PART ONE

History and Philosophy

Introduction by Norman A. Stillman

The study of Sephardic history and thought has its origins at the very beginning of the modern academic discipline of Judaic studies in nineteenth-century Germany with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement. The founding fathers of the field—Leopold Zunz, Moritz Steinschneider, Abraham Geiger, Salomon Munk, and Heinrich Graetz—all viewed the Jewish experience in Islamic Spain and in the early and more enlightened kingdoms of the *Reconquista* as one of the high points of diaspora history. It was they who created the notion of "the Golden Age of Spain," an idea borrowed from classical literary history. They were particularly impressed by the rich and original literature in poetry and philosophy produced by Andalusian Jews. They were also struck by the Sephardim's high degree of cultural assimilation (a consummation they devoutly wished for European Jewry in their own day). The *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars were classicists by predilection, and they had little interest in Sephardic history and thought after the Expulsion. Whereas Graetz devotes nearly an entire volume of his monumental *History of the Jews* to the medieval Islamic period and several chapters to the period in Christian Spain, only two full chapters and small parts of one or two others deal with Sephardim in the centuries that followed, and much of this is devoted to the Sephardim of Holland.

The *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school set the pattern of research in Sephardic history and thought for several generations. Over the past three decades, however, scholars have been turning their attention to the later periods and to broader regions of the Sephardic world such as North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean that had hitherto been, if not totally ignored, little studied. A primary impetus for this new direction of scholarship was the mass exodus of

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the Jewish populations from much of the Muslim world following the establishment of the State of Israel. With the sudden dissolution of most traditional Sephardic communities, a need was felt for a salvage operation to learn as much as possible about these Jewish cultures before they disappeared in the Israeli melting pot or assimilated into the culture of their host countries, particularly France, which also received large numbers of Sephardic émigrés. (Not surprisingly, Israel and France have become the two leading centers of Sephardic studies.) A good deal of this early 'salvage' work was ethnographic and consisted of collecting folklore, oral histories, or objects of material culture. Later, however, scholarly attention came to have a more historical focus.

The study of Sephardic history and thought over the past three decades has been very much influenced by the ethnographic anthropological, and sociological work of the preceding decade, as well as by the new trends in social-scientific history—what has been dubbed "the new history." (By the same token, some of the work of anthropologists and ethnographers—for example, Harvey Goldberg, Shlomo Deshen, or Laurence Loeb—has become decidedly historical.) This interdisciplinary, social-scientific historical approach is particularly evident in the papers in this section by Shmuel Trigano on social bonding and strategies in thirteenth-century Jewish society and Daniel Schroeter on the complex interrelation between the Jewish quarter (*mellah*) and the larger Morroccan city of which it was a part. It is also taken into account and commented upon in Jacqueline Genot-Bismuth's critique of some of the presuppositions of contemporary Jewish historiography in which the society of the sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Venetian ghetto is taken as a case study. Another example of the interdisciplinary approach may be found in Rachel Simon's paper which examines the way in which indigenous literature and especially oral literature may be used as source for the history of Libyan Jewry in late Ottoman time.

Not all Sephardic historical studies, of course, are of the new social-science variety. A great deal of significant work continues to be done in humanistic style of historical writing. Eva Alexandra Uchmany's paper on *cristianos nuevos* and *marranos* in Spanish America takes up the traditional historical concern with periodization and is concerned with archival and chronicle sources. Likewise, Matilde Gini de Barnatán's vignettes of Latin American marranism in the Rio de la Plata during the seventeenth century and Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini's overview of the Sephardic and Marrano community in Ferrara, Italy, in the sixteenth century employ similar traditional sources and methodologies.

The two chapters in this section that deal with the history of thought also reflect the two poles of methodological approach—namely, that of the humanities and that of social science. In his study of the concept of beauty in Yehudah Abrabanel's *Dialoghi d'Amore* Ze'ev Levy traces the classical philsophical roots of Abrabanel's attempt to merge Jewish religious conceptions with Renaissance Platonism, while at the same time placing him as a pioneer of Jewish aesthetics on the threshold of modern Jewish intellectual history. Zvi Zohar, on the other

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hand, looks at the thought of Yitzhak Dayyan, a little-known rabbi in Aleppo, Syria, during the 1920s, who while decrying the abandonment of traditonal Jewish studies for modern intellectual pursuits shows that he himself was not at all immune to modern cultural influences. Zohar's discussion of Rabbi Dayyan's thought is presented as a mirror of contemporary social change more than as a study of intellectual history *stricto sensu.*

While by no means covering all areas, the chapters in Part I reflect the geographical, temporal, and disciplinary diversity that characterizes present-day research in Sephardic history and thought and, indeed, Sephardic studies in general.

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