, is the fact that only a few are beginning to share with it the understanding of the five roots discussed here. And yet they *are* its roots; they *are* the justification of its presence on the Middle East scene; they are infinitely more important than the legality of the Balfour Declaration. “It is they and not British bayonets or the decisions of the League [of Nations] and the United Nations which give to her a solid basis for her hopes, an anchor in her perils.” Parkes is well aware of the insufficiency of such historical arguments in themselves. Indeed, in conventional political terms, he sees Israel as being confronted with an impasse. “For history is capable of many interpretations. Each one of her roots could be twisted, misrepresented, judged irrelevant, contradicted by a malicious enemy, as it could be sneered out of court by the mere fact that to put forward such claims marks her as unique.”

Nevertheless, these are Israel’s title deeds, Parkes concludes. “I believe that she must put them forward, stated with all the scholarship, the objectivity, the moderation, of which her greatest scholars are capable; put them without arrogance and without exaggeration, but above all put them forward with a clear recognition of the debt of honour which they entail, and the clear statement of acceptance of that debt.” In this same passage, Parkes expresses the hope that, the facts being interwoven with the past of both Christianity and Islam, there will be some “on the Christian side at any rate, but I hope on the Muslim also, who will know that in fact [Israel] is speaking the truth and will acknowledge it.”¹⁴

One Arab’s Misconceptions

The hope Parkes expressed that the Christian side would acknowledge the truth and justice of Israel’s case soon would be dashed. In the course of a

1962 lecture on “The Continuity of Jewish Life in the Middle East,” Parkes refers to his correspondence with Dr. Charles Malik, a Lebanese Christian and prominent professor of philosophy who also served as foreign minister and as Lebanon’s ambassador to the United Nations. Malik had published an article in *Foreign Affairs* in which he made many references to Israel. He began his article, entitled “The Near East: The Search for Truth,” by describing Lebanon’s role as “spiritual and intellectual mediation and understanding of what is best and truest in East and West.” He then went on to say that “some writers, whatever their motive, have depicted Israel as destined to reconcile East and West.”

“But how,” asked Malik, “can one reconcile two things by being outside them? The West is unthinkable apart from Christianity and the East apart from Islam. Israel is grounded neither in the one nor in the other.” Insisting that Israel was an intolerable intrusion into the Middle East, Malik went on to argue: “There is a profound intellectual chasm between Israel and the rest of the Middle East. Two entirely different economies, two entirely different religions, two entirely different languages . . . two entirely different mentalities, two entirely different cultures, two entirely different civilizations face each other across the chasm. I do not know of a single other instance in the world where there is such radical existential discontinuity across national frontiers. The ‘ingathering’ of the Oriental Jews may soften this discontinuity a bit, but not to the extent of making it at all comparable to the graded transition that obtains almost everywhere in the world.”

For Malik, then, Israel is “only geographically part of the Near East, and therefore her fundamental problem is not how to establish herself—a relatively easy matter, considering the world forces, both positive and negative, which aided her—but how to integrate herself, economically, politically, spiritually, in the life of the Near East; how to promote friendly, creative, sustained and sustaining, trustful, peaceful, internal relations with the Arab and Muslim worlds.” Self-establishment by force, he concludes, “is fairly easy—at least it is possible; but self-perpetuation is, in the nature of the case, absolutely impossible. At least history has not known an instance of a nation in permanent enmity with its immediate world.”¹⁵

Parkes relates in his lecture that, having seen Malik’s meditations on the problems of the Middle East to be important and that the article was widely quoted, he wrote to its author, pointing out that it was odd to complain that Israel was grounded in neither Christianity nor Islam, since both Christianity and Islam were grounded in the religion of Israel. Malik, however, was not prepared to modify his original thesis in any way, and the correspondence was closed.¹⁶ But while rejecting the first part of Malik’s

thesis out of hand, Parkes makes some remarks on the second part, the one dealing with Israel's future position in the area. If Israel, he argues, established itself in a completely alien territory simply by force of arms, "then one would have to agree that Dr. Malik was right." For such a situation is indeed ultimately untenable.

"Not only do comparative forces change their balance," Parkes writes in justification of Malik's remarks, "but it is impossible to maintain, generation after generation, the same *elan* which once sufficed to secure a victory against enormous odds, and to maintain a foothold on alien soil." Those who would argue on the side of Dr. Malik rest their case on what, to them, are two quite evident facts. "The transformation of a small immigrant population, painfully wresting a living from the soil, charity, or petty commerce, into a 'national home' with substantial self-government, was in two fundamental qualities an alien decision, which in no sense grew out of the contemporary conditions or capacities of the Middle East." As formulated by Parkes, these two fundamental qualities are:

1. The Balfour Declaration was a product of the last generation in which European and American powers could impose their will on the rest of the world.
2. The Jewish forces that built up the political, social, and economic life of the national home were the product of European and American emancipation and European and American technological and political experience.

Parkes points out that, in advancing his thesis, Malik was answering the usual argument put forward at the time by the Jewish side. The legality of the Balfour Declaration, for instance, was then constantly stressed, while the economic advantage that the Arabs of Palestine were said to be drawing from the vitalizing influence of Jewish settlement was almost always advanced as the ground for ultimate Arab acceptance of the Jewish national home. Today, however, "both these arguments have crumbled." The European origin of the Balfour Declaration "damns it completely in Arab eyes," Parkes explains, while economic progress and stability have become "a fairly low priority in Arab political propaganda and dreams of the future." The 1947 Partition Plan of the United Nations shares the same origin and the same condemnation as the Balfour Declaration.

However, the collapse of the main arguments advanced by the Zionists during the past half-century should thus have the effect, according to Parkes, "of forcing us back on to the true foundations of Israel, and of revealing how false every one of Dr. Malik's arguments is." For the fact is

that Israel today is “a Middle Eastern country both in history and population.” The majority of its population being Middle Easterners, “the only aspect of the matter which is a real subject for argument is the definition of the area within which these Middle Easterners ought to exercise their sovereign authority.”

That there are various differences between Israel and its neighbors is not a chasm but rather the normal relationship between adjacent countries. Taking the whole of the Arab area today, from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf, Parkes shows that the Jews, though numerically much fewer, share with the Arabs the claim to being an element in the population of every Middle Eastern country. “The countries to which Dr. Malik insisted Israel was completely alien were Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan and Egypt. The glorious absurdity of his argument is shown by the fact that, apart from Neolithic survivals and the Copts in Egypt, Jews are the longest-settled of the present identifiable inhabitants in some, and have lived longer in all the others, than Arabs have in Palestine or Egypt.”

Regarding Syria and Lebanon, the frontiers between the kings of Israel and the kings of Damascus fluctuated continually, and Jews lived scattered through the area before the Babylonian exile. In Iraq, communities of Jews from the exile of the kingdom of Israel have been settled in Kurdistan ever since; the exiles of Judah, settled between the Tigris and the Euphrates in an area south of the present city of Baghdad, provided a center for the whole Jewish people from the fourth century to the tenth and, in the Babylonian Talmud, gave form to Jewish traditionalism up to the present day. In Egypt, there were colonies of Jews from the Judean exile onward; at the height of its prosperity, before the Arab conquest, the city of Alexandria was home to more than a million Jews.

Parkes goes on recording the continuous Jewish presence in the Middle East by observing that Jews probably settled in the Arab Peninsula, in western Saudi Arabia and Yemen, at the same time they settled in Egypt. Although Muhammad expelled them from the northern area when he found that they would not accept this new version of monotheism, their importance can be judged from the fact that the second city of Islam is still known by its Jewish name of Medina. The origin of Jewish history is lost in the midst of antiquity. The Queen of Sheba may have come from there, and at one time there was an independent Jewish ruler in the area. It was from Yemen, too, that Jews crossed the sea to form the Falasha community of Ethiopia. Finally, the Jews of North Africa have been settled there so long that they claim to date from the time of Joshua. They were probably there at least from the time of the Punic wars, and absorbed into their communi-

ties many of their Punic or Phoenician fellow Semites after the defeat of the latter by the Romans. In any case, they extended their religion among the native Berbers, and a Jewish princess of Berber stock led the resistance to Muhammad in the seventh century.

Concerning Jewish history in Palestine itself, Parkes's thesis is that this history "is not anecdotal but continuous." The statement, which one encounters quite often, that the Jews left the country nearly two thousand years ago, he asserts, "is as absurdly unhistorical as the statements of Dr. Malik which we have just been examining." Moreover, independently of its fluctuating size and wealth, the Jewish community in Palestine has played a unique role in Jewish history. In the great breaks in the history of the Jews, political or religious, "it was always from the Jewry of Palestine that the new impetus came, that Judaism was cast into the new form which enabled Jewish history to continue its millennial development." It is, of course, true that from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries the Jewish communities of the Middle East experienced a sharp decline and Europe occupied the center of the Jewish picture; "but it is less obvious than it appeared to be to nineteenth-century historians that the Jewish future lies in the same area" (i.e., Europe).

The scientific study of Jewish history grew up in the nineteenth century, when the whole atmosphere suggested that Europe was the center and culmination of the world's evolution, with the American continent as its natural extension. "The East was romantic, it had been important in the past; but for nineteenth century historians of the Jewish people, whether Jewish or Christian, it had passed permanently out of the center of the picture with the death of Maimonides in 1204, and since then had only anecdotal importance." Yet, in truth, "the disappearance of the Jewries of the Middle East from their predominant position was not due to an internal decay or collapse of those Jewries but to the misfortune which fell upon the whole area, and from which Jews suffered little more than the rest of the population."

The point of Parkes's argument here is that after a long period of decline, the Middle East needed only "injections of various kinds from outside to help it regain the prosperity and dynamism which rightfully belong to it, both by the antiquity of its cultural heritage and the importance of its geographical position." This applies to the Jewries of the Middle East in the same way as it does to the population of the area as a whole.

After this brief historical sketch, Parkes turns to more pressing matters. The totally unexpected development which has made Israel a Middle Eastern country in population as well as in history, he maintains, has been the

result of an involuntary internal migration within the area itself, and Israel would be well-advised to assert and publicize this fact with all the means at its disposal.

Moreover, though this line of reasoning may not have a direct effect on Arab attitudes, there is no reason why it should not be of immense importance in the shaping of future relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors. "The founders of Zionism, the first pioneers, the pilot planning, all were European. They meant to build up an ideal European state. Those Middle Eastern Jews they found in Palestine they regarded as interesting survivals, not as partners. It is, then, possible for [then Egyptian president] Nasser or his successor to say: 'We were unalterably opposed to an intrusion of European colonialism into our heartlands. But what has now happened is that there has been an involuntary exchange of population within the Middle East world. That we can accept'."¹⁷

Parkes, finally, seems to have been well aware of the prevailing tensions between East and West inside Israel itself. "I know there are innumerable tensions between Jews from Europe and those from Muslim countries," he writes. "I find some Jews ashamed of their Sephardi brethren and convinced that there is an unbridgeable gulf between them. But I refuse to believe that these tensions outweigh the immense value of proclaiming to the world that Israel is a Middle Eastern country; and in announcing boldly that in helping forward her Sephardi elements, while keeping all that is of value in older ways of life, she is facing exactly the same Middle Eastern problem as Nasser in Egypt or Benbella in Algeria."

Parkes's ideas, articulated over three decades ago, continue to point a way out of the present Middle East impasse. Little, though, seems to have changed in the basically Eurocentric attitudes of the Israeli establishment. Nevertheless, the radical change that Arab attitudes have undergone since the Six-Day War, and which gradually bore fruit with the conclusion of a peace treaty with Egypt and the Oslo Accord with the Palestinians, has had its results. Israel today is a Middle Eastern country not only because of demographic-cultural factors; the importance of these and their impact have always been minimized by a determined and rigidly culturist in-group. What seems to be more important, on the practical plane, is Israel's growing involvement in the affairs of the region. This, added to the cultural changes within Israeli society and Israel's body politic, will inevitably open up vistas and possibilities so far-reaching that no narrowly ethnocentric stands and aspirations can preclude.¹⁸

Ideology, Politics, and Culture

Two basic aspirations underlie all our work in this country:
To be like all nations, and to be different from all nations.

DAVID BEN-GURION

Three aspects of Israel form the subject matter of this chapter: its ideological origins and the way in which they tended to shape the country's cultural face; the fragile nature of Israeli democracy and the uncertainties surrounding its future; and the still unfolding ethnic cleavage and its translation into actual political terms.

Origins

Myron J. Aronoff, a keen observer of the Israeli scene, remarks in a paper on the origins of Israeli political culture on the emphasis Israel places on the Jewish people's historical link to a land from which it has been exiled for nearly two millennia. Zionism's aim to establish the legitimacy of Israel by creating a credible claim to continuity since the biblical past, he writes, "has been accomplished primarily through the use of symbols, myths, and rituals that were interpreted differently according to the ideological perspectives of competing political movements and parties."¹

These different interpretations of symbols, myths, and rituals resulted in a certain measure of ambiguity. Zionism, in fact, "contains conflicting, even contradictory, principles that have been interpreted differently by competing groups in changing circumstances to justify their goals and to give legitimacy to their interests. This dynamic, after all, is the essence of cultural production and reproduction."

The tension between such contradictory aspirations, while it has always contributed to what Aronoff calls "the dynamics of Zionist discourse,"

seems to have been an inseparable part of the ideology. Take the early Zionists' notions of history. The impression one gets—to take one example—from reading Shmuel Almog's painstakingly researched book *Zionism and History*, which examines the writings and constant soul-searchings of the first Zionist ideologues, is that of individuals who didn't give two hoots about "history." Indeed, to quote one of the more opinionated of the group, "the forces of history" were there to be "defeated." In the formulation of Joseph Klausner, who was to become a renowned historian of the age of Jesus, these forces were to be approached "dialectically," the intention being "to exploit them in order to defeat them."

Interestingly enough Klausner chose the conduct of the Hasmoneans as a possible illustration of what we are to do with the forces of history. "If the Hasmoneans in antiquity," he wrote in an 1897 article entitled "The Establishment of a New Jewish Movement," "had measured their forces against those of the Syrians, if they had weighed through cold logic how superior were the forces of Greek culture . . . compared to the meager and isolated forces of Jewry, our heroes would unquestionably have come to the conclusion that there was no hope for Israel." Fortunately, as it were, "the Hasmoneans were filled with a sense of courage and were not concerned with calculating the odds!"²

Of course, there was no shortage of appeals to history or even to "the tribunal of history." Max Bodenheimer, a prominent leader of the German Zionists, lambasted the opponents of Zionism by comparing them to the Hellenists of the Hasmonean era and to Joseph Flavius in Roman times. "History," he announced, "will march on, condemning the derision of these gentlemen just as it condemned the traitors of antiquity—the Hellenistic High Priest Menelaus and the pseudo-Roman Joseph Flavius—to everlasting infamy."

As Almog comments, "The criterion for history's judgement seemed to be national fidelity, an unequivocal yardstick equally applicable to all generations." Yet, he adds, "such thinking assumed that history was on the side of the faithful and against the traitors—which inevitably led to the need to account for the common disparity between lofty ideals and actual success." Not surprisingly, utterances such as those of Bodenheimer and Klausner, and the far-fetched historical analogies they made, "could be taken as evidence that Zionism was inclined toward reckless adventurism and preferred the heroic ideal over sober political considerations."³

Zionism and History covers a period of a single decade—from 1896, the year in which Herzl's *The Jewish State* was published, to 1906, in which the Russian Zionists convened their conference in Helsingfors. The most im-

mediate impression a reading of the book is likely to make is the sheer exoticness of the terms employed and the amount of rhetoric the main protagonists indulge in. For example, Joseph Vitkin, in his famed manifesto, declaims: "Brothers, our people has always paid homage to quality, not quantity. Our creed, too, exhorts us to expel from our midst anyone whose private life is suspected to be more important to him than our people, all the faint-hearted who in time of peril may cast down their standards and flee." He then calls upon the youth of Israel to fight not only "nature, disease and hunger" but also their own friends and brothers, "enemies of Zion and Zionism."

This intense sense of mission is even stronger in Klausner, who is quoted as asserting that "we, and we *alone*, have offered a basic solution to the question of the continuing existence of the Israelite nation." This, he adds, entitled Zionists to regard themselves as "truly the lifeblood and powerhouse of this nation, and the historical-national process of Israel is transpiring in our camp alone."

The exotic vision of Zionism was to become an inseparable part of the self-image both of the ideology and of the sovereign state of Israel. For example, in May 1954, in an angry censure of a senior American State Department official who argued that the Law of Return was a cause for legitimate concern to Israel's Arab neighbors, the Knesset proclaimed that "the ingathering of the exiles is the supreme ideal of Israel." Speaking in the debate, foreign minister Moshe Sharett accused the American official, Henry Byroade, of willingness "to aim an arrow, as it were, at the very pupil of [Israel's] eye, at its most precious and sacred aspect." Because Israel was "unique and *sui generis*," he added, "it is idle to call its peculiarities into question." "Israel," Sharett concluded, "is such and can be no different. All quests for precedents and analogies would be in vain. There is no state exactly like it in the present international world because there is no parallel to Jewish history in the annals of Mankind."⁴

But to return to the subject of myths, symbols, and rituals: What are the myths on which Zionism bases its legitimacy? According to Aronoff, Zionism's core myth is "the eschatological notion of exile and redemption. It is both a 'root metaphor' that provides categories for conceptualizing the order of the world, and a 'key scenario' that elaborates mechanisms for social action. The prophetic promise to the children of Israel of an end to exile in the Diaspora by a return to Zion is the central principle that motivates and legitimates Zionism. It is interpreted as a historic right (or duty) by the secularists and a religious right (or duty) by the religious Zionists."

According to Aronoff, one of the primary motivations for requests for

reinterment of remains, particularly by secular Zionists, is related to the desire to fulfill this obligation on behalf of one's comrades, even posthumously. "While this ritual honors both the individual or group being reinterred, it no less importantly symbolically recognizes the Zionist credentials of the sponsors. I have already mentioned the sponsors that supported the reinterment of prominent Zionist figures like Hess, Herzl and Jabotinsky, as well as those soldiers and supporters reputedly associated with Bar Kochba."⁵

Again, analyses of the changing symbolic salience and meanings of Masada, the Holocaust, and the Western Wall for Israeli political culture reflect not only the general theme of the few against the many but a growing emphasis on the notion of "them against us." "The historical isolation of the Jewish people and the assumption of hostility on the part of the Gentile toward the Jew acquired a new meaning and salience with the Holocaust. . . . Even the celebration of traditional religious holidays and contemporary secular festivities in Israeli kindergartens emphasize[s] the victory of the Jewish people over enemies who sought to destroy them and their culture in both ancient and recent history."

"The twisted interpretation of tradition reflected in this anecdote is indicative of a sense of national paranoia that characterizes the more nationalistic Zionists and reaches its extreme manifestation among the xenophobic ultra-Zionists," Aronoff writes. What fundamentally divides Israeli Zionists is their evaluation of whether or not the Jewish people and its state are capable of being "normal," and whether or not such a condition (if it is possible) is one that should be sought. Essentially the humanist Zionists, even those who aspire for Israel to be a light unto the nations, aspire to normalcy (even if it may be unobtainable). The nationalists believe that the Jewish people, and consequently its state, are fated to be a nation that dwells alone. The ultranationalists glory in Israel's abnormality, its isolation, and consider this singularity as proof of providential "chosenness."

According to Aronoff, these orientations are related to different perceptions of security, perceptions of "the other," and temporal perceptions of myth and history. He puts it succinctly: "The humanists tend toward greater security, perceive history as a linear process, and aspire to national normalcy. There is an inverse relationship between degrees of nationalism and perceptions of security. There is a positive relationship between the degrees of nationalism and perceptions of history as myth, or temporal notions of totemic time."

