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SCHOOLING IN THE *BLED*: JEWISH EDUCATION AND THE *ALLIANCE ISRAÉLITE UNIVERSELLE* IN SOUTHERN RURAL MOROCCO, 1830-1962

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In 1860, the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) was founded in Paris. As an international Jewish organization, the AIU stressed as its central mission: the emancipation of Middle Eastern and North African Jewries through western and modern education.¹ Its European leadership tried to revive the Talmudic belief that Jews are responsible for one another. Oriental Jews were the main target of the AIU movement of Jewish regeneration. Regeneration implied a moral, political and intellectual deficit of Oriental Jews compared with their French and European counterparts. The role of the AIU became a mission of the emancipated European Jews to help those they considered their backward Oriental brethren. Seen as primitive, the Jewish communities of the Orient “had to transform themselves into enlightened, modern citizens, abandoning their particularistic habits and attitudes.”² This belief in international Jewish solidarity led to the opening of the first school of the AIU in the northern city of Tétouan in 1862. Later, other schools, mainly for boys, were set up in major urban areas such as Tangier (1864), Mogador (Essaouira) (1875), Fez (1883) and Casablanca (1897).

This article explores the reasons behind the late introduction of modern schools in southern Moroccan communities by the AIU. I contend that in its early stages the leaders of the AIU in Paris never pushed for spreading their educational mission to Jewish communities in southern tribal hamlets. This was due to the fact that French colonial authorities were not able to control the south until the early 1930s. In addition, and despite the French colonial “pacification” of *bled siba* (areas outside government control), the French maintained an indirect rule in the south leaving its political and economic management to local tribal allies.³ The establishment of the AIU schools in villages around southern Morocco such as Akka, Goulmim, Ighil n’Oghol, Tinghir and Taznakht did not take place until the late 1940s. Apart from the economic and political conditions, the expansion was due to the efforts of certain AIU graduates with family roots in Morocco’s *bled* who believed in the power of education as a means of economic and social mobility, especially given the hard economic and political realities of the late 1940s.

Rethinking Jewish Education in Morocco's Hinterland through Social Biography

In its early periods, the AIU limited its schools to urban areas and especially to communities along the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts. Moroccan rural areas and hinterlands, known as the *bled*, were not a primary target of the AIU early programs, leaving Jewish children's education in Morocco's hinterland in the hands of local rabbis. I look at the Jewish educational changes and continuities in Morocco's hinterland from the perspective of the social biographies of two ordinary Jewish individuals whose lives represent the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial phases of this history. In the absence of historical material on Jewish education in southwestern Morocco, the biographies of Mardochee Aby Serour and Elias Harrus shed light on how these southern Jews responded to local and colonial educational policies, challenges and opportunities.⁴ Although I use the lives of Aby Serour and Harrus to discuss the quotidian developments in Jewish education in southern Morocco, we should not be misled into believing that their lives were ordinary. As Burke and Yaghoubian commented, "the very fact that enough information exists about [certain ordinary individuals] to make possible a brief biography makes them, by definition, extraordinary."⁵ Like the individuals discussed in Burke and Yaghoubian's edited work, both Aby Serour and Harrus "were of humble origins and later moved up in the social pecking order."⁶ Through the life stories of Aby Serour and Harrus, I look at Jewish education in the *bled* before and after the AIU arrived in Morocco from 1830 to 1962.

There are a few studies on the history of the AIU schools and their interaction with local Jewish authorities and communities.⁷ For instance, Aron Rodrigue researched the local school of the AIU in Demotica, a Thracian town, between 1897 and 1924.⁸ Rodrigue argued that local studies "are of crucial importance for understanding the mechanics of the transmission of culture and ideology that characterized the process of Westernization."⁹ In this article, I build on Rodrigue's call for rewriting the histories of AIU schooling in areas outside major urban centers. This article focuses on two hamlets in southern Morocco, namely Akka and Goulmim, by using the personal communications of teachers and directors of the AIU schools (Charles Bitton and Elias Harrus) with the AIU delegate in Casablanca. This work is based on ethnographic data collected from Muslim and Jewish informants in southern Morocco.¹⁰ It is also informed by archival material from the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris. The archival documents include personal communications between teachers and the AIU directors, as well as accounting statements. In the absence of written documents kept by these communities, the AIU archives provide us with enough material to rethink the educational politics of southern Moroccan Jewry in the years preceding the Jewish migration from the region towards Israel. This combination of biographical material, ethnographic data and archival sources allow us to reconstruct not only the AIU schooling, but also history of Jewish education in southern Morocco. I will first describe the social, political and economic context of Jewish society in southern rural Morocco. Second, I will use the social biography of Aby Serour to cast a new light on the

traditional Jewish education in the *bled* before the AIU. Finally, I will discuss the AIU educational policies through the life story of Harrus.

Under Tribal Protection and Rule: Jewish Society in Southern Morocco

In the middle of the twentieth century, more than two hundred Jewish quarters existed throughout the oases of southern Morocco.¹¹ These communities were geographically distributed along trading routes that linked rural settlements throughout the regions of Sous, Dr'a and Ziz. In the early twentieth century, Nahum Slouschz observed that Jews formed an important part of the population of southern Morocco. He noted that "in certain villages they form a third and in others even a majority of the population."¹² Their primary economic occupation was peddling. They bought local products such as oil, nuts, almonds and cereals from the natives.¹³ Although Jews and Muslims interacted in many forms and shapes within these villages, Jewish-Muslim relations were strongest in the marketplace, so much so that a proverb went "a market without Jews is like bread without salt."¹⁴ As tribes fought each other, Jews were their economic mediators. Slouschz remarked, "no one knows the country or its people better than they do."¹⁵ Their knowledge of local Arabic and Berber dialects also facilitated their role as economic mediators.

