

The Jewish Quarter in Muslim Cities and Berber Areas

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A CYCLE IN THE LIFE OF MIDDLE EASTERN JEWRY

is nearing its completion. The Jewish population in Asia (except Israel) and North Africa (including Egypt) has dropped from 950,000—1,000,000 at the end of the Second World War to one-fifth that number in 1968, a result of the emigrations from the lands where Jews had lived for hundreds or even thousands of years. The crowded Jewish quarters in the major cities of Morocco—Fez, Marrakesh and Meknes—have been deserted by their inhabitants; the houses and shops are now occupied by Muslim neighbors. The rich and the well-to-do mostly succeeded in transferring their property or a great part of it before they themselves left. The poor—they were the overwhelming majority—carried their paltry belongings with them.

Objective expert observers predict that a great part of those still remaining in comparatively large concentrations in Morocco (about 60,000), Turkey (about 40,000) and Iran (about 75,000) will ultimately emigrate to countries willing to admit them, leaving behind only those who for various reasons are unable to go. Some tens of thousands of Jews will doubtless continue to live among some tens of millions of Muslims, but the time of organized, autonomous Jewish communities living in their own quarters is nearing an end. These quarters are called *mellāḥ* in Morocco; *ḥāra* (also *shāra*) or *zanqa* in Algeria, Tunisia and Tripolitania; *qā'a*, *sharḥa* or *masbata* in Yemen; *maḥalla* in Turkish and Persian environments.* Perhaps already in our time, but certainly in the next generation, all of them will be looked upon as historical and even archaeological sites where Jews once lived.

At this turning point it may, therefore, be useful to offer an histor-

*There is nothing derogatory in any of these terms. Most of them are used for Muslim and Christian localities as well and mean "quarter," "lane," "place" or "camp." Much research has been devoted to the explanation of the term *mellāḥ*, which means "salt-mine" in literary Arabic. All we know for certain is that it was the name of the first Jewish quarter in Morocco, established near the royal palace in New Fez in the 13th century. In the 16th century Fez had also a Muslim *mellāḥ*. The name was subsequently applied to Jewish settlements in Morocco generally, and today designates any such settlement, whether part of a town or village or some distance away from one. *Masbata* means a quarter where the Sabbath is observed; this name is not offensive either.

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ical survey of the Jewish quarters in Muslim countries and to describe their recent past in the southern regions of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, where they remained almost untouched by the political, social and cultural developments of our time—until they were abandoned for ever.

I

An Historical Outline

THE RESIDENCE OF NON-MUSLIMS in separate streets and quarters has been a well-known feature of the Muslim city ever since the Arab conquest in the 7th century. Owing to certain historical, ethnic, religious and economic factors, the Jewish quarter is the most conspicuous of all the non-Muslim quarters. It has been the object of much attention by European travellers since the 16th century. Their descriptions give the impression that the Jewish quarter was from the outset a ghetto, like that established in Christian environments since the 16th century. However, their sometimes unfavorable accounts are not always sufficiently objective.

In reality, the territorial concentration of the Jews in separate quarters in or near Eastern cities preceded the Arab conquest. It was caused by the need to enable every Jew to live in accordance with religious law. The particular conditions for Jewish residence that a city or quarter had to meet are stated in a second-century *Baraita*, which says, *inter alia*: "A Torah student must not live in a city which does not have a court empowered to implement its decisions; a charity chest administered in accordance with the Law; a synagogue; a bath; a scribe and a teacher for children" (*Sanhedrin* 17b). To ensure these facilities for every member of the community, it was necessary to live in separate residential quarters.

Professor G. E. von Gruenbaum, in a stimulating study of the Muslim city (*Saeculum*, 1955), pointed out the features a city must possess in order to fulfil its purpose as a residence of Muslims: 1) the *jāmi'* (or mosque for Friday services); 2) the *sūq* (market); 3) the *ḥammām* (bath); 4) a place within the *jāmi'* for religious instruction. The provision of these requirements must have had a considerable impact on the evolution of separate quarters for Muslims. But no less important was the "group feeling," as Professor Franz Rosenthal translates the term *ʿasabiya*, of the Bedouin Arabs, a feature discussed at length by Ibn Khaldūn. Due to this "group feeling," a Bedouin regarded it as natural and obvious for himself to settle among his own folk, and not among another, albeit Arab-Muslim, tribe. Clearly, the establishment of separate residential areas in Muslim cities for each group-conscious community was not from the outset considered, by either Muslims or non-Muslims, as involving any of the degradations associated with a ghetto. The opposite seems to have been the case. The inhabitants of the separate quarter regarded it as the citadel of their independence, enabling them to live

