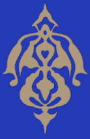

Article by **Vera Basch Moreen**

Published: June 15, 2009
Last Updated: April 23, 2018

JUDEO-PERSIAN COMMUNITIES IV. MEDIEVAL TO LATE 18TH CENTURY

JUDEO-PERSIAN COMMUNITIES OF IRAN

iv. MEDIEVAL TO THE LATE 18TH CENTURY

Over a millennium-long social and cultural history of Iranian Jewry in the Middle Ages (ca. 636-1736), accounting for about a third of this community's ancient sojourn in Iran, cannot be fully recounted as the scarcity of evidence leaves many gaps in such a narrative. Nevertheless, significant parts of this history are known in considerable detail. The Arab conquest of Iran (636 CE) and the end of the 18th century are convenient, if artificial, dates to demarcate the "Middle Ages" in a diachronic approach to the history of the Jews in Iran. During the first three centuries of Islam, the Jews of "Babylonia" and Iran formed the largest body of the entire Jewish Diaspora. As the earlier stages of "medieval" Jewish life in Iran cannot be easily disconnected from Jewish life in the Omayyad (661-750 CE) and ʿAbbasid (750-1258 CE) caliphates, the more ample materials from Jewish life in "Babylonia" (Syria-Iraq) also reflect, directly and indirectly, on life in Iran. While specific information about Iranian Jewry in these early centuries is generally spotty and sparse, data from documents discovered in the Cairo Geniza (Ar. *janāza* "burial," derived from Pers., *ganj* "treasure, storehouse") dating from the 9th-14th centuries, has

contributed significantly to a growing body of scholarship.

From ancient times Iranian Jews formed communities in most of the major towns, villages, and regions of the Persianate world. Between the 8th and 10th centuries, Iraq and Iran, then among the richest areas in the world, contained very large and prosperous Jewish populations (Goitein, II, p. 201). Travelers and early Geniza documents mention numerous areas and regions that had Jewish inhabitants, such as Āmol, Ahvāz, Arrajān, Balḵ, Bukhara, Barzanj, Dāmḡān, Isfahan, Firuzkuh, Ḡazna, Ḡur, Gorganj, Hamadān, Hormšir, Ḥolwān, Eṣṭaḵr, Jorjān, Kābol, Kāzerun, Khorasan, Kermān, Korkān, Māzanda-rān, Marāḡa, Marv, Nehāvand, Nišāpur, Qarmāsin (Ker-mānšāh) Qazvin, Rudbār, Samarqand, Šiniz, Shiraz, Šuš, Senān, Sirāf, Sirjān, Tawwaz, Ṭus, Tostar, Urmia, and Zarubān, (Gil, pp. 520-32; Goitein, I, p. 400, n. 2). By the 17th century, Bandar-e Gombrun, Faraḥābād, Golpāya-gān, Kāšān, Ḵᵛānsār, Ḵorramābād, Lār, Naṭanz, Qom, Šuštar, and Yazd are also mentioned in various sources (Moreen, 1987, pp. 56-117). The size of many of these communities appears to have been substantial. Tenth-century Arab geographers list them third after Zoroastrians and Christians in the population of Fars (Eṣṭaḵri, p. 139) and as particularly numerous in Hamadān, Ḥolwān, Nehāvand and Qarmāsin (Gil, p. 57, n. 46). The twelfth-century Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela mentions that there were 15,000 Jews in Isfahan and 10,000 in Shiraz, and another contemporary traveler, Petahiah of Regensburg, estimated 600,000 Jews in Babylonia, and the same numbers in Kus (?) and Persia (Gil, p. 491). None of these figures can be verified.