In addition, the social status of Jews as *dhimmi* (protected people) provided them with a special role within the southern tribal society, which defined both their position as outsiders of the political system and insiders of the marketplace. Social boundaries and the inferior legal status of Jews in these Muslim communities implied mutual suspicion and contempt. Under Islamic jurisprudence, Muslim sultans protected Jews in areas under their control, provided they paid the *jizya* (a special tax). However, the *Makhzan* (see endnote 3) was able to ensure Jewish peddlers and merchants' security only in limited areas. In southern Morocco, the *Makhzan* could offer little protection. Henceforth, Jews were forced to pay a tribute to tribesmen known as *zattata* to ensure their safe passage.

They traveled the countryside and maintained contact with different tribes. However, the lack of security in this part of Morocco forced Jewish merchants to seek protection from tribal chieftains to guarantee the safety of their business, and each Jew had a Muslim protector. It was through a network of patron-client relations that Jewish peddlers were generally able to travel unmolested through southern Morocco.¹⁶ A 'friendly' relationship was generally established between Muslim and Jew by ritual slaughter (*dabiha*) of a sheep by the Jew before a Berber or Arab patron of power. The patron had to have an influence in the community to assure his client's protection. The patronage and clientage were generally hereditary. Edward Westermarck pointed out that:

The 'ar [shame] is of great boon to strangers, especially in those parts of the country where the Government has no power. Among the Berbers, if a person wants to settle down in a strange tribe, he makes an 'ar-sacrifice outside the house or tent of a native, who then becomes his protector, or at the entrance of the mosque of the village, in which case he becomes the protégé of the whole village.¹⁷

In addition to peddling, other Jews were specialized metal-workers and artisans such as saddle makers, tin smiths, carpenters and jewelers. These occupations also reinforced the status of Jews as essential players in the local economy. Arab and Berber populations survived on agriculture. Jewish artisan skills were needed in this part of Morocco to maintain agricultural activities.¹⁸ A few engaged directly and indirectly in farming activities.¹⁹ In his study of the Jewish communities of the south during the 1950s, Pierre Flamand referred to these Jewish settlements as “chains of *mellahs* (Jewish neighborhoods).”²⁰ Throughout southern Morocco, a day’s walk or a mule’s ride separated these *mellahs*. Peddlers spent the week moving around Berber and Arab villages and small towns bartering their commodities before returning to spend the Sabbath with their families.²¹

In 1948, about 20,000 Jews lived in villages around the Atlas Mountains region of Morocco.²² These Jewish communities resided in Berber and Arab tribal communities. They lived in separate neighborhoods within the *ksours* (walled villages) of the Atlas Mountains and on their slopes. Some villages included no more than a few dozen families. Others housed larger Jewish communities ranging between 100 and 600 individuals. The majority of the members of these Jewish communities had little contact with areas outside the region. Unlike the Jewish communities of Tangiers, Casablanca and Essaouira, these communities remained essentially closed to any European influence.

In 1916, Slouschz was invited by Marshal Hubert Lyautey, the first French resident-general of French Morocco (1912-1925) to prepare a detailed study on the Jews of Morocco. The objective of his study was to reorganize the Jewish communities in order to set up new laws and regulations that managed their local councils throughout Morocco. Slouschz traveled throughout Morocco and visited many Jewish communities, including some southern communities. He noted that his travels in the Moroccan interior were successful “thanks to the effects of the [French] occupation of Marrakesh.”²³ The French presence in neighboring Algeria put European travellers in danger when they entered Moroccan areas outside the control of the *Makhzan*. The French occupation of Marrakesh, the southern capital, and their policy towards tribal lords signalled the beginning of a new phase in the history of the regions outside the central government control.

As the French succeeded in their gradual pacification of the south, a few Jews applied for French protégé status for fear of losing local tribal support. The Jewish communities of the *bled* continued to fall under the protection of tribal lords and local individuals. The French administrators left the political and economic management of the South in the hands of tribal Grand *caids* (lords) known as the lords of the Atlas, specifically Si Abdelmalek M’Tougi, Si Taieb Goundafi, and, above all, Thami Glaoui.²⁴ The use of the Great *Caids* was for the subjugation of the dissidents. Therefore, Lyautey and his followers opted for a policy of indirect rule in the lands under the management of these lords, deferring to local *caids* on issues relating to local Jews. For instance, in Telouet, a village under the control of Thami Glaoui, Slouschz reported that:

If the Kaid of Teluet happens to be at odds with any particular tribe, he makes it a habit to clap into prison any merchant unlucky enough to come to Marrakesh while the feud lasts. In fact, at the time of my arrival in Teluet, there were ten Jewish merchants from Askura who had been imprisoned because their Muslim patrons had refused to recognize the authority of the Kaid of Teluet.²⁵

Unlike the Jewish quarters of the major urban cities such as Fez and Marrakesh, the mellahs of the southern hamlets such as Goulmim and Akka were part of the walled village. The spatial proximity between Muslim and Jewish households reinforced social and cultural warmth despite the religious differences. Nevertheless, the relative isolation of Jews from the daily affairs of the Muslims permitted the Jews to live as prescribed by Jewish law. Social life was conducted in accordance with the prescription of rabbinical Judaism, where the seventh day of the week (Shabbat) was reserved for prayer. Like the Jews of Yemen, the Jews of the Moroccan rural south led a social and economic life according to the precepts of the rabbis (locally referred to as *Rebbi*). As S. D. Goitein put it, the world of Jewish community of Yemen “center[ed] around the synagogue, where simple people, craftsmen and labourers, are versed in religious lore and are able to follow arguments based on the Scriptures.”²⁶ Religion played a major role in dictating the procedures of marriage, circumcision, death and other communal festivals and cycles of life. Like Muslims, the Jews of the south stressed the importance of religious education and literacy in Hebrew and the Torah.

In the next section, I highlight the dynamics of this internal structure in terms of traditional Jewish education, its prerogatives, and characteristics before I discuss the AIU schooling in this region. In my discussion of Jewish education in the *bled* before and after the AIU, I focus on the dynamics of traditional and modern education by using the individual cases of Mardochee Aby Serour and Elias Harrus. Aby Serour was a local Jew from Akka southwestern Morocco who started as a student in the local *heder*²⁷ and finished as an ordained rabbi in Jerusalem. Harrus grew up as a successful child from Beni Mellal who eventually became head of the entire Alliance network in Morocco. Both Aby Serour and Harrus had relationships with the AIU.