The post-1967 period has seen a sharpening of the divisions within Israeli culture characterized by conflicting aspirations, interests, and politi-

cal perspectives. "In a very real sense the present situation is forcing many Israelis to reevaluate and to redefine the essence of Zionism a century after its beginnings and how it relates to the State of Israel in its fortieth year of independence. . . . The old policies have proved bankrupt and the old ideologies have lost their salience. There is no turning back."⁶

Another student of the current Israeli cultural scene has submitted a less sweeping formulation of the post-1967 situation. From what he calls a synoptic perception of a half-century of statehood, Yaron Ezrahi suggests that the precarious early balance between what he terms the universalistic and particularistic elements in the "public culture" of the Zionist enterprise was disrupted, especially after the Six-Day War. "The cosmopolitan culture—which Zionist personalities such as Herzl, Weismann, and Einstein hoped would acquire a significant authority in the newly established polity—have become largely marginalized, as more particularistic ethnic and religious Jewish orientations have gained force in the public realm, the political sphere, and the educational system." Reactionary antidemocratic currents of religious culture expanded into the civic and educational spheres, and during the series of Likud governments in the 1980s and the early 1990s a coalition of religious and radical right-wing parties emerged as a parliamentary force capable of openly defeating or significantly restricting most initiatives to pass constitutional provisions that normally protect individual freedoms and uphold the structure of democratic states.⁷

Moreover, in response to a chronic security crisis and frequent social and economic crises, Israeli governments make extreme demands on their citizens. "Israeli political leaders have discovered that their appeals to the common tribal identity—narrow Jewish national feelings and shared religious sensibilities—are much more potent for mobilizing the sacrifices and solidarity of the majority of the citizens than appeals to more general values, such as liberal or socialist ideas of the good society."

According to Ezrahi, the very insistence on the notion that Israel is a "Jewish state," despite its inherent ambiguities, rationalizes the role of the state as promoter of a national Jewish culture. "This role is clearly incompatible with notions of the relative neutrality of the state and the basic norms of democratic civic culture and their expressions in the educational system. In such a context, cultural forms not sanctioned within the established Jewish religious-national traditions in Israel are bound to appear 'foreign' and to be at least partly rejected as inimical both to the values promoted by the Israeli educational system and to the policies of state-sponsored cultural institutions."⁸

In conclusion, Ezrahi argues that the proliferation in Israel of voluntary

organizations in the diverse domains of political, social, economic, and cultural life does not contradict the view that there is a high degree of convergence between state and society, or rather between the state and the Jewish majority, that constitutes a serious constraint on the emergence of a viable democratic civic culture. “Many of these voluntary associations,” he explains, “while being relatively independent of the state and while channeling free citizens’ participation in various domains of action, are in fact dedicated to the promotion of narrowly Jewish religious, educational, cultural, and ethnic values. As such, these voluntary associations are often profoundly antagonistic to the inclusive principles and practices of democratic civic culture.”⁹

Challenges to Israeli Democracy

Students of the Israeli political scene generally agree that while Israel’s democratic record is fairly impressive, the maintenance of democracy in Israel is by no means a foregone conclusion. They see three major challenges to the democratic structure of Israel: (1) the lack of grassroots democracy in the country’s political parties and the lack of institutionalized civilian control over the military; (2) the unsolved problem of civil rights for Israel’s minorities; and (3) the deep social and cultural cleavage that persists between religious and secular Jews.

Regarding the subject of relations between civilian authorities and the military in Israel, one of these observers relates an episode that fully illustrates the lack of clear boundaries between the civilian and military spheres. In September 1969, the incoming director general of the Ministry of Defense, Colonel (Res.) Yeshayahu Lavie, appointed a committee to examine the ministry’s organization, structure, and activities. In the course of its work, the committee naturally had to deal with units of the Israel defense forces. But the then chief of staff, Haim Barlev, was aware of Lavie’s perception of the desired relationship between the ministry and the army—that the former should serve as a tool of civilian control over the latter—and expressed his objection to the committee’s dealing with the IDF.

“The committee’s dealings,” he wrote Lavie, “are with the Ministry of Defense, and not with the arms, branches, and corps of the IDF.” Barlev then sent letters to the IDF generals ordering them “not to discuss with the committee any actual IDF organizational or structural problems.” Forced to decide between his director-general and the chief of staff, Moshe Dayan (then defense minister) supported the latter; shortly thereafter, Lavie was

forced to resign. Not only did the issue remain unresolved, but in 1981, a new minister, Ariel Sharon, planned to act in the opposite direction, deciding to give the military direct responsibility for additional areas that were traditionally under the ministry's supervision. Opposition on the part of the ministry's staff, supported by certain outside political groups, in the end deterred the minister.¹⁰

Another observer, a noted student of the problem of the Arab minority and the challenges its existence poses in a Jewish-Zionist state, comments that if Israel is "an entity for serving Jews and a political instrument to achieve the goals of the international Zionist movement," then the status of the Arabs within its borders will remain unclear. "There is an internal ideological answer to this question," he adds. "The solutions of deZionization or population transfer are consistent but utopian. The way Israel handles the problem is by institutionalizing the Jewish-Zionist nature of the state, thereby forcing the Arab minority to pay the costs."¹¹

Another aspect of the subject of democracy is that of legalism, which many keen students of the Israeli scene consider crucial. "Israeli democracy," one of these has asserted, "has always been very weak on the question of legalism." Legalism in the Western sense of the term, he writes, "never was an integral part of the democratic system established in Israel by the Zionist parties and their leaders. Israel's illegalism has therefore been an *elite* legalism." Instead of curtailing grassroots illegalistic orientations brought in by immigrants from nondemocratic societies, he adds, "it has nourished them from above and continues to do so to the present."

What seems to be the real danger to Israeli democracy, he explains, is the growing deterioration of its daily routine, the decline of the quality of civic life of most educated Israelis. The fact that the democratic form of government is becoming perhaps the most prestigious model of our time does not necessarily imply that all democracies will be prestigious. Future political scientists, he estimates, are likely to distinguish developed democracies from backward and incomplete democracies and to place a high premium on the economic and cultural welfare of the citizens of these systems of government.

"The fact," he adds, "that Israel will most probably remain a part of the democratic majority of the world would mean less and less to fewer and fewer Israelis. The citizens of the Jewish state who earn little, pay high taxes, serve in the reserves for up to fifty days a year, live in danger of hyperinflation . . . and who are disregarded by their politicians and mistreated by their civil servants are not likely to question democracy, but

Zionism. Many of them may reach the conclusion reached by a large number of diaspora Jews that in order to be a good Jew and a decent human being, one does not have to live in a Jewish state.”¹²

The background of this state of affairs—the reason why many judge democracy in Israel to stand on somewhat shaky ground—has to do with the way the founding fathers of Israel perceived the kind of polity they sought to establish. The facts are fairly well known. The first Zionists who came to Palestine to build the Jewish homeland all arrived from lands that had no liberal or democratic tradition, the vast majority of them hailing from Russia. Collectivism was the one belief they shared—collectivism “as a principle of political and social life,” as another Israeli observer has expressed it.¹³

Collectivism thus “became a defining attribute of Israeli culture, from the Kibbutz movement to fundamental social perceptions and codes of behavior; [it] transcended the societal domain and gradually became a version of nationalism that lacked the individual-rights component indigenous to Western democratic systems. . . . Western, or ‘liberal,’ democracy contains a checks-and-balances system that restrains power and prevents abuse and usurpation. Eastern Europe, which produced the Zionist leadership, did not go through the liberal phase of democracy and did not adopt democracy as a normative ideology.”¹⁴

Adherence to democracy and a real commitment to its ideological tenets was never unconditional in the prestate days. “A consensus on democratic norms and institutions, freedom of association, a parliamentary regime, plurality of political parties, a free press, and an independent judiciary was always ostensibly declared. But consensus has not always prevailed concerning the specifics of the broad concept of democracy. An illustrative example is the emergency-time regulations governing the press in Israel. The political culture that developed after the 1977 elections exposed this lingering defect in the Israeli democracy.”¹⁵

The ambivalent attitudes toward some components of democratic culture affected the responses of the Israeli body politic on issues relating to perceptions of democracy. Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak cite some of these:

- Representative versus participatory democracy.
- Rule of law and individual rights versus considerations of *raison d'état*.
- Application of freedom of political organization versus the imposition of restrictions and limitations.
- Collectivism versus individualism in relation to the confrontation

between social mobilization for collective goals and the protection of individual rights.

- Universalism based on normative principles versus particularism based on ad hoc decisions.¹⁶

The three core beliefs of Israeli culture are collectivism, nationalism, and the Jewish religion. According to Yonathan Shapiro, a leading Israeli sociologist, cultural systems can be divided into those in which the principle of collectivism dominates and those in which individualism is the dominant belief. "Collectivism," he writes, "was the dominant principle in both socialism and the Eastern European version of nationalism. The most basic socialist principle, explained one of the ideologues of the Zionist-socialist camp, was 'the striving to turn the individual into an integral part of society'."

Collectivism was also the basic principle of the Eastern European version of nationalism. "Unlike Western nationalism, which identifies nationality with citizenship in the state, nationalism in Eastern Europe was identified with the ethnic group. This type of nationalism is also known as integral nationalism, in contrast to the Western version, which stressed the rights of the individual citizen."¹⁷

A third core belief of Israeli culture is the Jewish religion. This link between nationalism and religion singles out Israeli nationalist ideology from other European nationalist ideologies, which replaced religion and contradicted the traditional religious world view. "In contrast, Jewish religion is central to Israeli culture because of the strong historical and cultural link between Jewish religion and Jewish nationalism." In Western Europe, again, religion and the state have been separated in the process of modernization; this has become the hallmark of liberal democracy. "In the modern Jewish state, it is difficult to think of such a separation. This linkage between religion and the state has strengthened the collectivist component of the Israeli culture."

The dominance of the collectivist principle in Israeli culture, according to Shapiro, affected the idea of democracy and explains why the Israeli concept of democracy differs from the Western concept of democracy. As conceived in the West, democracy "not only expounds the principle of majority rule, but also provides for restraints to be imposed on the majority in order to safeguard the rights of individuals."¹⁸

This is not so in Israel, and the overall effect on the party system of this concept of democracy and its practices has been far-reaching. "According to democratic theory as we know it," writes Shapiro, "the role of an opposition party is essential in democratic politics. It presents before the elector-

ate an alternative point of view to that of the ruling parties and an alternative team of leaders, thus keeping the parties in power and their leaders under constant scrutiny and surveillance. A powerful opposition party constitutes an important guarantee for the freedom of individual citizens, since it restrains the power of the governing parties and makes elections a meaningful process by enabling the voters to choose between alternative leaders and alternative points of view.”

In Israel, in contrast, “we were lacking both the idea of liberal democracy, which espouses the rights of individuals and minorities against the encroachments of the rulers, and an effective opposition, the institution that guards these rights.” The Six-Day War in 1967 and the resulting occupation of vast territories marked a turning point in the political history of Israel, says Shapiro. The dominant party system soon came to an end, and a new chapter began in Israel’s party politics. However, while it is quite true that such a new chapter began after the 1967 war (and especially after the Likud’s rise to power in 1977), Israel remains a democracy that “has not been functioning effectively to address the mounting problems facing Israeli society.” Substantial reforms are needed on virtually all fronts—reforms that are necessary to improve the quality of life in Israel.¹⁹

According to Sprinzak and Diamond, “The cultural commitment to democracy and the democratic values of tolerance and moderation need to be refurbished and nurtured in the [Israeli] school system.” Critical currents in the culture need the space and financial autonomy to question established assumptions. “The disparities between Ashkenazic and Oriental Jews and especially between Jews and Arabs in Israel need to be more forcefully addressed. A much more concerted approach is needed to economic reform—reducing state patronage, corruption and waste; privatizing most state industries and closing those that cannot compete; pruning back state regulation and taxation; reorganizing the Histadrut; reducing dependence on international aid; and moving boldly to develop new industries that will integrate Israel more aggressively into an increasingly information-based global economy.” Many of these reforms, they add, may be necessary “for the viability of democracy itself in Israel in the long run.”²⁰

The disparities between Ashkenazi and Oriental Jews to which Sprinzak and Diamond refer played a leading role in the veritable political upheaval that brought the Likud alignment and its leader, Menachem Begin, to power in 1977. In the fierce controversy in Israel about the ethnic division, it is sometimes forgotten that the bulk of the Middle Eastern and North African element in the Israeli population—the majority, at least, of those who are still active and working—are Israeli-born. Every Oriental in

Israel who in 1997 was under the age of forty-seven was born, raised, educated, underwent his or her military training, and developed his or her political consciousness in Israel.

To put it a little differently, every Israeli of Middle Eastern or North African origin living in the country in the late 1990s and who was fifty-five to sixty years old was either born there or came to the country as a small child. It is thus no longer either possible or plausible to speak of these people as though they had come from another planet: They were made and bred in Israel, trained and educated at the hands of an overwhelmingly Ashkenazi establishment, and now constitute more than half of the country's Jewish population and some 70 percent of the youth the army recruits for military service.

It is obviously this section of the population, this generation of native-born and locally educated and trained Israelis of Oriental origin, who have decided in the late 1970s to assert themselves. And they did it with the only device they had left to them—their votes. That they chose to espouse the Likud, an Ashkenazi group, was also to be expected, considering, on one hand, that they had had enough experience of the Labor establishment and, on the other, that they had literally nowhere else to go. One of the main doctrines that had guided the establishment since Israel was established was that the Orientals should under no circumstances be allowed to organize themselves in ethnic political groups and that whatever portion they were to get of the “national pie” should be doled out to them by the existing parties. Like practically all other tools and methods of immigrant “absorption,” this stance, too, proved to be a total failure—and ultimately a boomerang.

The way in which this development came about has a weird logic all its own. Having been prevented from forming their own “ethnic” parties and pressure groups, Oriental Jews in Israel seem to have decided that they had found a political party and a leader with whom they could identify. A few days after the general elections in May 1981, a friend of mine, a newspaper reporter, took a taxi cab for a short ride. What with the talk current then—as now—about the massive support the Likud received from the Orientals, and easily identifying the ethnic origins of the driver, the reporter made a deliberately provocative remark about the new government and about Premier Begin. “What do you mean he's more *wuz-wuz* (a derogatory term for Ashkenazi) than Shimon Peres?” the driver responded with some heat. “He's practically one of us. He talks and behaves like one of us. He's of the people, and he knows how to deal with the Arabs!”

The driver's short lecture served only to confirm a feeling that my jour-

nalist friend had had for some time. This was that, shorn of their geographical-communal connotations, loaded terms such as *wuz-wuz*, *schwartz* *chayyes*, and other unflattering epithets used by Israeli ethnic groups to denigrate one another were ultimately largely cultural concepts. In other words, there is of necessity nothing “racial” or even ethnic or linguistic about these phenomena. Culturally, a person does not have to be of Middle Eastern or North African origin to be dubbed a “Levantine,” an “Asiatic” or an “Oriental” to be perceived as such or, more remarkable still, to be accepted by people generally so designated as one of their own group.

What has happened on the Israeli cultural-political scene since the 1970s tends rather to confirm this. Of course, the most eloquent visible proof of this sociological phenomenon was the way in which Begin—seemingly against all evidence to the contrary—was accepted by the ordinary Sephardi-Oriental in Israel as virtually “one of us.”

Volumes could be written on this subject, and one hopes they will be. Here, however, it will suffice to touch on three of the cultural traits that Israeli Orientals perceived—mostly with good reason—as being commonly shared by them and the leader of the Likud.

The first shared trait we will examine is the religious approach to Jewishness. This is not the same as what is known as Orthodoxy and strict observance of the *Halakhah*. It is a kind of liberal traditionalism—Sabbath rest, synagogue-going of a selective kind, frequent invocation of the name of God, and a generalized respect for Jewish traditions and practices. This, it may be added, is something no prominent member of the old (Labor) establishment would or could provide. On the contrary, there was often what seemed to be deliberate flouting of and disrespect for religious traditions. Some years ago—to give one example—in the course of an interview with a *Jewish Chronicle* reporter, the late Paula Ben-Gurion was asked whether she bought meat at a kosher shop. “Yes,” came the prompt reply. “But at home I made it *trefa*.”²¹

The second trait shared by Begin and Israeli Orientals is the importance of symbols. In Arab culture, symbols enjoy primacy of place over objects. This does not mean that the object is disregarded, only that it inheres in the symbol. This, in turn, is clearly connected with another facet of the culture—namely, the way the extraordinary richness of the language, its beauty and lucidity, tend to provide people with ready tools for overassertiveness and exaggeration. There is, of course, no easy way to establish an analogy between some feature of Arab and Oriental culture and a possible similar trait of East European, Polish, or Yiddish cul-

ture. And yet it seems remarkable that in this respect, too, one can easily detect an affinity between Begin's style and approach on one hand, and the ways here identified as "Arab" or "Oriental" on the other.

The third trait, "understanding the Arabs," begs the question, Why would Begin "understand the Arabs" more than, say, David Ben-Gurion, Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, or Shimon Peres? One of course treads very carefully indeed on such ponderous ground. But would it be an exaggeration to say that, having "attained" in the popular mind at least such a cultural affinity with a people, it follows logically that you are in a better position to understand them and to deal with them? For, in fact, this gift with which Begin was credited has two sides to it: While it signifies an open, candid, no-nonsense approach to one's neighbors in times of conflict, it also implies knowing how to deal with them in times of peace and reconciliation. Pomp and circumstance—what some Israeli observers have called Begin's "Polish sense of honor"—are after all part and parcel of the culture or the group of cultures with which we are dealing here.

There are, of course, other factors making for Begin's having been accepted by Orientals as "virtually one of us." These include the long-standing and deeply rooted identification of Labor with the Ashkenazi establishment and the fact that Oriental voters are no longer in fear (real or imagined) for their livelihood. But the main causes seem to be overwhelmingly cultural. Apart from the religious factor mentioned above, it has to be admitted that Labor's leaders, who ruled almost uncontested throughout the first three decades of statehood, never even tried to hide their contempt for everything Oriental or "Arab," their declared aim being to "mix," "integrate," and in other ways assimilate Jews who happened to be Orientals or Arabized.

During the 1981 election campaign, we were given a chance to watch Shimon Peres on television addressing in Beit Shemesh what looked like an exclusively Oriental audience. It may be difficult to believe, but what Peres did with this audience (apart from repeating the phrase "Oriental gestures" at least ten times in the space of two minutes) was to tell them in almost so many words that they represented precisely the kind of Israel Labor despises, and that what Labor wanted was "a civilized Israel" rather than "an Arab Israel."²² (The phrase "Oriental gestures" refers to a variety of obscene movements of the middle finger known and practiced all over the world, West and East, since time immemorial. Incidentally, it is of some relevance to mention here that Begin, in his famous TV confrontation with Peres, referred to these gestures as "certain obscene hand movements" rather than use the standard Israeli misnomer "Oriental movements.")

Naturally there are other deep-rooted factors. The fact is that Labor's secular, "Westernized" leaders failed over the years to earn the respect and affection of the ordinary Oriental Jew because they were somewhat ashamed of their own cultural background and, in effect, sought to disown and be "liberated" from their recent past. A Jewish historian and student of the Israeli cultural scene once wrote that what the Jews of Eastern Europe in Israel really dislike about their fellow Jews from the Orient is that the latter tend to remind them of the social and cultural conditions that prevailed only a few decades ago in their own now rejected *shtetls* and ghettos in Russia and Poland.²³ Begin can be said to be the first Israeli prime minister not to have been afflicted by this kind of snobbishness (some will call it "self-hatred"). It would seem that, accepting himself and his sociocultural background, he has accepted and been accepted by the ordinary Israeli Oriental as an equal.