and organize their lives in accordance with their traditional customs. Here they could establish, without hindrance, places of worship and other religious institutions and set up endowments managed by their own people; here they could preserve their own language or dialect. The quarter was not hermetically sealed to the inhabitants of other quarters, who were able to rent property (plots of land and shops) in it for the conduct of their business.

I stress this trend in Arab social life because the same pattern occurs in most Jewish communities with a non-homogeneous membership. The original inhabitants and the newcomers—and there were many—were organized in separate congregations according to countries of origin. Thus we find Iraqi and Shāmi congregations in Palestine and Egypt; an Iraqi congregation in Qayrouan, etc. We shall see that this fragmentation increased as the expellees from Spain—Muslims and Jews—settled in Middle Eastern countries.

Life in the Muslim city and in its Jewish quarter showed an amazing degree of affinity. This was due to a parallel development of religious institutions. There were, moreover, similarities in the structure of the administration. In localities subject to the Caliph in Baghdad, Cairo or Cordoba it was centralistic and authoritarian: just as the Caliph appointed the chief *qādīs* (judges) in the cities and they, in turn, appointed their representatives and deputies in the smaller towns and settlements, thus the Exilarch in Iraq, the presidents of the great *yeshivot* in Palestine and Iraq and, in later times, the Nagīd in Egypt appointed the *dayyanim* (communal judges) and chiefs of the communities, who also collected taxes for the supreme Jewish authorities, through which the poll-tax was paid to the Muslim government. In the Geniza documents and the responsa (12th-13th centuries) we sometimes encounter the term *muqaddam*, referring to an official who performed the functions of a *dayyan* and community head in smaller localities. According to Professor Ashtor, this official was the representative of the Nagīd in his community. Incidentally, the title "adelantado de la frontera" in Spanish medieval sources is a translation of *muqaddam*.

The community had only a limited, negative say in the selection of the *dayyan*. As R. Nathan b. Isaac (10th century) puts it: "The Exilarch sends the *dayyan* with the approval of the heads of the great *yeshivot*. . . the *dayyan* then chooses two members of the community to assist him as assessors. If the appointed *dayyan* is righteous in his ways and just in his judgements . . . the local leaders and the important persons will write to the Exilarch praising him. In the opposite case, they will write to the Exilarch and the heads of the *yeshivot* accordingly and they will recall him and appoint another in his stead." (Neubauer, *Medieval Jewish Chronicles*, II, 85)

Similarly, in the strongly centralized organization of the Jewish

communities in Iraq, there was no room for protests against the decisions of the authorities, such as "interrupting prayers" as a means of appeal to the public conscience by an individual or group that felt offended by an act of the leaders. A Gaonic responsum says: "In Iraq, that right to interrupt prayers is not recognized [because there is no] communal control over matters of law and justice. These matters are looked after by the court (*bet din*) and the community must abide by its orders." (Compare L. Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages*, p. 382.) The above quoted responsum concedes that in countries other than Iraq the "interruption of prayers" is a legitimate means to assert one's claims. Interruption of and staying away from prayers were resorted to in Egypt in the 12th and 13th centuries. It is not surprising at all to find the same kind of demonstration in mosques. Both synagogues and mosques were used not only for worship but also for study and the transaction of public business.

While noting the similarity of the respective institutions and the high degree of correspondence between life in the Jewish communities and their Muslim environment, we cannot overlook certain differences between the administration of the Jewish quarter and that of the Muslim city, even though they were less marked than the differences between both of them and Christian communities. The latter had their clergy with its hierarchy, their councils and synods—institutions which had no parallel in the Jewish and Muslim spheres.