Jewish Education in the *Bled* before the AIU

During my ethnographic research in southern Morocco on Muslims' memories of former Jewish communities, I collected a number of stories and narratives about Jewish and Muslim perspectives and experiences regarding education.²⁸ I was partly interested in how educational background influences and transforms generational memories of Muslims about Jews no longer present in the region. I was struck by my Muslim informants' emphasis on the differences and similarities between Jews and Muslims in terms of their response to the introduction of modern French and Jewish schooling in the region. Haddi, one of my oldest informants, said:

When the French built the primary school in my oasis, we were asked by our religious authorities to stay away from this polytheistic institution and

encouraged to attend Qur'anic schools only. On the contrary, Jews, although they were reticent at the beginning, they ended up sending their children to both traditional religious and French schools. They studied French, Hebrew, and Arabic. They were able to attend French schools and became teachers and doctors. Just last year, I met one of them who now works as a doctor in France during his visit to their local neighborhood in the village.²⁹

Many of my Muslim and Jewish informants noted that Jews strongly believed in their traditional education and saw the synagogue as an important institution in their daily lives. Masoud Sarraf, a Jew from Akka, southwestern Morocco, informed me during my ethnographic study of southern Moroccan Jewry:

The synagogue and *sla* (traditional school) were the most important social institutions for the Jews of the bled. The synagogue fulfilled its service function as the house of worship. The *sla* ensured that children could read and write and respect their traditions, elders, and the moral structures of the community.

Sarraf, a descendent of a family of rabbis in Akka, highlighted the importance of education within these traditional Jewish communities. Education was closely linked to the synagogue, where Jewish boys were tutored by local rabbis. Therefore, similar to what Goitein discovered in his research on Yemeni Jews, education in southern Morocco communities was “carried out *within* the synagogue, *by* the synagogue and *for* the synagogue [Italics are Goitein’s].”³⁰ This emphasis on religious education started to decrease in the late 1940s. Jews started to become open to modern education for their children in the early 1950s. My Muslim informants argued that Jews had a more positive attitude towards French schools in the region compared to Muslims who stressed the importance of Qur'anic education.³¹ According to another Muslim informant:

Before the French arrival to the southern region, villagers sent their children to the local mosque to learn the Qur'an.... Only a handful of families could train scholars who later became local judges and respected men in the region. They could read and write; they were nominated by the sultans of Morocco as our local judges. As for Jews, they had their own schools too and we never went to school together until the French arrived. Many of them were like us; only some of them could further their schooling in Marrakesh. Nevertheless, after the Alliance arrived they became much more interested in sending their children to the modern schools instead of the synagogue.

The openness of local Jews towards the AIU schools was the result of the economic and political crises following World War II, and the awareness of local Jewish elders and parents of the importance of modern education to improve the conditions of their disadvantaged children. For this reason, by the late 1940s the AIU administration succeeded in setting up schools throughout southern Morocco without encountering strong resistance. The AIU leaders managed to obtain the permission and moral blessing, as well as financial support of local rabbis and parents. In order to understand this educational change in the early 1950s, we need to describe the state of education in south-

ern Morocco before the arrival of the AIU schools. To provide a general idea about the nature of this education, it is important to describe the relationship of the southern hamlets with the capital of southern Morocco, Marrakesh.

While the AIU managed to gain ground in coastal towns, Marrakesh, the capital of the south (also known in colonial literature as the city of Morocco or Maghreb), resisted the implementation of its educational programs. In the early 1900s, Eugène Aubin made this observation about southern Jews in general and the Jews of Marrakesh in particular:

In the Maghreb [Marrakesh] the orthodoxy of the Jews is as strict and conservative as of the Mohammedans. Religious forms are observed with the most fanatical ardour.... This uncompromising religious attitude makes the Moroccan Jews as suspicious of Christians as they are of the Jews of other countries. The foreigner is looked upon, in the Mellahs as in the Medinas, with no kindly eye, and is forbidden to enter the synagogue, as he is forbidden to enter the mosque.³²

In her study of the historical patterns of Jewish-Muslim relations in Marrakesh, Emily Gottreich noted that the mistrustful attitude of these Jewish communities toward outsiders (including Jews) "helps explain the great difficulty experienced by the A.I.U. in gaining a foothold in the southern capital."³³ Maurice Périgny described the situation of Jewish education in the *mellah* of Marrakesh as based solely on rote memorization of Torah. He reported that rabbis were:

Responsible for Jewish education based on the unique knowledge of the Talmud and the Bible.... [T]hey gave their lessons in *sellahs*, squalid rooms near the synagogues, sometimes in a wicked corner of the house. In most of these *sellahs*, children were placed there for the simple reason of not interfering with their parents and learning to stay quiet. It was a pathetic spectacle that these poor little beings barely dressed in a shirt, wallowing in soil contaminated with garbage, face-smearred with dust and glanders, while the larger ones, grouped around a schoolmaster dirty and stupid, mumbled their ways with one nasal voice through verses from the Bible by engaging in a continual waddle of the head and chest [my translation].³⁴

European travelers and Jews continued to arrive in Marrakesh in the early periods of the twentieth century and provided accounts and descriptions of education in the city's mellah as backward and in need of reform. In his visit to Marrakesh, Slouschz discussed the state of education in its *mellah*:

There are no proper synagogues in Morocco, and no Talmud Torahs that merit the name. The Kitab (*heder*), or schools, are in dirty, sordid rooms, where the master and the children are all seated on mats, in the midst of indescribable dirt. The Talmud is taught in a Yeshibah under renowned rabbi Azar, but there are very few true scholars in Morocco, although there are gathered here the Jewish youths from all parts of the Atlas for instruction in the Law.³⁵

Despite the local opposition to any outside Jewish and non-Jewish presence, the AIU was able to establish its first school in Marrakesh in 1900 under the director Moïse Levy. European travelers and Jews saw that French education was the only way to improve the wretched condition of the Jews of Marrakesh and the southern Saharan region. In 1916, Slouschz wrote: "The only glimmer of light in this wretched life of the Mellah is brought by the schools of the Alliance and their present director, M. Danon, who has done much to ameliorate social and hygienic conditions."³⁶