Another factor that plays a significant role in making democracy in Israel appear somewhat wanting is the Arab-Israeli conflict. In a well-researched paper on the subject, Yoram Peri, an Israeli political scientist, indeed argues that the major force that shaped the boundaries of Israeli democracy and the country's political system as a whole has been national security. Since its creation in 1948, Peri shows, Israel was preoccupied by problems of day-to-day security. To put it another way, "Israel's 'natural' state of existence was one of permanent war."

Appraising the cost to Israel's democracy of its conflict with the Arabs, Peri writes, "Once a sphere of life is included under the rubric of security, it is automatically excluded from the rules governing civil society." Following this distinction, he argues that three separate legal systems exist in Israel: the system under which most Israelis live; the system applied to the Arab citizens of the state, which includes certain restrictions; and the military government, under which the 1.7 million Palestinian Arabs of the occupied territories live. Clearly distinguishing among the three, Peri concludes that Israel's security constraints impose a heavy burden on its democracy. He enumerates the security factors that affect Israeli democracy and the various manifestations of this relationship. Apart from the major wars, these include "subconventional warfare," fear of a "Fifth Column," and military government; force "as a principle in the Israeli reality" and "the metaphysics of security"; the legal complexities in the occupied territories; the government's *modus operandi*, *raison d'état*, and "qualified democracy on an ethnic basis."

Peri ends on a cautiously hopeful note. Israel's security situation, he observes, "caused injury to its democracy, and especially to that aspect of

democratic life relating to the status of the Arabs.” However, he adds, “If a condition of permanent war naturally encourages the creation of a garrison state, . . . then shouldn’t the damage actually be much greater than it is? Perhaps this limited injury is testimony to the strength of the democratic forces in the country.”²⁴

The Ethnopolitical Cleavage

Since the early 1980s, Israel has been in the throes of a fierce controversy. The so-called ethnic problem—the division between Oriental and Western Jews—took on a new and rather ominous dimension. The fact that the right-wing populist Likud alignment maintained its parliamentary majority since 1977 thanks to the “Oriental vote” added considerably to the bitterness of the debate. Warning signals again were sent, and with added emphasis, about the dangers of “Levantinization” and “Orientalization”; talk was rampant about the hazards of “mob rule,” “government by the street,” and “politics of the square.”

There was ominous talk about the emergence of “two cultures” and sometimes about “two *political* cultures.” The Likud’s maximalist policies, the massive settlement projects in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the government’s attitudes to the Arabs and to the outside world, its “Masada Complex,” and its exclusivist Jewish ideology were all somehow blamed on the allegedly primitive instincts and the ignorance of the Likud’s Oriental supporters, whose so-called “hatred of the Arabs” was described by one Labor member of the Knesset as “pathological.”

Things came to such a pass, indeed, that doubts were actually voiced in private and insinuated in public about the very validity, utility, or even legitimacy of a democratic system of government which had deprived the educated, enlightened, and “sane” section of the population (read the Euro-Americans) of a say in running the country’s affairs and ultimately in deciding their own fate. An Israeli columnist of the right, himself an Ashkenazi, actually accused the opposition of advocating the use of undemocratic means to overthrow the Likud regime. In an article in *The Jerusalem Post*, Shmuel Katz spoke of “an interesting note that has been insinuating itself subliminally into the new ‘doctrine’ that the defeated minority in Israel is entitled to seek outside help to ‘topple’ the government.” This is that “the Likud government derives its main support from the Oriental communities. . . . The idea presumably is that the majority sustained by proletarian and unsophisticated Eastern Jews should not really be allowed to out-vote the Ashkenazi-dominated bourgeois-socialist ‘quality’.”²⁵

These are grave charges indicating a still graver state of affairs. The question remains, however, whether the present political-ideological division in Israel can reasonably be said to parallel the ethnic divide as between Orientals and Westerners, Sephardim and Ashkenazim. In other words: Have we been witnessing another, more advanced, and more sophisticated phase of the old “communal controversy” in the ranks of Israeli society?

It is notorious that the ethnic divide in Israel has not yet been properly defined. Forty-six years have passed since hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the countries of the Middle East and North Africa started to flood Israel in the early 1950s, and yet there is no consensus as to the precise nature of the problem that the integration of these newcomers has posed. To be sure, everyone speaks of “the problem of the communities,” “the communal problem,” and the “ethnic gap”; some even speak of “Two Israels,” “two cultures,” and the “cultural gap.” But when it comes to describing the character or analyzing the contents of the problem, no one seems to know the answer. Are we dealing only, or even primarily, with a socioeconomic gap, a cultural-psychological divide, an educational gap, a genuine interethnic problem, or all of these put together? There is no clear-cut answer to this question. I will therefore approach the subject in what seems to me to be the only intelligible and useful way left—namely, the historical one.

In the perspective of five decades, it would be fair to say that the communal problem has its deepest roots in the general attitude of the old Yishuv, the in-group, toward Oriental newcomers and their ways. I will cite here a few examples.

In his autobiographical work, *Level Sunlight*, Maurice Samuel speaks of a fierce internal controversy surrounding Israel’s decision to launch the operation known as “*Kibbutz Galuyyot*” (the ingathering of the exiles). Those who opposed the operation argued that it was dangerous to bring into the country “those masses that issued from a medieval world and needed long preparation for the new environment.” Large numbers of these immigrants, the argument went, “had no feeling whatsoever for the Jewish state, and knew nothing of the spirit that had built the country for them.” Moreover, “Many had . . . acquired the deep-seated conviction that government, any government, was something sinister, something to be circumvented. For them a state was an evil thing, plotting evil against the individual. Or else, if they came from the East, they could not conceive of the existence of government officials who were not licensed thieves.”²⁶

Shortly afterward, when the ingathering of the exiles started in full

swing, Michael Assaf, a leading spokesman of the establishment and Mapai's star Arabist, wrote in the Histadrut daily, *Davar*:

What must therefore be the task of the Ingathering of the Exiles? Not only to bring them [the Oriental Jews] to the soil of Israel, but also to restore to them their first exalted value. The same thing holds good with regard to all parts of the [Jewish] people who were, to their misfortune, dispersed by the hand of Fate among low-grade peoples. And every Jew who is not seized by the fear of the possibility . . . that we will not be able to prevail and to purify our brethren from the dross of Orientalism which attached itself to them against their will, will be held accountable for this before the guardian spirit of the nation. There is reason for the most serious anxiety . . . how to cleanse and purify these brethren—how to lift them up to the Western level of the existing Yishuv.²⁷

Berl Locker, then head of the Jewish Agency Executive, furnished another representative sample of the kind of idea the Israeli leadership had formed of the Oriental Jews who were being “ingathered.” Locker's statement was made in a spirit of generosity and expansiveness. In an article in the Jewish Agency's monthly, *Zion* (August 1951), he wrote: “Has it ever happened in history that a people which had worked very hard for several decades to obtain a place in the family of nations and which had at long last achieved its liberation and independence, then followed this up by making a supreme effort to bring to its country another people, another race, which will soon surpass it in numbers and become the ruling element in the State?”²⁸

This was the ruling establishment's attitude in the early years of mass immigration from Middle Eastern and North African countries. Lest it be thought that the passing years brought a change of attitude, I will cite some examples from the mid-1960s and early 1970s.

David Ben-Gurion, who remained at the helm throughout the state's first fifteen years of existence, told Robert Moskin of *Look* magazine in 1965: “[Jews] from Morocco have no education. Their customs are those of Arabs. They love their wives, but they beat them. . . . Maybe in the third generation something will appear from the Oriental Jews that is a little different. But I don't see it yet. The Moroccan Jew took a lot from the Moroccan Arabs. The culture of Morocco I would not like to have here. And I don't see what contribution present Persians have to make.”²⁹

A few months later, Ben-Gurion told Eric Rouleau of *Le Monde*: “We do

not want Israelis to become Arabs. We are in duty bound to fight against the spirit of the Levant, which corrupts individuals and societies, and to preserve the authentic Jewish values as they crystallized in the Diaspora.”³⁰

In 1971, faced with a wave of violent demonstrations organized by the newly founded Black Panthers movement, Golda Meir, then prime minister, made a considered statement in the Knesset in which she said that she would be “the last person in the world to shy away from the reality and pretend that the communal gap did not exist.” After asserting that there could be no greater distortion of the truth than to say that the gap was the result of Israeli policy, she tried to answer the question as to the roots of the existing situation. “Many immigrants from the Islamic countries,” she said, “brought deprivation and discrimination with them in their ‘baggage’ from their countries of origin. . . . The Jews who came to us from the Islamic countries were of a higher level than the populations from which they came; but it was their fate to live in countries that have not yet developed intellectually, industrially, and culturally, and they were deprived of the opportunity to develop their special characteristics, to express their intellectual capacities, and to acquire the knowledge and education that were given to those coming from the developed countries of Europe and America.”³¹

These are only a few samples, but they are representative of the kind of attitude the East European in-group had toward immigrants from the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, the out-group. Since the in-group could wield power and determine facts and decide policies, it is safe to say that, as far as this aspect of the problem is concerned, the ethnic division in Israel can be described as a cultural gap or a manifestation of the existence of two cultures. This gap and the socioeconomic gap that inevitably followed and accompanied it, were the result more of the attitudes of the in-group than of the “foreignness” of the culture of the out-group.

This is almost self-evident and needs hardly any elaboration. The enormous task of “ingathering the exiles” was followed by the no-less-ambitious and certainly more crucial one of cleansing and purifying these Orientals from Assaf’s “dross of Orientalism”; to try to prevent the fulfillment of Locker’s terrible nightmare of an alien people—an alien race even—from becoming the ruling element in the state; to try, with God’s help, at least to get something out of the third generation of these immigrants, a feat that Ben-Gurion was sadly doubtful could ever be accomplished; to curb Levantinization and, worse still, “Arabization”; and, finally, to await the day when Golda Meir’s vision of the full fruition of the poor Orientals’

“special characteristics” would finally be developed and their intellectual capacities expressed.

The task, of course, proved to be beyond the capacities, intellectual or otherwise, of the ruling establishment. Once having rejected the culture and mores of these newcomers so totally and unequivocally, the “absorbing” authorities ended up by denying these people’s very humanity and by rejecting them as persons. Their children, at times, were approached as if they were Europeans and consequently failed to perform; at other times, they were approached as if their own cultural heritage were empty and obnoxious and this again failed to lead to the desired goal. The result has been that decades after they set foot in the state of Israel, these immigrants from the East and their children remained as alienated as they had been in the beginning, if not more so.

Before attempting an appraisal of Israel’s ethnic problem, it may be advisable to try to define the problem in a slightly wider context; this can be done by glancing briefly at the development of the problem from its beginning in prestate years. At its roots, the difficulty lay not only in an income inequality that ran parallel to ethnic divisions. Principally, it resided in the pattern of ethnic-group stratification and ranking that prevailed before the establishment of the state and which, somewhat naturally, continued to prevail after 1948 and the mass immigration of Middle Easterners in the early 1950s. Within this pattern, Ashkenazim were ranked far higher than Sephardim and Orientals. “To come from Poland or Britain,” writes Beer-sheba University sociology professor Alex Weingrod, “is *ipso facto* to be more prestigious than to have one’s origins in Egypt or Iraq. The rift is fundamental, and it runs throughout the society.”³²

How concretely this pattern of stratification and ranking affected the actual status and the economic position of the Middle Easterners one can see from a brief consideration of the long-term trends in these immigrants’ social, economic, and political mobility as seen in the mid-1960s. The relevant data are provided by Weingrod. Concerning socioeconomic mobility, it may be perfectly natural that veterans should earn somewhat more than new immigrants. What seemed disturbing was that the income gap between old-timers and immigrants tended to widen rather than narrow with the passage of years. In 1954, for instance, the ratio of income between pre-1931 veterans and post-1952 immigrants was 100:55. In 1958, it became 100:38.

Further statistics reveal that a comparison of income according to occupation showed this rank order: European veterans, European immigrants,

Middle Eastern veterans, Middle Eastern immigrants. Thus the incomes of European immigrants had risen far more quickly than those of Middle Eastern veterans. The conclusion is clear: Ethnic affiliation was more important than the length of time spent in the country. In Weingrod's words, "Europeans as a group are more mobile than their Middle Eastern brethren." Thus, there is no doubt that "subjective variables," such as prejudice and discrimination, were factors blocking the Middle Easterner's path.

Those who studied the communal situation in Israeli society were disturbed to note that the ethnic-income split in this society tended to expand rather than narrow with the passage of time. In the long run, of course, what all this meant was a joining of ethnicity and class—a trend which, by all accounts, is dangerous.

Not unexpectedly, the same pattern of stratification and ranking prevailed in the other important sphere of social mobility—education. Here again, there was a joining of ethnicity and lack of achievement. The economic factor no doubt was important here: Those who earn less spend less on the education of their children. But, in addition to this factor and probably surpassing it in importance, "cultural differences also select against the Middle Eastern students. . . . The school curriculum is heavily slanted towards European traditions; the teachers are also predominantly European, and this too gives advantages to European students." Weingrod's conclusions are clear: "So long as [Middle Eastern] children are approached as if they were Europeans, the students are unlikely to perform well. . . . Similarly, approaching these children as if their own cultural heritage were empty will not lead to the desired results."³³

This was the position in the mid-1960s, and the problem tended to worsen rather than improve during the two to three years of economic "entrenchment" that followed the general elections of 1965. Then came the stunning sequel of events of May to June 1967, and everything took on a different appearance: Along with the economic difficulties, it seemed, ethnic tensions—and the ethnic problem itself—were considered by many to have virtually disappeared.

There are, of course, several deep-seated factors at work here. The main trouble, however, lay not in the general "low" level of the immigrants but in their being simply *different*. That many of them were, in fact, equipped with a higher level of education and were no less competent than immigrants who hailed from the "right" backgrounds could not save the newcomers from the Orient, *as a group*, from being stereotyped and relegated (again, as a group) to a low status in the social-cultural scale. Thus, out-group standards, real and imaginary, led to in-group prejudices and to a

pattern of “natural” discrimination which caused those standards to decline further and thus reinforce the prejudices and gradually “stabilize” the discrimination pattern.

To reverse this process—to upset the workings of this vicious circle—what was needed was a substantial change in either of the two factors at work—namely, out-group standards and attainments and in-group attitudes and prejudices.

In Israel today, there is a curious diversity of views on the country’s ethnic problem. Thirty years of intermittent war after the Six-Day War and visible economic prosperity have led to a considerable increase in social solidarity between the various Jewish communities and a visible improvement in the material conditions of the Middle Eastern-Sephardic element. In the realm of attitudes, the result of these changes has been a fairly pervasive optimism concerning both the actual situation and the future prospects of communal integration.

On the official, in-group level, there is near-unanimity that the communal problem has been solved once and for all. According to this estimate, the Middle Eastern element has both proved its mettle and attained its socioeconomic aspirations. Concerning the cultural aspect, it is felt that the Middle Easterners—especially the native-born—are not only willing but actually eager to embrace the emerging general culture, which is neither Western nor Eastern but a unique amalgam produced by the unique position of Israel within Jewry and the world community as a whole.

On the popular level, both the Middle Easterners and the Europeans, especially of the second generation, seem likewise satisfied that the process of integration is off to a successful end. Culturally, native-born Israelis, children of Jewish immigrants both from Europe and from Middle Eastern and North African countries, share the same interests, like the same Mediterranean dishes, enjoy the same rock music, hum the same songs, and share the same pride in their society’s cultural and military superiority over its neighbors. In themselves, these changes can have very far-reaching effects on the communal situation. Reinforced by a corresponding change in the material standards of the Middle Easterners, they can mark the onset of a revolutionary change in the situation, a veritable breakthrough.

But there is another side to the coin—a different set of factors that may work against the prospect of such communal harmony. These factors reside largely in the socioeconomic and educational spheres, rather than the strictly cultural, and may be summarized in four closely interrelated phenomena. For though the material standards of the Middle Easterners have risen considerably, those of the Europeans have gone up far more substan-

tially, thus keeping the socioeconomic gap between the two communal divisions as wide as it has ever been, and in many cases widening it. Economic prosperity and its results have been most visible in the cities and the larger towns with “mixed” populations; however, development towns, urban slum areas, border immigrant settlements, and largely “communal” villages with overwhelmingly Oriental populations have not benefited from the boom in any comparable manner. In these areas, discontent and bitterness tend to increase, especially among the young generation. Though the general material standard may have improved, the disproportionate rise in the general level of life in the cities and in neighboring veteran settlements and *kibbutzim* tends to accentuate intercommunal differences.

Moreover, the educational gap—which parallels the communal division—is still extremely wide. While all Israeli children are obliged to go through their first nine years of free primary education, their educational level on leaving the school is often disastrously uneven. The pattern here is all too familiar: Economically underprivileged Middle Eastern parents produce culturally deprived children. In secondary education, the situation is even more precarious for the average Oriental pupil: Having finished primary schooling with such a low standard of attainment, these pupils can hardly be expected to cope with their lessons—assuming that the family can even bear the financial burden of sending them to a secondary school at all.

Regarding higher education, it is relevant to note that while the Middle Eastern element now constitutes well over half the population and while children of Oriental origin make up some 70 percent of the country’s kindergarten population, Middle Eastern and North African students represent less than 30 percent of enrollment in Israeli institutions of higher learning. However, even these data are somewhat deceptive since, in any given academic year, most of the Oriental students are first- to third-year students, many of whom eventually will drop out because of lack of attainment, failure to adapt, or lack of means.

What of the prospects? How does the class-ethnic-political cleavage look in the last few years of the century? According to Sammi Smootha, a veteran student of Israel’s ethnic problem, this cleavage will probably be exacerbated by the mass immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel in the 1990s. “It is forecasted that 1.5 million will settle in the country during the 1990s, and they will increase the total population of Israel by one-third. To provide these new immigrants with adequate housing, employment, education, health and welfare services, billions of dollars are needed. . . . Assuming that Israel will fail to raise abroad the bulk of the necessary monies, the

per capita resources will decrease and inequality will increase.” The erosion of the welfare state will especially hurt the middle, working, and poor strata. “The gaps between the haves and have-nots will rise, intensifying the social tensions. There will be a real growth of the poor since the Soviet immigration comes with a very large proportion of dependents, especially old persons and single-parent families.”

As a result, “Orientals will be harder hit by the Soviet mass influx than Ashkenazim. First, since most Orientals are in the middle and lower classes, they will be hurt disproportionately. Second, they will lose their numerical majority and strategic power as voters to be lured by special dispensation. Third, those among the Orientals who are in the process of upward mobility will be hardest hit because they will face tough competition for jobs from the newcomers. The highly qualified and credentialed new arrivals will be forced into downward mobility that will place them into the same niches of the economy most sought by mobile Orientals.”³⁴

To what extent do the divisions under discussion distort and potentially destabilize Israeli democracy? According to Smoocha, while dominance by the middle and higher classes exists in Israel as in other industrial societies (notwithstanding the early socialist pretense of the founders of Israel) and while class inequality is growing, drawing Israel even further into the semi-Western category of countries, “social class is not a political issue, and on this score Israel rather resembles Western societies.” However, “Israel’s weakest point is that it generates much less wealth than Western countries. Although capital imports compensate partly for low productivity and zero economic growth, Israelis as a whole are deprived relative to Westerners to whom they compare themselves. This deprivation will reduce the confidence in the political system; once peace is achieved, it may become a basis for popular discontent and not just a push for emigration, as it is now.”³⁵

In fact, because of the entrenched dominance of Ashkenazim in the areas of class, culture, and politics, ethnic deprivations and grievances are not pressed as issues. This is a distortion of Israeli democracy, Smoocha asserts. “In view of the Ashkenazic dominance in Israel and world Jewry, all one can realistically hope for is greater equalization of resources. The main problem is the living conditions of the Oriental working class. Other issues are power positions for ambitious Orientals and letting Orientals have more cultural impact. Such reforms will not do away with Ashkenazic dominance, but they will make it more bearable.”³⁶

Where do we go from here? A friend of mine, an Israeli professor of philosophy with very clear-cut ideas as to the future of Israel, said to me recently that the very fate of the state of Israel depends on “the direction

the process of modernization of the Orientals in the country is going to take,” and all we can do is keep our fingers crossed and hope for the best.

