



Mohammed Kenbib.- *Juifs et musulmans au Maroc: Des origines à nos jours* (Paris: “Histoire partagée” Tallandier/Projet Aladin, 2016).

Mohammed Kenbib’s book on Muslim-Jewish relations in Morocco is part of a new series published by Tallandier under the rubric of “Histoire partagée.” Distinguished scholars have already produced several books in this series, including one on Algeria (Lucette Valensi) and another on Tunisia (Abdelkrim Allagui). Prof. Kenbib’s volume completes the triad for the major countries of the Maghrib. According to the Preface, the aim of this ambitious project is to introduce young people in the Muslim world “who have no direct experience of this shared history, with its periods of conflict and tensions, but also with its long tradition of coexistence and exchange” to the pivotal role once played by Jews in Muslim societies. The series is being directed by Prof. Michel Abitbol, a historian born in Morocco who taught for many years at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Prof. Abdou Filaly-Ansari, a Moroccan philosopher who has written on questions of democracy and Islam.

The choice of Mohammed Kenbib to author the Moroccan volume in this series was an astute one. A generation ago, at the height of the great exodus that marked the end of Jewish millennial existence in the lands of Islam, Mohammed Kenbib began studying the sensitive question of *dhimma* in its Moroccan context. While other historians gravitated to “safer” topics, he was left alone to take command of the intercommunal field. His *Juifs et Musulmans au Maroc*, a 750-page *doctorat d’État* published by the Faculté des Lettres in Rabat in 1994, demonstrated deep historical insight but tressed by immense factual detail. In this newer, lighter, and more condensed version, Kenbib offers a highly readable account of the same subject, examining how Jewish and Muslim communities in Morocco coexisted over time, how they shared religious, cultural, social and ethical values, and how the customs,

practices, and self-perceptions of each were profoundly shaped by the proximity of the other.

In four extended chapters, the author covers the entire expanse of Muslim-Jewish relations in Morocco from their very beginning, focusing on political history and the role of the ruling class in accommodating Jews within the structure of the State. Chapter One outlines the introduction of Jews into Morocco at an obscure moment in the past, when they secured their place by assimilating to the Berber peoples already living there. The arrival of Islam was a cardinal moment, offering a “symbiotic” and “fecund” environment for the flourishing of Jewish culture in major cities such as Fez, Sijilmasa, and Marrakesh. The passing of successive Berber dynasties brought periods of both prosperity and violence, ending in the thirteenth century with the coming of the Merinids and the reestablishment of calm. This chapter also explores the subject of the *mellah*, or Jewish quarter. Kenbib shows how Moroccan Jewish quarters differed radically from the European ghetto, serving as protective incubators for Jewish life. The emergence of shared religious practices such as saint veneration, the intense economic exchanges, even the Jewish borrowing of Muslim names such as Afriat, Lasry, Ohana, and Ouaknine, were vectors of a rampant *convivencia* that took root in the pre-modern period despite a facade of seclusion and separation.

A deeper and more meaningful structural bifurcation took place during the period 1830-1912 as Morocco became embroiled in European power politics. Chapter Two describes the slow and agonizing process of European encroachment and the Sultanate’s determined but largely ineffectual efforts to block it through internal reform. A European school system introduced by the Paris-based Alliance Israélite Universelle was undoubtedly the single most important factor in promoting Jewish modernity and widening the gap between educated Jews and their Muslim counterparts. Coincidentally, a separation emerged between those same elite Jews and the great mass of Jewish poor, creating an irrevocable split that overlay pre-existing schisms based on class, education, geography, and religiosity. The small political micro-steps that furthered this transition, culminating in the 1912 Treaty of Fez, are traced in this chapter on the long nineteenth century.

France’s forty-four year rule over Morocco from 1912 to 1956 is covered in Chapter Three. Its effects were deeply traumatic for Jews and Muslims alike. The old makhzanian system that had maintained a fragile equilibrium among various ethnic and social groups was upset when the traditional mechanisms of power (court, *shurafa*’, *qa’ids*, *pashas*, tribal *jamaas*, etc.) disappeared behind a curtain of highly centralized control imposed by the colonial state. Educated Jews, many of whom had already traveled far down the road of

Westernization, were rudely reminded of their *dhimmi* status, crushing hopes for steady advancement. Kenbib exposes the Machiavellian measures used by the colonial regime to reduce traditional Jewish self-government to the vanishing point. Even the schools of the AIU, the centerpiece of Jewish progress, were eventually placed under the strict control of Protectorate authorities.

The Jewish response to these measures was to seek other pathways for development. Zionism began among Jews in Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century as a response to anti-Semitism; shortly thereafter it reappeared in North Africa where it took on a different coloration. In Morocco, it was taken up by the Jewish elite as a means of imagining a future free from contingency and subjugation. More of an intellectual passion than a political one during the interwar period, Zionism in Morocco was warmly embraced by Jewish youth as an instrument of personal and collective liberation. Kenbib’s close reading of the Jewish press in this period illuminates the multiple and often contradictory strands influencing Moroccan Jews who identified as Zionists.

World War II changed the old basis of understanding between Muslims and Jews even more. Nationalist historians have written about the war years from the narrow perspective of decolonization, but Kenbib, a scholar of contemporary history, takes a broader view, arguing that Morocco’s war was a complex, sprawling, and chaotic affair. He shows how the Vichy race laws of 1940-1941 banning Jews from schools, housing and certain professions permanently poisoned relations between Jews and other social groups—not only with the settlers of the extremist Croix de Feu variety, but also with ordinary Moroccans who seemed oblivious to Jewish suffering. He also takes on the thorny issue of Sultan Mohammed Ben Youssef’s (the future King Mohammed V) recognition and then rejection of the Vichy laws, his subsequent effort to repair relations with Jewish leaders, and finally, his eventual apotheosis as “protector” of the Jews. However, the damage had been done, and the trauma of exclusion accentuated during the Vichy period was an open wound troubling Jewish-Muslim relations for years to come. In this chapter we also read about the post-war era when the gap between the Jewish community and the rest of Moroccan society steadily widened. The Nakba, the creation of the State of Israel in 1947-1948, and the 1953 banishment of their patron Sultan Mohammed Ben Youssef (the future King Mohammed V) by the Protectorate authorities created a panic among Morocco’s Jews, who began to exit in droves. The appointment of a Jewish Minister, Dr. Leon Benzaquen, to the first post-independence government in 1956 did little to calm their fears that the forces of history were not on their side.

Kenbib's 1994 book ended here on a deeply pessimistic note. He assumed that Morocco's Jewish patrimony would soon be forgotten by Muslim youth of the next generation who had no first-hand knowledge of Jews. He also assumed that Moroccan Jews, most of whom were now living in the diaspora, had become far more Israeli, Canadian, French, or Latin American than Moroccan, and that they, too, would soon forget their origins. This new book takes a far more optimistic view, pointing out the reemergence of the "Jewish component" as a positive feature of Morocco cultural life today. The press and the media, official pronouncements and attention from the palace, have managed to reconstitute key aspects of the Jewish patrimony and place them in a glowing light, while insisting on the "permanence" (*pérennité*) of Judaism in the Moroccan collective memory. Mohammed Kenbib's lifelong ambition to insert the Jewish-Muslim dimension back into the grand narrative of the Moroccan nation has finally been achieved. This latest book should carry his message forward to even larger audiences in the greater Francophone world.

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