Even in countries with a strong central government, every Jewish community had to bear its burden of obligations, which necessitated the active participation of the members, but things were particularly difficult when no such government existed. The communities could not rely on endowments by the state, the caliphs and the emirs to maintain their synagogues and finance their social services. R. Isaac Alfasi, a famous rabbinical and legal authority (11th century), who prepared a codex summarizing the decisions of the Babylonian (and sometimes the Palestinian) Talmud, and therefore entitled "The Little Talmud," quotes a Talmudic rule (not contained in our text of the Talmud) which was accepted by all later authorities: "The inhabitants of a town can compel one another to build themselves a synagogue and buy a Torah scroll, Prophets and Hagiographa" (*Baba Batra* 5a). In one of his responsa (No. 281) he decides, in accordance with that rule, that "if anybody will not pay [his share in] the salary of the prayer leader, it shall be taken against his will."

The building and maintenance of synagogues, the provision of Bible scrolls and the payment of the salaries of synagogue officials, were only part of the obligations of the members of the community. They also had to maintain ritual baths, provide ritually fit food and take care of a well-developed system of charity and welfare work (e.g. distribution of

bread and cash; the redemption of captives from the hands of Saracene and Greek pirates; financial assistance to wayfarers, especially students; medical aid and hospitalization; and, last but not least, payment of the poll-tax of the poor to the government).

In major communities, the funds for all these purposes came partly from taxes, levies and excises, partly from the income of endowments. In smaller and poorer communities, the financial situation was far from satisfactory. There were no large endowments and taxes were a heavy burden on the individual. All these commitments, and even only part of them, depended on local authorities and resources for their implementation. Even where there was an appointed representative of central authority, he had to look to the local leaders for help. A case in point, as we have seen, were court sessions. There were no elections in Muslim cities—at any rate, we never find them mentioned. It is unlikely that the *tubey ha'ir*, *boni viri* or elders who appear in many documents, were elected. It seems more probable that they represented the wealthy, powerful families.

LET US NOW EXAMINE HOW RELATIONS between the Muslim city and its Jewish quarter or quarters developed. As the city never had autonomous municipal authorities, it is a question only of relations with authorities appointed by the ruler of the state and with the Muslim neighbors.

It would be out of place here to dwell on the 'Ahd 'Omar, i.e. Omar's Stipulations, the discriminations imposed upon *dhimmīs* (protected persons), Jews and Christians alike. According to all Muslim sources and special studies, it was the *muhtasib*, a judicial officer subordinate to the *qādī* and charged with the supervision of markets, morals and *dhimmīs*, who was responsible for the behavior of non-Muslims in the city. It was his duty to implement the discriminatory stipulations imposed on non-Muslims. But it is noteworthy that the *muhtasib* is practically ignored in Jewish sources. I have found him mentioned only once in a short narrative of the 11th century, about a little orphan girl abandoned by her uncle in a strange town, far from her home. At sunset, she started crying in the *sūq*, but the Muslim merchants were powerless to help her because she refused their hospitality, saying she was Jewish. By chance, the *qādī* and the *muhtasib* passed through the *sūq*, and they found a Jew who took care of her. Perhaps this tale, told by R. Nissim b. Jacob, a famous rabbinical scholar in Qarouan, is more indicative of friendly relations between Jews and Muslims than any long dissertation.

In fact, important evidence contradicts the view that it was the *muhtasib's* duty to implement the discriminatory regulations. The historian Maqrizi (*Sulūk* I, pp. 909-915) describes the persecution suffered by the *ahl al-dhimma* (people under Muslim protection) in Cairo and Fustat in 1301 C. E. They were forced to comply with Omar's Stipula-

tions, which had fallen into abeyance. In that detailed account, the *muhtasib* is not mentioned at all. The *qādī al-quḍāt* (chief *qādī*) assembles the Patriarch, the Bishops, the *rais al-yahud*, i.e. the Nagid, and the *dayyan*, and these representatives of the Christians and Jews promise to implement the Stipulations. Maqrīzi adds that the *rais* and the *dayyan* pronounced a ban on every Jew who would contravene the stipulations.

We have seen that one of the obligations of every community was the provision of a synagogue. Stipulations forbade the construction of new houses of worship, but non-Muslims knew how to circumvent this restriction. In fact, hundreds of non-Muslim houses of worship were erected in cities founded in Islamic times. They included large and sumptuous ones, as may be concluded from a letter describing the destruction of the Jewish quarter in Qairouan (1058). Of course, the situation was not the same at all times. According to a reliable source of the late 15th century, the Jews in Jerusalem, then under Mameluke rule, were forbidden to rebuild their houses without permission, even if they were falling down, and the permit was sometimes more costly than the rebuilding itself.