Indeed, looking back now on five decades of Israel’s existence, one cannot help feeling that what we have been witnessing has the dimensions of a Greek tragedy—at least as far as the fortunes of the ruling establishment are concerned. The fact is that, having the low opinion they did of the Orientals, members of the ruling elite—whether Labor or Likud—could not do anything right; they had to stumble on and on and in the end arrive exactly where they now find themselves—namely, in a situation in which more than half of the electorate is alienated and thus capable of the most drastic and unpredictable shifts of mood.

The Likud group, which now commands the support of the Orientals, has little cause for celebration except in the very short run. Once they realize that it is in their power to change things, the Orientals may well find another, more genuinely representative way of asserting themselves.

To return to the question with which this section opened: What is the nature of the communal division in Israeli society? The answer cannot be uniform. In one sense, of course, it is a socioeconomic gap; but it is a gap that cannot be bridged through merely socioeconomic measures. It is also an educational gap, but here again, to close it would require more—far more—than additional efforts to provide Oriental children with “more education.” Again, it is certainly a kind of clash between two cultures; but as culture gaps go, this is one that may take generations to bridge.

A Postnationalist Middle East

When one believes that God promised him a particular part of the world, one is inevitably exclusivist about it in a lunatic way. When politics becomes religion, the outcome is lethal, because it can only be violent.

P. J. VATIKIOTIS

Of the three great civilizations with which Jewry came in close contact after developing a unique culture of its own—Greek civilization, Muslim-Arab civilization, and the civilization of the Romanic and Germanic peoples of Central and Western Europe—the one with which the encounter produced the closest and most fractious symbiosis was the medieval civilization of Arabic Islam. In fact, it is possible to say that Jewry's fortunes became inextricably linked with those of Muslim Arabs, their culture, and their civilization.

The encounter spanned a period extending from the seventh to the seventeenth centuries, more than a millennium. The question whether such a symbiotic relationship can be repeated in the contemporary world is obviously pertinent to any study of Israel's place in the Middle East and of its cultural and national identity. Equally relevant, of course, is the direction the surrounding Arab-Muslim world is taking in its continuing confrontation with modernity.

This chapter touches on various aspects of these topics: the Arab-Muslims' changing perception of their national identity and the manner in which they relate to the precepts of their faith; the constantly changing face of Israel demographically, culturally, and ideologically; Israel's Jewish identity; and the scarcely defined status of non-Jewish Israelis and non-Israeli Jews.

Pan-Arabism Runs Its Course

From the short perspective of present-day tensions and estrangements, the kind of cultural cooperation and interaction that produced the great "Golden Age" of Judeo-Arabic civilization in Spain and in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa would naturally seem rather difficult to attain. Nevertheless, there is so much that is basically shared by the two peoples, as well as by the two religious traditions, that there seems to be no reason why, in some not so distant future, fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation between Jews and Muslim Arabs should not be envisaged.

Much, of course, will depend on a conscious realization on the part of the Muslim-Arab and Jewish-Israeli sides that they have a great deal in common in their religious-cultural traditions, and that many of their respective attainments in the past sprang from the same spiritual-philosophical roots. To this realization, as Erwin Rosenthal has suggested, both Arab Muslims and Israeli Jews must contribute their full shares. The strength of Muslim consciousness in the Arab world will determine whether long-term self-interest is going to bring the Arab states nearer to Israel. On the Israeli side, too, "more than a return to the ancient homeland, more than a physical return to the cradle of the religious Semitic civilization is needed." To become aware of one's roots is, therefore, "the first step for believer and agnostic alike on both sides towards forging a new link for the future on a basis more solid and stable than political expediency and material aspirations."¹

These wise counsels were made some thirty-five years ago. It would, of course, be rather bold to venture prophecies about so intricate and ponderous a subject as the future shape of Israeli-Arab relations in the Middle East. Nevertheless, without being unduly visionary, one can point to a number of factors and trends that do seem to favor a genuine coming together of the two groups.

Since the early 1940s the countries of what has come to be known as the Arab world have been undergoing one of the acutest and most unsettling religiocultural crises in their history. The twofold assault of Western culture and the European creed of ethnic nationality has been too massive and too concentrated for an already weakened religious culture like modern Islam to stave off or sustain. Meanwhile the Palestine "disaster" and the challenge of a dynamic Western-type creation in the heart of the Arab domain, the state of Israel, dealt so severe a blow to Arab pride and self-esteem that secular nationalism, chauvinism, and Islamic fundamentalism inevitably won the day.

The few voices of reason and moderation that dared make themselves heard were silenced, often with extreme violence and arbitrariness. The Arabs, in fact, seemed to have been reenacting the national unity movements of nineteenth-century Europe with a vengeance, and nothing short of total pan-Arab unity and an exclusively “Arab” Middle East appeared to satisfy them. In all this, of course, the 1948 debacle in Palestine and the defeat of the Six-Day War played a prominent role—sometimes as a cover-up for various ambitions and failures, but more often quite genuinely, and accordingly Arab hostility to Israel and to its Jews tended to intensify.

Today, however, after two generations of agitation and strife, there are indications that this violent and destructive phase in the modern revival of Arabic Islam may be coming to an end. The doctrine of pan-Arabism, a concept fundamentally at variance with the teachings of Islam, started since the mid-1940s to take two leading forms, anticolonialism and socialist radicalism. The anti-imperialist, nationalist phase came to an end, broadly speaking, in 1958, the year that witnessed the Egypt-Syria merger and the collapse of the pro-British Hashemite regime in Iraq. In the years 1958–67, and especially after Syria’s defection from its merger with Egypt in September 1961, the nationalist pan-Arab phase gave way to the radical socialist one. In this new phase, the enemies of the Arabs were increasingly held to be not Great Britain or France or American “neocolonialism” but the various brands of “reactionaries” within the Arab camp itself, including hereditary monarchs, political oligarchies, landowners, and wealthy business figures and financiers. Leading pan-Arab spokespersons, indeed, took to talking about the end of “the nationalist revolution” and the onset of “the socialist revolution.” Egypt’s massive intervention in Yemen in 1962–67 was itself presented as an example of this new phase of social revolution rather than the pan-Arab gesture it tended to seem to the outside world.

The defeat of the Arab armies in the Six-Day War, though it generally served to intensify Arab nationalist feelings and to bring the Arab states closer to each other, in fact did nothing to promote the pan-Arab cause. On the contrary, it strengthened the social-revolutionary and particularistic trends at the expense of pan-Arabism. In this connection it is noteworthy that the Palestinian movement, which after the Six-Day War gained considerably in momentum and influence, became a factor both in further weakening the pan-Arab movement and in strengthening the trend toward revolutionary-style socialism.

The result was that, as the 1970s drew to a close, there emerged a clear trend in the Arab world away from pan-Arabism and toward a healthy particularism. This trend had been discernible even before the late Egyp-

tian president, Anwar al-Sadat, decided to go it alone and concluded a peace treaty with Israel amidst general Arab disapproval and clamor. Several Arab observers drew attention to this change. Writing in 1977 on the effects of the civil war in Lebanon, Kamal Salibi noted that, “at a time when many Arabs were turning away from Arabism and barely managing to conceal their sympathy for the Christian Lebanese position, Arabism found itself making a last stand in Lebanon. . . .” According to this Lebanese historian, following the defeat of 1967 and more so after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, there appeared certain signs of weariness where Arabism was concerned. “The idea of Pan-Arab unity, for all intents and purposes, had finally been abandoned, and the various Arab states were beginning to turn full attention to their own separate interests and problems.”²

This, of course, is not the same as saying that the idea of pan-Arabism is dead. As late as the middle of 1978, two exponents of the ideology were still stressing the validity and durability of pan-Arab aspirations. Walid Khalidi, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, observed that the Arab system was “first and foremost a ‘Pan’ system, postulating the existence of a single Arab nation behind the facade of multiplicity of sovereign states.” From this perspective Khalidi concluded that “the individual Arab states are deviant and transient entities; their frontiers illusory; their rulers interim caretakers or obstacles to be removed.” According to his reading of the situation, the legitimacy of these individual Arab sovereignties “shrinks into irrelevance” before the “super-legitimacy” of pan-Arabism, and *raison d’état* becomes “heresy.”³

Another advocate of the ideology, Muhammad Hasanein Haykal, conceded (in an article published in the same issue of the journal) that “the idea, the tide, the historical movement” that pan-Arabism represented was no longer a factor in the Middle East conflict; that the doctrine had been forced to retreat in disarray; that Egypt, for so long the mainstay of the Arab system, had opted out of it; and that the opportunity afforded by the Yom Kippur War of 1973 to put the system on solid foundations had been lost. Nevertheless, Haykal insisted that the Arab system, while it may have suffered a temporary setback, could bounce back because the Arab world possesses a vitality that makes “the real constituency of any Arab leader the Arab world as a whole.”⁴

Contrary to Haykal’s thesis, however, the story of the decline and retreat of pan-Arabism goes deeper and farther back than Sadat’s peace initiative. According to Fuad Ajami, it was the Six-Day War that marked the Waterloo of pan-Arabism. Between 1967 and 1973 a certain measure of vague-

ness continued to prevail, and the real opportunity to break out of that situation and assert *raison d'état* arose only with the Yom Kippur War. "The irony," Ajami explains, "is that the war which Mr. Haykal and others looked at as an opportunity to revive the Arab system was precisely the event that would enable reason of state to challenge the then feeble but still venerated pretensions of pan-Arabism. The logic that triumphed in October 1973 was not the pan-Arabist one held up by Nasser and the Ba'th; it was the more limited notion of solidarity preferred by those states that had long opposed Pan-Arabism. . . . Egypt's sacrifices and what Mr. Sadat called 'the size of the victory' on the Egyptian-Israeli front . . . would be used to legitimize a break with the Arab system."

Two additional factors led to the same kind of break with the pan-Arab idea. One was the rise of what can only be described as a separate Palestinian nationalism which, with its obvious particularistic tendencies, posed a standing challenge to pan-Arabism. "The duel that raged between the Palestinians and the Nasserites from early 1968 until Nasser's death," Ajami notes, "was in essence a fight about the independent rights of Palestinian nationalism. If the Arab states could not protect themselves against Israel, let alone do something for the Palestinians, then the latter were to construct their own independent politics."⁵

The other factor leading to pan-Arabism's retreat has been the split in, and the virtual end of, the Ba'th Party, which in the late 1960s and early 1970s became the only pan-Arab group that took seriously its mission of bringing about the one united Arab nation. To be sure, a shell called the Ba'th remains, and it claims hegemony both in Syria and in Iraq; but the implications of so deep and durable a split in the ranks of a party whose primary goal is to unite all the Arab states are obviously difficult to ignore—and are negative in the extreme as far as the validity of pan-Arab claims and aspirations is concerned.

Developments in the 1980s and 1990s served only to strengthen these trends, both on the Palestinian and the inter-Arab fronts. Indeed, when, shortly after the end of the Gulf War of 1990–91, Colonel Mu'ammar Gaddafi announced in a speech to the nation that he had decided to "cancel" Libya's boundaries with the neighboring Arab Republic of Egypt, and that from then on the borders between the two "sister countries" did not exist, his move failed to elicit any official reaction from Cairo, while Arab newspapers and other media refrained even from featuring news of the announcement. Those that did made no comment.

Coming as it did such a short time after a war in which Arab openly took up arms against fellow Arab and the Arab world as a whole was split, this

failure to respond to the move can perhaps be attributed to Gaddafi's typical impulsiveness and theatricality. However, while this was significant, the really important factor was that pan-Arabism both as idea and as praxis had been in steady decline; so much so, indeed, that outside of some academic circles the term itself is no longer current.

In one way this is a strange phenomenon. Arabs, after all, speak the same language; Muslim Arabs have the same history, share the same cultural and literary heritage, observe the same religious precepts and feel pride in a common, glorious past. Yet the Arabs, despite a century of endeavor, have failed to attain any kind of unity, least of all political unification. The most that can be said about Arab unity is that, at best, it is "a unity in diversity." The reasons are not far to seek. In the first place, as a living tongue Arabic cannot be said to constitute one single language. There are dozens of different Arabic vernaculars, some quite unintelligible to speakers of the others. Culturally, too, in the current sociologically accepted usage of the term "culture," there are almost as many Arab cultures as there are vernaculars, and it is not at all rare to encounter among Arabs cultural differences that sometimes cause estrangement or even hostility.

These differences, moreover, include an often shocking degree of mutual ignorance. Many people in the countries of the Arab East, *Al-Mashriq*, know next to nothing about their fellow Arabs in the lands of the Arab West, *Al-Maghrib*, comprising Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania. This lack of cultural cohesion has led a number of Arab writers and thinkers to issue demands periodically for some sort of coordination and exchange programs, arguing that such moves in the cultural sphere have to precede any practical measures for establishing a union of Arab states.

Calls are also still issued for closing what these writers term the "gaps" that plague inter-Arab cultural life and relations. One of the more serious gaps is said to have resulted from the obstacles placed by Arab governments in the way of distributing and marketing Arabic books published in other parts of the Arab world, so that Arabs are practically barred from reading books in Arabic other than those produced in their respective countries. The result of this anomalous situation is that Arabs of the *Mashriq* usually obtain information about the Arab countries of North Africa from books published in the West. A comprehensive index or bibliography of books published in Arabic does not exist anywhere; no coordination is possible in the field of translation of foreign works; a book is sometimes translated and published in two or three different Arabic versions; consequently, Arab scholars can know nothing about what goes on in their disciplines elsewhere in the Arab world.

So much for the difficulties in the cultural sphere. The other stumbling blocks on the road to Arab unification which existed before the Gulf crisis have now become more conspicuous. This crisis, which has generally been considered the fiercest and most bitter the Arab world experienced in recent decades, has in reality been only the latest in a long series of conflicts and feuds that have plagued Arab-Arab relations since the end of World War II. Indeed, as a number of Arab observers have noted, the past five decades witnessed more active Arab-Arab crises and conflicts than Arab-Israeli ones. During this span of time, the Arab world East and West spent over a thousand times more on its own civil, border, and propaganda wars than on its social services, cultural growth, and human development.

Again, while in those fateful postwar years Europe marched steadily toward unity, the cause of Arab unification suffered its most spectacular setbacks, first with the collapse of the Egypt-Syria merger in 1961, followed by the failure of the Egypt-Syria-Libya union barely two years later, and finally with the inability to consummate efforts to bring about some kind of partial Arab unity, now between Sudan, Libya, and Egypt; now between Libya, Sudan, and Syria; between Iraq and Syria; and finally between Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. Beside these failures, none of which involved active conflict or armed hostilities, there were splits and feuds that were less peaceful, one such conflict for each decade, as one Arab commentator put it recently. As listed by this observer, these were:

- The civil war in Yemen in the mid-1960s, involving Nasser's Egypt on one side and Saudi Arabia on the other.
- The September 1970 clashes in Amman between armed Palestinians and Jordan's security forces. But for fear of outside intervention, the Syrians would have come to the aid of the Palestinians.
- The hostilities that continued in 1991 started in Beirut in 1975 and spread to other parts of Lebanon; in one way or another, Iraq as well as neighboring Syria became involved.
- The war in the 1980s, which Morocco and Mauritania, both member states of the Arab League, fought over the Western Desert.
- And finally, ushering in the 1990s, the Arab-Arab war over Kuwait in which even Ba'thist Syria fought side by side with "reactionary" Saudi Arabia and rival Egypt against Saddam Hussein's fellow Ba'thist regime.

In between these armed conflicts, there were a number of inter-Arab wars that somehow stopped short of being actually waged: one between Egypt

and Libya, another between Syria and Iraq, a third between Morocco and Algeria, and a fourth between Jordan and Syria. It was the Lebanese arena, however, that was to witness the worst of all the inter-Arab conflicts. Lebanon during the years 1975–90 presented conclusive proof that it was possible for Arabs to fight each other even on someone else's soil, offering as it does all the requirements needed for civil strife. What is worse, Lebanon proved that it was possible to confine the Arab-Israeli conflict itself to a “neutral” territory that is neither a full-fledged war front nor the territory at issue.

Lebanon's special case apart, Iraq's annexation of Kuwait in August 1990 and the consequent war have marked what is easily the worst inter-Arab divide since the creation of the Arab League in 1945. What made this particular crisis seem so ominous was that, in the Gulf War, Arabs and Muslims found themselves fighting side by side with “infidels” and “intruders” against fellow Arabs and Muslims. Not that this was the first time Arabs have joined non-Arabs in fighting fellow Arabs—witness the active help provided by Syria and Libya to Iran in its eight-year war with Iraq.

At the root of inter-Arab feuds and conflicts lie four main factors: disparity between the political regimes, foreign influences, economic conditions, and individual psychological differences among leaders. Starting with Nasser's rise in the mid-1950s and ending with his army's defeat in the Six-Day War, practically all inter-Arab conflicts had their origins in the disparity among Arab political systems. The Baghdad Pact controversy between the Kingdom of Iraq and the Arab Republic of Egypt in 1955 was a case in point, and it was followed by the two countries' struggle over Syria in 1957. Then came the quarrel between Egypt and Lebanon in 1958, followed by the crisis that led to the sudden collapse of the merger between Syria and Egypt in what used to be the United Arab Republic. Fierce differences then erupted between Baghdad and Cairo in the years 1958–63. The difficulties attendant on the violent fall of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq did nothing to restrain the conflict, and in 1961 another crisis threatened in the Persian Gulf when Iraq's Abdul Karim Qassem decided that Kuwait was an integral part of his country. An imminent Iraqi invasion of the emirate was prevented only upon active intervention by Great Britain. Nasser's last act of armed intervention came in 1966, when he sent troops to far-off Yemen to help local Nasserists topple the regime there, which in turn was actively aided by neighboring Saudi Arabia.

Another source of inter-Arab tensions and conflicts falls outside the Arab world although it is closely related to the nature of the various regimes and ideologies. The escalation of the Cold War during the 1950s and

1960s played an important role in inter-Arab conflicts as the two super-powers competed for influence and to secure a foothold in the Arab region. The quarrel over the Baghdad Pact and the tensions that led to the Six-Day War are good examples.

The economic factor, the third source of conflict among the Arab states, made itself felt only in the mid-1970s, when the oil-rich Arab countries started to accumulate huge wealth and the gap between the haves and the have-nots of the Arab world became progressively wider. This gap widened because of the phenomenal rise of oil prices following the Yom Kippur War. While it did not actually lead to armed conflict between Arabs before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, it was a cause of tension and controversy, first in 1961 when the Iraqis made a claim to Kuwait, and then in the years 1964 and 1976, when Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania were locked in conflict over the Western Desert and its resources of natural gas.