The period between the 8th and the 10th centuries, when the major Jewish spiritual centers were located in the heart of the caliphate, Iraq and Iran were the most prosperous regions in the world. Their large Jewish populations flourished and most aspects of Jewish life in western Iran resembled that of their coreligionists elsewhere in the caliphate. Whether or not Iranian Jews actually welcomed the Arab conquerors (Abu Noʿaym Eṣfahāni [d. 1038], I, pp. 22-23) because of earlier Zoroastrian bouts of persecutions (Widengren, pp. 117-62), they were nevertheless affected by the discriminatory legislation instituted against the *ahl al-ḏemma* by the second caliph, ʿOmar b. al-Ḵaṭṭāb (d. 644), including the payment of poll-tax (*jezya*, q.v.), for "protection," which enshrined second-class citizenship. Beginning in 807, *ahl al-ḏemma* were required to wear a patch of yellow cloth known as *ʿasali* (honey-colored), *yahudāna*, or *ḡiār*, over the shoulder. However, the strict enforcement of discriminatory legislation in centers distant from Baghdad is open to question.

Thus in 739, during the reign of Hešām b. ʿAbd-al-Malek (r. 724-43), the protector (*māneḥ*) of the Jewish community of Marv in Khorasan, by the name of ʿAqiba, is mentioned as having exempted the Jews from paying the *jezya* (Ṭabari, II, p. 1688; Gil, pp. 276, 288). The high degree of religious autonomy enjoyed by Iranian Jews in pre-Islamic Iran continued under Muslim domination as well. The "Babylonian" exilarch, or *raʾs-al-jālut* (head of the Jews), was the nominal leader of the eastern Jewish communities, while the prestigious sages of the academies (Heb., *yeshivot*) of Sura, Pumbeditha, and, increasingly after the 10th century, Baghdad dominated their spiritual lives throughout the gaonic era (ca. 7th-11th cent.).

Iranian Jews set themselves apart from the majority of Rabbanite Jews through the fomenting of sectarian movements which, rather than "borrow" from or be "influenced" by Muslim (proto-Shiʿite) movements, were due to a "shared inheritance" of religious messianic discourse that may have had its roots in late-antique Judaism (Wasserstrom, pp. 47, 89). The first such, essentially syncretistic, movement, known as the ʿIsāwiya, was initiated by Abu ʿIsā Eṣfahāni (q.v.), some time in the 8th century. Confusing and contradictory details notwithstanding, Mo-ḥammad Šahrestāni (p. 168, Pers. tr., pp. 168-69, Ger. tr., I, pp. 254-55) relates that Abu ʿIsā proclaimed himself a prophet and forerunner (*rasul*) of the expected Messiah, using a variety of heterodox and Shiʿite vocabulary and advocating a rigorous, pietistic lifestyle (Gil, pp. 241-46; Wasserstrom, pp. 71-89). The revolt he may have instigated against the caliph al-Manṣur (r. 754-75) resulted in his death, or "disappearance," after which the movement was led by Yudḡān (Yuḏʿān, or Yuḏaʿān? see Šahrestāni, p. 169 and Ger. tr. p. 254?), his disciple, who made similar claims (Gil, pp. 246-48). The contemporaneous Karaite movement, the main challenge to Rabbanite Judaism, originated in Iraq, but it spread quickly to Iran, especially to Tostar, Jebāl (former Media), and Khorasan (Gil, p. 268), as well as to Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Byzantium, and even Christian Spain (Goitein, I, p. 65). One of its most articulate proponents was the Iranian Benyāmin b. Mose Nehāvandi in the middle of the ninth century, whose views are expounded by the important Karaite writer Abu Yusof Yaʿqub Qarqisāni (fl. 10th cent.; Gil, pp. 264-65). Another important opponent of Rabbanite Judaism was Ḥiwi Balḵi (fl. 9th cent.), hailing from Balkh, Khorasan. His two hundred questions about certain biblical passages and injunctions repeat many anti-Jewish polemical arguments and are known primarily from the answers to them of the great Rabbanite sage Saʿdiā Gāʿon (Saadia Gaon, d. 942) and from the statements of a number of Karaite biblical commentators (Gil,

pp. 318-22). Ḥiwi Balḵi's early "scriptural criticism" forced Jews, Muslim, and Zoroastrians into an early form of "interreligious discourse" (Wasserstrom, p. 148). Two 12th-century Jewish travelers to the east, Obadiah the Proselyte and Benjamin of Tudela, mention that some Iranian Jews fought alongside the Ismaʿilis (see ISMAʿILISM), and that another Jewish messianic movement arose in ʿOmariya, near Mawṣel (Mosul), in the mountains of Kurdistan in northern Mesopotamia, during the 12th century, led by David Rōʾi (Gil, pp. 424-25).