Before the French arrived in Morocco, there was no central Jewish educational system or institutions. Education was run through the local religious synagogue and supervised by the rabbi.³⁷ When local Jewish children finished their rudimentary education in the local *heder*, those who excelled and were financially able were sent to the regional *yeshiva* where they finished their training to become rabbis. The *mellah* of Marrakesh housed one of these regional *yeshivot* attended by rural Jews from High Atlas, Anti-Atlas and Sous regions. In all villages, Jewish parents enforced the practice of sending their boys at an early age to memorize the religious texts as part of their socialization. Parents also did their best to send their male children to religious schools in Marrakesh to further their studies and prepare them for becoming rabbis. Women had no access to education, although they were taught Jewish dietary laws and how to maintain the proper religious atmosphere to celebrate Shabbat and other religious festivals and customs. In the next section, I describe this educational relationship between Morocco's hinterland (using Akka as an example) and Marrakesh its center through the story of Mardochee Aby Serour.

Mardochee Aby Serour: The Story of a Jew from a Saharan Oasis

The story of Mardochee Aby Serour, a Jew from Akka in southwestern Morocco, provides an example of the historical relationship between Marrakesh, Jerusalem, and the rural hinterland of southern Morocco in terms of education.³⁸ Known as the guide of Charles de Foucauld during his trip in southern Morocco,³⁹ Mardochee, the fourth child of a jeweler by the name of Ya'ish Aby Serour, was born in the late 1820s in Akka. According to Mardochee, his ancestors were originally from the Sahara. Before his father settled in Akka, he lived in Mhamid El Ghozlan in the lower Dr'a Valley. In his article on the Daggatouns, a tribe of Jewish origin in the Sahara, Mardochee traced his genealogy to Tamantit and the Jews of Touat. He reported:

In our family our ancestors told their children, who taught us, that Tementit was once a capital of Judaism... Between Tementit and El Hamméda there is still today descendents of Jews once expelled from Tementit, we call them Tementilins. They and the inhabitants of El Hamméda have conserved their tradition and their history. My father and his brothers and their father were born in El Hamméda and my father continuously narrated these events to us [my translation].⁴⁰

The events Mardochee referred to here were about the expulsion of the prosperous Jewish community of Touat in 1492 after the *fatwa* (religious opinion) of al-shaykh Muhammad ben ibn al-Karim ibn Muhammad al-Maghili al-Tilimsani.⁴¹

At the age of three, Mardochee was sent to the local rabbi to learn how to read and write Hebrew and get an introduction to Talmudic texts.⁴² After a much-celebrated local success in the *heder*, Mardochee demonstrated an unprecedented intelligence and high level of learning that qualified him to join the yeshiva of Marrakesh. The community saw in his success the birth of a local rabbi and a future leader. At the age of nine he was sent to the rabbinical seminary in Marrakesh where he once again excelled.⁴³

In Marrakesh, Muslim students from neighboring rural villages attended the traditional Islamic *madrasa* of Ibn Yusuf.⁴⁴ Since most of these students came from a poor background, their room and board was provided by religious endowments from local Muslim individuals. Poor Jewish students like Mardochee also benefited from religious endowments reserved for the support of economically disadvantaged students. Rural Jewish students from outside Marrakesh were supported with funds designated for that purpose during the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ The achievement of the highest degree of "*Rebbi*" was a personal, family and community dream, after which the man was eligible to administer the local affairs of the synagogue, teach the local children how to read and write Hebrew, and slaughter animals according to the sacred religious rites.⁴⁶

Mardochee finished his education in the regional yeshiva of Marrakesh. However, his appetite for learning was not satisfied by what he learned from the local scholars in Marrakesh. His desire to further his knowledge in rabbinical scholarship took him to Jerusalem, where a Moroccan community had maintained a link for centuries between North African Jewish societies and the Holy Land.⁴⁷ Rabbis on mission to collect funds for the support of yeshivot in Palestine visited the local Moroccan communities every year. Mardochee's social and economic background would have thwarted his ambition if such local support did not exist. In the company of a rabbi from Palestine, Mardochee left for Jerusalem. His journey took him through Mogador, Tangiers, Gibraltar, Salonica, Constantinople, Izmir, Jaffa and finally Jerusalem. In the Holy Land, aged sixteen, he was introduced to the religious texts under the supervision of famous rabbis. At around twenty-two, he officially became a rabbi.

Instead of going back to Akka to serve his local rural community, Mardochee traveled north to Aleppo, where he taught at a rabbinical school for one year before he decided to return to North Africa following the caravan trade route to Algiers passing through Jerusalem, Cairo, Tripolitania and Tunisia. On the way to French Algeria, he taught Talmudic sciences in Tunis, Constantine, Algiers and Oran. Between 1854 and 1857, while he taught Hebrew in a Talmudic school in Algiers he paid short visits to Ouarghla, Touat and In-Salah, the last trading post in the Algerian desert before heading to Timbuktu. During these trips to the Algerian interior, Mardochee noticed the success of Moroccan and Algerian Jews in their trading enterprise. In Algeria, A French colony, Y. D. Semach observed that Mardochee saw: "Jews in Algeria...were

free.... [and] expressed love for France. He did not want to be Moroccan, but Algerian. He obtained a French passport and as a French protégé he returned back to his country [my translation]".⁴⁸

The relatively improved situation of the Algerian Jews under French colonial authorities had instilled in Aby Serour recognition for France, which he saw as liberating.⁴⁹ Aby Serour returned to Akka and established a trading colony in Timbuktu. The successive raids of Saharan tribes along the dangerous western trading route ultimately ruined his business. Aby Serour's appreciation for colonial French authorities would influence his later decision to work for Auguste Beaumier and also Charles de Foucauld. Beaumier was an Arabist and one of France's ardent believers in intelligence gathering during the nineteenth century. Foucauld traveled through southern Morocco as a rabbi from Palestine between 1882 and 1883. Aby Serour was his main guide.