At approximately the same time, the Ottoman Sultan Muhammad *al-Fātiḥ* forbade the construction of new synagogues, but permitted the use and repair of old ones. A generation or two later, a scholar of the first generation of refugees from Spain describes conditions in Turkey as follows: "We are not permitted to obtain permanent quarters for a synagogue, let alone build one; we are compelled to hide underground, and our prayers must not be heard because of danger."

It is a fact that many synagogues were built during the Turkish period, thanks to both tolerance and venality on the part of the administration. A short time after the conquest of Constantinople by Muhammad *al-Fātiḥ*, the Jewish population increased when that ruler brought Jews (and Christians) from the Balkans and settled them in his new capital, but even then there were only three or four small congregations in Constantinople. In the 16th and 17th centuries, however, expellees from Spain and Portugal and other newcomers from Italy and Central Europe founded forty or even more congregations, whose members settled all over the city and its suburbs, on both sides of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus, and built houses of worship and study everywhere.

This influx of immigrants from Europe caused far-reaching changes in the administration of the Jewish quarters in Muslim countries. The immigrants brought with them the democratic features of resolutions and statutes adopted at meetings of all the franchise-holding members of the congregation. In the Ottoman Empire—at first in Rumelia and afterwards also in Anatolia—the fragmentation of the community into congregations, each of which formed a self-contained jurisdictional unit,

independent of any other congregation within the quarter, reached its climax.

According to R. Isaac Adrabi (*Divrey ribhot*, No. 159), every synagogue that had its own wardens (*parnassim*) and burial society and levied taxes for its day-to-day requirements was an independent congregation. Another noted rabbi, R. Samuel de Medina, stipulates that every congregation is to be regarded as a separate township. A third authority declares that no congregation can be subject to another, even if the other is more numerous. In keeping with this attitude, every congregation had its own list of poll-tax payers. Members of a congregation were forbidden to move from one quarter to another. However, these facts did not prevent further fragmentation. This fragmentation cannot be explained as caused by differences in ritual and language, because it occurred even among immigrants from the same country and town. (A similar phenomenon was observed among Muslims by Ibn Khaldūn, who describes the group feeling resulting from contacts and association without common descent: "Many inhabitants of cities come into close contact through intermarriage. This draws them together and, eventually, they constitute individual related groups. The same friendship or hostility that is found among tribes and families is found among them, and they split into parties and groups" [*The Muqaddimah*, translated by F. Rosenthal, II, pp. 303-3].) The result of such a fragmentation within the Jewish community was that an overall representation—secular or religious—within the city no longer existed.

The system of government within the Jewish quarter was seemingly different from that of the Muslim city. Still, during the Turkish period the latter sometimes showed, at least outwardly, similar manifestations of fragmentation into *ḥāras*, each surrounded by a wall, the gates of which could be locked.

Developments in the Maghrebi countries, where some of the earliest expellees settled, were not uniform. The Jewish quarter in the Moroccan capital, i.e. Fez and afterwards Meknes, was headed by a *Nagid* appointed by the *Sherif*; beside him there were congregations, each of which made its own bylaws. A different situation prevailed in Algeria. In the 17th century, control was still in the hands of three *muqaddams* (wardens, selected members of the board, *adelantados*), but in the 18th century and until 1835 there was only one *muqaddam*, appointed by the day. The common feature of all the Jewish quarters in North Africa was that they turned in time into ghettos, so that the terms *mellāḥ* and *ḥāra*, which designate the Jewish quarters in Morocco and in the rest of North Africa, respectively, became synonymous with "ghetto." The degradation of the Jewish quarter in North Africa to the status of a ghetto was not accidental. The same process occurred in the other countries where the Jews

were the only remaining non-Muslim community, viz. in Yemen, Afghanistan and Persia.

Analyzing the sometimes bizarre disruptive quarrels in the so-called Spanish-Portuguese congregations, we may have to take into account another factor, viz. the individualism characteristic of the Spaniards. A 17th-century Spanish writer says: "Experience has shown that obedience to decrees and corrective laws is of short duration in Spain: for every private citizen (*hombre particular*) makes it a point of honor to go against them, deeming it an act of positive nobility to refuse to submit to laws" (quoted from A. Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, Princeton, 1954, p. 619). The same features occurred among the Jewish expellees. In fact, the term *yahid*, which denotes the individual member of a congregation, sounds like a translation of the Spanish *hombre particular*.

