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RESEARCH ON THE MODERN NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST IN ISRAEL

(History and the social sciences)

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The aim of these brief remarks is to describe and analyze some of the research, recently conducted in Israel, on the modern Near and Middle East. The area under consideration extends from the Maghrib to Turkey and Persia. The examples for this outline are derived primarily from the fields of history and the social sciences — for the sake of brevity — even though research is being carried out in Israel which concerns Arabic and Islamic literature, philology, philosophy, art and music as well.

Research in the above fields is carried out, in the main, at three Universities, although some lectures are occasionally held at the Israel Academy of Sciences and other institutions. These three Universities include the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv University, and Bar-Ilan University in Ramat-Gan (near Tel-Aviv). Obviously, research in all three is related, at least partly, to teaching. Therefore, it is perhaps advisable to start with a brief description of the instruction on the Near and Middle East at these institutions.

a. The Hebrew University, which inaugurated its first courses over forty years ago, is the oldest academic institution in the country as well as the largest, with a student body numbering 4 Israel has to show but little original work on the Maghrib (except for its Jewish communities); therefore, for practical purposes, the area might have been better defined as "stretching from Egypt to Turkey and Persia."
over 12,000. A great advantage lies in the fact that the National library, containing about a million and a half volumes, is situated on the University Campus and serves its lecturers and students. The Hebrew University offers a wide range of courses on the Near and Middle East, leading to B. A., M. A., and Ph. D. degrees. This area is also studied, less intensively, at the extension-courses of the Hebrew University in Tel-Aviv, Haifa and Be'er-Sheba.

b. Tel-Aviv University is younger - only eleven years old; it now has an enrolment of approximately 6,000 students. Almost from its inception, attention was given to the organization and development of a department of Middle Eastern studies, which, in addition to courses in Arabic and Turkish, has a complete curriculum of studies in the medieval and modern history of the Arab East. Supplementary lessons in this area are given in the departments of political science and economics.

c. Bar-Ilan University, also founded eleven years ago, has an enrolment of over 2,600 students. In contrast to the two other universities, it was conceived as an orthodox institution of higher learning, intended to afford its students extensive knowledge in Jewish subjects, in addition to the humanities or sciences. Bar-Ilan University does not have as yet a special department of Middle-Eastern Studies, but in its departments of Arabic literature, history, and other disciplines, various courses are offered on the Islamic world, medieval and modern.

Obviously, at least part of the research undertaken at these three universities is conditioned by the general character of each of these institutions and by the courses actually offered. Tel-Aviv University, with its stress on the modern Middle East, carries out group-research on the Arab States in its «Shiloah Research Center», which has already published, in English, two large volumes of detailed analysis on *The Middle East 1960* (1962) and *The Middle East 1961* (1966). Bar-Ilan University, with its emphasis on Judaic studies, founded the «Rivlin Institute», (director: H. Z. Hirschberg) which has issued, in Hebrew, a number of books investigating Jewish communities in Middle Eastern countries, their history and life during the last two centuries.
The bulk of Israeli research on the modern Near and Middle East is connected with the Hebrew University. Some of its teachers are engaged in analyzing in depth various aspects pertaining to the State of Israel itself, exploiting the unique opportunities for research offered by a new State, still working out tentative answers to the nature of its political identity and social characteristics: various research projects have been published by Hebrew University political scientists, chiefly in Hebrew and English, on Israeli political parties (B. Akzin), parliamentary elections (E. Guttman), and national planning (B. Akzin & Y. Dror). Several members of the Political Science Department contributed to a book in German on modern Israel (ed. by J.M. Landau). The University's sociologists (chiefly S.N. Eisenstadt and J. Ben-David), have systematically evaluated Israel as a melting-pot for various groups, and have examined the absorption of immigrants as well as the social tensions arising therefrom. Its economists (headed by D. Patinkin) have analyzed economic change in Israel.

Despite the natural attraction which the new experiments in Israel exert on many historians and social scientists, a number of these scholars concern themselves objectively with neighboring States. In this area, some long-range projects are conducted at the Hebrew University — though not under the aegis of the social sciences — examples of these are a complete edition of al-Baladhuri's *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, the Concordance of early Arabic poetry, an encyclopaedic dictionary of modern literary Arabic and, more recently, studies in Islamic art in the newly-founded L. A. Mayer Institute for Islamic art and archeology.

