

parently are meticulous about the purity of rituals are not so much concerned with purity in their social and religious interaction with other groups. They serve the Badaga in festivals and funerals as ushers and bow their head before a Badaga elder, but not vice versa. The Badaga would not eat in the house of the Toda, while the contrary is the norm. The Toda eat with the Kurumba only on selected occasions such as at the latter's funerals. The Toda give the Kota, who are ranked as inferiors, ghee but not milk or buttermilk or butter whereas the Kota would not accept cooked food from the Toda. All this shows that the purity-impurity concept of Hindu society is far from being applicable to the Toda.

Secondly, the religious practices of the Toda illustrate a different type of principle underlying their life. The Toda perform magic and witchcraft, they are healers, diviners and sorcerers. Their magic is much valued and sought, especially by the Badaga, who although being economically and politically superior, use this as an antidote to the more malevolent powers of the Kurumba. Because of their dependency on the Toda for magical protection and counter-sorcery, they don't want to offend the Toda lest the latter's witchcraft turn against them. Further, the Toda promote the prosperity of the Kota, their crops and cattles, while they themselves fear Kurumba sorcery, although it is sought to remove or prevent misfortune and to heal. All this shows the symbiotic relationship of the Toda with other Nilgiri societies in the religious sphere. This is far from the philosophical purity-impurity concept of the Hindus, and hence is not likely to prove a link between the Toda and Hindu society.

The author tried to cap the hitherto existing studies with "a new look" but the cap does not satisfactorily suit Toda anatomy. All the same the book challenges the reader either to pursue further and to prove the author's claims or to give due credentials to the independent identity and uniqueness of the Toda of South India.

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#### IRAQ

AVISHUR, YITZHAK. *Women's Folk Songs in Judaeo-Arabic from Jews in Iraq. Studies in the History and Culture of Iraqi Jewry, no. 4. Or Yehuda/Israel: Iraqi Jews' Traditional Culture Center, Institute for Research on Iraqi Jewry, 1987. xxii+244 pages. Bibliography, plates, English summary. (In Hebrew)*

The study of folk culture which began in the nineteenth century in Europe and whose achievements were considerable, did not achieve the same functional continuity and organic development amongst the Jews. The collection of material, the stage which precedes research and systematization, is one of the essential elements in the study of folk culture. The documentation of folklore—both verbal and from scant written sources—is a task whose essentialness and urgency has been much discussed. The situation today is such that any contribution in this direction, both about eastern European Jewish groups and about those from Asia and Africa, is significant.

Avishur has spoken out on more than one occasion about the situation of the folk literature of the Jews of Iraq and one can only praise him for his efforts to make a meaningful contribution to this field. His study, presented to the scientific community and to those interested in the study of the traditions of Jewish ethnic groups, is

without doubt a major landmark. It is a fundamental book, absorbing and profound, which reveals many hitherto unknown sides of the popular culture of the Jews of Iraq.

The publication of a folklore study with a different approach and written by a distinguished scholar, whose main field of research is not necessarily folklore, is to the good fortune of folklore researchers and introduces a breath of fresh air to the field. The present book is such a case. Avishur, known for his research on the Bible and on ancient Semitic cultures, remains, however, bogged down to text and word. Instead of dealing with "Women's Songs" as a type of tradition, in effect he deals only with a few women's songs, while discussing a number of versions for each song treated. The loss in lateral width that results from his not presenting additional existing texts is balanced, however, by an absorbing depth which probes the chronological and textual limits for each song and its versions.

Central to this study is the conceptual problem of its layout. Four folksongs are presented here in twenty-three parallel versions with the addition of two further versions given in annexes 1 and 2. The question as to whether the researcher is correct in confining himself to four songs with the addition of parallels, when he could have offered close to thirty different songs, is of course a matter of personal choice and of taste. However, Avishur's statement that he deals with "... a vast treasury of songs. In the nineteenth century alone thousands of them were written down, and a much larger quantity still remain in the memories of elder members of the community. A literary treasury of such a wide scope as this, unparalleled in any Jewish community..." is very premature at this stage, since the treasury has not yet been revealed in its entirety, with the exception of certain primary works. H. Zafrani's enlightening studies on Jewish secular and liturgical poetry of North Africa and recently the work of J. Chetrit of Haifa, testify to a rich and extensive folk literature also in North Africa, part of which has been written down in several manuscripts.

