

Jews in islamic world

Business



Mark Cohen in his famous work *Under Crescent and Cross* raised the burning question of Islamic-Jewish and Christian-Jewish relations (1994).

The question had provoked heated discussions among scholars and it resulted in the appearance of two polar views on this problem. Mark Cohen generalized different scientific thoughts and called these two approaches the “myth of interfaith utopia” and the “counter myth of Islamic persecution of Jews” (1994). According to the author, supporters of the first approach were convinced that Islam created favorable conditions for protecting Jews, while Christianity posed a threat to Jews and Christians persecuted them. Some Jewish scholars also emphasized the importance of the tolerant attitude of Muslims to Jews. Furthermore, there was evidence of their cultural development and political breakthrough in the Islamic world. Even Lutheran scholar of Hebrew poetry defined this period as “golden age” in Jewish history.

Jewish fate under Christendom, in contrast to their destiny under Islam, was completely different. In Christian Europe, Jews experienced animosity and oppressions. In short, one Jewish historian related this period with “lachrymose conception of Jewish history” (Cohen, 1994). The circumstances arose in such a way that the roots of Christian intolerance to Jews lay in the absurd belief that Jews killed Christian children and used their blood for some ritual purposes. This superstition led to the numerous acts of unprecedented cruelty towards Jews and ended in the Inquisition in Spain.

Muslims took advantage of this situation and started to protect Jewish people in order to accuse Christian Europe with its liberal views of intolerance later

on. Indeed, it was only the act of leniency to the members of non-Islamic religion. In such a way, the myth of interfaith utopia existed even till 20th century, to some extent. During the Nazi period, for example, the reminiscences of the favorable times under Islamic protection exacerbated the conditions of Jews within the scope of anti-Semitism policy. Nevertheless, the idyl under Islam was also described in the books *Jews in a Gentile World: The Problem of Anti-Semitism and Anti-Semitism: Challenge to Christian Culture* (Cohen, 1994).

Arabs successfully used the “ myth of interfaith utopia”, pursuing their aims. Therefore, the myth served as a useful tool in Zionist confrontation. From Arabs’ perspective, it was Jewish fault that the period of harmonious relations between two nations ceased. Zionism provoked antipathy from the side of Arabs. Considering Arabs’ claims, the situation would change for better if Jews refused all their demands. The truth about real Arab-Jewish relations was revealed only in the 19th century.

It was catalyzed by the increase of the acts of open anti-Semitism. Besides, Six Day war also made its contribution to the worsening of the situation. Soon after the war, many publications which highlighted the real state of affairs appeared. The light on the problem was shed by the “ counter myth of Islamic persecution of Jews,” as Cohen called it (1994). AIPAC published forgotten essay of Jewish historian Cecil Roth, who tried to change the common view on the Islamic tolerance. In fact, life of Jews under Islam was much worse than the one under Christianity.

Local Jewish people suffered humiliation and were oppressed by Muslims in social, cultural, and religious life. Furthermore, Roth quoted the abstract from the Epistle of Maimonides, in which it was mentioned that Arabs, unlike any other nations, were too eager to humiliate and oppress Jews and contributed to their degradation by any possible means (Cohen, 1994). All in all, the true story of Jewish-Islamic relations remains a big gap in the world history. Till nowadays, there is no definite view on this problem. It resulted in the appearance of many supporters and opponents of the “ myth of interfaith utopia.

” The website Peace with Realism (URL – [www. peacewithrealism. org](http://www.peacewithrealism.org)) gives a complete overview of the problem. The true history of Jews at the Arab lands is set forth from the position of the “ counter myth.” On this site, one could find extended information about Jewish-Arabic relations from the time of their formation until modern confrontation.

Furthermore, there are a lot of proves of Arabs’ intolerance towards Jews from the beginning of their conquest of the Middle East and during the further development of their complicated relationship with Jews. It reveals the reality of life at the behest of Islam: how Jews paid with blood and money for their safety; how Arabs abandoned their guarantees not to massacre Jewish community, when there was no need in financial contributions of the Jewish people. In spite of all the efforts of Jews to assimilate in Islamic society, thousands of men were killed and women were enslaved. Using Allah’s will as a cover, Arabs practiced mass slaughter of the Jewish people. Moreover, the site includes the interpretation of the roots of Arab intolerance

and all the consequences it led to (Jews of Arab Land, 2003). On the website Jewish Virtual Library (URL – www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

the information about Jewish – Arabic relation is more disposed to the “ myth of interfaith utopia”. This site is full of evidence of prosperity of Jewish nation during the period of Muslim rule in Spain. According to the information on the site, the “ golden age” for Jews meant improvement almost in all spheres of their life: social, cultural, religious, and economic. Moreover, they also got a right to take part in the conduct of public affairs. The scientific thought highlighted on this site, proved the real possibility of peaceful coexistence of these two nations, which was mostly rejected by many scholars (Weiner, 2012).

All in all, describing two scientific approaches to Islamic-Jewish question, Mark Cohen in his work *Under Crescent and Cross* demonstrates unbiased attitude to the problem. The author does not express his support of either theory. In such a way he equalizes both of them. According to the opinion of the author that is revealed in his work, there is enough evidence in favor of two polar views, what gives both of them a right to exist.