EDITORIAL

Reform Judaism in the UK owes its origins to both Sephardi and Ashkenazi elements. When nineteen *Sephardim* and five *Ashkenazim* signed a declaration on 15 April 1840 that led to the creation of the West London Synagogue of British Jews it represented a coming together of the two traditions. The list of Sephardi names on the table of past presidents and chairmen of the congregation attests to the lingering presence of those early families till today over 150 years later. The prayerbooks that originated in the new congregation, up to the most recent ones that serve the British Reform movement as a whole, remain influenced by both traditions. However, because of the impact of refugees from Germany and the dominant East European Ashkenazi culture of British Jewry, the ethos of British Reform is today well within the Ashkenazi fold.

The German liberal Jewish influence remains in institutions like the Leo Baeck College, the European successor of the Berlin *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and inevitably in the concerns of this journal, beginning with our founding editor Ignaz Maybaum. Nevertheless the Jewish-Muslim dialogue we document from time to time does bring us into the world that was the home of Sephardi Jewry at its greatest historical period. All of which is simply to point out that an issue devoted to Sephardi Jewry in Europe is long overdue.

A one-off issue can do no more than present a sampling of articles that reflect aspects of this rich heritage which we have approached through memoirs, poems, historical studies and contemporary issues. One article however does link indirectly with the origins of Reform Judaism in the UK. Bruce Mitchell's pioneering study of the language usage of Sephardi Jews in England refers to the tradition of sermons delivered in Portuguese at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in London till the middle of the nineteenth century. It was the desire for sermons to be delivered in English, amongst many other issues, that led the first Reformers to break away.

A link with more familiar *European Judaism* territory is afforded by Professor Esformes' study of the Sephardi background of Nobel Prize winner Elias Canetti. I had the privilege of visiting him once in the sixties in his flat in Hampstead. We were planning a conference for the Youth Section of the *World Union for Progressive Judaism* on the breakdown of traditional 'mythologies' in our time and the question as to what might replace them. I remember little of the encounter except his insistence that he had nothing in particular to say to the Jewish world. Nevertheless, as Professor Esformes shows, he has far more to offer than he might

have imagined in bringing a past Jewish culture to life. By a fortunate coincidence during the preparation of this issue a neighbour of Albert and Evelyn Friedlander showed them a photo of part of the Canetti family and we reproduce it with a covering note.

The memoirs by Gabriel Josipovici and David Abulafia provide a personal touch, evoking family events and characters by the former and the broader sweep of history by the latter. Two poems, by Wanda Barford and Morris Farhi, offer poignant reflections on the recent tragic past. In contrast Richard Kostelanetz' ironic 'Sephardic Culture and Me' points to an absence of Sephardic cultural references for someone growing up in America.

The richness and diversity of Sephardi culture is brought to life by Hillary Pomeroy's study of the unlikely persistence of Spanish ballads in the world of Moroccan Jewry. She highlights the subtle changes that enabled these songs of the courtly life of Christian Spain to be not only acceptable but essential parts of the traditions of Jewish family life in the harsh existence in the *Mellah*, the Jewish Quarter.

Perhaps inevitably three of the contributions focus on events surrounding Jewish life in Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The physical reality, sights, sounds and smells, of Lisbon, and the suffering of the Jewish community at the time of the expulsion from Spain, are vividly brought to life by Richard Zimler, author of *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon*. The subsequent fate of the *Conversos*, which is central to his article, is taken up in Andrée Aelion Brooks' study of Dona Gracia Nasi who became their self-appointed protector. Her turbulent life, the intrigues she had to combat, her journeys criss-crossing Europe and the extraordinary significance of her role and influence are graphically illustrated. Her name, already invoked by David Abulafia, occurs in passing in Professor Macedo's study of the Jewish press in Ferrara, the famous translation of the Hebrew Bible published by Abraham Usque being dedicated to her. In a fascinating piece of literary detection, he explores the hidden agenda of Bernardim Ribeiro's celebrated novel *Menina e Moça* (*A Young Girl*) with its traces of the difficult experience of a New Christian.

I am particularly grateful to Lucien Gubbay for setting me off on the track of potential contributors. His popular study of Jewish-Muslim relations through the ages, *Sunlight and Shadow: The Jewish Experience of Islam* (The Sephardi Centre, London 1999 ISBN 0952890712) is a valuable contribution to a widening awareness of the Sephardi world and heritage. His article on the attempt by the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* to regenerate the Jews of the Ottoman Empire is nicely complemented by Simon Sibelman's impressive survey of the extraordinary impact on French Jewry of the arrival of North African *Sephardim*.

The tragic fate of the Greek community is evoked by Maria Vassilikou in her study of the history of the Salonika Cemetery, a potent reflection of their changing political fortunes this century.

Missing is a direct study of the Sephardi experience in Israel, which has been the subject of considerable re-evaluation in recent years. A curious sidelight on it however can be found in Daniel Dayan's extraordinary presentation of Ygal Bursztyn's book *Face, Battlefield*. The theme is the 'facelessness' of actors in the early Hebrew and Israeli cinema, an art form caught between the different demands of aesthetics and political ideology. The breakthrough into films with real 'faces' comes precisely in the depiction of Sephardi immigrants, albeit conventional caricatures. (I am grateful to Séverine Haziza for translating this piece from the French.)

Before completing the issue with poetry and book reviews, we step out of our theme briefly to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Paul Celan. Albert Friedlander's overview of his writings introduces new translations of two of his poems by Harold Teichman and a poem in memoriam by Esther Cameron.

The Editors wish to acknowledge a subsidy from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany for the last issue (99/2).

Jonathan Magonet