In 1866, Beaumier heard about a newly established Moroccan Jewish community from Akka in Timbuktu and had been fascinated by the story ever since. France and other European colonial powers started to become interested in the conquest of Africa and established geographical societies to facilitate the process.⁵⁰ Despite the crushing defeat of France by the Prussian army, Aby Serour made the news in France in 1870. The *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Paris* (Bulletin of Geographic Society of Paris (GSP)) published Aby Serour's trading account in Timbuktu after its translation from Judeo-Arabic to French by Auguste Beaumier under the title: *Premier établissement des Israélites à Timbouktou*.⁵¹ Beaumier started another campaign in favor of Aby Serour, urging the director of the GSP and the AIU to put him on the board of their scientific mission in southern Morocco. This signaled the beginning of Aby Serour's relationship with different players of the French colonial authorities and scientific organizations in Morocco, as well as the AIU.

Aby Serour was enlisted to serve France with his knowledge of southern Morocco and his experience in Timbuktu. Beaumier believed that, as a southern Moroccan Jew, Aby Serour could represent the perfect agent for the French colonial enterprise in the region of Sous. In May 1873, Beaumier introduced Aby Serour to Samuel Hirsch, the director of the AIU School in Tangiers, during his inspection of the school of Essaouira. Between 1870 and 1874, Beaumier sent letters to the AIU headquarter in Paris to ask that Aby Serour be hired as an agent in Morocco's *bled*. On April 1874, the AIU and the Geographic Society of Paris funded Aby Serour's short trip to Paris for a training in data collection. He was introduced to Henri Duveyrier, the French Saharan explorer, who introduced him to the use of the compass, barometer and the thermometer. He was also familiarized with the basics of photography. French newspapers and newsletters published small biographies of Aby Serour. Many saw him as France's new explorer of the Sahara. For instance, in *L'Explorateur*, Hertz wrote:

This Jew, born in one of the southern provinces of Morocco, expressed his interest in serving French interests; he was able to establish a Jewish colony in Timbuktu, the capital of the Sudan, which survived for a period of over ten years. We hope that the Commission of the Commercial Geography will recognize the future work of Rabbi Mardochée in the service of the Geographical

Society of Paris. Thanks to this ingenious and humble collaborator, Timbuktu may become the head office of our commercial operations between Senegal, Algeria, Niger, and all of Western Africa. Our national influence will reach one third of the African continent.⁵²

On his return to Morocco, Aby Serour instantly conducted scientific missions in the Sous region to collect plants and insects for the GSP. Duveyrier published the results of Aby Serour's mission to Djbel Tabayoudt in the Bulletin of the GSP in 1875.⁵³ In 1876, another article was published on Aby Serour's tour in Sous and his discovery of some ancient rock drawings.⁵⁴ In 1876, Aby Serour's long-time supporter, Auguste Beaumier, died. Aby Serour's relationship with GSP ended shortly after because its officials lost faith in the ability of Aby Serour to do scientific work.

However, before his return to Algiers, Aby Serour was asked by the AIU to send reports on the Jewish communities of the Sahara. The AIU saw some benefits in utilizing Aby Serour as a native Jew to gather information on the subject. Aby Serour's knowledge of local dialects was seen as an advantage for the collection of statistics on the ancient Jewish populations. His relationship with the AIU and the GSP ended in 1880. He went back to Algiers where he taught in a local Jewish school before his return to southern Morocco as the guide of Charles de Foucauld.⁵⁵

As a native of Akka, Aby Serour managed to achieve the highest educational status of his community. He became a rabbi. Nevertheless, despite his teaching experience in different communities in the Middle East and North Africa, Aby Serour failed to carry out the dream of his community to teach children of the *bled*.⁵⁶ Aby Serour saw his future in Saharan trade as a merchant. When he failed, he offered his services to French authorities as a data collector. In the next section, I discuss the relationship of another individual, Elias Harrus, with the AIU, and his attempts to make an impact on Jewish children in southern Moroccan villages.

Elias Harrus and the Modern Educational Project of the AIU in Morocco's Hinterland

Like Mardocheé Aby Serour, Elias Harrus was born in Morocco's *bled*. Unlike Aby Serour, Harrus grew up at a time when the French ruled in Morocco and started implementing their own modern educational policies. Harrus was born on September 19, 1919 in Beni Mellal, a major Jewish settlement located in the Middle Atlas Mountains.⁵⁷ He also started his educational career in the local synagogue with the same success that Aby Serour demonstrated in his early years. Aby Serour's education was entirely traditional, taking him from the local *sla* to the *yeshiva*, and ending in the highest rabbinical schools of Jerusalem. On the other hand, Harrus benefited from modern educational programs introduced by French colonial authorities as they extended their power over Morocco. He attended the French primary school, which opened in Beni Mellal around 1919 before the AIU opened its own school in his hometown.⁵⁸

Unlike Aby Serour, Harrus pursued his education in Casablanca not in a regional *yeshiva*, but in the AIU school in Casablanca. This was made possible through a scholarship that paid for his living expenses with a Jewish family. His success in school earned him another scholarship to the École Normale Israélite Orientale (ENIO) in Paris to train as a teacher. Harrus was also introduced to the techniques of pedagogy. In 1939, Harrus finished his training and returned to Beni Mellal for a short visit. The outbreak of World War II forced him to begin his career as a teacher in primary school in Marrakesh. After World War II, Harrus became the director of the AIU's École Professionnelle Agricole (Professional Agricultural School).