Another source of conflict between the Arab states is the "individual-psychological," that is, the personal whims and predilections of the rulers of the day and the inevitable differences among them, often leading to full-fledged conflict between their countries. The importance of this source of tension springs, of course, from the regimes being in almost every case individual and dictatorial in character, making the shifting moods and whims of the individual leaders the decisive factors in relations between the states. For instance, Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Hafez al-Assad of Syria, though presiding over regimes that are guided by the same pan-Arab ideology, have never managed to be on speaking terms. Another example also involves Assad and his Ba'th regime: Since 1976 sharp differences prevented any meaningful cooperation between Damascus and the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Many Arab observers attribute this to the personal animosity between Assad and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.

More tellingly, the Arab Socialist Ba'th (Resurgence) Party, with its famous slogan "Unity, Freedom, Socialism—One Arab Nation with an Eternal Mission," has proved to be one of the most "provincial" of Arab leaderships, concentrating on local issues rather than on all-Arab causes. Ba'th leaders Hafez al-Assad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq have in fact both long abandoned the pan-Arab cause, if not as an ideology then certainly as an attainable goal.

Confronted with this state of affairs, the Arab world of the late 1990s pursues far more modest goals, with the emphasis being placed on what some Arab leaders have termed "the new Arab order." The general argument is that the Arab order as it had been prior to the war is obviously

crumbling, and a new “Arab order” is now called for, the kind that would finally put the Arab house in order, so to speak.

It may be legitimate to ask what sort of “Arab order” existed up to Iraq’s seizure of Kuwait or, for that matter, whether such an order had ever existed. The answer of course is that, if we discount the ever-ailing and chronically dormant Arab League, no Arab order of any substance governed relations between the Arab peoples since the fall of the great Muslim-Arab empire some thirteen centuries ago. There were, to be sure, all sorts of legal-institutional frameworks, pacts, commitments, mutual defense agreements, and aid grants provided by certain Arab “haves” to certain Arab “have-nots.” The 1980s, especially, witnessed the emergence of three Arab groupings, all boasting the relatively modest title of “cooperation council.” These were the Cooperation Council for the Arab states of the Gulf: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman; the Arab Cooperation Council: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen; and the Cooperation Council for the states of North Africa (the Maghrib): Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Libya.

However, rather than adding up to an “Arab order,” these councils demonstrate the lack of one. Nor was there real “order” in the composition of all these groupings. For while the North African and Gulf cooperation councils could both claim to be regional arrangements, the Arab Cooperation Council lacked any of the attributes that could provide a basis for a coherent alliance. It is not a regional grouping, as its member states are distant from each other and in one case separated by continents; it is not an alliance of the Arab have-nots against the Arab haves, since Iraq is in no way a have-not nation; and it is not even a grouping of popular republican regimes lined up against reactionary hereditary monarchies and sheikdoms since it includes a monarchical regime, the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan.

In their quest for an acceptable version of a new, post-Gulf War Arab order, a number of Arab political thinkers and commentators have been trying to fathom the deeper roots of this state of affairs and to suggest a possible way out. One of these is Fuad Zakariyya, a leading Egyptian philosophy professor and one of the most thoughtful political intellectuals of the Egyptian Left. In an article in the Egyptian monthly *Al-Hilal*, he presents a cogent analysis of the current state and future prospects of “the Arab order.”

Put briefly, Zakariyya’s thesis is that no Arab order of any significance or duration is possible unless it is based on objective, nonpersonal considerations rooted in the facts of history and geography, the nature of the region, and the character of the relations between its peoples. What makes

it highly difficult to speak of an Arab order today, he adds, is the lack of democracy and of representative government in the Arab world. Democracy alone can provide an Arab order with a solid, stable, and rational basis; democracy alone is capable of protecting such an order against the whims and biases of rulers and their private impulses. What is more, democracy makes it possible for the people to share meaningfully in shaping and safeguarding the character and direction of that order.⁶

Another well-known Arab academic and author who writes on contemporary Arab politics and culture, Muhammad 'Abed al-Jaberi, is slightly more hopeful. What passes today for an Arab order, he writes, has three crippling drawbacks. It is an order that has been dictated by and has come as a result of a series of global conflicts starting with the Napoleonic Wars and going all the way up to World War II. It is also one in which the interests of the imperialist West predominate, at the expense of Arab progress and advancement. Finally, the Arab order, as we know it, has been imposed by force on all levels, beginning with artificial geographical boundaries and ending with economic dependence.

Thanks to the Gulf crisis, Jaberi asserts, the existing Arab order is dead, and the consequences of the war are bound to lead to the establishment of a new Arab order that, in its turn, will be part of the new world order that started to take shape following the introduction of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and the momentous events that followed. In the course of his analysis (published in the Paris-based weekly *Al-Yawm as-Sabi'*) Jaberi quotes the former Russian leader as coining the slogan "reordering the European house" as a prelude to a new world order. He adds, however, that the house of Europe is only one of the houses comprising the new world order and that other "houses" have to be "reordered." There is, for one, the Arab house, which for the West was and remains what the East European house was for the Soviet Union.

The West, Jaberi asserts, is duty-bound to do for the Arab world what the Soviets have done for Eastern Europe, when they helped topple its tyrannical regimes and allowed the reunification of Germany. This would be a fitting prelude to reordering the Arab house, he explains. To be sure, the West's interests in the Arab world may differ from those the Soviets had in Eastern Europe; but the trend of recent events and of history, as Jaberi sees it, makes a reordering of the Arab house—and of the states of the Third World—inevitable. Otherwise, the Cold War cannot come to an end.

In a sense, then, Jaberi perceives the Gulf crisis, costly and regrettable though it was, as a kind of a blessing in disguise; it marks the demise of the old Arab order. Zakariyya, too, tends to find at least one positive aspect to

the crisis. Ugly and objectionable as it certainly is, he writes, it has finally “exposed the reality of the Arab non-order for everyone to see—and this perhaps is the only benefit the Arab peoples are going to draw from this disaster.”⁷

A fitting conclusion to this brief survey is supplied by a renowned publicist and columnist, Fahmi Huwaidi, an Islamist though he is generally severely critical of the extremism of the fundamentalists. Huwaidi was invited to attend a conference convened in Beirut in 1994 by stalwart Ba'thists and an assortment of other veteran agitators for Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism. “From where I sat,” Huwaidi wrote, “the conference appeared to represent an extinct tribe using strange words—indeed, a language incomprehensible in our time. Most of them had grey hair and stooping backs. Some needed canes to help them walk. Some had hearing aids and shaking hands that made it difficult for them to write, and others had difficulty getting the words out.”

“Astonishingly,” added Huwaidi, “none of this stopped them.” But they were “blowing in a broken bagpipe.”⁸

Islam, Democracy, and the Peace Process

Contemporary Islam is perceived and interpreted by its adherents in many different and often opposing ways. Even Muslim religious savants, *'ulama*, often differ widely in the religious edicts, *fatwas*, they issue on matters of observance and on how to relate to new developments in society, the economy, and politics.

These wide discrepancies between edicts pronounced by different recognized Muslim theologians—ministers of religion and guardians of the faith proving so flexible and so resilient in their judgments, often on extremely vital issues—indicates the status and fortunes of fundamentalist Islam. Such differences call for a reexamination of the widespread view that Islam is basically fanatical in character. It is, indeed, extremely difficult to envision fundamentalist Islam triumphing where the powers-that-be are seriously set against such a development. Even in Iran, where the Islamic revolution did succeed, its success was due partly to the fact that the fundamentalists were joined by discontented segments of the society that were more anti-Shah than pro-Khomeini.

In this connection it is worth citing the experience of Sudan, another Muslim country in which an Islamist regime was established. Ja'afar Numeiri, the country's sole ruler throughout the 1970s and part of the 1980s, at some point decided he wanted Sudan to be a truly Islamic polity

run strictly in accordance with the tenets of Islam. Numeiri's efforts failed dismally; the fundamentalists themselves pronounced the attempts "impracticable." To give one example: One of the tenets of the *Shari'a* (religious law) decrees that a person who is convicted of theft should have his or her hand cut off. Numeiri in his zeal wanted to put this rule into effect along with all the other practices of pristine Islam. The Muslim fundamentalists themselves, however, argued against this particular practice with vigor and aggressiveness.

How, they asked, can you punish a poor person so severely when the whole social order allows a state of affairs in which people become hungry and destitute enough to resort to stealing? Can you reasonably cut off the hand of a person compelled to steal a loaf of bread in order to feed his or her family? The implications of this line of argument are as clear as they are far-reaching: In order to establish the Islamic state on the principles and tenets of pristine Islam, you must first change the social order—a change so radical as to seem like a reordering of the universe.

Regarding foreign policy and international relations, the situation is even more critical. A truly Islamic state would have to be in a constant state of *jihad* (holy war) against literally everybody and every other non-Muslim political entity in the world—until the time comes when they will all either embrace Islam or pay *jizya* (poll tax) to their Muslim masters. Plainly, not even Ayatollah Rohallah Khomeini or any of his successors allowed himself even to fantasize in such fashion.

Somewhat more pressing, practical issues tend to exercise the minds of Muslim Arabs today. In the Arab world, to cite one leading issue, opinion is divided as to the likely impact of Islam on democratization, Westernization, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. A considerable number of scholars, including many Muslims, maintain that Islam and democracy are compatible and that Islamic groups as a whole support a transition to democracy. However, as Jamal al-Suwaidi observes, "the liberal tradition of Islam that attempted to make Muslim teachings compatible with democracy does not at present enjoy widespread support and is not a viable alternative." Rather, traditional and conservative interpretations of Islam are dominant in the Arab world today. "Current religious groups are not committed to democratic values; they merely want to acquire political power in order to establish an Islamic sociopolitical order, which they define as the 'common good'."

Therefore, those who support the argument that religious groups will eventually become more democratic are misinterpreting the ideology of political Islam. Here, al-Suwaidi quotes approvingly a comment made by

the *Economist* to the effect that “people who suggest that an Islamic reformation may speedily be followed by a liberating Islamic renaissance should be warned: many of the Islamic movement’s leaders, with first-hand experience of Western society, are determined not to repeat any Western pattern.”⁹

This situation places supporters of democracy in the Arab world in a serious predicament, al-Suwaidi adds. According to him, “the strength of Islamic groups is in large part a response to the oppressive nature of the state in the Arab world.” Arab rulers have not allowed secular opposition and have consequently created through their own style of governance a radical religious opposition. “Islamic groups are the only route for effective dissent in the Arab world today; a lack of institutionalized channels for political participation and the exercise of political influence has enabled underground movements calling for Islamic solutions to gain widespread support among a disaffected public seeking greater government accountability. Yet the long-term prospects for democracy may be diminished rather than enhanced should such movements come to power as regimes respond to demands for political reform.” Thus, for the present at least, Arab political life will be shaped by the conflict between authoritarian states and quasi-totalitarian opposition movements, with the prospects for sustained democratization uncertain at best.

Concerning foreign policy, al-Suwaidi writes, “the relationship between democracy and foreign policy in the Arab world would seem to depend on two highly interrelated considerations: the nature of Arab political culture and the role and importance of political Islam.” This relationship is mediated by considerations of political culture, and in this connection the attitudes and beliefs that shape assessments of other states may be traced not only to the growth of democratic values but also to their roots in a country’s historical and cultural traditions. In addition, “traditional Islamic values will be critically important to the extent that governmental decisions take popular sentiment into account, and the ideological predispositions of governments themselves will place less emphasis on liberalism and democracy when judging other states if democratization does indeed allow Islamic opposition movements to gain power.”

For both of these reasons, al-Suwaidi concludes, “political reform may lead to the establishment of religious rather than liberal democracies, and religious democracies may not be more inclined than authoritarian regimes to resolve peacefully the Arab-Israeli conflict and other regional and international disputes.” Thus political Islam must be treated as an important intervening variable in the relationship between democracy and peace in

the Arab and Islamic world. And, turning to prediction rather than explanation, these considerations also suggest “that democratization in the Middle East may not at the present historical juncture take place in a way that increases the prospects for regional peace.”¹⁰

Another student of the Arab world, Hisham Ja'it (Hichem Djait), wrote in 1978 that “it would not be healthy to pin all hopes on achieving some sort of absolute [pan-Arab] unity,” adding that an attempt by an Arab state to use its power for the purpose would be “not only dangerous but doomed to failure.” No Arab state had sufficient power to effect such unity, and no Arab could “entertain the notion that America, Europe, or Russia would allow so cohesive a unity to be founded in the heart of the Old World.”

On the more general subject of Arab-Muslim attitudes to modernization and Westernization, Djait wrote, apropos of the notorious Salman Rushdie affair: “For at least a century, the Muslim world has tended toward two principal goals in the course of its development: to participate in the modern world, but at the same time to demand recognition for its own special historical, cultural, and religious heritage. These two goals frequently converge; but they can also diverge. In fact, the search for recognition, through both nationalism and Islam, has always taken priority over everything else.”¹¹

On the subject of democracy and other Western concepts and creeds, Islam again cannot be said to have a uniform or even a defined attitude. The diversity on this subject within the Muslim community has given particular attention to the views of intellectuals and politicians associated with Islamic fundamentalism. As Shukri B. Abed, an Israeli Muslim scholar and a keen observer of the Arab political scene, has observed, “While Islamic reformists believe in the universality of concepts like democracy and assert that the Islamic and Western worlds have the same needs and, therefore, that what is good for the West is good for Muslims, fundamentalists, or traditionalists, believe not only that Western political concepts are inapplicable to Muslim communities but that they have a negative, indeed a corrupting influence on the human soul.”

Traditionalists, however, address the issue of democracy with two voices, that of the theoretician and that of the politician. “The theoretician’s attitude is characterized by an open, straightforward critique of Western political concepts, a critique that rejects their application in the Muslim world and even questions their effectiveness in Western societies.” Fundamentalist politicians, on the other hand, while strictly adhering to the principles of an Islamic solution, employ the language of modern political discourse. “They present themselves as defenders of democracy and human rights, although

they seek the meaning of these terms in the *shari'a* rather than in Kant and Rousseau.”¹²

The struggle between the reformist and traditionalist streams within Islam is almost as old as the religion, Abed adds, having manifested itself in various forms throughout Muslim history. There were debates between theologians and philosophers in early Islam, and later, in the modern period, between fundamentalists on the one hand and liberal intellectuals and nationalists on the other. “This struggle is bound to continue, and possibly even to intensify, in the future. The debate between competing ideologies purporting to offer solutions to the Muslim world’s problems appears to be sharpest during difficult and dynamic times when Islam is exposed to real or perceived external challenges.” It is also driven, at present, by the unfortunate state of affairs in the Muslim world, including problems that have not been alleviated by governments identified with non-Islamic political formulas. Indeed, given the current malaise in many Middle Eastern countries, “it is likely that the fundamentalist stream of Islam will continue to gain ground, with Muslims in general, and Arabs in particular, seeing Islam as a last resort in their search for a better life.”¹³

The close connection between democratization in the Arab world and the Israeli-Arab peace process is tackled by Mark Tessler and Marilyn Grobschmidt. These two observers point out that, while the belief that democracy will provide Islamist parties with an opportunity to influence national policy has some merit, and while Islamist movements and candidates have indeed done well in those Arab countries that have in recent years permitted competitive elections, most notably Algeria, Jordan, Tunisia, and Egypt, “the reasons for growing popular support of Islamist challenges to the status quo deserve careful scrutiny, as does the contention that this support demonstrates an inverse relationship between democracy and peace in the Middle East.”

The two writers concede that it is probably the absence of democracy and the existence of unresolved domestic economic and social problems that have produced most of the current support for movements with Islamist tendencies, rather than anything that has to do with Arab culture or even, in a direct sense, with the religious faith of ordinary citizens. “With secular regimes tied to the U.S. (or until recently to the USSR) lacking legitimacy in the eyes of their own people,” they explain, “it is not surprising that many have responded positively to slogans which proclaim that ‘Islam is the solution’. This conclusion may be understood in the context of observations about the bases for popular discontent and demands for accountable government.”¹⁴

Is there a well-defined, authoritative Islamic stand vis-à-vis Israel and the subject of relations with Israel? The answer depends largely on what group or school of thought in Islam is involved and at which stage of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Take the official Islamic stance in Egypt, for example. Throughout the period 1948–77, all the religious edicts issued by the highest Islamic instance, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, decreed that holy war (*jihad*) ought to be waged on the Jewish state. When King Farouk and his cabinet decided to join in the war against Israel in 1948, the *'ulema* duly issued numerous *fatwas* explaining why a *jihad* must be declared against the foreign “usurpers.” This went on for forty years, with Nasser’s revolutionary regime adopting an increasingly militant stance against Israel and the *'ulema* unanimously joining the bandwagon.

However, when Nasser’s successor, Anwar al-Sadat, decided toward the end of 1977 to make peace with Israel, the self-same religious leadership—including the Sheikh of Al-Azhar—hastened to issue religious edicts in support of their president, urging Muslims to seek peace and conciliation should the adversary follow the same peaceful course. All along, needless to add, quotations from the Koran and the Hadith were cited in support of the *fatwas*. This prompted one Muslim *'alim*—Dr. Nader al-Tamimi, “the PLO mufti”—to condemn his fellow *'ulema* in Egypt for supporting Sadat’s “Camp David conspiracy” with their “ready-made *fatwas*.”

This remarkable adaptability of the *'ulema* has fairly understandable reasons, chiefly that the *shari'a* itself leaves its practitioners with considerable leeway. This is nowhere as evident as where government is concerned. As Sana Osseiran points out, “neither the Quran nor the Prophet Muhammad laid down any particular form of government for Muslims.” As long as the *shari'a* is applied, “the *umma* can choose any structure [of government].” When the Arab-Islamic states were formed using Western models, she explains, people did not contest the legitimacy of their rulers or the Western model.

Indeed, the ideas of the French Revolution influenced their acceptance of that model. The earlier primacy of Turks over Arabs, the emergence of nationalism (and with it the colonial and military power of the West) all give rise to the hope, euphoria, and inspirations that shaped the modern destiny of the Arab-Islamic states. . . . Discontent with the regimes emerged [only] as a result of bad politics, inefficient economic strategies, authoritarian rule, and ambiguity between state and religious laws, governing the social life of the citizen. This accounts for the success of the Islamists’ claims today. Arab-

Islamic governments are intimidated by them precisely because of the failures of the ruling elite.¹⁵

On Islam and democracy, Osseiran cites Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawy, the famed Egyptian jurist, to the effect that the two are compatible. Many of the religious edicts, *fatwas*, 'Ashmawy has argued, are in reality legalized "opinions," made by jurists at the service of a caliph. They are man-made and have nothing to do with divine koranic law.

He added that this lack of separation and clarification between what is political and what is essentially religious has caused great confusion in the Muslim community. This confusion has led to the alienation of the population in reaction to decisions affecting their lives. The Islamic movements are the only ones in the Arab world that have kept a vigilant eye on the development of Arab-Islamic societies. "The failure of leftist and rightist intellectuals, as well as unsatisfactory governments, have brought these religious movements into the foreground of the political scene. . . . What is clear today is that the leadership in Arab-Islamic states has lost its legitimacy because of corruption, favoritism, and a lack of concern for the governed. The corruption of the FLN (National Liberation Front) in Algeria partially explains the success of the Islamic movement."

