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REVIEWS

Judíos y musulmanes en al-Andalus y el Magreb. Contactos intelectuales. Seminario celebrado en la Casa de Velázquez (20-21 de febrero de 1997). Actas reunidas y presentadas por Maribel Fierro. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2002.

Reviewed by R.W. SZPIECH, Yale University

Since the publication of the commemorative work *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain* (New York, 1992) to mark the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of Jews from the Iberian peninsula and the Christian conquest of Granada, there has been a proliferation of collections of essays treating the subject of "contact" between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity in medieval Iberia. Titles such as *Creencias y culturas. Cristianos, judíos y musulmanes en la España Medieval* (Salamanca, 1998), *Chrétien, musulmans et juifs dans l'Espagne médiévale: de la convergence à l'expulsion* (Paris, 1994), and *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Change* (Notre Dame, 2000), all bespeak the ubiquitous interest in medieval Iberia (including Muslim al-Andalus and the Christian kingdoms of later centuries) as a model of a complex, multicultural society with abundant examples of conflict, cooperation, and symbiosis that prove fertile for modern scholarship. To be sure, recent events of global politics have only fueled this interest, making medieval Iberia for many a new and poignant "distant mirror" of the twenty-first century. It is against the backdrop of this new fascination with interaction between Iberian cultures that this collection of essays can most meaningfully be situated and most fruitfully be read.

The attention to Iberia's medieval multiculturalism, for better or worse, has brought with it the tendency to see "the three faiths" as a single, independent subject that can be coherently studied apart from the specific study of each individual tradition. The scholars represented in this collection seem manifestly aware of the implications of this approach, and make explicit reference to its possible limitations. In her introductory remarks, Maribel Fierro (who oversaw the collection of the essays) promises that the articles which follow avoid falling back on the all-too-familiar model of "debt and credit" implied in such terms as "borrowing" and "influence" (x). Likewise, Esperanza Alfonso calls such models of contact "excessively simple" (59) and instead seeks to trace what she calls a map of the "processes related to the transference between one literature and another" (59). All of the scholars live up to these editorial ideals in their individual texts, and the erudition of the studies in this volume rests first of all on this critical conceptual foundation.

The volume contains ten essays, in French, Spanish, and English, originally presented at the Casa de Velázquez, the well-known institute for French scholars in Madrid, at a conference held there in February of 1997. The theme of the conference, "Intellectual Contacts between Jews and Muslims in al-Andalus and the Maghreb,"

is understood in manifold ways by the various presenters. Some of the articles represent a newer version of previously published material (such as the articles of Ross Brann, Ángel Sáenz-Badillos, and Sarah Stroumsa), while others offer entirely new findings presented here for the first time. Although the focus of the collection is predominately the interaction between Jews and Muslims (the text constitutes the first volume of a projected series to be titled "Judíos en tierras de islam" or "Jews in Muslim Lands"), it also includes some discussion of the role of Christians vis-à-vis these groups, such as Dominique Urvoy's article on Ibn Khaldūn's view of biblical texts and Esperanza Alfonso's consideration of Jewish attitudes toward Islam (which studies, in part, material written by Jews in Christian kingdoms after 1085). The "intellectual contacts" mentioned in the title cover a broad range of subjects, including language (David Wasserstein), grammar and exegesis (Ángel Sáenz-Badillos), literature, poetry, and biography (Ross Brann, Raymond Scheindlin, and Joseph Sadan), and religion and polemic (Sarah Stroumsa, Dominique Urvoy, Camila Adang and Mercedes García-Arenal). Although the volume purports to be exclusively about al-Andalus and the Maghreb, the essays by Sáenz-Badillos, Scheindlin, and Sadan also offer broader perspectives of Andalusí contacts with the central Islamic world.