After World War II, the AIU expanded its schools in the rural regions south of Marrakesh.⁵⁹ As a representative of the AIU in Marrakesh, Harrus devoted many years of his life to developing a system of schools in the Atlas Mountains and remote southern villages. He emerged as one of the leading figures of expanding the Alliance's educational mission into rural communities in Southern Morocco. In 1942, he became the director of the AIU school in Demnat, one of the largest Jewish communities east of Marrakesh. This was also when he began photographing villagers, with no intention other than the pleasure of recording a special moment, with no thoughts whatever of documentation, or that this was a way of life that would disappear just around the corner.⁶⁰ Rather, due to his own Atlas origins, he photographed Jewish villagers as if they were members of his own family.⁶¹

This personal experience in Demnat allowed him to gain more knowledge about rural communities and become aware and sensitive of their needs and aspirations. This personal experience in Demnat became a driving force for Harrus to take his educational mission to remote areas on the Saharan fringes. His personal contact with these communities, his understanding of their local traditions, and his own upbringing and awareness of the local religious sensitivities made possible the AIU's task to expand its schools to Morocco's southern hinterland. Unlike previous personnel of the AIU, Harrus was familiar with local customs. The agreement of the community to the building of each school was an important step for Harrus before any project took place. The local rabbi and elders were always involved in discussions about the school. In the next section, I discuss the AIU schools in southern Morocco using the examples of Akka, Tinghir and Goulmim, three hamlets of southern Morocco in which Harrus was directly involved. I describe the teachers' lifestyles, their relationship with the community and the delegate of the AIU in Casablanca, the school's location, the program and content of instruction.

The AIU and the Jews of Morocco's Southern *Bled*

On January 27, 1952, Harrus sent a letter to the delegate of the AIU in Casablanca reporting the opening of the AIU school in Goulmim.⁶² Goulmim is located at the southwestern end of the region of Sous. It was one the major caravan posts before entering the Saharan interior. Many Jewish merchants and artisans lived in Goulmim.⁶³ Their trade was prosperous because of their

location as a resting post in the trans-Saharan trading routes.⁶⁴ The report by Harrus outlined the hiring of the teacher, the renting of the location, the enrollment of the students, the relationship between the AIU delegation in Casablanca, the Jewish community and the French colonial authorities.

In the case of every school, the recruitment of the local teacher was one of the top priorities of the AIU delegate in Casablanca. For the school of Goulmim, Harrus' choice was Mr. Harrosch, the son of a wealthy family from Marrakesh.⁶⁵ Although Harrosch failed the first section of his high school final exam, he had a broad knowledge of Hebrew and Talmudic studies. The community of Goulmim was extremely satisfied and pleased with his knowledge when he offered to lead the Shabbat Morning Prayer in the absence of the rabbi. Harrus also organized a training period in pedagogy for Harrosch with M. Marelli at the school of Mr. Sarfaty with the agreement of the inspector of primary education in Marrakesh. Recently trained in Paris, Marelli introduced Harrosch to the latest techniques of teaching and class management. Therefore, before he headed to Goulmim, Harrosch was equipped with the skills and knowledge to run the school of Goulmim. As for the school's management, Harrus taught Harrosch how to deal with formal letter-writing, accounting, inventory, and gave him practical advice regarding the school's activities.

Throughout southern villages, teachers played a key role in the success of the AIU educational system. In 1976, Haïm Zafrani told Michael Laskier:

It was not the policy of the Alliance in Paris that mattered in the bled. It was the policy of the school director who aided the communities in every way possible. His influence in these communities resulted in the rise of prestige for the Alliance and its credibility. The director did everything: he taught courses, fed the children, at times he even taught them a trade...⁶⁶

These teachers were trained at the École Normale Israélite Orientale (ENIO) and École Normale Hebraïque (ENH).⁶⁷ The ENIO was founded in 1867. Its aim was to bring to Paris the best students of the AIU networks of schools throughout the Middle East and North Africa and train them to go back and "introduce young Jewish children to Western culture."⁶⁸ The ENH was created in 1946 in Casablanca to prepare trained teachers for the traditional Jewish studies and modern secular education. Stanley Abramovitch noted:

The École Normale Hebraïque changed the image of the Hebrew teacher in the AIU from that of *heder* product to one of a qualified young man who not only spoke Hebrew correctly but also knew Bible, Mishnah, Talmud and History. The ENH taught its students how to prepare lessons and the art of teaching.⁶⁹

In addition to Harrus, Vitalis Eskenazi, Haïm Zafrani, Cohba Lévy and Alfred Goldenberg played a major role in the application of the ENIO educational policies in southern Morocco. The AIU also hired local rabbis to teach Hebrew. In 1960, Reuben Tajouri, the head of the AIU in Morocco, died. Harrus and Zafrani replaced Tajouri in administering the AIU networks in Morocco. The challenge of Harrus and Zafrani was to define the role of the AIU mission

in independent Morocco. A new term was coined for the AIU to become known as *Ittihad-Maroc* (*Ittihad* meaning Alliance in Arabic). The teaching of Arabic was enforced as a requirement of the new independent state. For instance, in Akka, given the fact that the AIU was not able to hire an Arabic teacher, the local *imam*, al-Hafyan Hmad Ouhamou, was hired to teach Arabic (see *Figure 1*).

Educational Curriculum: the co-existence of the *heder* with the AIU

In the *bled*, the educational program was a six year track that culminated with French primary school certificate. Students who were interested in pursuing their secondary education moved to Marrakesh or Casablanca. The subjects taught included history, drawing, physical training, science, arithmetic, French language, French reading, Hebrew and Biblical history. In order not to alienate the local community, the Alliance curriculum included biblical history and Hebrew. Local rabbis were hired to teach Hebrew. After independence, some schools started teaching Arabic (see *Figure 2*).

Teachers were provided with books and school material through the central office of the AIU in Casablanca.⁷⁰ They were asked to strictly follow the guidelines prescribed for each subject. In the meantime, the AIU delegate sent supervisors who visited each school in southern Morocco periodically to check and grade teachers' performance.