A FEW REMARKS ARE IN ORDER about the personal relations between the Jews and their Muslim neighbors in the cities, as reflected in medieval historical sources.

It is readily understandable that Jews and Muslims preferred to keep their residential districts separate. The Jew considered it objectionable to sell or let property in his vicinity to a non-Jew. Jewish law granted the Jewish neighbor the right of preemption in order to keep away Gentiles. Most remarkably, Muslim law conceded this right to the *dhimmi* partner in a house owned jointly with a Muslim. But in view of certain charges made in both Rabbanite and Karaite sources of the period, which describe social and religious customs (mutual visits at weddings, etc.), we may assume that relations between Jewish and Muslim neighbors were good and that there was even a strong assimilationist trend among the Jews.

On the part of the Muslims, we find appreciation of the role played by their Jewish neighbors in the city's development. This appreciation is expressed by Ibn Khaldūn, who says in his *Muqaddimah* that since Jews ruled Syria for about 1,400 years, sedentary culture became firmly established among them: they became skilled in the customary ways of making a living and in the manifold crafts connected with food, clothing and all the other aspects of the (domestic) economy, so much so that these things, as a rule, can be learned from them to this day (F. Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 287-8).

Ibn Khaldūn's statement is not a social theory but a conclusion based on observation. Jews were under no restrictions whatsoever in earning their daily bread; the Geniza documents mention about three hundred occupations pursued by Jews. Clearly, this economic freedom was assured not only by Muslim law but also by the social structure of the city. Matters did not change even in the darkest periods. Jewish

craftsmen and peddlers moved freely about the bazaars of the *medina*, the Muslim city, and all over the countryside. Partnerships between Muslim and Jewish merchants were not unusual. At the professional level, we find Muslim and Jewish physicians in friendly cooperation. Isaac Israeli (10th century), the famous philosopher and physician in Qairouan, received instruction from a distinguished Muslim doctor and in turn imparted knowledge to Muslim pupils. Maimonides' personality made a great impression on many Muslim physicians, and Muslim writers praise his medical skill.

Interesting testimony is provided by a Muslim merchant and *homme de lettres* from Egypt who visited Africa and Spain in the middle of the 15th century. When disturbances in Morocco compelled him to prolong his stay in Tlemsen, he used this opportunity to study medicine under a famous Jewish physician, who eventually awarded him an *ijāza* (diploma). He notes that his teacher's lectures were attended by many distinguished persons and that he never met a *dhimmi* so skillful and truly devout. On the other hand, in a treatise written in the 12th century in Seville, containing instructions for the *muhtasib*, the author (Ibn 'Abdūn) strongly opposes the attendance of Muslim patients by Jewish physicians, the purchase of meat of animals slaughtered by Jews, and the employment of Muslims in menial occupations.

As a rule, the Muslim *qādi* had no power to interfere in matters where the litigants were Jewish. According to Jewish law, it was strictly forbidden to resort to a Gentile court. But sometimes, when the plaintiff could not obtain redress because the defendant refused to appear before the Jewish court, he was allowed to apply to the *qādi's* court. There were, moreover, litigations between Muslims and Jews and the *qādi* was called upon to adjudicate. It is interesting to note that a responsum of R. Sherira and R. Hay, two foremost Gaonic authorities, praises the fairness of the Muslim courts in Iraq and the honesty of the official witnesses. The deeds issued by those courts were to be accepted with implicit confidence.

Obviously, relations lasting 1,300 years involved many instances of jealous enmity between the Jewish quarter and the Muslim city, persecution and even temporary expulsion of the former's inhabitants by the government—although the latter measure was very rare. But Jewish sources frequently note the protection afforded to the Jews by the *qādīs* against the turbulent mob, and also the reparation made by the ruler for damage to synagogues and other property.

II

The Recent Past in North Africa

FOR THE ISRAELI CITIZEN AND JEWRY IN GENERAL, 1948 marked the achievement of Jewish statehood and the beginning of the wars and day-to-day

clashes with Israel's neighbors, the Arab countries, which are still not prepared to accept the fact of an independent sovereign Jewish State. For the victims of Nazi persecution in Europe, as well as for the Jews of the Middle East, that year marked the beginning of the great exodus and of the ingathering in Israel with all its difficulties and problems.