More related to the subject of this paper, however, are those research projects undertaken at the Hebrew University within the areas of history and the social sciences. Only a brief survey is possible here. The Ben-Zvi Institute for Research on Jewish Communities in the East has sponsored the publication of important monographs on Jewish communities in various Islamic countries. Its annual, *Sefūnāt*, is the forum for original articles

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and manuscript materials relating to this field. Even more intensive research on Islamic and Arabic affairs is carried out at the University's Institute of Asian and African Studies. It is in this Institute that the activities of the Israel Oriental Society are chiefly centered. This society is a non-political body engaged in research on and dissemination of information about the Near and Middle East. It publishes a quarterly in Hebrew, Hamizrah Haḥadash (= The New East) and an annual in English, Asian and African Studies (both edited by G. Baer). Both journals treat of the modern and contemporary East. A series of monographs also published by the Israel Oriental Society, the Notes and Studies, devote more special attention to separate subjects in history, linguistics and art. The editorial committee for this series includes D. Ayalon, U. Heyd and H. J. Polotsky.

A number of studies by Hebrew University staff have appeared in the above journals and monographs. In addition, some of their lecture-courses have been printed by the Students' Association. Although the latter serve mainly as textbooks, they often contain original and provocative expositions of ideas or new facts. However, all this reflects only a part of Orientalist research. Israeli Orientalists and others interested in related subjects also publish books abroad, as well as articles in the specialized journals in Europe and the U.S.A. Furthermore, Israeli periodicals, in various degrees of specialization, increasingly cater to the public interest in the modern Near and Middle East.

There is a constant flow of books and articles about the Near and Middle East by non-University people, too. Various encyclopaedias contain articles on this area — on the Social Sciences, Education, Literature, etc. Then, the larger political parties have their own publishing-enterprises. This applies, mainly, to the workers' parties, which invest considerable effort in issuing books reflecting their ideologies. A part of these publications is concerned with the modern and contemporary state of the Arab countries. While some of these are rather journalistic in style, others are of high quality, such as Y. Shim‘oni's Hebrew textbook The Arab States, their Contemporary History and Politics (1965). In particular, the «Workers' Library» (organ of the MAPAM Party) has issued, in Hebrew, some valuable books in this field: a 3-vol. history of the Arab East by A. Cohen, and
the more recent works on *Arab socialism* by A. Ben-Tzūr and *The officer class in the politics and society of the Arab East*, by E. Be'eri, both issued in 1966 (all three works are interesting and lucid, but, it must be noted, based on a Marxist approach).

The spate of new publications on the Near and Middle East has been encouraged by public interest in Israel in this area. In addition, inherited habits of reading and book-buying as status symbols have contributed, in some cases. Hence, also, the tide of translations into Hebrew, not only from the major world languages, but also from Arabic (and, to a lesser extent, from Turkish or Persian). Some of these translations into Hebrew included also works by leading foreign Orientalists (e.g., Ig. Goldziher, B. Lewis), economists (e.g., Ch. Issawi's *Egypt in revolution*), or analysts of current affairs in the area (e.g., R. St. John's book on 'Abd al-Nāṣir).

Translations from Arabic into Hebrew and vice versa are given an additional stimulus by the fact that Israel is in fact a bilingual State. Although Hebrew is preponderant as the language of the 2,500,000 Jewish majority, Arabic as the language of the 300,000 Arab minority is assured of its status by law and practice. Not only are all paper-currency, coinage, stamps and seals written in Hebrew and Arabic; all laws, decrees, etc., have to appear in both languages; debates in Israel's Parliament, the Kneset, are held in either Hebrew or Arabic, with simultaneous translation; and instruction in all Arab schools in wholly in Arabic, with Hebrew and English taught in the upper grades as foreign languages only.

Hence, an increasing number of books in Arabic, original or translated, have appeared in recent years. Many of these are concerned with history or current affairs in Israel and the Arab States. Articles in the various Arabic periodicals published in Israel show as much interest in these subjects as their Hebrew counterparts. Among the factors encouraging Israeli research on the Near and Middle East is the number of institutions in which this subject of research is pursued (relatively a large number, compared to the State's small population), the competition arising therefrom, and the long tradition of scholarship, brought over by immigrants from Europe and elsewhere. An added factor, Israel's locality, is not necessarily a contri-
butory one. Indeed, since Israel itself is situated in the area under discussion, some scholars fear they may sometimes lose the proper perspective; furthermore, the lack of direct contact with the Arab centers of learning and their source-materials limits the choice of subjects for Israeli scholars interested in the past, a fortiori in the present. Hence, a number of Israeli historians and social scientists have recently been transferring their attention to the non-Arab countries of the area and to Africa.