

VARIEDADES

NOTA BIOGRAPHICA: MAKLOUF LEVI AND EVARISTE
LÉVI-PROVENÇAL

David J. WASSERSTEIN

Tel Aviv University/Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin

I recently published an article, in a collection of studies of Jewish orientalists dedicated to Bernard Lewis on his eightieth birthday, dealing with the life and work of Evariste Lévi-Provençal.¹ I suggested there that there seemed to be some little mystery attached to that scholar's identity, especially insofar as concerns his name. I said that «According to the late Eliyahu Ashtor... this scholar's name was actually Mabkhus», adding that it was not clear whether Ashtor meant by this to refer to Lévi-Provençal's first name or to his family name.²

In the article as a whole, I argued that, beyond the matter of his name, the identity of Lévi-Provençal left a number of questions unresolved. This most important of all the students of al-Andalus, Islamic Spain, in the twentieth century seemed to know nothing of the important cultural legacy of the Jews of that country. Despite the bulk and the significance of what remains of their writings, mainly but not entirely in Hebrew (and Aramaic), Lévi-Provençal seemed wholly unaware of the contents of these works, and treated of the Jews there, in one of the great periods of Jewish history, as of any small and unimportant minority in any other part of the Islamic world in any period. The Jewry of which Lévi-Provençal himself was a product, moreover, that of North Africa, was in part and saw itself as an extension of that Iberian Jewry of the middle ages. It would have been natural to expect Lévi-Provençal, as a Jew with such a background, to devote special attention to the Jews of al-Andalus and to

¹ «Evariste Lévi-Provençal and the Historiography of Iberian Islam», in *The Jewish Discovery of Islam, Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis*, ed. Martin Kramer (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1999), 273-89.

² I went on «Although Ashtor does not say so, it looks as though this name may be an Algerian form of one of the diminutives of the Hebrew name Mordechai. Where the name Evariste came from it is impossible to say. Its Greek linguistic origin is clear, but its use as a name in French is uncommon, at best. The name Lévi-Provençal, if it is the scholar's original surname, would tend to confirm his identity as a North African Jew, and not a Jew of European immigrant stock in North Africa; but it would do no more than *tend* to confirm it. The use of the name Mabkhus, on the other hand, seems to offer solid confirmation of a North African background, as no such onomastic form would have been in use among European Jews settled in Algeria. "Evariste", perhaps because of its Greek source, might suggest a particularly strong gallicizing tendency, of a piece with the rest of our knowledge of the man (and might also point to a similar tendency in his background)», *ibid.*, 275.

the rich sources for their history and place in Andalusí society. He did not. There was here a mystery. It suggested that perhaps Lévi-Provençal did not have a very strong Jewish cultural element in his upbringing and education, and, more than this, that perhaps he wished to submerge his identity as an Algerian Jew in a new identity as a Frenchman of Jewish extraction. Because of the relevance of this for Lévi-Provençal's work on al-Andalus it may be of interest to readers of this journal to know that some new evidence has now become available which throws light on this matter.

Shortly after the article appeared, Mr Robert Attal, the librarian of the Ben Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, in Jerusalem, very kindly sent me a copy of correspondence between himself and the Sous-direction de l'Etat Civil of the French Foreign Ministry, in Nantes, in 1988. In that correspondence, Mr Attal had enquired about precisely the same questions as I raised in my article, the original name of Lévi-Provençal. He was sent the following information:³

le 04 janvier 1894 à 02 heures—
est né à ALGER (Algérie)
—Maklouf, Evariste—
—LEVI—⁴

This material is of considerable interest, as it answers several questions for us. In the first place, it provides us at last with the place of Lévi-Provençal's birth, something which, as I pointed out in my article, none of his biographers seemed to know. And Lévi-Provençal himself had not mentioned it in the «Note sur les titres et travaux scientifiques de M. E. Lévi-Provençal» that he had apparently published in 1934, even though in that publication he had provided a number of biographical details about himself. Now we know that he was born in Algiers. As can be seen, in the context of Lévi-Provençal's refashioning of his identity, the failure to mention the place where he was born fits in very well with the apparent desire to distance himself from what we now see to have been a North African origin.

We also know rather more: as can be seen, we now have details of his first name, or names, and of his family name, and all of this material is of interest

³ In a letter dated 18 february 1988, a certified «Extrait d'Acte de Naissance», reference number COL ALGER.1894. RE.60.

⁴ The document also contains details of Lévi-Provençal's two marriages: first, in Algiers, on 24 July 1919, to Laure Guibert; and second, in Paris 5e, on 7 July 1927, to Antoinette Jeanne Marie Pelcot.

here. As to the family name, we see that this was, at least at the time of his birth, Lévi (? or Levi), without the addition of Provençal. This fact justifies the doubts I expressed in my article, where I pointed out that the name Lévi-Provençal is very rare, that it is not found among Algerian but rather among Moroccan Jews, and that even among them the name is extremely rare, scarcely occurring at all after the sixteenth century. It also seems, in combination with the name Maklouf which the document confirms for us, to confirm beyond doubt the North African, rather than European immigrant, background which I had suggested for the man.

