

# THE ARTY SEMITE



CULTURED BLOGGING ABOUT ARTS AND ARTFUL BLOGGING ABOUT CULTURE

July 27, 2010, 9:40am

## Giving Sephardic Literature Its Due

By Maia Efreim

The first annual New York [Sephardic Jewish Book Fair](#) on July 25th at the Center for Jewish History was a quiet success. What started as a push by the [American Sephardi Federation](#) to sell marked-down books by Sephardic authors snowballed into a day-long event featuring 11 speakers, a constant flow of about four dozen patrons, and the guests of honor: hundreds of books.

"We had both Sephardi and Ashkenazi patrons and everyone was very interested and supportive. We also learned a few things for next year: we need a larger space and more vendors," said organizer Shelomo Alfassa, the coordinator of Special Projects for the American Sephardi Federation.

In addition to book vendors the fair featured author lectures, including a keynote speech by Marc D. Angel, the Rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, [Congregation Shearith Israel](#). One of the most moving speakers of the day was Professor J. Daniel Khazzoom, who flew in from Sacramento to give an account of his flight from Iraq to Israel. Khazzoom's [newly published](#) book "No Way Back: The Journey of a Jew from Baghdad" discusses his resentment of his family's status as "tenth class citizens in our homeland."

Khazzoom, the first Israeli college graduate accepted by a Harvard University graduate school, was visibly emotional at the fair. "This fair should have been put on a long time ago and the recognition is overdue. But it's never too late, the Sephardi Jewry has a responsibility to write down our stories before we all forget and so we don't forget," he said.

While authors took the stage for 30-minute readings, other writers discussed their books at the tables lining the perimeter of the room. The event's most popular vendor, however, was [Israel Mizrahi](#), who was offering more antiquarian wares. At Mizrahi's stand you could purchase a Haggadah published in 1680 for only \$200; hold the prayer books distributed by the U.S. military to Jewish soldiers in World War II; and haggle over Mizrahi's *pièce de résistance*: a copy of [Joel ibn Shu'aib's](#) "Olat Shabbat," printed in Venice in 1577.

Among the many older attendants there were a few young faces as well. Children looked through "[The Rabbi's Cat](#)," a graphic novel by Joann Sfar about a cat in 1930s Algeria that decides he wants to study the Kabbalah and have a bar mitzvah. Foodies browsed "[Indian-Jewish Cooking](#)" by Mavis Hyman, and history aficionados bought "[History of the Jews of Tangier](#)" by Mitchell Serels.

Pleased with the turnout and reaction to the event, Alfassa was optimistic about the future of the book fair. "I'm very excited about seeing this grow into something bigger, where people appreciate the literature, the history, and learn a few new things" he said.

Permalink | Share | Email | Filed under: *Sephardic Books, American Sephardi Federation, Center For Jewish History*

[Back to The Arty Semite](#)

### COMMENTS

There are no comments posted yet. [Be the first one!](#)

### POST A NEW COMMENT

Comment as a Guest, or login:



Name

S. Alfassa

Email

salfassa@gmail.com

*Displayed next to your comments.*

*Not displayed publicly.*