The advent of the Shiʿite Buyid dynasty (945-1055) heralded the disintegration of the caliphate and brought great social, religious, and economic upheaval in its wake that affected the Jews also. On the whole, Iranian Jews appear to have sided with the Shiʿites during this period and, as always during turbulent times, messianic expectations appeared around 1024 (Gil, pp. 412-13). The 9th and 10th centuries witnessed Jewish emigration westward to other Muslim countries, especially to North Africa, and eastward to India via Upper Egypt and the Red Sea (Goitein, IV, p. 2). The paucity of letters in the Geniza during the Saljuq era (1038-1157) may indicate both continued turbulence and, more likely, that the Jewish communities of Iraq and Iran preserved their documents (if they did so at all), in their own *genizot* (archives; Goitein, I, p. 22). From the 10th century until the arrival of the Mongols in the 13th, both the spiritual and economic life of the Jews shifted westward due to continuous warfare and misgovernment (Goitein, II, p. 204).

There is no detailed information regarding the fate of specific Jewish communities during the Mongol onslaught, although Ebn Kaṯir (d. 1373) claims that Jews and Christians were spared during the conquest of Baghdad in 1258 (Gil, p. 433). It is known, however, that two Jews of Iranian extraction rose to high office during Mongol rule. Saʿda-al-Dawla b. Ṣafi, originating from Abhar in northern Iran, an agent (*dallāl*; Abu'l-Fedā, IV, pp. 17-18), but more likely a physician, became an important courtier of the Il-khanid ruler Arḡun b. Abaqa b. Hülegü Khan (r. 1284-91, q.v.). Working first in Baghdad, he provoked the jealousy of some courtiers and in 1288 was moved to the Mongol capital of Tabriz. He was responsible for major administrative and fiscal reforms, promoting his own men, often Jews, to high positions and patronizing scholars and poets. Rising to the office of grand vizier, resentment against him as both a Jew and a powerful man brought about his murder and that of many of his associates in 1291 shortly before Arḡun's death (Gil, pp. 483-84). Saʿd-al-Dawla's more famous contemporary was Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allah b. ʿEmād-al-Dawla Abi'l Ḵayr b. Ḡāli, who converted to Islam at the age of thirty. Hailing

from Hamadān (q.v.) and also a physician, Rašid-al-Din was vizier to the Il-khan Abaqa (r. 1265-82) and later to his grandson Ḡāzān Khan (r. 1295-1304, q.v.). Rašid-al-Din was accused of bringing about the death of Öljeytü (Uljāytu; r. 1304-16), Ḡāzān's brother and heir, religious heresy, and financial embezzlement. Like Saʿd-al-Dawla, Rašid-al-Din was also murdered in a barbarous fashion after Öljeytü's death in 1316 or, according to Maqrizi (d. 1442), in 1318 (Maqrizi, II/1, pp. 189 ff.), after the execution of one of his sons in his presence. He was buried in a mausoleum in the Rabʿ-e Rašidi quarter of Tabriz, but his remains were disinterred a hundred years later and buried in the Jewish cemetery of the city.

Rašid-al-Din's fame rests mainly on his *Jāmeʿ al-tawāriḵ* (q.v.), a universal history of the Mongols and the peoples with whom the Mongols came into contact, which caused John Boyle to call him "the first world historian." He also wrote a partial Qurʾānic commentary, and an important treatise on botanical, zoological, and agricultural subjects, called *Āṯār wa aḥyāʾ*. He was deeply interested in architecture. He funded and oversaw major construction projects of Sufi *ḵānaqāh*s and *madrasa*s and was keen on preserving his legacy by having his Arabic works translated into Persian (and vice versa), as well as preserving much of his correspondences dealing with financial and administrative matters (Gil, 2004 pp. 485-86).