The first essay, by David J. Wasserstein, "Langues et frontières entre juifs et musulmans en al-Andalus," discusses the role of language in the formation of Jewish identity under Islamic rule in al-Andalus. He draws a distinction between "language change" and "language choice," contrasting the Jewish adoption of Arabic after the eighth century—an adoption he sees as a means of social assimilation—with the choice to revive Hebrew and Aramaic, which he sees as a way the Jews differentiated themselves from the Muslim majority. The second essay by Ross Brann, "Reflexiones sobre el árabe y la identidad literaria de los judíos de al-Andalus," represents a slightly expanded Spanish translation of his article "The Arabized Jews" from the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: The Literature of Al-Andalus* (Cambridge, 2000). Brann questions the simple description of Jewish adoption of Arabic language and culture as "arabization," asserting that the complex interaction of Muslim and Jewish cultures in al-Andalus is more fruitfully understood as a dialectic between cultural influence and active appropriation, between "acculturation" and "transculturation" (19). Ángel Sáenz-Badillos's article on the role of grammar and exegesis in the intellectual contact between Jews and Muslims, entitled "El contacto intelectual de musulmanes y judíos: gramática y exégesis," does not focus only on the Iberian Peninsula but naturally includes much information about the Arab grammatical schools of the Basra and Kūfa. Sáenz-Badillos shows the link between Muslim and Jewish grammatical ideas, and by comparing their respective exegetical techniques, presents the similarity of Muslim and Jewish treatment of Holy Scriptures. Importantly, he draws a distinction between the external similarities of each and the internal knowledge that each group had of the other. His article also includes an up-to-date bibliography on linguistics, grammar, and exegesis in both Judaism and Islam.

Esperanza Alfonso, in her article, "Los límites del saber. Reacción de intelectuales judíos a la cultura de procedencia islámica," examines Jewish attitudes toward the knowledge and literary styles borrowed from Arabic-Islamic sources. She divides Sephardic history into three stages: an initial phase, in the tenth century, when Jews were largely on the margins of the dominant Arab society; a middle phase in the eleventh, when Jews were more integrated into Islamic society and culture (in which she considers many aspects of Jewish intellectual life, such as poetry, history, phys-

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ical sciences, astrology, and religion); and a late phase, when Jews were marginalized once again following the arrival of the Almohads in 1145. The article by Raymond Scheindlin, "Old Age in Hebrew and Arabic *Zuhd* Poetry," compares Arabic models with later Hebrew versions through the ascetic (*zuhd*) poetry of Abū Ishāq al-Ilbirī and Moses ibn Ezra. Highlighting the differences between the Hebrew optimism and Arabic sobriety found in this literature, he concludes that the Arabic *zuhd* poetry is most often "grounded in Islamic pietism," while "Hebrew poets tended to be educated more in the mold of the *falasūfs*" (104) in expressing a neoplatonic eschatology. Joseph Sadan's article, "Un intellectuel juif au confluent de deux cultures. Yēhūda al-Ḥarīzī et sa biographie arabe," based on a previous text published in 1996 in the Hebrew journal *Pē'amim* (v. 68), reevaluates the known information on the life of Jewish writer Yēhūda al-Ḥarīzī (d. 1225) according to the little-known Arabic biography of him by Ibn al-Ṣa'ār al-mawṣili (d. 1256). In addition to offering compelling new information regarding al-Ḥarīzī's date and place of death, his physical characteristics, his travel between his native Toledo and the *Mashriq*, and his career as one of the rare Hebrew authors admired by Muslims for his poetry in Arabic, Sadan includes the original Arabic text and a French translation with his article.