The book is divided into five parts: The first part is on "Cradle Songs" and the second on "Songs for Young Children." The third part, the most comprehensive from the point of view of the presentation of various songs, relates to "Wedding Songs." The fourth part comprises "Songs for the Ziyara" (pilgrimage songs) and the fifth part is on "Lamentations and Dirges." These songs loyally represent the main stations in the life cycle from the cradle to the grave, although no doubt there are yet many other subjects to which the folksongs give expression. The cradle songs presented by the author are an exceptional and invaluable contribution to this still meagre genre. The lack of cradle songs is apparent in all Jewish ethnic groups, and therefore any contribution to this category is a blessing.

The presentation of a number of versions registered already in the nineteenth century in different manuscripts and their comparison to parallel versions recorded in recent years, opens new horizons for detailed studies in different areas. The researcher's precision and his expertise in the field of linguistics guarantee the production of a reliable text. The difficulty in interpreting the meanings of some words and expressions, as evidenced throughout this study, is further proof of the urgent need and indispensability of such a work.

Avishur's study of women's folk songs among the Jews of Iraq belongs to a type of study which is never outdated. The author's reliance on a song and its different versions, gathered both from manuscripts and from the oral tradition, opens new horizons, whose meanings are yet difficult to fathom. There is no doubt that this book will provide the basis for additional studies in the fields of folklore, popular literature, linguistics and so on. The many and varied subjects addressed by the texts, such as the mention of different names, many customs and beliefs, curses, garments,

jewellery, magic numbers, names of animals and so forth, call for the preparation of a detailed index. In the reviewer's opinion, such an index would certainly have made the book more easily accessible to those wishing to make specific use of it.

Throughout, we recognise the author's precise approach to the presentation of the text, a balance between the different versions, his explanations for each group and for the principal poetic structure, as well as a short but essential interpretation of names and customs. His remarks about parallel material in the Moslem culture are useful and testify to an often surprising cultural interaction. Lamentation no. 80 in particular, which the informant claims that she heard from a Moslem mourner, proves to what extent this factor should be taken into account.

The addition of musical notes to the songs and the correction of printing errors, together with a graphic improvement of the printed layout, would give an additional attractive quality to the next edition, which is certain to be forthcoming.

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JASON, HEDA. *Folktales of the Jews of Iraq. Tale-Types and Genres*. With a contribution on the folktale in written sources by Yitzhak Avishur. Studies in the History and Culture of Iraqi Jewry, no. 5. Or Yehuda/Israel: Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, 1988. 145+37 pages. Bibliography, Hebrew section.

On the surface Jason's book seems to be another regional index of folktales, but in fact it is much more than that. The book is centered around two main sections, the first of which is an index of the tale-types of Jewish-Iraqi folktales collected in Israel between 1957 and 1983, and stored in the *Israel Folktale Archives* (IFA). This follows well-established paths of the study of folklore—the tale-type classification. The second section is the "Index of Ethnopoetic Genres," which includes definition and classification of the folktale genres developed by the author and which is new and of considerable theoretical interest.

Before approaching the main section of the book, we have to consider two introductions to it. The first, by the author, attempts to describe the history of the folk literature of Iraqi Jews as an outcome of their history and culture. This introduction hardly adds anything to our knowledge of the Jewish-Iraqi community beyond that which could be obtained from a survey in any good encyclopedia. There are also some errors: "As to Iraq, not even a single work of entertainment literature is known with certainty to have been compiled by Jews in Iraq proper until the 19th century. Whatever Jewish entertainment literature was read in Iraq, was composed in other countries" (13-14). This assumption contradicts all we know about the beginning of Hebrew narrative in the Middle Ages, and the central place occupied by Babylon (Iraq) in this process. In this context, one need only mention such early folktale compilations as the *Midrash of the Ten Commandments* and the *Alphabet of Ben-Sira* (DAN 1974, 1-32; YASSIF 1986). And it is hardly correct to say, "The [Babylonian] Talmud . . . carries some *belles lettres*, in which some folktales of various genres . . ." (14). The hundreds of tales included in the Babylonian Talmud and Midrashic literature make up one of the largest and most important corpus of folktales in late antiquity. The variety of its genres, themes and contexts do not deserve the description of "some