Despite the spectacular rise and fall of Rašid-al-Din, the rule of the Il-khanid dynasty seems to have been relatively benign and especially encouraging of the arts. The name of Sultan Abu Saʿid Bahādor Khan (r. 1316-36, q.v.) is important for the history of Iranian Jewry not on account of specific acts on his part, but because Mawlānā Šāhin, the most important poet of Judeo-Persian literature (see below), flourished during his reign and even wrote panegyrics in his honor.

The Timurid and Qarā Qoyunlu-Āq Qoyunlu (1370-502) periods have not yielded information about Iranian Jews thus far. With the establishment of the Safavid dynasty more information becomes increasingly available. Shah Esmāʿil I (r. 1501-24, q.v.), the founder of the dynasty who compelled Iran to become Shiʿite, certainly had other priorities than the Jews. Defeating the Āq Qoyunlu and the Uzbeks, and being threatened by the Ottomans, his attention was focused primarily on Sunni foes. That he had little love for Jews is mentioned by two travelers. Tomé Pires, the Portuguese ambassador to China visited Iran in 1511-12 and wrote: "He [Shah Esmāʿil] reforms our churches, destroys the houses of all Moors [Sunnis?], and never spares the life of any Jew

(Pires, I, p. 27). Raphaël du Mans, a later traveler, wrote in the 1660s: "*Syach Ysmail hayt si tresparfondement les Juifz que partout où il en trouve, il leur faict crever les yeulx et puis les laisee aller* . . ." (du Mans, Appendix p. 274). These statements remain uncorroborated, however. It is only with the reign of Shah ʿAbbās I (1581-1629, q.v.), at the summit of Safavid rule, that Iran Jewish historiography begins with Bābāʾi ben Loṭf's *Ketāb-e anusi*. This chronicle deals with the periodic persecution of Iranian Jews between 1617 and 1662 and describes some events also in the reigns of Shah Ṣafi I (1629-42) and Shah ʿAbbās II (1642-66). Bābāʾi ben Loṭf, a Jewish native of Kāšān, can be considered a reliable recorder of events, many of which he appears to have witnessed. A number of events described by him are corroborated by other chroniclers such as Eskandar Beg Torkamān and Waḥid Qazvini (see BĀBĀʾI BEN LOṬF). He recounts a number of anti-Jewish incidents that took place during the reign of Shah ʿAbbās I, chief among these the shah's violent reaction to accusations of magic against his person made by two bickering factions of the Jewish community of Isfahan. The episode, corroborated by the traveler Pietro della Valle (q.v.), relates that the shah punished the community by the option to convert to Islam or be devoured by ferocious hounds. A few Jews preferred martyrdom, but most Jews converted temporarily (Moreen, 1987, pp. 57-58; Appendix A; Della Valle, p. II, p. 72; *Chronicle of the Carmelites*, I, pp. 158-59; for a portion of the wall of a synagogue in the Safavid period, see Figure 1). Shah ʿAbbās I also sided with a Jewish apostate who tried to enforce a humiliating headdress on his coreligionists throughout the kingdom (Moreen, 1987, pp. 80-86). The Jews were by no means the only group that suffered from this monarch's efforts to consolidate the kingdom and concentrate all power in his hands. There is no information on how many Iranian Jews may have converted to Islam during his reign, and Bābāʾi ben Loṭf states clearly that the Jews regained full religious freedom during the reign of Shah Ṣafi I (Moreen, 1987, pp. 93-94). However, the sporadic persecutions that began during the reign of Shah ʿAbbās I intensified considerably during the reign of Shah ʿAbbās II, whose grand vizier, Moḥammad Beg, made a concerted effort during the years 1656-62 to convert all the Jews of the kingdom. It would appear that he was motivated more by religious zeal than by covetousness. Although he first rewarded the new converts, he later demanded that the reward money be returned and that the *jezya* be paid in full—even retroactively—by anyone wishing to return to Judaism. Some Muslim communities (Faraḥābād, Golpāyagān, Ḵorramābād, Ḵᵛānsār, and Yazd) and a few ranking Muslim officials and divines (notably Mollā Moḥsen Fayż Kāšāni, d. 1680, q.v.), in defiance of the central authority,