Sarah Stroumsa's article, "Entre Ḥarrān et al-Maghreb: La théorie maimonidienne de l'histoire des religions et ses sources arabes," examines Maimonides's view of pagans, which he generically terms "Sabaeans" (*al-ṣāba*). As she notes, the role credited to the Sabaeans in the development of Jewish Biblical laws constitutes a thoroughly "original contribution to the history of religious ideas, a contribution which continues to be curiously ignored by most researchers" (154). Dominique Urvoy, in his article, "Ibn Ḥaldūn et la notion d'altération des textes bibliques," adds some useful observations to the already well-worn topic of Ibn Khaldūn's (d. 808/1406) notion of *tahrīf*, or alteration of biblical texts by Jews and Christians. After noting how Ibn Khaldūn's specific discussion of the topic in his *Muqaddima* and *Kitāb al-'ibar* ignores the religious aspect of the issue almost entirely (and instead views the religious texts as historical documents), Urvoy concludes that his attitude is "ultimately ambiguous" (165), because he often lets his discussion be guided by the rhetoric of religious polemic. Camilla Adang, in her article, "A Jewish Reply to Ibn Ḥazm. Solomon b. Adret's Polemic against Islam," also examines the topic of polemic between Jews and Muslims and carefully presents the apologetic response of the Barcelonan rabbi Solomon ibn Adret (d. 1310) to the polemic of Ibn Ḥazm presented in his *Kitāb al-ḥiṣāl fī l-milal wa-l-ahwā' wa-l-niḥal*. The final article by Mercedes García-Arenal, "Messianisme juif aux temps des *mahdī*-s," compares Jewish and Muslim Messianic movements in twelfth-century Iberia and the Maghreb and traces the parallel effects of Shi'ite ideas, funneled through the medium of Andalusī Sufism, on messianic ideas in both cultures.

Almost invariably in collections of articles, especially those stemming from academic conferences, the content of the essays is united on only a superficial level. Certainly those interested in the larger topic of intellectual, literary, and religious contacts between Jews and Muslims will find abundant material in this volume to merit their attention, whether from a specialist's point of view, looking for new contributions to a familiar bibliography, or from a generalist's perspective. This volume blends the two perspectives fairly well, although some of the essays are much more technical than others. Each article, however, despite the general theme of the conference and book, makes most sense when read in the light of its own relevant bibliography rather than in relation to the other articles in the collection. Nevertheless,

given the formidable roster of contributors—all specialists in their fields—the collection also bears reading as a single book, reminding the reader that, nostalgia aside, the Jews and Muslims of al-Andalus can indeed be studied together as parts of a single multicultural society.

RÉDA BENSMAÏA. *Experimental Nations, Or the Invention of the Maghreb*. Translated from the French, *Nations Experimentales*, by Alyson Waters. Princeton University Press, 2003. Pp. xi + 215.

Reviewed by AIDA A. BAMIA, University of Florida

Experimental Nations is the title Réda Bensmaïa chose for his book comprised of seven chapters and an appendix, "Le Dépays, On Chris Marker's *Lettre de Sibérie* (1957)." The essays were previously published in various journals and as book chapters, between the years 1992 and 2003. Each chapter carries a title different from that of the original essay. Bensmaïa is primarily interested in the experimental process that takes place in the nation formation of the recently independent Maghribi countries. He compares them to open air laboratories where the various experiments normally lead to nation building.

Bensmaïa's hypothesis is based on the position of a number of French romantic writers seeking exotic adventures in the new colonies. The inhabitants, especially the Algerians were, traditionally, perceived as exotic subjects, an outlook that continued to the day the colonized subjects assumed an active role and engaged the colonizer in the colonial language, French.

The ambiguous role of the colonizer's language in the life of the Maghribi peoples led to a dramatic linguistic situation that has not ceased to provoke heated debates. It is the main theme of *Experimental Nations* in which Bensmaïa "attempted to show the complexity of the problems posed by the relation to language" (3).

He examines Maghribi literary works in the context of postcolonial literature, in an attempt to provide an interpretation distinct from the existing one, which according to him was "reduced to mere signifiers of other signifiers, with a total disregard for what makes them literary works in and of themselves" (6).

Bensmaïa's purpose is to assess the literary qualities of Maghribi writings, to reveal "the originality of the literary strategies deployed by postcolonial Maghrebi writers..." (7). He undertakes this task within the context of a different definition of nations. The definition is neither geographic nor political, but one "that writers have had to imagine or explore as if they were territories to rediscover and stake out, step by step, countries to invent and to draw while creating one's language" (8). Bensmaïa sees hope in the theater as the literary genre that would act as a unifying force for a diverse multilingual and still significantly illiterate population. The role that Ahmed Reda Houhou played in colonized Algeria is a case in point. His plays written in colloquial Algerian reached a wide spectrum of the population despite the high percentage of illiteracy in the country. His success was a source of concern for the colonial administration which, having failed to rally him to its cause, played a role in his assassination.

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