

The Jewish Athletes of Iran: The Sports Activities and Achievements of the Jews of Iran, Arsalan Geula, San Bernardino, CA: Author, 2019, ISBN 978-1-6538-7808-6 (pbk), 86 pp.

This book is a welcome addition to the relatively small corpus of writings on the social history of Jews in Iran. It also provides valuable information on sports in Iran, an underdeveloped field of inquiry in Iranian studies. After introducing the reader to the main traditional athletic disciplines of Iran and giving us a capsule history of Iranian Jewry, the author comes to the main part of this short book, Jewish Iranians' involvement in modern sport.

When physical education became a compulsory subject in Iranian schools in 1926, the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle introduced their students to gymnastics and later to other sports. Soon some Jews developed a taste for modern athletics, and a master craftsman by the name of Joseph Geula made the garden of his house available for exercise and training. Gradually a number of clubs were formed, most of them ephemeral. Three figures stand out for their achievements at the national level: Soleyman Binafard, twice Iranian flyweight wrestling champion in the 1950s; Janet Kohan-Sedq, national 100-metre dash champion and Iranian "athlete of the year" in 1965; and Houshang Mashian, who was Iranian chess champion in 1958.

Beyond introducing the lives and times of these outstanding athletes, the book at hand also provides valuable insights into the social settings surrounding athletes, in particular the members of the various soccer teams, as they engaged with both the state and wider Muslim society, having to navigate the shoals of prejudice, politics, and bureaucracy. Of particular interest is the last section of the book, which discusses chess, the game at which the author himself excelled.

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Afghanistan Rising: Islamic Law and Statecraft between the Ottoman and British Empire, Faiz Ahmed, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017, ISBN 9780674971943 (hbk), 448 pp.

The past decade has been an exciting time for Afghanistan Studies, as the burgeoning field has been enriched with the methodologies of Central Asian, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Studies. Scholars have replaced the common perception of Afghanistan as economically and geographically isolated with one that emphasizes the role of Afghans