At each crisis in the Arab-Muslim states, whether caused by a military defeat in its wars against Israel or the desire to cover up scandals, lip service has been paid to Islam, Osseiran writes. "This was the case with President Anwar Sadat, with Ja'afar Numeiri, and most recently with secular President Saddam Hussein, who suddenly discovered Islam in order to rally the Arab-Islamic people during the Gulf War. Islam is still a dynamic force. This dynamism should . . . not be conceived of as a regressive force. The spirit of Islam should be used for the present as well as for the future."¹⁶

The difficulty here lies, again, in authoritatively defining Islamic law and in applying its rules to state affairs as well as to matters of personal status. Several years ago the veteran Muslim revivalist Hassan Turabi, now considered the uncrowned head of the Islamic government of Sudan, said in an interview, "The Muslims themselves sometimes don't even know how to go about their Islam. They have no recent precedent of an Islamic government." Turabi, a trained lawyer with degrees from the Sorbonne and the University of London, made this instructive remark when confronted with examples of arbitrary measures taken by the authorities in Khartoum, including after-dark arrests, morality police, and restrictions on women, some of whom

have complained that in offices and schools they have been threatened with the loss of their jobs if they went on wearing Western dress.¹⁷

That present-day Muslims do not quite know how to go about Islam—how, that is, to interpret it or reinterpret it as the comprehensive, all-inclusive code of life and government it is meant to be—is apparent to anyone who follows the endless intra-Islamic controversies raging constantly in the Arab world. So-called Muslim fundamentalists, too, all advocating a return to pristine Islam, appear to be hopelessly divided on the question of what such a revival actually means.

There are, for example, certain leading Muslim *'ulema* and dignitaries whose views are considered anathema in Saudi Arabia, a famously Islamic state. Again, to take an example from Egypt, the two highest religious authorities there in the early 1990s—the Grand Mufti Sheikh Jadelhaq Ali Jadelhaq and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Dr. Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi—used to speak in two entirely different voices on many theological and juridical subjects touching upon the everyday life of Muslim men and women in that largest of Muslim-Arab countries.

An article printed in the Cairo weekly *Rose el-Yousuf* contains a number of examples. Carrying the heading, “Whom Are We to Believe—the Grand Mufti or the Grand Imam?” the article opens with short remarks about the almost identical backgrounds of the two men. Both, it appears, had attended the same university, studied the same theological treatises, the same Koran commentaries, and the same compilations of Hadith (the Prophet’s traditions). “However,” adds the author of the article, “the distance between the two is very long indeed if you happen to read their *fatwas*. A Muslim can cross oceans and negotiate mountains, and yet he wouldn’t know whom of the two to believe—the mufti or the imam.”¹⁸

Differences between these two luminaries seem to cut across the spectrum of the pressing issues of the day: birth control, transplantation of human organs, savings and interest, among others. On each of these subjects, the imam and the mufti issued diametrically opposing *fatwas*.

At the root of the confusion here is the multitude of individuals and committees authorized to issue *fatwas*—or just believed by popular consensus to be fit to do so. The phenomenon can reach absurd dimensions. The author of the article in *Rose el-Yousuf* quotes a popular Egyptian saying: “Leave it all to the *'alim*; all else is vain; and thus, secure and safe you will remain.” The meaning is clear: You can get any *fatwa* you want, so do your own thing and leave the rest to the *'alim* or the imam. “In Egypt,”

adds the writer, “you can stop at any news stand and have your pick of whatever *'alim* on whose neck you choose to hang your misconduct. You will find a whole variety of leading sheikhs to choose between—Sha'rawi, Ghazzali, Yousuf el-Qardhawi, Yassin Rushdi. Each has a different opinion and each the right quotes from the Koran and the Tradition.”¹⁹

Needless to say, such wide differences of opinion and interpretation extend all the way from everyday matters like family planning and banking to the criminal code and to affairs of state. On this latter subject, especially—on the precise nature of Islamic government—the views are often diametrically opposed. As these differences all have some basis in the scripture, moreover, Muslims have always felt free to choose whatever version seems suitable—to their temperament, to their immediate circumstances, or both.

The case of Islamic law itself is highly instructive. There have always been two fairly different approaches to that law, corresponding to the two portions of the Koran revealed to the Prophet in Mecca and Medina. In the former, where Muhammad's whole mission was threatened, the precepts of the law were stricter and far tougher than those revealed in Medina, by which time Islam ruled uncontested. Thus, for the contemporary Islamist to lean on the Meccan precepts is to be the more militant, the more idealist, and accordingly the less tolerant of minority opinion and of followers of other faiths. Those who choose to base their programs on the Medinan version, on the other hand, are more liberal and politically the more pluralistic.

Or that is what they profess, anyway. As Turabi put in on more than one occasion and in a variety of ways, the Islamist movement is one of intellectual renewal and active social reform, representing a revolt against “the dormancy and dogmatism of traditional societies.” As for the impracticability of the rules of the *shari'a*, he points out that, although that law has been in force in Sudan since 1991, there has not been a single amputation of burglars' hands yet—which for him is proof that the law has proved to be a very effective deterrent.

In an exhaustive interview with Hassan el-Tal, editor of the Jordanian daily *Al-Ra'i*, Turabi said the Islamist tide spread considerably after the Kuwait crisis and the Gulf war. This helped expose the fallacies of those “who clamored for democracy, but who, when their Islamist adversaries won the elections in Algeria early in 1992, turned their backs on democracy . . . and called openly for suspending the elections and closing this option for a return to Islam.” The only difference between the democratic state and the Islamic state, Turabi said in conclusion, “is that, in the latter, one code of laws guides all government institutions—the *shari'a*.”²⁰

Hassan Hanafi once described political life in the Arab-Muslim world thus: “Every week, a government ministry in Cairo prepares a model sermon and then distributes it to the preachers throughout the country who either read it or put its contents and meaning into their own words. In them, government policies are espoused and backed up by quotations from the Quran and the Sunna.”²¹

This may well be the case. However, a more serious and more appropriate approach is needed. While Islam’s political tradition—as well as Arab political culture, which is almost wholly based on it—are essentially alien to democracy as it is known and practiced in the West today, the question also arises whether democracy itself, as many Arab intellectuals maintain, is the only remedy for the Arab world. These, to quote Elie Kedourie, “disregard a long experience which clearly shows that democracy has been tried in many [Arab] countries and uniformly failed.” Indeed, until European ideas and the European example spread in the Middle East, “the Arab world together with the rest of the Middle East was governed by regimes which were no doubt despotic, but whose methods were understood and accepted.” Those methods were discredited and “irremediably damaged” by the power and influence of Europe. “Nothing as lasting,” Kedourie laments, “or even as satisfactory, has succeeded in replacing them.”²²

The dismal failure of what Kedourie calls “the varieties of democratic experience in the Arab world”—which reminds him of the Latin poet’s rueful confession that he “saw and approved what was best, yet ended up following the worst”—had its roots in the Muslim political tradition, to which the various trappings of democracy and democratic government he deems to be “profoundly alien.” In a brief summary of this tradition, he explains that in the political theory of Islam, “as it has remained to the present day, the caliph is the sole political and military authority with the *‘umma* (the community), and all civil officials and military officers are his servants and derive their powers solely from this, the highest public office in Islam.” The conclusion is clear enough: In such a political tradition, “there can be no question of checks and balances, of division of power, of popular sovereignty, of elections or representative assemblies.”²³

Thus, when dealing with such aspects of contemporary Islam as its attitude to the democratization process or the peace process, one inevitably is confronted with the whole subject of Islam, its tenets, and the different ways in which these have been put into practice throughout its history. These days, it is customary to generalize about Islam, often speaking of its innate extremism, its essentially intolerant and “undemocratic” character. However, as Abed asserts, “It is hardly fair . . . to portray Islam as inher-

ently antidemocratic and the single greatest obstacle to political progress in the Arab world, especially when a wariness and suspicion of democracy and other Western exports is shared by many staunchly opposed to the Islamic movement. Like their Muslim fundamentalist counterparts, Arab Marxists and leftists often argue (though perhaps for different reasons) that Western-style democracy is not necessarily the best form of government for the Arab countries.”²⁴

Fortunately this attitude is not confined to Muslim observers and scholars. Britain’s Prince Charles—of all unlikely observers, some will say—in the course of an address he gave in 1993 at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, warned against the temptation of believing that extremism is in some way the hallmark and essence of the Muslim. “The Prophet [Muhammad] himself disliked and feared extremism,” he added.

As an introduction to this piece of advice the speaker said, among other things:

Many people in the Islamic world genuinely fear Western materialism and mass culture as a deadly challenge to their Islamic culture and way of life. We fall into the trap of dreadful arrogance if we confuse “modernity” in other countries with their becoming more like us. Our form of materialism can be offensive to devout Muslims. We must understand that reaction. This would help us understand what we have come to see as the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. We need to be careful of that emotive label, “fundamentalism,” and distinguish, as Muslims do, between revivalists, who choose to take the practice of their religion most devoutly, and fanatics or extremists, who use this devotion for political ends.²⁵

Some four months later, Anthony Lake, U.S. President Clinton’s top foreign policy adviser, said roughly the same thing. In a speech at the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy “meant to define a shift in U.S. attitudes,” Lake said, “Islam is not the issue. . . . Our foe is oppression and extremism,” not “a renewed emphasis on traditional values in the Islamic world.”

These are important, weighty sentiments the likes of which are not heard very often even in the stately seats of the academic world. A pithy but entirely understandable comment on this phenomenon occurs in Akbar Ahmed’s *Living Islam*, a work that can be said to present a sober and fair-minded idea of what fundamentalist Islam is—Islam as a faith as against political Islamic extremism.

Ahmed goes to the root of the problem. He writes:

Western commentators often use—or misuse—terms taken from Christianity and apply them to Islam. One of the most commonly used is fundamentalism. As we know, in its original application [‘fundamentalist’] means someone who believes in the fundamentals of religion, that is the Bible and the scriptures. However, in the manner it is used in the media, to mean a fanatic or extremist, it does not illuminate either Muslim thought or Muslim society. In the Christian context it is a useful concept. In the Muslim context it simply confuses because by definition every Muslim believes in the fundamentals of Islam. . . . A Muslim even talking of Islam will be quickly slapped with the label fundamentalist in the Western media.

Elsewhere in his account Ahmed speaks of the phenomenon as “the Western bogeyman.”²⁶

Israel’s Jewish Identity

Five factors have combined to belie the validity of the “pan” nature of the Arab system: (1) the ramifications of the Arab-Israeli conflict, (2) the Lebanese imbroglio, (3) the rise of a distinctive Palestinian nationalism, (4) the growth of local Islamist movements, and (5) the virtual end of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party as the leading Arab group working toward a united Arab world. While the Arabs thus appear to be fast outgrowing their intense pan-Arab aspirations, Israel itself has undergone a demographic-cultural transformation that may well prove of decisive significance to the future prospects of a dialogue between Arab Muslims and Israeli Jews.

In 1948, the Jewish population of the newly established state of Israel totaled some 650,000. In the mid-1980s—less than forty years later—this population grew more than fivefold, largely through immigration. The newcomers came from the four corners of the earth, but the overwhelming majority hailed from countries of the Middle East and North Africa. The result has been that about 60 percent of Jews living in Israel today either come from Islamic lands themselves or are descendants of those who did, while of the remaining 40 percent an increasing number are Middle Easterners, having been born in the country though of European extraction. The implications of these figures politically, culturally, and in terms of Israel’s future position in the region can hardly be overestimated. In James Parkes’s words, this totally unexpected development makes Israel “a normal Middle Eastern country, . . . a country at home with itself and its problems.”²⁷

In terms of Israel's future position in the region, the change is likely to be decisive. Not only has Israel become *of* as well as *in* the Middle East; an even more interesting development is that this was brought about largely "by Arab action, legal and popular, which made life intolerable for Jewries as ancient as those of the Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Egypt." These considerations, Parkes writes, "change the right of Israel to exist from the abnormal basis of the special arguments which lay behind the claims of Zionism and the issue of the Balfour Declaration to the normal basis of history and tradition." For, though Herzl would have been amazed at it, and though Balfour never envisaged it, "Israel exists today in the Middle East on the absolutely normal basis that the majority of its inhabitants are Middle Easterners and never have been anything else." The fact that these Jews are now concentrated in the single area of the state of Israel is the result of "local migration" and cannot affect their character as Middle Easterners.

To the unprejudiced, nonpartisan observer all this would be self-evident. Yet the still overwhelmingly East European Zionist establishment in Israel would have none of it. Broadly speaking, two arguments have been advanced against a "Middle Eastern Israel." Proponents of the first usually argue that a Middle Eastern Israel would be backward, morally lax, easy-going, and generally "Levantinized," whereas what is needed is a strong, advanced, technologically and militarily superior Israel. The second argument is even more loaded culturally and emotionally. Israel, according to this viewpoint, is and must remain a Jewish *rather than* a Middle Eastern state. For the proponents of this latter argument there exists, thus, a fundamental and unbridgeable opposition between "Jewish" and "Middle Eastern." With them, for Israel to become a Middle Eastern country means that it automatically loses its Jewish character.

Addressing the first argument, Parkes again furnishes an answer. "By calling Israel a normal Middle Eastern country," he has written, "I do not . . . mean that it is like every other Middle Eastern country, for it is normal that countries in that region should present as many features which are unique to themselves as features which they share with their neighbors. I would emphasize also that it is normalcy of the decade of the Sixties of which I am speaking. As I said earlier, this differs completely from the situation in the 1920s."²⁸ Yet, as David Marquand, touching on this same point, observed a few short months after the Six-Day War, there is little sign that Israel is prepared psychologically for the adjustments necessary for the Middle East to enjoy a stable peace.

Like Parkes, Marquand considers the normalization of Israel as an integral part of the Middle East a first requisite for peace in the region. "It is

clear,” he writes, “that Israel cannot hope to live in peace with her neighbors unless they cease to regard her as an alien intruder and accept her as a Middle Eastern state like themselves.” He however goes on to relate that any suggestion of this sort is “violently—and sometimes hysterically—rejected by the vast majority of Israelis.” “‘Israel,’ I was told, not once but a hundred times, ‘is *not* a Middle Eastern state. We are Westerners, with a Western culture and a Western political system. We have no objection to carrying the blessings of Western technology and Western civilization to the more backward parts of the Middle East. But for God’s sake don’t ask us to become Middle Easterners ourselves. How would you like it if you were told to become West Indians?’”²⁹

Marquand, obviously not impressed, then goes on to explain why lasting peace between the Arabs and Israel depends on a fundamental change of attitude. He writes:

It is easy to sketch out the terms of a possible peace treaty. Israel obviously needs a guarantee of her *de jure* existence as a State, and frontier adjustments to give her greater military security. In return she will obviously have to give back most of the occupied territories to their former owners; to allow back the refugees who fled from the West Bank this summer; to accept some status short of complete annexation of the Old City of Jerusalem; and perhaps to arrange some sort of compensation for the original refugees who fled from what is now Israel twenty years ago. . . . But a peace treaty of this sort (or indeed of any sort) would not be worth the paper it was written on unless it were accompanied by a genuine decision on the part of the Arabs to accept Israel as a fact of Middle Eastern life—a decision guaranteed not by signatures on a peace treaty but a fundamental change of attitude. But no such change in the Arab attitude to Israel is possible, it seems to me, until an equivalent change has taken place in Israel’s attitude to herself. At present, Israel sees herself as a Jewish state which happens to be situated in the Middle East. Permanent peace will not be possible until she sees herself as a Middle Eastern state, most of whose people happen to be Jewish.³⁰

This brings us to the second type of argument against a “Middle Eastern Israel”: that for Israel to become a Middle Eastern state signifies a negation of its being Jewish. Marquand seems to accept—though probably unwittingly—the wholly untenable thesis that in Israel’s case “Middle Eastern” presents a sort of antithesis to “Jewish.” A more striking, and plainly less unwitting, effort to oppose Jewishness to Middle Easternness is worth cit-

ing. In a review of British press comments on the Middle East crisis of 1967, the *Jewish Chronicle* of London reported rather reproachfully that the *Times* and the *Guardian* had advised Israel to become “a Middle Eastern rather than a Jewish state.”³¹ An examination of these two papers shows, however, that all their editorial writers had advised Israel to do was to become “more of a Middle Eastern country” if it were to attain lasting and meaningful peace with its Arab neighbors. The false and patently ludicrous opposition between “Jewish” and “Middle Eastern” was, it transpires, no more than a figment of the *Jewish Chronicle* reviewer’s imagination, or rather a piece of rationalization and wishful thinking. Not only have Jews been full-fledged Middle Easterners from time immemorial; well over half of Israel’s present population are Jews *and* Middle Easterners.

Needless to say, the opposition the editorial writers of the two leading London dailies had in mind was not one of a Middle Eastern versus a Jewish Israel but, rather, one of a Middle Eastern versus a European, Western-oriented Israel. Seen in this light, the *Chronicle*’s misquotation becomes a little more intelligible. Apart from a desire on its reviewer’s part to depict the two papers’ perfectly sensible advice in an utterly absurd light (for what could have been more natural than a friendly advice to Israel to become a Middle Eastern rather than an allegedly European state?), his “error” could have had a far deeper motive. According to this interpretation, Israel should at all costs maintain its European character and persist doggedly in avoiding the danger of becoming a Middle Eastern country; but since this attitude has become increasingly difficult to maintain, the best way to defend it would be the invocation of the formidable motif of Jewishness. Hence the claim that Israel cannot very well be a Middle Eastern country since it wants to preserve its Jewishness—and Jewishness is incompatible with being Middle Eastern, witness the *Times* and the *Guardian*! Even as devices of rationalization go, this one would seem to be too transparent for words.

There is, however, another and far more basic reason for the argument that Israel is not and cannot be a Middle Eastern country. One can well imagine the existence of many Jews (in fact, one encounters them quite often) for whom the only Jews who count are those of European, and specifically of East European, extraction. Following the habitual “culturist” attitude, which suggests that people of whom one knows nothing had no history and possess no significance, those Jews tend automatically to deny not only the history and culture but sometimes the very existence of Middle Eastern Jewry. The antithetical opposition between “Jewish” and “Middle

Eastern,” utterly unfounded as it may appear to most of us, in this way can sound perfectly valid to the East European Jewish culturist.

In a short and incisive article, Walter Zenner, a perceptive American Jewish anthropologist and a keen student of the Israeli scene, has dealt with this subject with candor and insight. “The assumption of culturism,” he writes with regard to Israel, “is that European culture must dominate. One can go from this point to the next: that a person of European background is superior and more fitted for many tasks than one of the Middle Eastern or African culture. It is a conclusion like that of the racists. By implication, the culturist goes further. He implies that European culture has the answers to the problems of the modern world. No reflective North American or European, whether Jewish, Christian or unaffiliated, would make this judgement.”³²

But an Israeli “culturist” would. Coming closer to the core of his subject, Zenner adds: “To say . . . that Israel should be a European state is nonsensical and dangerous. Two important population components in Israel are Middle Eastern: the Arabs and the Jews from Mediterranean and Islamic countries. Unless the Israeli state becomes totalitarian, it is impossible to prevent these people from making some synthesis of their own between European and Middle Eastern culture.”

This, of course, is where Israel’s two crucial problems, the communal and the regional, meet and converge. Israel’s problem in this context has always been the twofold one of finding a way to accommodate—not assimilate, absorb, or fuse—its Middle Eastern citizens in its so far predominantly Western set-up and, partly through this integration, itself to become integrated into the Middle Eastern landscape and accepted by its neighbors. “A complete rejection of Middle Eastern culture,” Zenner asserts, “is by implication to reject [the bearers of this culture] as people who have nothing worthwhile to contribute. . . . It is likely to lead to the Orientals’ rejection of the Europeans. It should be apparent that Israel is in the Levant and in Asia, and that it must come to terms with its neighbors. The Israeli Arab and the Arabic-speaking Jew have much to teach their European compatriots so that the latter may come to an accommodation with the other residents of the area.”³³

There is, though, one particular—and rather wild—sense in which Israel cannot be both Jewish and Middle Eastern. This is the sense in which culturally, politically, nationally, and socially you cannot be Jewish *and* anything else besides. For those who maintain this position, Jewish culture, Jewish identity, and the very state of being Jewish are self-contained and

entirely self-sufficient phenomena—representing a validity all their own. In this sense, again, it would be inconceivable for Israel, a Jewish country, to be anything else culturally as well as sociopolitically. Not only is Israel barred from being a Middle Eastern state; it cannot be a Western, East European, or American state. For that matter, it cannot be a democratic, socialist, communist, or fascist state.