resisted the implementation of the drastic order to force the Jews to convert. However, most of the major Jewish communities appear to have converted under duress, and their Jews became anusim (Heb. “forced converts”) for about seven years, outwardly complying with Shiʿite Islam while practicing Judaism in secret, a practice not unlike that of *taqiya* (dissimulation) practiced by the Shiʿites for many centuries. Similar pressures were brought to bear at the time also on the Armenians, in order to confiscate their wealth, and on the Zoroastrians out of religious intolerance (Arakʿel of Tabriz, tr. Brosset, pp. 289-91, 489-93; Waḥid Qazvini, pp. 218-19; *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, I, pp. 364-67; Moreen, 1987, pp. 62-79, Appendixes C, D).

Although Shah ʿAbbās II reversed many of the policies of Moḥammad Beg, whose machinations brought about his own downfall, the persecutions during his reign set a dangerous precedent that scarred Iranian Jewish communities deeply, both spiritually and materially. During the reigns of Shah Solaymān (1666-94) and Shah Solṭān-Ḥosayn (1694-1722), the power of the Shiʿite hierocracy continued to increase. Sufis as well as religious minorities, such as Christian Armenians and Zoroastrians, were increasingly the targets of religious intolerance. Also during the reign of Shah Solaymān, the false messianic movement of Sabbatai Zevi (d. ca. 1676) spread to Iran. According to the French traveler Jean Chardin, the Jews of Hyrcania (Gorgān) were so certain of the pending appearance of the Messiah that they refused payment of the *jezya* (Chardin, VI, p. 135). It is, however, difficult to gauge the spread of this movement among Iranian Jews, as no documents have surfaced by contemporary Jewish or Muslim sources.

There is little or no information available for the period from 1662 to 1722, that is the time between the end of *Ketāb-a anusi* of Bābāʾi ben Loṭf and the beginning of the second Judeo-Persian chronicle, Bābāʾi ben Farhād’s *Ketāb-e sargoḏašt-e Kāšān* (see below). The Chronicle of the Carmelites recounts a disturbing incident that occurred in 1678. A severe draught caused a steep rise in the price of cereals and men of all faiths prayed for rain. Apparently some unidentified theologians, fearing the potency of non-Shiʿite prayers, complained to Shah Solaymān that Jews and Armenian Christians had conspired to annul the Muslims’ prayers. As a result, the shah ordered the execution of the rabbi and two important notables of Isfahan and delayed their burial until it could be “purchased.” Many Jews fled Isfahan and the remaining community was heavily fined, while the Armenians, probably due to their greater economic importance and the protection of western powers,

were less so (*A Chronicle*, I, p. 408).

Both foreign and internal pressures greatly weakened the late Safavid kingdom. In 1709 the Ḡelzāy Afghans captured Kandahar (Qandahār), which had been in Safavid hands since 1648, and the weak Safavid response emboldened them to penetrate Iran. Maḥmud, their chief, defeated the Safavids decisively at Golnābād and laid siege to Isfahan, which caused a disastrous famine in the city. The siege ended on 25 October 1722 (14 Moḥarram 1135), when the Afghan chief accepted the Iranian crown from the hands of Shah Solṭān-Ḥosayn, and entered Isfahan. The brief reign of the two Afghan rulers, Maḥmud (1722-25) and Ašraf (1725-30), marks a nadir in the history of Iran, which was simultaneously beset by Ottoman and Russian invasions and efforts from various pretenders reclaiming the Safavid throne. Clearly, no social or religious group could have prospered in such trying times, and it is not surprising to learn that Iranian Jews were, once again, deeply affected. Their trials are recounted in *Ketāb-e sargoḏašt-e Kāšān*, the second Judeo-Persian chronicle, written by Bābāʾi ben Farhād (q.v.), the grandson of Bābāʾi ben Loṭf. Bābāʾi ben Farhād lived through the downfall of the Safavid dynasty and the invasion of the Afghans, Ottomans, and Russians, and he briefly refers to them chiefly from the perspective of Jewish communities and the individuals they affected. The greater part of *Ketāb-e sargoḏašt-e Kāšān* deals with the rise to power of Ṭahmāspqoli Khan, the future Nāder Shah (r. 1736-47), at first the chief promoter of the Safavid prince and, briefly, Shah Ṭahmāsp II (r. 1722-31).

