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Moishe Becher/Zvi Ben-Dor Benit (eds.), Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, and Culture, 1892–1958
(The Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry Series/
The Brandeis Library of Modern Jewish Thought),

The anthology is a collection of articles written by Middle Eastern Jewish intellectuals in several languages, including Arabic, Hebrew and French. The editors are Moishe Becher, Professor of Jewish History at University of Manchester, and Zvi Ben-Dor Benit, Professor of History and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University.

The 33 articles are organized chronologically, with some exceptions, from 1893 to 1958. Each author is briefly introduced, which functions as a key to assist the reader in understanding the respective author’s writing, along with giving information not only about the publication dates but also about the contextual meaning of the articles. However, the editors do not prefigure a specific interpretation of the texts, instead they leave interpretation up to the reader.

To begin with, they address the crucial question of terminology. Should one speak about Oriental, Sephardic, Eastern or Mizrahi Jews? The editors thus begin their rich anthology of modern Middle Eastern Jewish thought with an informative diachronic investigation of the term Mizrahi Jews. This journey to a neglected part of history is an attempt to read Oriental Jewry beyond the perimeter of the strictly literary sphere – a salient aspect of the anthology.

After the mass immigration to the State of Israel during the 1950s Jews from Arab countries found themselves in a linguistic and cultural milieu distinct from their Oriental culture. Therefore one can argue that Oriental Jews were at the very center of the ultimate clash between Orient and Occident. This claim springs mainly from key geographical and historical facts, the location of the State of Israel after 1948 in the Middle East, where Arabic language and culture are dominant, was bound up with the Israeli Ashkenazi leadership’s vision of establishing a Jewish homeland and national state significantly influenced by European culture. Therefore it is not surprising that the first article of the anthology, written by Avraham Einishi (1876–1967), in titled East and West, Einishi discusses the aims and visions of founding the Hebrew journal Mifgah a-Mar'eeh (East and West) in Jaffa, published between 1919 and 1928. Moreover, at its end, the anthology presents two Oriental
Jews, Jacques Lohr and chief Rabbi of the community. The third category comprises authors who write about the Jewish communities in the Middle East, including the one in Israel, and the fourth category comprises works that are not exclusively focused on the Middle East but touch upon Jewish issues in a broader context.

The anthology is notable for its diversity of perspectives and its contribution to understanding the complex relationships between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East. It provides a rich resource for students and researchers interested in the history, sociology, and cultural dynamics of Jewish communities in the Middle East.

The authors of the anthology, including Sadan, Ben-Zion Meir Hai, and también destacan por su contribución al estudio de la historia y la cultura judías en el Oriente Próximo. El conjunto de textos aborda temas variados, desde la historia y la sociología hasta la cultura y las dinámicas políticas, brindando una visión holística y multifacética de la vida judía en el mundo árabe del siglo XX y principios del siglo XXI.
an Egyptian national activist during the 1860s and '70s, until his exile to France in June 1878 due to his opposition to the government of Khedive Isma'il Pasha. He was among the founders of the Egyptian theater, a journalist, playwright and cartoonist, and also founded the Arab-French satirical magazine Ame Nasrada in 1877. The anthology includes eight texts by Sana'a, among them an essay entitled Some Teachings of the Koran. It is the earlier text in the anthology, presented in 1893 at the World's Parliament of Religions and at Religious Congresses in Chicago, where he discusses his views on the Qur'an. Sana'a wrote: "The Qur'an is tolerant, humane and moral." (12) In another text here, "Sana'a begins by congratulating Muslims on the occasion of the festival "Id-al-Flit," one of the most important religious Islamic festivals. (14)

In my view the book is a must-read for scholars interested in the history of Oriental Jewry in the 19th and 20th centuries. It provides plentiful and useful leads for scholars who want to embark on further research of Miiniti Jewry. The anthology covers diverse aspects of Jewish thought and activity, mutual relationships with Arab communities, the debate on Zionism and nationalism. There is considerable data about Oriental Jews from texts originally written in other languages then translated into English, thus facilitating accessibility to these sources and enriching available literature on Oriental Jewry. In addition, the volume should prove interesting for a more general readership, given its handbook-like presentation of the authors and their articles, supplemented by relevant footnotes that will assist non-specialists in appreciating the texts in a broader context.

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