

The Review Section

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The current issue includes three reviews that illuminate Jewish-Arab relations in three different locations in the Middle East—Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine—during the late Ottoman and colonial eras, particularly during the first half of the twentieth century. The three books under scrutiny attempt to provide more balanced accounts of the conventional national narratives that have formulated our historical knowledge regarding Arab-Jewish relations by highlighting a variety of aspects that are not confined to the field of political history.

In the first review Abbas Shiblak examines Orit Bashkin's *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* and stresses the process of the rise of the "Jewish question" in Iraq during the first half of the twentieth century. Shiblak presents Bashkin's criticism of the modern dehistoricization of the memory of coexistence shared by Muslims and Jews in Iraq in a period when Jews perceived themselves as both Arabs and Iraqis. Iraq was, at this time, at the crossroads of several conflicts, including the rise of the "Palestinian question" and the involvement of the Zionist movement in the Iraqi Jewish community. This fact crystallizes the uniqueness of the story of the Jewish community in Iraq. The mixture of historical developments and reactions revitalizes the debate regarding the reasons behind the mass exodus of the Iraqi Jewish community in 1950–1951. Bashkin's book, as Shiblak concludes, helps us relocate the Iraqi Jews in the larger context of Arab history.

Akram Khater reviews Tomer Levi's *The Jews of Beirut: The Rise of a Levantine Community, 1860s–1930s*, highlighting the evolution of the Beirut Jewish community during a period of time that overlaps that under consideration in Bashkin's book. Levi traces the establishment of local institutions and the formation of Jewish identity within the context of Beirut's development from a marginal town to a provincial capital; the analysis is made with reference to the development of

other port cities, such as Izmir and Alexandria. Levi, whose arguments bear deep similarities to those of Bashkin, contends that the Beirut Jewish community continued to perceive itself as part of the emerging Lebanese nation. Despite the fact that the research does not focus on the second half of the twentieth century, it enriches our understanding of the situation of the Jewish community in Beirut on the eve of regional political change.

The third review, written by Max Reibman, presents Jacob Norris's *Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905–1948*, which probes the question of Arab-Jewish relations in Palestine during the first half of the twentieth century. Focusing on the field of political economy, Norris examines the social development in light of the growing British economic interest and involvement in the region and the transformation of Palestine to an important imperial center. Reibman's review emphasizes the vast influence of British policies on the lives of Jews and Arabs in Palestine and portrays the cooperation between entrepreneurs from the two communities. This introduces us to an intriguing perspective on the fluid business environment and globalized economy as well as to the consequences of uneven colonial involvement for this area's future.

These three works provide fresh perspectives on the historiography of Jewish people in Arab lands in the context of the transition from imperial to nation-state organization. They range from social to cultural and economic history and constitute a significant contribution to scholarship. In addition they represent a substantive attempt not to succumb to the dominant limited approach of political history as it is applied to the history of Arab-Jewish relations.