Turning Houses into Schools

When Harrus decided to open the AIU school in Goulmim, he contacted the local representative of the community about the future location of the school.⁷¹

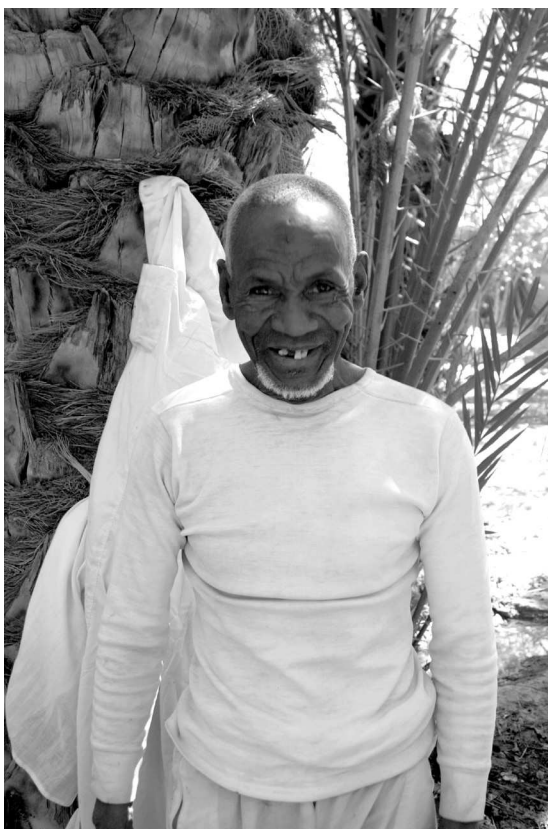


Figure 1. Portrait of al-Hafyan Hmad Ouhamou, teacher of Arabic at the AIU, Akka. Photo Credit, Aomar Boum, 2004.

In general, the AIU rented houses from Muslim and Jewish members of the community for its schools in southern Morocco. The renting of houses from the communities as schools was meant to save money. For instance, Harrus rented the house of the *Caïd* of Tinghir for the AIU school.⁷² In this case of Goulmim, the location of the school was owned by Meyer Ohana, the son of Chalom Ohana, the leader of the Jewish community of Goulmim. The community of Goulmim was largely composed of the extended family of Ohana which resettled from the neighboring community of Oufra after the French control of the south.

In many cases, Harrus was obliged to modify certain sections of the rented houses from the local population to accommodate the needs of the school and teachers.⁷³ The renovated mud-brick house became suitable for the functioning of the school. It included five rooms with a spacious courtyard.

Given the fact that the number of students was too large for the rooms, Harrus opted for using the open courtyard as the classroom (see *Figure 3*).⁷⁴ A teacher's table, a blackboard and twelve benches were arranged in the courtyard. The benches were ordered from urban centers such as Agadir and Marrakesh. The house included a room of the teacher as well. Recreation usually took place in an area outside the house in the main street of the neighborhood.

Enrollment: Mixed Schools in the *Bled*

In addition to hiring the teacher and renting the school's location, one of the most challenging tasks that Harrus faced was the enrollment of students for the schools. Before the AIU arrived to Akka, male Jewish children attended the French primary school along with Muslim pupils until 1952 when the AIU school in Akka was built. Unlike urban areas where the AIU set up separate schools for boys and girls, the AIU schools of the *bled* were mixed. These co-educational schools did not face any resistance, with a few exceptions. In Akka, for instance, a few elders opposed the education of girls.⁷⁵ Laskier con-

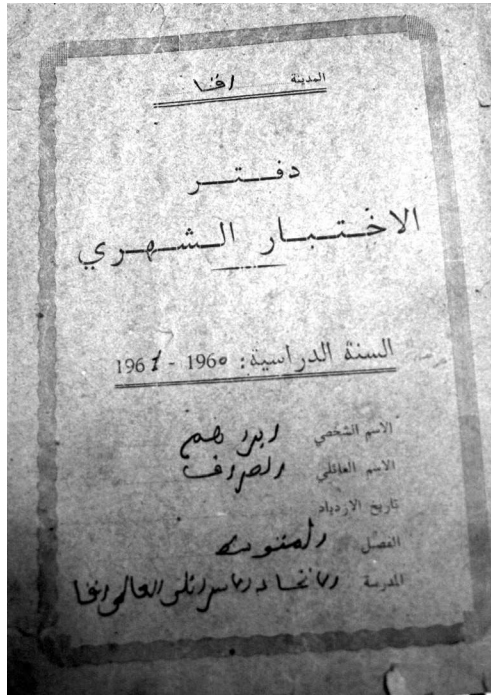


Figure 2. Cover of the Arabic Exam notebook of Sarraf Abraham, fifth grade, AIU school, Akka. Photo Credit, Aomar Boum, 2004.

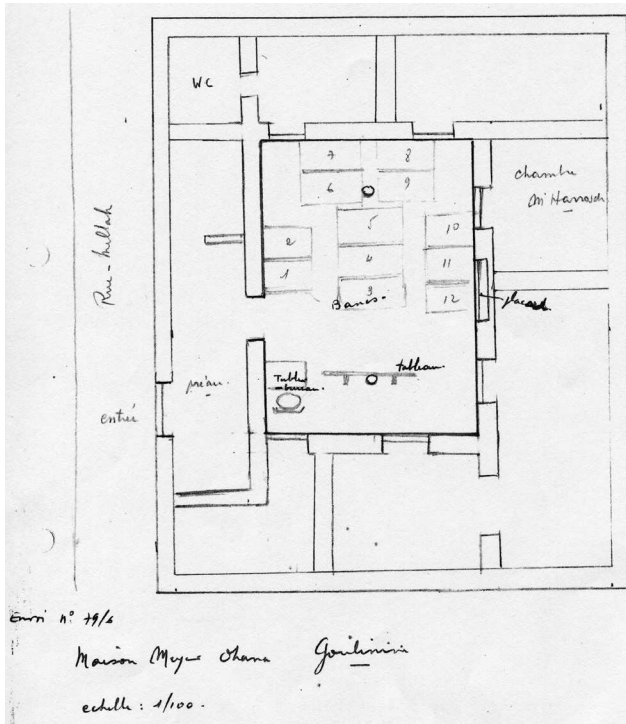


Figure 3. Chart of the AIU School in Goulmim. Source Harrus's letter to AIU delegate in Casablanca, 27 January 1952.

tended that since the majority of the Jewish communities of the *bled* "numbered only several hundred souls, the number of pupils was naturally smaller and therefore, the need for extensive educational facilities such as secondary and vocational schools, was not deemed as crucial as in the large towns."⁷⁶

The challenge was to satisfy the needs of every member of the community. For instance, in his description of his encounter with the community of Tinghir, Harrus writes: "The welcome we had received from the community was very moving. Each individual according to his means, but all

with one heart wanted to celebrate this solemn event. Abenham the old rabbi came to talk with us."⁷⁷

