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## Review

*The Jews of Islam.* Bernard Lewis. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984. pp. xii + 245. Cloth \$42.50, Paper \$8.95.

In the later 1940's, the arrival in Israel of many "Sephardim"—Jews from Muslim countries—provided the impetus for an investigation into their history and culture which was long overdue. The history of these people, who had attained the highest intellectual pinnacles during the medieval period, had previously been neglected by modern historiography, as a result of the prolonged period of decadence and obscurity which had kept them on the margins of mainstream Jewish history during the premodern and modern period. However, as a result of growing interest, a substantial body of research and publication has emerged during the last quarter of a century, which enables us to speak with greater confidence and authority, not only about the major cultural phenomena of these people, but also about their everyday life. In this book, Professor Lewis has attempted, by drawing on the current proliferation of literature and on his vast knowledge and understanding of Islamic history, to provide an overview of this chapter of Jewish history, a period which lasted for about 1400 years. He has also attempted an analysis of those factors which shaped its evolution, and, even more, of those which caused its decline.

The book is divided into four chapters, arranged chronologically, and varied in length. The first chapter, "Islam and other religions," is in itself a well-rounded discussion of the major themes which are developed in more detail in the remaining chapters. The author describes numerous related problems concerning the attitude of Islam towards its non-Muslim citizens, in an attempt to define its particular relationship with Judaism and the Jews. While Islam's basic attitudes were determined by principles derived from the 7th and 8th centuries' Qor'an and Sunna which ordained tolerance, yet second-class status, for Jews and Christians, the "People of the Book," historical conditions in their turn actually shaped everyday life. The author surveys Jewish limitations and prerogatives, occupations, and legal, fiscal, and social qualifications, periods of prosperity and security, and the periods of threat and persecution which came mostly from the Messianic and Millenarian Muslim movements. The long period of decline which would follow the medieval period is also referred to in this chapter. Its causes are linked to the Crusades and to the disappearance of the Middle Eastern bourgeoisie, of which Jews were respectable members.

The second chapter, "The Judeo-Islamic Tradition," deals with the profound influence of Islam, and the adoption, by the Jews living under its aegis, of Islamic modes of thought and culture, as well as patterns of behaviour. Given the highly intellectual and sophisticated nature of the Islamic culture during the medieval period, Lewis' discussion of the surprisingly few cases of Jewish converts to Islam is extremely relevant.

The third chapter, "Late Medieval and Early Modern Period," is devoted to the general decline in the status and conditions of the Jews, and the general decadence in the Muslim countries. This period coincided with the growth of a new political unit: the Ottoman Empire. The author describes here the reasons why Jewish life in the early days of the Ottoman Empire was happier than it was later on, or than it was in Iran and Morocco. The expulsion from Spain and Portugal first of the Jews and later of the Marranos, provided the expanding Ottoman Empire with highly desirable immigrants, who were skilled in finances, languages and technology, and who often owned considerable amounts of money, which greatly helped the economy of the new empire. Jewish physicians, merchants and translators were welcomed and encouraged to settle, and were sometimes even moved forcibly into newly-conquered areas.

At this point, Lewis devotes some valuable space to discussing the possibilities for research which the Ottoman archives offer. These archives are outstanding both for their organization and for the wealth of information which they contain about this period.

The Jews living in Muslim lands were not entirely responsible for the decline of their fortunes, although Lewis does mention the loss of their skills through withdrawal from Europe, and the cessation of Jewish immigration from Europe as contributory causes. However, the growing material and cultural impoverishment and the general weakening of the Ottoman Empire led to increasing segregation of the Jews, while reduced tolerance for them led to their diminished participation in the social and economic life of the empire. In contrast to the decline of the Jews, the rise of other minorities, particularly the Greeks and the Armenians, was even more dramatic. They came to occupy positions previously held by Jews, and achieved status through having European education. The protection which was offered to the Christians by the Great Powers provided these new minorities with a power base which was unavailable to the Jews.

In the fourth and last chapter, "The End of Tradition," the author describes what he correctly perceives to be the final stage of the Jewish existence under Islam: the end of an era. Based on reports written by teachers from the Alliance Israélite, as well as by European travellers, the chapter provides a pretty accurate picture of the constant humiliation and threat, financial burden and material degradation which hundreds of Jews faced daily. The Muslims' intolerance of the Jews was reinforced at this stage, through an injection of elements of Christian antisemitism,

notably the blood libel, which were imported from Europe by diplomats and clergymen serving in the Middle East. The political circumstances created at the beginning of the twentieth century gradually brought the relationship of Jews and Moslems into a new phase, that of confrontation. The subsequent physical removal of the Jewish communities became inevitable.

The book, based on a series of lectures delivered in 1981, has retained the vivid style and flow of a live presentation. Although meant to be a general synthesis, the book never loses sight of historical details, in spite of its many dimensions and the length of time which it covers. It provides these details within the text, and in the voluminous annotations and references. In this book, as in his previous works, Professor Lewis unfailingly displays his unique talent for combining the description of a long period of evolution with the detailed use of primary sources. With a light, yet authoritative hand, he guides us through a long, rich and troubled history, in a book which is a major contribution to an important historical debate, relevant to both Jewish and Islamic history.

MAYA SHATZMILLER,  
*University of Western Ontario*