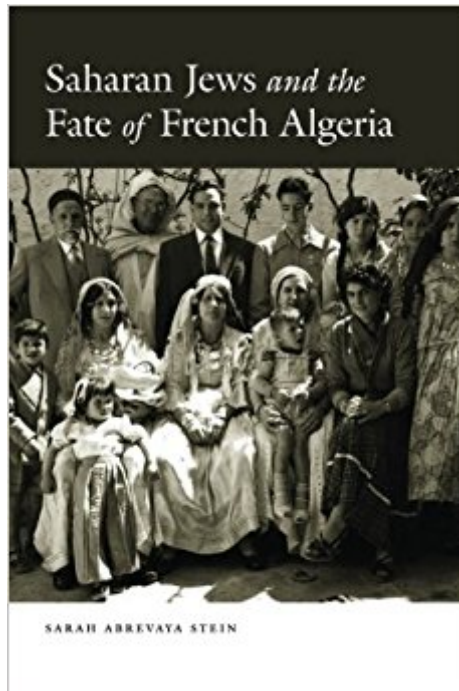




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# Saharan Jews And The Fate Of French Algeria



## Synopsis

The history of Algerian Jews has thus far been viewed from the perspective of communities on the northern coast, who became, to some extent, beneficiaries of colonialism. But to the south, in the Sahara, Jews faced a harsher colonial treatment. In *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria*, Sarah Abrevaya Stein asks why the Jews of Algeria's south were marginalized by French authorities, how they negotiated the sometimes brutal results, and what the reverberations have been in the postcolonial era. Drawing on materials from thirty archives across six countries, Stein tells the story of colonial imposition on a desert community that had lived and traveled in the Sahara for centuries. She paints an intriguing historical picture of an ancient community, trans-Saharan commerce, desert labor camps during World War II, anthropologist spies, battles over oil, and the struggle for Algerian sovereignty. Writing colonialism and decolonization into Jewish history and Jews into the French Saharan one, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* is a fascinating exploration not of Jewish exceptionalism but of colonial power and its religious and cultural differentiations, which have indelibly shaped the modern world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria is a fascinating and extremely well-researched book. It is imaginative, quite original, broad in scope, and deals with a truly understudied topic: the small community of Jews of the Mزاب valley in the Algerian Sahara. Stein uses their experience to highlight a number of fascinating episodes in Jewish, French,

Algerian, and even American history, and as such it will appeal to a wide audience. (Joshua Schreier, Vassar College) "Stein's beautifully written book, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* is an indispensable exploration of the history of indigeneity in Algeria under French rule. . . . These fascinating stories can only emerge under the high-resolution magnifying glass that Stein has so impressively brought to this part of the globe and their significance will be readily apparent to all who read this finely wrought book.

(H-France) "Stein's book should be celebrated as a new and important contribution to the field of Jewish, Middle Eastern, and North African Studies. The author shows her persistence to write against mainstream historical themes and subjects. She insists that the margin has the capacity to tell a complex story that sheds light on the center in relation to larger networks. Like the ostrich feather story, the narrative of Mzabi Jewish dwellers is used by the author to highlight global connections of a historical narrative whose plot starts in the Mzab Valley and takes the reader to Algiers, France, Israel, and back to Ghardaia. This way of writing and conceptualizing the story allows Stein to avoid abstract jargon that could limit her readership to academic environments. The book is not only a compelling read for students of Middle Eastern, Jewish, and North African Studies but also for a growing general public of readers interested in questions of North African Jewish and Muslim memory and history. (International Journal of Middle East Studies) "This wonderfully told story breaks new ground in the history of North Africa. Stein brings the Mzabi Jews of the Sahara into the main currents of colonial-era Algerian history for the first time. She shows clearly how colonial texts produced Mzabi Jews as the archaic vestiges of a lost tribe, and how this version was recycled into the work of the anthropologists, philanthropists, and administrators who wrote the rules that gave form to Mzabi Jews as political subjects. *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* admirably pulls Mzabi Jews from the footnotes, and like the very best work of historians it gives rise to a critical interrogation of the present. (Benjamin C. Brower, University of Texas at Austin) "Stein's compelling study takes us into the vexed spaces where nation and empire, family and colony, religion and the state, and knowledge and law converged and collided. By situating Saharan Jews at multiple, unsteady historical margins, the book argues that colonial military legislation and policy called into existence this Southern Algerian indigenous community. Scholars of the Middle East and North Africa have long fixated upon the Orientalist East-West divide, but Stein's masterful account redirects attention to the genealogies of North and South through a sort of micro-history set in motion that never loses sight of the big story. (Julia Clancy-Smith, University of

Arizona) — Stein's beautifully written monograph, with its convincing argument about the vagaries of French colonial policy in Algeria, expands the boundaries of what we know about the processes of transformation that turned wildly divergent types of North African Jews into conventional Mizrahim. (Journal of North African Studies, review essay)

— "Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria is a very engaging piece of historical scholarship and should interest any graduate students and academics working in the modern history of North Africa, French colonial history, and legal history. In addition, Stein's treatment of questions of identity and subjectivity, and the way she unravels their place in the process of modernity, make this book of interest to anyone wanting to better understand the ways in which the empire articulated new relationships all along the late colonial moment." (Journal of North African Studies)

— "The granting of Algerian Jews French citizenship by the Crémieux Decree of 1870 is a central theme in the history of colonial Algeria, yet forgotten in this standard narrative is how the Jews in the Saharan region of the Mzab valley were excluded from this new status. Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria explores how Mzabi Jews came to be differentiated from other Algerian Jews under the French military regime that governed the Southern Territories by legally designated them as indigenous along with the Muslim inhabitants of Algeria. Stein begins by telling the intriguing story of an ethnographic study of the Jews of Ghardaïa, the major Jewish community of Mzab, undertaken by the American anthropologist, Lloyd Cabot Briggs, and his assistant, Norina Lami Guéde, on the eve of Algerian independence in 1962. Yet rather than treating the study as an authentic source on an isolated Jewish community to be mined for information, Stein analyzes it as a product and culmination of eighty years of French colonial rule in the Sahara. Stein then traces the encounter of the Mzabi Jews with French colonialism from the time of the conquest of the Sahara to the period of decolonization and mass departure of the community. Drawing from a rich array of archival evidence and primary accounts, Stein poignantly reveals how the Saharan Jews were shaped by events and processes of change in colonial Algeria: the Dreyfus Affair and settler anti-Semitism, military conscription, public health, education, Vichy in the Sahara, the oil and natural gas boom of the 1950s, the Algerian war of independence, and emigration. In examining the distinctive ways that Jews of Mzab experienced French rule, Stein's richly documented and eloquently written book offers exciting new insights not only on the importance of regional differentiation in Algerian history, but into larger questions on the relationship between colonialism, decolonization, and the Jews." (Daniel Schroeter, University of Minnesota)

Sarah Abrevaya Stein is professor of history and the Maurice Amado Chair in Sephardic Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is the author of *Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce* and *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*, and coeditor of *A Jewish Voice from Ottoman Salonica: The Ladino Memoir of Sa'adi Besalel a-Levi* and *Sephardi Lives: A documentary history, 1700-1950*.

A little know history that helps put today's scenarios into a perspective otherwise not known, An important bit of history that should not be forgotten.

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