A preliminary consultation with the rabbis and the elders of the community was always the first step leading to the establishment of any school in the *bled*. In an interview with Sarah Levin in 1999, Emile Sebban, the director of the ENH, described how these meetings typically took place:

We arrive in the morning with his car in a little village and Mr. Harrus asks to see the chief of the Jewish community, and he asks to bring together a dozen members of the community, those in charge....So, he had this very humane way of entering into contact with people.... And it was then that he'd negotiate with them for the school. He would explain what an Alliance school was, and how it would serve them.⁷⁸

After the initial meeting with the community leaders, Harrus started the process of enrollment. Parents were usually asked to bring their children to a public place. In Tinghir, children were brought to the local market.⁷⁹ The census of every child in the community would then be carried out. Parents usu-



Figure 4. The AIU school of Akka, Photo Credit, Aomar Boum, 2004.

ally attended the inventory process to make sure that their children were not left out, given the fact that they were aware of the limited number of available places in the classroom.

Before making a final decision, students were distributed by age and gender. When two or three Jewish communities were close enough to each other to have a school that served their needs, the census took into account the place of origin of every child. For instance, in Tinghir the closeness of the *mellah* of Asfalou led Harrus to open some seats for the children of this neighboring Jewish settlement. The inventory of the children, whose age varied between five to thirteen years old, was fifty-one boys and forty girls in Tinghir.⁸⁰ However, the room could hold only fifty students. Harrus decided to enroll thirty-nine boys and twenty-one girls, allowing each bench to seat more than three children.

In Goulmim, Harrus took a census of children, which numbered twenty-seven pupils (thirteen boys and fourteen girls) between the ages of six and ten.⁸¹ Harrus also visited the neighboring *mellah* of Oufrane to convince local children to join the school where a number of seats were still open. Members of the Jewish community of Goulmim offered to put up some children from Oufrane. Ten children from Oufrane were added to the school (nine boys, one girl). In Akka, the school started with thirty-four students. In 1956, the report of Charles Bitton, the director of the school of Akka, to the Inspector of Primary Education of Marrakesh noted that twenty-six students attended the school (seventeen boys and eight girls).⁸² Five children resettled in different areas in Morocco and three left for Israel before finishing their primary education certificate.

By 1956, Zionist movements began to encourage Jews to immigrate to Israel in light of the growing popularity of Jamal Abdel Nasser and pan-Arab



Figure 5. Girls in front of the freshly white washed building designated for the AIU school of Akka, March 1955, Photo Credit, Elias Harrus.

ideology. Jews began to leave Morocco for Israel and Europe. The directors and teachers of the AIU schools in the *bled* became aware of the possibility of the migration of these students with their families to Israel.⁸³ In May 28, 1956, Charles Bitton reported to the AIU delegate in Casablanca that the number of students in the next academic year starting October would increase to thirty or thirty-five students unless the “Jews of Akka leave for Israel.”⁸⁴

Relations with Jewish communities: the JDC Collaborates with the AIU in the *Bled*

Despite the openness of many parents to the AIU schools in the *bled*, some were suspicious of the activities of the AIU. Families were not prepared to abandon their customs, which teachers challenged as superstitions. Many were against the mixed school and opposed to the education of girls. Harrus and the AIU required the support of the local rabbis to allow girls to attend schools instead of supporting the tradition of child marriage.⁸⁵ Alfred Goldenberg, the founder and director of the school of Demnat, noted that the school faced strong opposition in enrolling girls because parents saw girls’ roles as wives, child bearers and housekeepers.⁸⁶ The tradition of child marriage was deeply rooted among these Jewish communities. The AIU teachers saw that part of their job was not only to fight illiteracy and educate these rural Jewish children, but also to fight some of their old traditions. Although enlisting rabbinic support helped curb this tradition in some communities, it failed in others, even at times putting the AIU work at risk.⁸⁷

After World War II, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) began to play a major role in subsidizing food, clothes, equipment and medical support for the children of the southern Moroccan Jewish communities. The *Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE), an organization based in Paris, also joined the AIU and the JDC to expand their medical and educational support to the families of these communities. The Holocaust played a major role in enlisting the support of international Jewish agencies, such as JDC, in attenuating the suffering of Jews throughout the world. The JDC, for instance, began subsidizing the canteen in Akka during the post-war period. In addition, the JDC also offered hygiene advice to families in response to the high rate of trachoma and tuberculosis among the Jews of Akka. In the 1950s, the National Council of Jewish Women became interested in the welfare of the children of the southern Moroccan communities, sending packages of clothes from members in Springfield (Ohio), Chicago (Illinois), Tacoma (Washington), and New York. The dresses of the girls in figure five were donated by the JDC.⁸⁸

Conclusions

In the late 1940s, the AIU spread its networks of schools throughout different hamlets in Morocco’s southern hinterland. The late arrival of the AIU schools to southern Morocco signaled a geographic shift in the AIU policies supported by other international Jewish agencies, namely the JDC. Education

was viewed as a necessary tool for the modernization of these forgotten Jewish communities. However, by the time the AIU schools were opened in southern Morocco, Moroccan Jews started migrating for Israel. Nevertheless, the AIU teachers and school directors focused on the education of the Jews who decided to remain in the *bled*. Many believed that schooling was the best preparation of these Jewish communities for emigration. It was not until the early 1960s that the newly-configured AIU (now renamed *Ittihad-Maroc*) closed most of the schools in the southern hinterland.

Despite the outreach of the AIU in southern Morocco, the AIU school was not able to positively affect a large number of children despite its considerable favorability among the community. There are many factors that hindered the AIU's success to curb illiteracy. The late arrival of these schools and the shortage of funds, as well as the inability of many communities to support these schools, were part of the reason. In addition, as the social biographies of Mardochée Aby Serour and Elias Harrus inform us, these communities, unlike those of urban Jews, were introduced to new educational systems at a later stage in the modern history of Moroccan Jews. The movement from the *heder* to the AIU school required fundamental cultural and religious change that a modern educational transformation of ten to fifteen years could not achieve.

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