All this may sound, and in fact is, quite absurd; but it is ultimately the gist of the argument used by those who seek to establish a kind of dichotomy between the terms “Jewish” and “Middle Eastern” as might be applied to Israel. For quite a few years now certain sections of the far right of the Zionist movement—representing what some of them call the New Zionism—have been openly propounding just such a position. The late Israel Eldad, a prominent and articulate spokesman of these circles, went on record more than once that Israel cannot be a democracy in the accepted sense of the word and that the only democratic system the country can follow is “Jewish democracy” or “democracy for the Jews.” Again, the late Rabbi Meir Kahane—member of the Israeli parliament and leader of a movement called *Kach*, which many observers considered a rising force—dubbed the Israel Declaration of Independence “schizophrenic,” in that it speaks in one breath of Israel being a Jewish country and a democracy granting equality to its citizens irrespective of race, religion, or sex. In the final analysis, indeed, this is what all those Israelis who now talk of the need to keep Israel “Jewish and democratic” are ultimately saying since, were Israel a democracy in the generally accepted sense of the term, why should the inclusion of more non-Jews in its citizenry pose a danger to its democratic character?

This, ultimately, is also the gist of what the *Jewish Chronicle*’s press reviewer, whose remarks were quoted above, had to say when his “error” was pointed out to him. Admitting that neither the *Times* nor the *Guardian* had actually made the alleged opposition between “Jewish” and “Middle Eastern” he had claimed they did, this reviewer wrote: “What I was trying to say—and I think it was and is a valid interpretation of British press opinion—is that the world just won’t accept the idea of a Jewish state, because—pace Herzl—the world to date still insists that it is a contradiction in terms.”³⁴

Turning to the more crucial question of what constitutes Jewishness and why this does not leave room for Israel to be Middle Eastern, the writer adds: “A lot of us think that *Jewish* is not an ethnical but an ethical description. We don’t want what our enemies or false friends want—a pathetic little Levantine country—let us face it that’s what they really want. . . . We

want a Jewish land. It is and must be a different land from its neighbours'. Otherwise the whole point is missing." The wooliness then gets thicker and thicker: "To be Middle Eastern is to be a geographical expression," we are advised. "To be Jewish is to have a way of life in which men, women and children have their own dignity. I see no reason for pallid approximations to physical environment. We shall only command and maintain respect as Jews."³⁵

Clearly, such a stand is difficult to sustain. If, for instance, "to be Middle Eastern is to be a geographical expression," is to be a European, a North American, a Southeast Asian, an Iberian, or a West Indian equally a mere geographical expression? If so, why then should people in Israel—men who tie and loose and in whose hands the lives of millions are entrusted—be so uncompromising in their insistence that Israel is "European," or "Western"? No one probably wants Israel to be "a pathetic little Levantine country"; yet for Israel to belong in the Levant would seem to many to be immeasurably less pathetic than for it to pretend to be a biggish country belonging in Europe or "the West." Again, many of us would wholeheartedly agree that "Jewish" is not an ethnic but an ethical description; but, then, so is Muslim, Catholic, Socialist, Democrat, and Buddhist. If a Middle Easterner can also be a Christian, a Muslim, or a Social Democrat, is there any conceivable reason why he or she cannot be Jewish?

Obviously, then, to maintain that it is impossible to be Jewish and at the same time to be in possession of any ethnic, cultural, ideological, or environmental attributes other than those one happens to consider "Jewish" verges on what can only be described as cultural nihilism and in the end is tantamount to denying the very humanity of people. It is a fact of history and of the social sciences that the appellation "Jewish" has seldom been used without a hyphen. Everything else being equal, indeed, the *Jewish Chronicle* writer—like his paper—would, if asked, describe himself as an Anglo-Jewish journalist, in the same way as we all naturally speak of, say, American-Jewish literature, Judeo-Arabic culture, German-Jewish writers, Israeli-Jewish songs and dishes, and a thousand other Jewish objects, attributes, and subjects.

Another aspect of this subject, not unconnected with the problem of culture, is Israel's Jewish identity. Apart from the strictly national context there are three other possible senses in which many speak of Israel's Jewish identity: the racial, the religious, and the cultural. Religiously, however, Israel is not a theocracy; Judaism is not the state's religion; and theologically Israel is Jewish neither in practice nor by aspiration. Very few of the founders of Zionism and even fewer of the country's past and present lead-

ers are observant or even believing Jews. In a newspaper interview he gave in 1967, David Ben-Gurion declared that the Jewish religion and its precepts “are no longer needed,” having already performed their task, which he defined as “the preservation of the Jewish people in its dispersion.”³⁶ In present-day Israel there is, to be sure, a certain amount of what the secularists call “religious coercion” by state decree. But this is due mainly to pressures brought to bear by politicized religious groups eager to get their respective shares of “the national pie” rather than indicating a wish to Judaize the state in the religious sense.

Israel’s “racial” Jewish identity is even more open to question. The whole subject of “race” in Judaism is hardly worth going into. “Thy mother was a Hittite, thy father an Amorite” were the words the prophet Ezekiel flung at the Jews as far back as two and a half millennia ago. More to the point, perhaps, is the fact that it is possible for a Gentile—any Gentile, of any “race,” color, or ethnicity—to become a Jew. Conversions to Judaism go back at least to the time of the book of Ruth and, though there have been periods in Jewish history when Jews tended to discourage conversion to their religion, there has never been any question that it was possible to convert to Judaism and to be considered a full Jew. This fact alone makes it conclusively clear that applying the category of “race” to either the Jews or Israel would be both inaccurate and misleading.

Finally, regarding Israel’s cultural Jewish identity, it is manifest that this claim, too, depends on whether Jews as a collectivity can be said to have or belong to one culture that can reasonably be defined as “Jewish”—and indeed on whether such a culture exists. Regardless of the question of how we define “culture”—as “high culture” or culture in the anthropologist’s sense of being the sum-total of a way of life—there is no such thing as one “Jewish culture.” What people, in fact, are in the habit of calling “Jewish culture” invariably turns out to be nothing more than the culture and folkways of a particular Jewish environment and a particular Jewish group. This is the case in the various manifestations of higher culture (music, literature, the arts) as it is with features of popular culture (cuisine, entertainment, humor).

Neither the Jews as a group, then, nor Israel as a polity and a society can be said to have anything like a well-defined racial, religious, or cultural *Jewish* identity. The Arab nationalist movement, too, like its slightly older sister, the Jewish nationalist movement, was a direct borrowing from a purely Western context and Western terminology, suited neither to the culture nor to the ethnic, racial, or religious realities of the people concerned. In this sense, what has been said above about the concept of Jewish nation-

hood is almost as valid with regard to the pan-Arab nationalist doctrine as it is with regard to the pan-Jewish nationalist doctrine.

Something more practical is at issue here, too. For together with the twin misconceptions of Arab and Jewish nationalities goes another, no less persistent, fallacy—namely, the alleged antithetical opposition between “Jew” and “Arab,” an opposition often made to appear totally irreversible and which has taken root in the vulnerable minds of the young generation of Arabs and Jews alike.

In chapter 4, I dealt at length with this opposition, attempting to demonstrate its lack of any firm historical or cultural basis. There will, however, be those who would still argue that, granted that neither the Jews nor the Arabs constituted a nationality in the European sense, the roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict and of the opposition between Jew and Arab lie in factors other than nationality, factors that have more to do with cultural traits, ethnic characteristics, and language. Such an argument, however, would have been easier to maintain in the prestate period, when the Jewish population of Palestine was predominantly European, than it is today. For one thing, Judeo-Arabic culture is still too much of a living heritage in Judaism for it to be easily dismissed or forgotten. For another, “Arab Jews” now form a rather conspicuous part of the Israeli landscape, their presence furnishing a speaking refutation of the ill-conceived and artificially maintained “great divide” separating Jew from Arab.

Whatever its origin, however, it is in the nature of such a divide to be self-perpetuating and self-escalating. A quick look at the respective attitudes of the two sides to each other, and the image each side has of the other, is appropriate. It hardly needs emphasizing that one of the main impediments to meaningful coexistence among the Israelis and their neighbors has been their incomprehension of one another, arising in the main from the failure of both sides to grasp the nature of the forces at work in their respective camps and the meaning that new and unforeseen factors have introduced into their societies and in the character of their confrontation since its beginning some one hundred years ago. Zionist-Jewish settlement in Palestine began in the 1890s; the first disturbances between Arabs and Jews in Mandatory Palestine occurred in the late 1920s; the mass exodus of Palestinians and the mass influx of Jewish immigrants into Israel both took place in 1948–51. Yet despite the passage of so many years and the appearance of many new elements on the scene, Zionists and Arab nationalists persist in relating to the issue as though we were still living the events of 1948, 1936, or 1898.

Consider, too, the respective images the two sides now have of each

other. The Arab nationalists, who in the meantime have seen their countries freed from Western dominance, insist on viewing Israel as a totally alien element in an exclusively Arab region—a “settler state,” an extension of nineteenth-century European colonialism, a spearhead of the West, and a foreign cultural intrusion.

On the other side, the position of the pan-Jewish nationalists has not altered substantially since the early days of Zionism. Inasmuch as they keep reiterating the claim that the proper place for the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine (now mostly refugees) is “with their own brethren in the Arab world,” they not only betray a fundamental tribal strain in themselves and in their basic ideology but also a lingering belief in the old Zionist rhetoric about “the land without a people for the people without a land.” Moreover, many of them are still attracted to the theory that they have some sort of “civilizing mission” to perform in the area, and most persist in the conviction—a heritage of centuries of Christian persecution, anti-Semitism, and forced exclusion—that Jew and Arab stand in inevitable opposition to each other, just as Jew and “Gentile” had lived in seclusion and mutual hostility for centuries back in Eastern and Central Europe. This last misconception was, of course, strengthened by the ugly and indiscriminate propaganda emanating from certain Arab quarters and smacking of a clear anti-Semitic strain.

The dangers inherent in such mutual miscomprehension go beyond distorted images. As in so many spheres of human affairs and intergroup relations, a situation of this kind tends to gain an impetus of its own and to develop into a vicious circle. Not only do the two sides fail to comprehend each other but, by heaping accusations and prejudices against each other, they also provoke types of reaction and patterns of behavior in the other side that, in turn, help strengthen their poor opinion of each other. In this way their opinions and appraisals acquire the power of self-fulfilling prophecies.

A few examples of the way in which this vicious circle works are apposite. In chapter 4 a statement by Charles Malik was cited, to the effect that Israel was “only geographically part of the Near East.” This admittedly was an exaggerated version of the actual situation; yet there is no gainsaying the fact that, in writing what he wrote, Malik was only echoing views held and repeatedly expressed in public by responsible Israeli leaders and ideologues as to the character of their state and the nature of their society and culture. Where the workings of the vicious circle manifest themselves here, however, is when continued rejection and hostility on its neighbors’ part begin to drive Israel more and more in the opposite direction, thus provoking more accusations of exclusivity and alienation.

On a more practical level, we may cite Israel's standing policy—often more a matter of sheer habit than of rational calculation—of automatically opposing the Arabs' various moves, aspirations, and stands in international forums and conventions and in fields of foreign policy generally. This policy, based as it would seem to be on the primitive if understandable assumption that one's enemy's enemy is one's friend, had naturally tended to confirm Arabs in the belief that Israel is little more than a "spearhead of Western influence."

Here, again, it can be argued that what may make this behavior on Israel's part understandable is the Arabs' own shocking habit of standing in total and indiscriminate opposition to Israeli, and often to general Jewish, interests. Two blatant examples of this stand were the Arabs' manifestly ill-advised opposition to the Ecumenical Council's decision in 1965 to absolve the Jews from the alleged murder of Jesus (as if Islam itself had not done so already!), and the few protests voiced in some Arab intellectual circles against the awarding in the same year of the Nobel Prize for Literature to the Israeli writer S. Y. Agnon.³⁷

Again, when Israelis speak of "Arab anti-Semitism" they have a wealth of evidence to support them in the indisputably anti-Semitic publications actually sponsored by some Arab regimes—along with the angry, embittered pronouncements made daily by certain groups of Muslim Arabs against Israel, "the Jews," and "international Zionism"—which latter phrase they often confuse with "world Jewry."

Yet insistence on the part of these Israelis to brand Muslim Arabs "anti-Semites" betrays ignorance; for the fact is that these publications and pronouncements, though anti-Semitic in character on any showing, are belied by everything we know about Muslim-Arab history, tradition, and culture. Moreover, by introducing into the controversy an element so obviously alien to the Muslim-Arab tradition as that of European-style anti-Semitism, these Israelis reinforce the prevalent tendency to establish a baseless dichotomy between "Jew" and "Arab." Such a dichotomy, once established, is bound to augment and aid the classic pan-Arab stance which rejects any vision of the Middle East other than the one that depicts it as an exclusively Arab region.

Non-Jewish Israelis and Non-Israeli Jews

A great deal of ambiguity, not entirely unadvised, besets the issue of Israel's Jewishness. Israel, one might well say, is Jewish inasmuch as the majority of its inhabitants are designated as Jews. Yet Israel cannot, by virtue of this fact alone, be reasonably described as Jewish in the same sense in which

France is French, Italy Italian, or Belgium Belgian. One corollary of the demand habitually made by Israelis in high places (for one, Moshe Dayan's remark in an interview on the *Face the Nation* program on June 11, 1967, that Israel must be "a Jewish state like the French have a French state") would be the assertion that non-Jews cannot be full-fledged citizens of Israel. The reason why neither that demand nor its corollary is tenable is self-evident. They both imply, and seem to insist on, a nonexistent, unverifiable equation of "Israeli" and "Jewish"; they labor under a hopeless confusion between Israeli nationality—which like French, British, Swiss, American, and Egyptian nationality is a function of territory and citizenship—and Jewish "nationality," which at best is a theoretical aspiration.

That "Jewish nationality" is no more than an aspiration is supported by the fact, among many others, that over five million Jews still choose to live in the United States, nearly a million and a half in the former Soviet republics, and more than a million in France and Britain. Needless to say, these and other non-Israeli Jews, who constitute about 70 percent of Jewry, are not Jewish nationals nor could they be said to belong to a Jewish nationality; and they are certainly not Israeli nationals no matter how one chooses to look at it. Israel's Arab citizens, on the other hand, are full-fledged Israeli nationals whose main grievance is that they are not treated as such. To relegate them to another (that is, Arab) nationality, is indeed doubly to beg the question since, in the first place, such a nationality does not exist—at least not as a function of citizenship, common territory, or international procedure—and, second, for the simple reason that they hold Israeli passports and identity cards and are thus nationals of the state of Israel.

The official Israeli position on the nationality issue thus has far-reaching implications for the life and the status of two groups: Israelis who are not Jews and Jews who are not Israelis. To start with the former group: Israel's insistence on simultaneously defining itself nationally as a Jewish state and drawing a distinction between the "nationalities" of its Jewish and non-Jewish citizens inevitably raises the basic question as to the status of those of its citizens who happen not to belong to the Jewish faith. While citizenship and nationality are two different concepts in Israel, there is a virtual equation between citizenship and *statehood*, in the sense that any ethnically designated state must perforce identify itself with those of its citizens who have the same ethnic designation. In the mid-1960s, a senior Israeli official put the matter as accurately and as succinctly as such matters can be put. "One cannot," said the then prime minister's adviser on Arab affairs, "expect the Arabs of Israel to be loyal to the State; they belong to another nationality." After all, he explained, one cannot expect Israel's

Arabs “to believe in the Jewish national values.” Their problem, he concluded, could not be solved on the basis of their identifying themselves with these values.³⁸

So much for Israelis who are not Jews. The other group, comprising Jews who are not Israelis, is less directly affected by Israel’s concept of Jewish nationality. However, viewed in a theoretical-ideological context, the Israeli position can, in the long run, make the situation of non-Israeli Jews somewhat precarious. A British Jew is a citizen of the United Kingdom and therefore—according to his country’s definition of “nationality”—a British national. An American Jew is a citizen—and therefore a national—of the United States. And so it is with French, Danish, Swiss, and Tunisian Jews. Israel, in effect, views these as Jewish “nationals” or members of the Jewish “world nation” and—in accordance with its own definition of itself as a Jewish state and with the concept of nationality implicit in its laws—as consequently in some way “belonging” to the Jewish state.

While such a position does not materially affect the present status of non-Israeli Jews, it can be used to advantage by any regime that chooses to be hostile to its Jews or attempts to cause them embarrassment and even harassment. This, basically, is what happened in the Arabic-speaking states of the Middle East following the 1948 war in Palestine and in Poland after the Six-Day War. There is no guarantee against its happening in other parts of the world.

Of the two problems posed by this state of affairs, the one affecting the Arab citizens of Israel is manifestly the more urgent. The question, as formulated by a noted student of the Israeli political scene, is: “Can a formula be found which, without giving Jewish Israelis the impression that an essential aspect of the State’s Jewish character is being sacrificed, would satisfy Arab Israelis that for them to live in the Jewish state does not mean accepting the permanent status of outsiders?” The answer offered by the writer is novel in that it is based on an analogy between the respective positions of non-Jewish Israelis and non-Israeli Jews. He writes:

Perhaps the way to start building the ideological basis of a new relationship is to examine the *Jewish* experience for clues. In that light it may seem both fair and logical to allow the Arabs in Israel the same legitimation of their differences that the Jew claims for himself in the diaspora, differences that are not confined to the religious and cultural spheres. The Israeli Arab’s identity, so it appears, is only slightly less complex than that of the diaspora Jew; it comprises, as in the Jewish case, not only religious and cultural but also ethnonational

elements. But the precise definition of that identity must be left to the group itself, without interference from the outside.³⁹

Elaborating on this last point, the writer quotes the Jewish historian Simon Dubnow: "The Jew says: 'As a citizen of my country I participate in its civic and political life; but as a member of the Jewish nationality I have in addition my own national needs. . . . I have the right to speak my language, to use it in all my social institutions, to make it the language of instruction in my schools, to order my internal life in my communities, and to create institutions serving a variety of national purposes'." The suggestion is that, if we substitute "Arab" for "Jew" in this passage, the parallels between prestate Jewish aspirations in the diaspora and those of Arabs in the Jewish state become apparent. Once these parallels are recognized and understood, "there is no reason why the historic incompatibility between 'Arab' and 'Israeli' should not become a thing of the past."⁴⁰

This is an appealing scenario, but it takes no account of something considered basic to the Israeli situation. For, as Smootha has pointed out, while its Arabs accept Israel as a state and respect its territorial integrity, they reject its ethnic features. "This is true of all the predominantly Arab parties," he asserts. He cites a survey conducted in 1988 according to which only 13.5 percent of the Arabs denied Israel's right to exist, whereas a majority (63 percent) rejected its right of existence as a Jewish-Zionist state. In addition, 92 percent of those surveyed disagreed that Israel is the homeland of Jews only rather than the common homeland of both Jews and Arabs; 83 percent objected to the idea that Israel should maintain a Jewish majority; 72 percent favored the repeal of the Law of Return; and 67 percent believed that Arabs cannot be equal citizens in Israel as a Jewish-Zionist state and cannot identify with it. When asked directly about Zionism, 70 percent regarded it as racist; in response to another question, 1 percent defined themselves as Zionist, 52 percent non-Zionist, and 47 percent anti-Zionist. All these rejection figures are significantly higher among non-Bedouin Moslems, who constitute a large majority of Israeli Arabs.⁴¹

As Smootha remarks, however, from a Jewish viewpoint, "rejection of Zionism as an ideology and a force shaping the state and its character is like rejecting the state itself." The refined distinction between the state and its character is neither understood nor condoned by the Jews, Smootha adds. "They are not interested in having Israel be just a state, but rather be a Jewish-Zionist state. For this reason, Arabs who doubt Israel's right to be Jewish-Zionist are regarded as potentially hostile and subversive."⁴²

From an Israeli Arab's viewpoint, Smooha adds, the provision that Israel is the land of Jews all over the world, but not necessarily of its citizens, "degrades [Israel's Arab citizens] to a status of invisible outsiders, as if Israel were not their own state." Furthermore, it turns the Jewish-Zionist nature of the state into "an incontrovertible fact." In this way, illegitimate dissent is unduly expanded from negation of the physical integrity of the state to a denial of its special character. "In fact, not only is a party that proposes to de-Zionize the state by peaceful legal means banned from parliamentary elections, but also the speaker of the Knesset may block the presentation before the Knesset of a bill with such intention."⁴³

Broadly speaking, throughout the years there existed among the Arabs of Israel three trends as to how best to deal with their situation in a state that they feel neither would nor could grant them full rights as citizens.