Bābāʾi ben Farhād concentrates mainly on events in his native Kāšān for a period of seven months between 1729 and 1730, and the circumstances that led to the short-lived apostasy of its Jewish community. In pursuit of Ašraf, Ṭahmāspqoli Khan passed through Kāšān demanding taxes and tolls. Several communal leaders converted to Islam after having made payments in order to save their own lives and lessen the financial burden on the community. One of them then demanded that the entire community convert as well. Despite the opposition of many, including, notably, the Jewish women of Kāšān, all the Jews of the city were forced to convert. They briefly lived as anusim (see above) until the same communal leader went to Isfahan and, through the intercession of an official and the payment of further sums, was able to persuade Ṭahmāspqoli Khan to relent and allow the Jews to return to their faith (Bābāʾi ben Farhād, pp. 33-56).

The precedent for purchasing freedom of worship having been set in the 17th

century, the Jews of Iran began to live under the threat of the annulment of this freedom. It is not surprising, therefore, to find some Jews sympathizing with the Afghan conquerors in the hope that Sunni rule might alleviate their hardships. Bābāʾi ben Farhād recounts how Ašraf killed Maḥmud as well as many Shi-ʿites but was generous to the Jews of Kāšān (Bābāʾi ben Farhād, pp. 31-33). Benyāmin b. Mišʾāel (d. after 1732), known by the nom de plume Aminā, a Jewish poet from Kāšān (see below), even wrote a panegyric in honor of Ašraf (Moreen, 2000, pp. 292-93).

The sources of the Afšār (1736-95) and Zand (1750-96) periods do not provide reliable historical information about Iranian, Jews although Judeo-Persian literary texts can be traced to this period. The historical trail picks up again at the dawn of the modern era, during the rule of the Qajar dynasty (1779-1924).

Economy. Without information preserved in the Cairo Geniza, little would be known about the economic life of Iranian Jewry in the early centuries of Islam. As it is well known, the Radhanites, at least some of whom were of Iranian origin, dominated commerce between the Muslim and Christian worlds between 600 and 1000 CE, and may had done so already in pre-Islamic times (Gil, pp. 615-37). Early Muslim geographers, as well as letters preserved in the Genizah refer to Tostar, a town in southwestern Iran, as an important center of the textile, especially silk, industry, in which Jews were fully involved (Eṣṭaḵri, p. 92; Ebn al-Ḥawqal, p. 256, tr., II, p. 253; Moqaddasi, pp. 409, 416). The far-flung manufacturing and commercial activities of the large eleventh-century Karaite Tostari family (originally from Tostar, later from Ahvāz) are particularly well documented (Gil, pp. 663-75; Fischel, pp. 68 ff.; Goitein, III, index). The Kujiks (Pers., Kučik) and the family of Joseph ha-Kohen b. Yazdād, were two other prominent Karaite families whose activities appear in the Cairo Geniza documents beginning in the 11th century (Goitein, III, p. 11; Gil, p. 677). Information about the dealings of some successful bankers of Iranian origin, such as Sahlawayh b. Ḥayyim and Ebn Šaʿyā (Goitein, III, pp. 56,136, 290) can also be found there. Such families, who emigrated to Egypt from Iran and Iraq, are recorded as having brought with them, selling, buying, and bequeathing in dowries, precious fabrics from Ṭabarestān, very fine royal silk called Ḵosravāni, curtains, carpets, garments named “Jorjān,” perfumes, sugar cane, a fine fabric called *susanjerd*, lily-embroidered tapestries (Goitein, IV, pp. 109, 121, 123, 192, 225, 247, 306-7), flax, and jewelry (Gil, pp. 670-71). It is more difficult to determine the degree to which Iranian Jews were involved in the manufacture rather than the trade of these commodities. By the 17th century,

