

Pe'amim

Studies in Oriental Jewry

131

Twentieth Century Transformations

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**Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish
Communities in the East**

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In This Issue

This issue of *Pe'amim* concerns transformations that Jewish communities in the East underwent in the course of the twentieth century. The opening article by Harvey Goldberg discusses the "Cave Dwellers of Tripolitania," an expression that was commonly used during the major wave of immigration to Israel in the 1950s, but originated in the visit by Nahum Slouschz to the area of Gharian, south of Tripoli, Libya, in 1906, and in his subsequent publications. Slouschz's romantic description influenced other Jewish visitors, until the immigration of the residents of Gharian to Israel after 1949. Field study in Moshav Porat between 1963 and 1965 sought to present a realistic picture of the nature of the "caves" and their context. Recently photographs taken by the journalist Amos Gordon in Gharian in 1947 were discovered. Some of them are included in the article, providing a better understanding of this subject.

Harvey Goldberg is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The Rabbinical Seminary in Rabat, the capital of Morocco, operated in the 1950s and 60s. Its founder, Rabbi Shaul Ibn Denan intended to establish a unique seminary for training rabbinical judges with the hope that they would eventually replace the existing spiritual leadership of the community. In this article Shlomo E. Glicksberg tells the story of the seminary, the legal and cultural background, and how it differed from accepted frameworks for Torah study. Finally he

tries to evaluate the degree to which it achieved its goals.

Dr. Shlomo Glicksberg teaches in Efrata College, the Lander Institute and the Faculty of Law at Bar-Ilan University.

The article by Haya Gavish tells the story of forced workers and woodcutters who were compelled to work in the forests of Northern Kurdistan in the rain and snow of winter. In order to warm themselves they danced, while singing "Ti-ti-ti Israel." During the Israeli War of Independence this singing endangered their lives. They were sentenced to prison and managed to emigrate to Israel only after the first wave of immigration from Iraq in 1951. The arrest of eleven prisoners of Zion from the Zakho community between 1948 and 1952 is not well known and its absence from the current narrative disturbs the leadership. They are eager to make the story known to their community and to the general public in Israel. This article is a step in that direction.

Dr. Haya Gavish, today retired, taught Hebrew language and literature at the Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem.

The article by Vivian Hafif-Digmi takes a close look at Rebecca Reuben, the principal of the Bene Israel school and the unofficial leader of the Bene Israel community in India in the years 1920-1957. It focuses on her work during the first years following the establishment of the State of Israel, during which most of the Bene Israel made aliyah to Israel, and on her reaction

to their leaving Israel and going back to India and to the question of racism in Israel, which was discussed in the Parliament of India.

Vivian Hafif-Digmi is a research student at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

The article by Eliezer Baumgarten deals with Jews from Oriental communities who joined the Breslav Hassidic sect. The writer claims that these individuals create a provisional identity, and form separate sub-groups within the Hasidic sect, maintaining their own Oriental identity. The article describes the processes that have taken place within the Breslav sect, processes that have enabled the creation of Oriental sub-groups, something that was impossible in other Hassidic sects with similar characteristics, such as Habad. In those groups there is a point at which these identities are challenged, such as customs that conflict between the Hassidic practice and that of the ethnic groups from which the individuals came. Some examples come from the text of prayers, pilgrimage to Uman, and Halakhic rulings regarding ritual impurity. The discussion of these rituals raises the question of Halakhic authority, which may define the social adhesion of members of a group.

Dr. Eliezer Baumgarten is engaged in research in the Department of Jewish History at the University of Haifa.

Joseph Conforti discusses the leadership of the Jews of Bulgaria and the community of Sofia from the establishment of the Bulgarian state at the Berlin Conference of 1878 until the eve of

World War I. The crowning achievement of the period was the building of the Central Synagogue in Sofia in 1909. The problems of adjustment to a nation state led to the development of a dynamic central leadership that guided the Jews of Bulgaria towards progress similar to that of progressive communities in central and western Europe, while maintaining their religious and national character. The writer surveys the processes that led to the building of the synagogue, discusses its architecture and describes the dedication ceremony.

Joseph Conforti is a research student at the University of Haifa.

In the Book Review section Yigal Shalom Nizri a Ph.D. candidate at New York University reviews a collection of essays on Jewish culture and society in North Africa, edited by Emily Benichou-Gutreich and Daniel Schroeter, published by Indiana University.