There was, first, the old school of traditionalist, conservative "notables" who, with their rich past experience with foreign rulers dating back in certain cases to the Ottoman Empire, knew the art of compromise and believed that the best way to deal with the powers-that-be was by appeasing them and simply trying to get the maximum out of them—and then to leave the rest to the incomprehensible ways of God. This group had much influence in the first decade of Israel's existence, its power and prestige beginning to dwindle after the Sinai War of 1956. (Toward the end of the 1950s, small groups of younger activists emerged, some calling for "genuine" separate Arab political organization and generally evincing marked pan-Arab and Nasserist sentiments. However, the authorities were still in a position to curb and finally silence these groups—the most active and articulate among them one calling itself *Al Ardh* (The land), which finally in the mid-1960s was declared outside the pale by a Supreme Court order.)

There was, secondly, a very small group of Arabs who, noticing the fast-waning influence of the traditional leadership and perceiving the fundamental paradox of the situation of Israel's Arabs legally and constitutionally, decided that the best solution to their dilemma was by declaring that they consider themselves *Israeli* Arabs, or Israelis first and Arabs only second—and that on the strength of such "Israeli-Arab Consciousness" (the name they chose for their group) they could reasonably claim full rights and be allowed to fulfill all obligations along with their fellow Israelis, the Jews.

The leaders and guiding lights of this group were Rustum Bastuni and Salim Jubran. The former, an engineer from Haifa who was once a Knesset member on Mapam's list, eventually emigrated to the United States; the latter, a veteran Mapai Arab functionary also from Haifa, is still active in

the Arab section of the Haifa Labor Council. Both were to be sorely disappointed when they discovered that their advocacy of an Israeli-Arab identity was accepted neither by the Israeli government nor by their own fellow Arabs. Jubran indeed is on record that the blame for the alienation of Israel's Arab citizens from their state was to be placed squarely at the door of the Establishment, which simply refused to accept them as full-fledged Israelis.

Here "outside" factors began to play a role. In the mid-1960s, despite the government's severe measures against *Ardh*-type activists and its gentle but firm rebuke to the advocates of "Israeliness," signs of discontent among Israel's Arab citizens were growing and certain Arab intellectuals continued to grope for some sort of solution to their problem. The Six-Day War, however, and the crushing defeat it brought to the Arabs as a whole, led to a temporary ebb in nationalist feeling, and the impression was created that the Arabs of Israel were finally being reconciled to their uncertain status.

Under the surface, though, another paradox was now added to the life of an Israeli Arab citizen. An Arab's so-called nationalist sentiment as an Arab was partly muted by the realization that fellow Arabs abroad stood helpless in the face of Israel's challenge. However, this sentiment tended to grow through sheer frustration at the sight of the Arab nation being constantly humiliated. Here, again, the division was between the compromisers and those who refused to bow to the realities of the situation.

In this state of affairs, the Communist party, Rakach, seemed to offer a reasonable way out. A legally licensed party with good and efficient organizational apparatus, the party could be supported in several ways other than open enrollment and the consequent possible victimization. Although it masqueraded as a Marxist party, ideologically Rakach was every bit an Arab-oriented group which, despite whatever reservations it might have had about pan-Arab nationalism in theory, was willing to go most of the way to meet the nationalists. Moreover, Rakach fairly openly identified with the "moderate" faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which called for the establishment of a separate Palestinian state in part of Palestine.

Almost imperceptibly, the Communists gained in strength during the period between the Six-Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. Now, more than twenty years after, it maintains its strength by joining forces with another radical Arab group.

The most interesting development in this field in the 1990s has been the apparent shift of position in some of the more radical groups among Israel's Arabs. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the shift appeared to be in the

direction of the Bastuni-Jubran school of thought, although both the language and the orientation may have undergone a slight change. The shift was best exemplified by the announcement, made early in 1997 by 'Azmi Bishara, a new Communist-affiliated member of the Knesset, that he intended to present his candidacy for the office of prime minister in the year 2000.

The decision created quite a commotion, with at least one fellow MK—from the Likud group—submitting a draft law whose gist is that no non-Jew can be prime minister in the Jewish state. Others tended to dismiss Bishara's decision as a media gesture and/or a provocation. Those who took it seriously, however, were mostly of the opinion that the move cannot and should not be opposed, and that Israel as a "Jewish and democratic" state was bound to allow an Arab, one of its citizens, to be a candidate for any high office. This stand was adopted both by the liberal left, the right, and the religious parties. But the paradox of the formula "Jewish and democratic state" did not go unnoticed, with some Israeli observers pointing out that when leaders of a party like the National Religious Party protest that Israel is at once "Jewish" and "democratic" they are either naive or consciously distorting the facts.⁴⁴

Bishara himself, firmly denying that his decision was a provocation or a "media gesture," described it as "an attempt to improve the bargaining position of Israel's Arab minority in issues concerning its political empowerment." Anyone looking at the country's new electoral system, he explained, would have to come to two major conclusions. First, Israel's parliament is drawn along demographic, ethnic, and religious lines, owing to the separation of votes into two primary types, the presidential and the parliamentary. The former is essentially an ideological vote, the latter one of identity. "This composition," Bishara added, "does nothing to resolve the political marginalization of the Arabs in Israel, despite the increase in the number of Arab Knesset members."

Second, generally speaking, Israel's parliament has lost some of its power and significance to a system which has yet to define whether it is a presidential system or a parliamentary democracy. "Given this decline in the status of the Knesset, the political influence of the largely-excluded Arab minority in Israel has also decreased, despite the fact that its relative representation in the Knesset has increased."

If so, Bishara asks, "what reason remains to ignore the second, more significant political field—that of the election of prime minister, where the number of Arab votes still makes a difference—and thus "liberate ourselves from the idea that we, a priori, belong to one of the two camps?"

In fact, says Bishara, an Arab third candidate “may force the whole system to go through a second round, if no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the total votes.” In that case, “no candidate will be able to make it in the second round without our support.” Such support ought not to be granted without a quid pro quo of political benefits, in the form of genuine political rights.

But this proposal is not only pragmatic, adds Bishara. It is based on a vision—a dream. It will not be merely an exercise in politics. “The notion of Arab candidacy deals seriously with the vision of equality and shared civic participation in a state of all its citizens.” In spite of some progress in its civic culture during the last decade, Bishara explains, “contemporary Israel has been unable to turn citizenship into the cornerstone of the relationship between the state and the individual.” Israel is the state of the Jews *de facto* and *de jure*. “It is a very unconventional, historical nation, a nation one may join only by belonging to the Jewish religion. The only remaining dispute seems to be whether joining the Jewish holy community takes place according to the Orthodox, Conservative or Reform rituals.” The vision embodied in his candidacy, Bishara concludes, “is a separation of citizenship from religion. It is a dream of normalization of Israeli democracy.”⁴⁵

In conclusion, it can safely be said that the status of the Arab citizens of Israel has not been finally and clearly defined. No amount of talk about the need for the Israeli Arab’s “full integration” in Israel’s political, social, and economic life can materially affect the still prevailing monolithic view of Israel as an exclusively Jewish state and of its Arabs as a separate “national entity.” Obviously, as long as this view prevails, no talk about Israeli Arabs’ being granted “equal rights and duties” along with their Jewish fellow citizens could really amount to anything more than lip service.

Prospect

A Changing Israel in a Pluralist Middle East

What are the prospects of Israel's becoming an integral part of the Middle East, of accepting its neighbors, and of being accepted by them—and all this largely through its own efforts and as a result of internal processes and developments? It is far less difficult to answer such a question today than it was before a peace treaty was concluded between Egypt and Israel in the late 1970s, followed by a similar treaty with Jordan in the mid-1990s.

The Six-Day War had two somewhat opposite sets of results concerning Israel's position in the region. On one hand, the war made the Israelis “discover” the Arab Middle East; it made Israel's presence in the region far more conspicuous and far more felt; and, by enhancing Israel's role and broadening the areas of its day-to-day contacts with the Arab populations, it gave the Israelis a better-developed and more concrete sense of belonging to the region, of being part of it, and of the hugeness of the stake they have in its fortunes. All these factors tended to work for an Israel more integrated into and more at home in its own habitat than it had been before the 1967 war.

On the other hand, however, the Six-Day War had another set of effects, entirely different in nature and, indeed, standing in direct opposition to the above. While the war and its aftermath served to deepen Israel's involvement in the region and its fortunes, it had, at the same time, accentuated rather than bridged the gap that had always existed between Israel and its immediate surroundings. Opinion may vary widely as to the nature, the reality, and the extent of this gap. It may be argued, for instance, that the difference between the Middle Eastern-Mediterranean element in Israel itself (which constitutes nearly 70 percent of the population, including non-Jews) and the Arabs of the region is by no means as substantial as it may appear.

Nevertheless, what people take to be the case—the way they themselves define a situation—is often most decisive in its consequences; what matters to us here is that both the Israelis and the Arabs have come to consider the gulf between their respective cultures and societies, their intellectual and technological standards, to be virtually unbridgeable. This apparent widening of the cultural gap between Israel and its neighbors still poses a set of most difficult questions for the future. It also constitutes Israel's greatest challenge. The question Charles Malik asked in 1952, whether Israel's leadership and its ethos were adequate to the requirements of positive co-existence with the Arabs, is of course as relevant today as it was more than forty years ago—and in no way less embarrassing.

Positive coexistence, it seems evident, would presuppose the present power structure in Israel's abandoning the doctrine that makes the state and a generalized Jewish "nation" or "world nation" commensurate with each other. As Lord Acton envisaged it, a state practicing such a view of itself reduces to a subject condition all other nationalities that may be within its boundaries. Such a state would not admit members of other nationalities to an equality with the ruling "nation," which according to this doctrine constitutes the state, "because the state would then cease to be national, which would be a contradiction of the principle of its existence." Accordingly, real equality in such a state remains completely out of the question no matter how "democratic" its system of government may appear to be.

Thus the phrase habitually used to describe the status of the non-Jewish citizen of Israel—"a national minority in a democratic state"—is manifestly a contradiction in terms, even though it is presented as just about the last word in democracy and liberality. Acton's harsh verdict of over a century ago has lost none of its validity or relevance: "A state which is incompetent to satisfy different races condemns itself; a state which labors to neutralize, to absorb, or to expel them destroys its own vitality; a state which does not include them is destitute of the chief basis of self-government."¹ By insisting on the *nationally* Jewish character of Israel, therefore, Israelis render themselves unable to discharge their *ethically* Jewish obligation of ensuring equal treatment to their non-Jewish fellow citizens. By equating state and nationality, on one hand, and by insisting that Israel's Arabs belong to another nationality and form an "inseparable part of the Arab nation," on the other, Israelis tend virtually to disenfranchise all citizens of the state who are not Jewish.

But returning to our question about the future, recent developments in the Middle East have shown conclusively that Israel may have no cause to worry about its physical existence—especially now that two of its neigh-

bors, including the largest and most powerful of the Arab states, have abandoned the option of armed conflict. However, the two major wars of 1967 and 1973 and the limited one of 1982 in Lebanon (euphemistically called “Operation Peace of Galilee” and still raging fifteen years later), though they ended with Israel’s continuing to have the upper hand, have shown that no measure of Israeli military might can make the Arabs as a whole accept Israel as a welcome or even tolerated neighbor. This leaves Israel, even after the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and the highly important Oslo accord with the Palestinians, at something of an impasse. Fuad Ajami has pointed out that, even after these and other agreements, “there has been no discernible change in Arab attitudes toward Israel and little preparation in the Arab world for the accommodation the peace promised.”² What he terms “the great refusal” persists. “A foul wind,” he explains, “attends this peace in Arab lands. It blows in that ‘Arab street’ of ordinary men and women, among the intellectuals and the writers, and in the professional syndicates. The force of this refusal can be seen in the press of the governments and of the oppositionists, among the secularists and the Islamists alike, in countries that have concluded diplomatic agreements with Israel and those that haven’t. This is the one great Arab fidelity that endures in a political culture that has been subjected to historic ruptures of every kind.”

Neither Jordan’s King Hussein nor Yasser Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization, he adds, could or would take this peace to the coffee houses and the universities and defend it. Arafat, “the man who had been followed by the Palestinians over the roughest and loneliest roads would come to know recriminations once he embarked on this new path of realism.”

Ajami goes on to say that he finds it strange that the opposition to the peace remains fiercest in Egypt, the state that led the way to accommodation with Israel in the 1970s. The gatekeepers of Egyptian culture, he adds somberly, “remain unalterably opposed to normal traffic with Israel. They have kept Israelis out of an annual international film festival and out of book fairs year after year. And they have discouraged the men and the women of culture and letters from traveling to Israel, branding that simple deed as a journey across forbidden lines.”

Ajami rejects as erroneous what he calls the prevailing wisdom, which has it “that the hard-line stance of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu frightened off those in the Arab world who had bet on the peace.” That wisdom errs, he says. It was not Netanyahu’s frigidity, he asserts, “but Shimon Peres’s embrace that made the Arab world recoil; the ‘New Middle East’

of Peres, his talk of a region at peace, with open borders, became a rallying point for those who maligned peace as nothing but a form of Israeli hegemony, a *pax Hebraica*. Millennial, grand, and technocratic, Peres's project was a threat to all the sacred totems of Arab nationalism." He quotes Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani, who, he says, "caught this dread of Peres's utopian world when he said that its vision was one of a 'Middle Eastern supermarket with an Israeli chairman of the board'."

Ajami's appraisal, somber and ponderous though it may sound to many of us, makes the task of building a new Middle East—a Middle East in which Israel takes its place as an equal among equals—far tougher, both for Ajami's "kings and pharaohs" and for the state of Israel itself. The problem confronts both, and as far as the Israelis are concerned, it is one out of which they themselves will have to find a way. "History," to quote Malik once again, "has not known an instance of a nation at permanent enmity with its immediate world."

There is, however, no reason why Israel should inevitably stand in permanent opposition to, and alienation from, its immediate surroundings—if only because by demography, culture, and geography it can be said to be *of* as well as *in* the Middle East. Nevertheless, it is still premature to try to envisage the precise form that Israel's ultimate integration into its habitat will take. In his remarkable essay on the lessons of the Six-Day War, Cecil Hourani points out that a closed, exclusive, and fanatic Israel cannot hope to survive side by side with an open, liberal, and tolerant Arab world, and that the Arabs' greatest victory will be the day when Jews prefer to live in an Arab society rather than in an Israeli society.³

Precisely. Yet the aspect which Arab society itself presents to the world, as we come to the end of the millennium, makes Hourani's scenario sound more like a pipe dream than anything approaching a conceivable eventuality. May one not hope, rather, that an open, liberal, and pluralist Israeli society will help the Arabs abandon a position that has played a major role in shaping the kind of closed, illiberal, and narrowly nationalistic regimes that have fallen to their lot during the last five decades? For it is notorious how two mutually hostile and ethnically oriented political entities living in geographical proximity can feed and grow on each other's tribal myths and dreams.

Hourani is, of course, right in assuming that an open, tolerant Arab society could make it rather difficult for Israel to maintain what he sees as a closed and illiberal society. The fact remains, however, that it is no longer quite possible to depict Arab society itself as an open and pluralistic one.

Be that as it may, the following reflections by Karl Popper, to which he gave expression during World War II with reference to Western society, are well worth contemplating by both pan-Arab and pan-Jewish nationalists. “For those who have eaten of the tree of knowledge,” Popper wrote, “Paradise is lost. The more we try to return to the heroic age of tribalism, the more surely we arrive at the Inquisition, at the Secret Police, and at a romanticized gangsterism. Beginning with the suppression of reason and truth, we must end with the most brutal and violent destruction of all that is human.”⁴

Notes

Retrospect: Then and Now

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Chapter 1: Jews and Arabs: Past and Present

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3. Musa Nasser, "Arabs at the Crossroads" (in Arabic), *Al-Quds* (Jerusalem), December 10, 1970.
4. Ahmad Bahaeddine, *Israeeliyyat* (Israeli studies) (Cairo, 1965).
5. Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J., 1994), 207.
6. George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (New York, 1946), 16–17.
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8. Cecil Roth, "Jews in Arab Lands," *New Palestine* (Jerusalem), 1946; reprinted in *Near East Report* (Washington), August 1967, B17–B20.
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11. David Corcos Abulafia, "The Attitude of the Almohadic Rulers Towards the Jews" (in Hebrew), *Zion: A Quarterly for Research in Jewish History* 32, nos. 3–4 (1967), 137–60.
12. André N. Chouraqui, *Between East and West: A History of the Jews of North Africa* (Philadelphia, 1968), 53–54.

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15. Alfred Guillaume, “The Influence of Judaism on Islam,” in *The Legacy of Israel*, ed. Edwyn R. Bevan and Charles Singer (London, 1969), 154.
16. J. A. Montgomery, *Arabia and the Bible*, quoted in Baron, *Social and Religious History*, 256.
17. Baron, *Social and Religious History*, 61–64.
18. *Ibid.*, 65.
19. *Ibid.*, 70–74.
20. Guillaume, “Influence of Judaism,” 154.
21. Isidore Epstein, *Judaism: A Historical Presentation* (Harmondsworth, England, 1959), 180.
22. *Ibid.*, 181.
23. Quoted in M. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, 5.
24. Quoted *ibid.*, 6.
25. Leon Poliakov, *A History of Antisemitism*, vol. 1 (London, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1975), vi–viii.
26. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 23–24.
27. *Ibid.*, 24–25.
28. *Ibid.*, 27.
29. Constantine Zureiq’s *Ma’na al-Nakba* is available in an English translation, *Palestine: The Meaning of the Disaster*, translated by R. Bayly Winder (London and Beirut, 1956), 37.
30. Zureiq’s 1966 article is quoted by Abul Nasr in his article in *Hiwar* (Beirut), March–April 1967, 288 ff.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. “Dhimma,” 229–30; quoted in M. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, xvii.
33. Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, *On Jewish History in the Middle Ages* (in Hebrew), translated and quoted in M. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, 36.
34. Translated and quoted in M. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, 7–8.
35. Quoted *ibid.*, 8.
36. Quoted *ibid.*, 207.
37. Quoted *ibid.*, 205.
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41. James Parkes, *Antisemitism* (London, 1966), 61.
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45. Ibid., 68.
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47. Ibid., viii.
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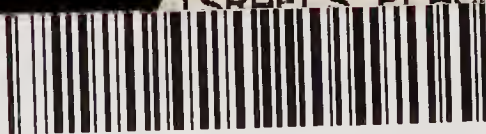
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