sources mention Jews who were weavers, farmers, dyers, minstrels, and butchers. Jean Chardin sums up their state as, “ils sont pauvres et misérables partout . . . ,” (Chardin, VI, pp. 133-34) artisans, small-scale usurers, purveyors of medical and magical services, with Jewish women having access to the palaces of rulers. Although some bankers are mentioned in the Geniza (Goitein, III, p. 290), Iranian Jews in late medieval Iran were apparently never great financiers; by the 17th century they were entirely eclipsed by Hindu merchants and middlemen (Bāniāns). Neither were they large-scale merchants, an activity in which they were far surpassed by the Armenians (Chardin, VI, pp. 133-34; Moreen, 1987, pp. 149-52). Both Judeo-Persian chroniclers testify to the hardships caused by the demands of the *jezya*, thus compounding the impression that the economic status of Jews declined continuously in pre-modern Iran.

Cultural accomplishments. The almost three millennia-long sojourn of Jews in Iran produced profound acculturation. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the spheres of literature (see ix. below) and the applied arts. Iranian Jews strove to emulate the arts of the Iranian tradition of illuminated manuscripts. Only thirteen Judeo-Persian illuminated manuscripts have so far been identified, none of which dates earlier than the 17th century. They tend to illustrate Hebrew transliterations of Persian romance *maṯnawi*s, such as Jāmi’s *Yusof o Zolayḵā*, and album leaves containing miscellaneous short verses. The best examples are the illuminated manuscripts of the epics of Šāhin and ʿEmrāni, imitating the pictorial tradition of the *Šāh-nāma*. However fine and remarkable these manuscripts may be (like SPK [Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin] or. Qu 1680, of Šāhin’s *Ardašir-nāma*, and IM [Israel Museum] 180/54, of his *Musā-nāma*), they are not comparable to the products of the royal workshops that produced the great masterpieces of Persian miniature paintings, but rather to their less accomplished provincial imitators. Without exception, they are the products of one hand in a given manuscript rather than the collective effort of a workshop. There exists no proof that these manuscripts were produced by Jews, as they are all unsigned, but we know of no reasons or prohibitions, on the Jewish side, that would have prevented them from acquiring these skills. However, Muslim guild laws may well have thwarted such efforts. It would appear that some painters may have been Muslims as ms. IM 180/54, which repeatedly depicts Moses’s face covered by a veil on which “His Excellency Moses” (*janāb-e ḥażrat-e Musā*) is written in Persian script, would suggest. It cannot, however, be discounted entirely that a Jewish painter, wishing to show his work to Muslims, would have complied

with pictorial clichés that respected Muslim sensibilities. Based on some discrepancies between a number of miniatures and the texts they illustrate, it would seem that some of the painters, whether Jews or Muslims, probably unable to read the Judeo-Persian text themselves, had to be informed about the contents of their pictures. If the painters were Muslims, these manuscripts represent attractive examples of Jewish-Muslim cooperation. Jewish calligraphers, when they were not owners preparing texts for their own personal use, are generally anonymous, although at least two manuscripts (IM 180/54 and SPK or. oct. 285) were copied in the excellent hand of Nehemiah ben Amsal of Tabriz. Many Judeo-Persian manuscripts have lovely tooled leather bindings; very few have 19th century lacquered bindings. While nothing is known about the patrons of these manuscripts, it is reasonable to assume that they were made for prominent members of larger Jewish communities, such as those of Isfahan and Kāšān (Moreen, 1985)

Iranian Jews also contributed greatly to the musical life of Iran (see x, below), especially to its instrumental dimension. Although the names of individual Jewish instrumentalists from the medieval period have not been preserved, families with long traditions of musical performance have survived into the present time (Loeb).

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