Strikingly, Maklouf Lévi seems to have added the element Provençal to his surname very early indeed, for it appears as early as 1913, in the very first publication of his that we know, when he was just nineteen years old.⁵

As to the first name, things are even more interesting. While Ashtor was wrong in his claim about the name Mabkhush, he was not wrong in his underlying suggestion that there was an Algerian Jewish name there. That name was Maklouf (= Makhluf). Unlike Mabkhush, which is a diminutive of a Hebrew name, Mordechai, Maklouf is Arabic.⁶ It is not without interest here too. The word *makhluḥ*, which is no more than a passive participle from the verbal root *kh.l.f.*, serves, like the word *khalīfa*, from the same root, as a name among the Jews of Morocco and North Africa more generally. It is found from the fifteenth century to the twentieth.⁷ Unlike most names, however, these two belong to a special category. This category includes names given to children who are born after another child has died, children who are seen as a sort of replacement, or substitute, in Arabic *khalīfa* (literally «substitute»), *makhluḥ* (literally, «replaced»);⁸ Laredo

⁵ Evariste Lévi-Provençal, «étudiant à la Faculté des Lettres d'Alger», «Mars africain?», *Revue Africaine*, 57 (1913), 63-69; *id.* (now identified as a «professeur au Collège de Médéa»), «Note sur un fragment de CURSUS sénatorial relevé à Constantine», *Revue Africaine*, 58 (1914), 21-8; *id.*, «Deux nouvelles inscriptions de Timgad», *Revue Africaine*, 61 (1920), 14-8. These three articles were not included in the list published in the bibliography of 1934 (mentioned above). This is simply because, unlike a fourth article, also published in the *Revue Africaine* («Un chant populaire religieux du Djebel marocain» [1920], 215-48-Lévi-Provençal began as he always was, prolific), they deal with classical, not with Islamic, topics.

⁶ The, purely linguistic, difference between Arabic and Hebrew need not, of itself, worry. But the fact that we have here now an Arabic first name plus a French middle name, neither of which seems to have a Hebrew (viz. Jewish) correlative may seem, on one hand, odd, on the other, to provide still more confirmation of what looks like a very limited Jewish identity for the family.

⁷ See Corcos, D., «Quelques aspects de la société juive marocaine dans le Vieux Maroc-Les Prénoms des Juifs marocains», *Folklore Research Center Studies* (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), 3 (1972), 143-229, at 175, n.º 160 (repr. in *id.*, *Studies in the History of the Jews of Morocco*, Jerusalem: 1976, 191, n.º 160), for the chronological distribution; Corcos also gives there the variants M'khleuf, Magalouf, Magaluff, Khellouf, Yahklouf, Ikhlef, Bakhleuf and Ballo.

⁸ The same phenomenon is found also among Ashkenazi Jews, where such children are often given names like «Alte» («old») as a sort of charge on fate. See also Corcos, *op. cit.*, 207, n.º 160, for further explanation of the meaning of this and similar names.

gives a list of such names, which he describes as «Votifs de vie et de substitution», pointing out that they were «originellement donnés aux fils posthumes ou aux frères puînés».⁹ This last qualification, «originellement», is important here, for it tells us that the use of the name in the case of Lévi-Provençal need not mean that he was himself a child born after the death of another in the family.

Corcos adds another fact which may be of relevance here. He says: «Il est à remarquer que *Khalifa*, *Makhlouf* et tous les prénoms qui ont plus ou moins le même sens que ceux-là n'ont été généralement utilisés que par la classe populaire».¹⁰ This does not mean, of course, that Lévi-Provençal necessarily came from a poor background. But it does tend to support the broader picture which emerges from all our material, that of a Algerian Jew, from a background which gave active encouragement to gallicizing tendencies, and lacked prominence in the Jewish community or much interest in Jewish culture, education or history.

But what is most interesting in all this is perhaps the fact that the name Maklouf is paired here with the name Evariste, the name which Lévi-Provençal used, to the exclusion of any other, in all his publications. In other words, «Evariste» was not a later addition to his original name by the man himself. This document thus offers striking confirmation of a most interesting yoking, at the very moment of Lévi-Provençal's birth, of his Algerian-Jewish background and the gallicizing tendency (thus perhaps present already in his family background) which would become so much more apparent in his education and in his career. The Algerian Jew Maklouf Evariste Lévi was born with a distinctly Jewish first name and merely a middle name of French character, along with a family name which was very distinctly Jewish. Onomastically, he was visibly an Algerian Jew. Along the way, some time before he reached the stage of publishing his first article in 1913, he lost that Jewish first name, making thereby his middle, gallic, name very much more prominent, and he gave his extremely Jewish surname a hyphenated (and perhaps, because double-barrelled, also an aristocratically) gallic appearance to become the Frenchman Evariste Lévi-Provençal.¹¹

⁹ Laredo, A. I., *Les Noms des Juifs du Maroc. Essai d'onomastique Judéo-Marocaine* (Madrid, 1978), 150-51, listing the forms Khalifa, Alkhelifi, Khalfon, Ben Khalfon.

¹⁰ Corcos, *op. cit.*, 207, n.º 160.

¹¹ I am most grateful to Mr R. Attal for sending me a copy of his correspondence with the authorities in Nantes.