The twenty years following the Second World War will also go down in world history as the period of the African Revolution, which completely changed the face of that continent. During that period, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria achieved full independence. Dozens of other colonial territories all over Africa also became sovereign states. Of course, these changes are only one aspect of what is a political, social and economic revolution. A new era is beginning in the life of the peoples and tribes of North Africa, whether they mean to ally themselves in one form or another with the Arab society in Egypt and Asia or to graft European culture upon the African races. The problems arising in this connection are very complicated, and it will surely be a long time before a new world emerges from the present turmoil.

For students of this period of Jewish history it is important to know the background, so as to be able to assess the degree and extent of the present changes. Of particular interest is the recent past of the Jewish communities of North Africa, that huge land mass—about two-thirds the size of Europe—which has shared in the history of the Mediterranean Basin for the last 2,500 years. The aboriginal population of that area are the Berbers, who had a varied fate from the days of the settlement of the Phoenicians and their Punic and Greek heirs to the conquests of the Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Turks, French and Italians. Those events caused many changes in the composition and social structure of the population, but it is generally agreed that in the High Atlas district of Morocco and the plain to the south of it the Berbers have preserved their original character, i.e. their language, customs, form of government and social order. That region was less influenced than any other by the Arab Bedouin and the *Makhzen*—i.e. the central, dynastic government—and remained almost to this day *bled es-siba*, the country of freedom. The same applies to the Muslim inhabitants of Gardaia, a Saharan town in Southern Algeria, which until 1962 had an ancient Jewish community concentrated in the *mellāh*. The great majority of the Muslims, men and women alike, speak Berber as their mother tongue, although the men speak fluent Arabic and French as well. However, our knowledge of their past is scanty, since no ancient literature exists in any of the Berber languages.

During all those successive periods, a large Jewish population lived in North Africa beside the Berbers. Yet, the changes mentioned produced many shifts as to its area and density of settlement, its cultural relations and the languages spoken by it. At a certain period, it may have received

an admixture of Berbers who embraced Judaism, but we have no means of knowing the number of those converts or the circumstances of their conversion. For some periods and areas, our information is very fragmentary, though there can hardly be a doubt as to the chronological continuity of Jewish settlement in the territory as a whole.

The convulsions that have visited the Middle East since the Second World War have not passed by the Jews of North Africa even in the most remote regions, and account for numerous changes in their life. They are reflected, above all, in emigration to Israel and an increased flow of emigration to other countries, and in fluctuations of the population within the country itself. The number of Jews who have left North Africa during that period—mostly (far more than half) for Israel, but also for France (about 250,000), Italy, Spain, Britain and the Americas—is thought to be at least 750,000. Nevertheless, there are estimated—in 1968—to be still 15,000 in Tunisia, 2,000 in Algeria and 60,000 in Morocco. In the Libyan Kingdom, their number is not more than 2,000, after the mass exodus (more than 35,000 persons) in the years 1949/50. According to available data, the total number of Jews in the four countries is at present 75,000 to 80,000.

The abandonment of the southern regions by the Jews was dramatic. Old *mellāhs* were evacuated overnight. Large settlements which I saw during my visit in 1955 and described in my book *Mc-Erez Mebho ha-Shemesh* ("Inside Maghreb") exist no more. Here are two utterances of Jewish scholars, who recently visited Morocco in connection with some research work and compared their findings with my descriptions.

Joseph R. Rosenbloom writes:

In the Berber Mountain Regions and the river valleys of the south, where the oldest and most primitive Jewish settlements are to be found, few remain. In Tinerhir we just missed the last Jew. In Tasenakhte one Jew remains, while in the adjoining region there are two Jews who, having sent their families on to Israel, decided to stay and are now living with Arab women. Ifrani de Anti-Atlas, which was a large and famous center, has no Jews. Rissani, which was the home of the Alouite dynasty and where the Jews once formed the larger segment of the population, now has only a *minyān*—and so on. ("Moroccan Jewry: A Community in Decline," *Judaism*, Spring 1966, p. 221)

The second quotation is from a letter:

