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by Gabriel Tamman (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2021), 206 pp. £18.99 (paperback). ISBN 978-19-12676-80-4

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The history of the Jews of modern Egypt has been the object of studies that on the one hand investigated the formation and consolidation of this diaspora in colonial and monarchic times, for example Jacob Landau's *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (1969), Gudrun Krämer's *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914-1952* (1989) and Dario Miccoli's *Histories of the Jews of Egypt: An Imagined Bourgeoisie, 1880s-1950s* (2015), and that on the other analyzed its demise and the memories that its members and their descendants have of the so-called 'cosmopolitan Egypt' – like *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry* (1998) by Joel Beinin and more recent research by Michèle Baussant, Liat Magid-Alon and other scholars. In addition to academic research, dozens of memoirs, autobiographies and novels have been published over the last decades in languages as different as English, Hebrew, French and Italian: from Andre Aciman's *Out of Egypt* (1994) and Ronit Matalon's *Zeh 'im ha-panim 'eleinu* ('The One Facing Us', 1995) to Carole Naggar's *Egypte, retour* (2007) and Daniel Fishman's *Il chilometro d'oro* (2006).

Gabriel Tamman's *Exodus Too: The Story of an Ordinary Egyptian Jewish Family in Extraordinary Times* combines historical reflections and personal memories, inscribing the life of the author – who was born in Cairo in 1932 and died in Geneva in 2021, only a few months before the publication of the book – in the history of the Jews of Egypt. Tamman is not the first to do so: a similar approach can be found in two early examples of Egyptian Jewish autobiographies – Maurice Mizrahi's *L'Égypte et ses Juifs: le temps révolu* (1977) and Yahudiya Masriya (Bat Ye'or)'s *Les Juifs en Égypte: aperçu sur 3000 ans d'histoire* (1971). On the other hand, the majority of the autobiographies and memoirs – like that of Naggar or the more recent *Souvenirs doux amers du pays perdu* (2018) of Andre Cohen – do not aim to give a general insight on the history of this Jewish diaspora or of Egypt and are based on the author's personal recollections.

Tamman's work is divided into eight chapters. It begins with an overview of pre-modern Egyptian Jewish history, then presents the life of the author and describes his family background that, as it is very often the case for the Jews of Cairo and Alexandria, reveals a history of migration from the Middle East and the Mediterranean region to Egypt. In Tamman's case, his paternal family came from Italy and his mother's family from Iraq. The author discusses his life during the interwar years and during the Second World War, up to the post-war period, the Suez crisis (1956) and finally the mass departure of the Jews for Israel or countries in the Diaspora. He recalls the development of the Zionist movement in Cairo, as the monographs *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970: In the Midst of Zionism, Anti-Semitism, and the Middle East* (1992) of Michael Laskier and *Tziyonut be-tzel ha-piramidot* ('Zionism under the shadow of the Pyramids', 2010) of Ruth Kimhe carefully showed. Finally, Tamman explains that after 1948 he was arrested for Zionist activities and at around the same time his parents decided to migrate to Khartoum, Sudan – where a small Jewish community, mainly of Egyptian origin, had come into existence from the early twentieth century. The final chapter focuses on the author's choice not to migrate to Israel but first to West Africa and then to Switzerland. Tamman also describes different kinds of initiatives undertaken in Israel and in the Diaspora – to which, in some cases, he contributed – to preserve the Middle Eastern Jewish heritage. The book ends with the reprint of interviews of eight Jews born in Egypt, originally published in the booklet *Out of Egypt* by the Congregation Shearith Israel of New York in 2019.

The author based *Exodus Too* on the most important books published on the history and culture of the Jews of Egypt, interspersing the information derived from them with his own memories of life in Cairo. Thus, whereas the historical sections do not offer new information and only re-elaborate previous research, the autobiographical pages constitute a first-hand

account of Egyptian Jewish family life in the interwar years and during the 1950s. It would have been interesting to read more about the author's life in West Africa and in Switzerland, but unfortunately – as it is almost always the case in this kind of work – the post-migration years are not given much space. Tamman instead discusses with frankness the ambivalences of Israeli society and the state apparatus – especially in the 1950s and 1960s – vis-à-vis the *Mizrahim* and how the history of the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa still waits the recognition that it deserves.

Tamman, who is also the author of the semi-autobiographical novels *Talisman* (2011) and *Raphael* (2018), wrote this book because – as one reads in the website *Exodustoo.com* – he wanted 'to publicise the history of the Jews of Egypt and to bring this story, with a personal touch supported by rigorous academic research, to a general readership'.¹ In comparison to other similar works, *Exodus Too* is quite historically accurate and gives a balanced overview of contemporary Egyptian Jewish history. However, this kind of book forces historians to ask if the proliferation of memoirs, autobiographies and memorial literature more generally is really improving our knowledge of a subject that – as opposed to what is perhaps too often argued – is by now well-researched. In fact, these texts often reiterate a similar narrative and highlight the same aspects and events to the detriment of others: as I said above, the focus is almost only on the 1940s and 1950s and the post-migration years are rarely or very briefly described. Nonetheless, they are an important source that allows us to get a glimpse of Egyptian Jewish ordinary life and episodes.

For this reason, and as someone who, over the last years, has read dozens of Egyptian Jewish autobiographies, memoirs and novels, Tamman's work also made me think of what will happen once the last witness of this history has gone. Will we be left with literary fiction by second or third generation Egyptian Jews, like Orly Castel-Bloom's *Ha-roman ha-mitzri* ('The Egyptian novel', 2016) or Moshe Sakal's *Yolandah* (2011)? In this perspective, an increased role should be played by museums and heritage centres, by historical exhibitions – like *Juifs d'Orient: une histoire plurimillénaire*, hosted at the Paris-based *Institut du monde arabe* in early 2022 – and by forms of research-creation like a podcast, a documentary or an interactive website. By combining all these archival and non-archival sources, we will perhaps bridge the gap that often exists between purely academic research and popular knowledge when it comes to the modern history of the Jews of Egypt and, more generally, of the Middle East and North Africa.

Note

1. 'About the Author: Gabriel Tamman', *Exodus Too*, available at: <http://exodustoo.com> (accessed 30 December 2021).

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