I have recently returned from a two-year stay in Morocco, where I was carrying out research for a dissertation on the city of Salé. Out of special interest in the history of the Jewish community of Morocco, I carried—figuratively speaking—your *Eretz Mavo Ha-Shemesh* in one hand, and *Le Guide Bleu* in the other. As you know, most of what you describe is now archaeology, from the *Millāh* of Ufran to that of Salé. There are curious remnants (or at least there were before this summer)—a *minyān* in ar-Rissani where they still bake their own *matzot* for Pesach, a hundred people in Tiznit still carrying on their business in *Shilhā* and going down to Goulimine as itinerants or peddlers for the week, a sole tinsmith in Tarou-

dant . . . (Mr. Kenneth Brown, Committee for the Comparative Study of New Nations, The University of Chicago; letter is dated 11.10.1967)

Most interesting are the remarks with which Lloyd Cabot Briggs and Norina Lami Guède begin their book, *No More for Ever: A Saharan Jewish Town* (Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Mass., 1964):

This book is the record of a people who are gone. It tells of the ancient Jewish community of Gardaia in the Sahara . . . whose numbers fled the desert and the continent of Africa in May and June of 1962. In only a few weeks new and sudden centrifugal forces tore their little colony apart and scattered the pieces as irretrievably as the pieces of a bursting hand grenade. They can never be put back together again; the picture that we saw has been destroyed. A peculiarly distinctive way of life, call it a culture or a social structure if you will, vanished from the face of the earth almost overnight.

The Jewish quarter, or mellah, of Gardaia was a town within a town, a community whose members had no dealings with outsiders or with their next-door neighbors of other faiths except commercially. Even Jews from elsewhere, near and far alike, were looked on as outsiders too . . . (p. 3)

What caused that exodus? It was not only the longing for *Eretz Israel*, because a large portion of the emigrants did not go to Israel. It was not the fear of troubles and pogroms; the Jews in North Africa were, like their Muslim neighbors, used to daily troubles, and pogroms, like those in Russia, Poland and Rumania, never occurred in this area. The truth that is the Jews found themselves in the vortex of the African Revolution. There were indeed many important differences in the situation and status of the Jews of Tripolitania, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, but the common feature was that they faced a sharp turning-point in their history, that the rapid evolution taking place in the society in which they lived affected them more than others. At the center of the convulsions were the Jews in the Berber region of the south, of whom we know less than of the Jews of the northern areas.

FORTUNATELY, HOWEVER, SOME FIELD RESEARCH WAS DONE in those southern mellāhs during the last years before their inhabitants left. It sheds much light on one of the obscure chapters of the history and ethnology of that population, which—like its Berber neighbors—has retained a great deal of its ancient structure.

Indeed, the rule that nature abhors a vacuum applies also to historiography, and travellers' reports, therefore, from the 18th century onwards, abound in romantic references to Berber Jews who lived in "caves" in the Atlas Mountains, and their customs. But these references contribute very little to our knowledge of the basic facts which are the object of historical-social research. It should be noted that Charles de Foucauld (*Reconnaissance au Maroc*, 1888, pp. 401-403) gives statistical figures of the mellāhs in that region, as he found them during his visit in 1883/4. But between then and 1950 changes occurred; many mellāhs

were abandoned and new ones established, and the size of the population changed, the political regime altered, etc. All this seems to have escaped the notice of those whose duty it was to know the facts. When I visited Morocco in the spring of 1955, I vainly asked the Center of Jewish Communities, which still functioned in Rabat, for a detailed, up-to-date list of the settlements in the south*

The mellāh of Demnat is the first about which a modern ethnological study has been written—*Un mellah en Pays Berbère: Demnate* (Paris, 1952). Demnat is a townlet on the northern slope of the High Atlas (120 kilometers east of Marrakesh), which in 1950 had some 7,000 inhabitants, including about 2,000 Jews crowded into an area of only 25,000 square meters. The author, P. Flamand, at that time inspector of French schools in the region, was aided in collecting the material on the mellāhs by some teachers at schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. In the preface to his monograph, he discusses the difficulty of reconstructing the history of the community in the absence of archival material, when even tombstones are inscriptionless, in accordance with discriminatory laws that were in force in the country for many years. The Jewish population was at first unwilling to cooperate with the author by giving data on itself that were to serve in lieu of statistical and demographic figures, for fear that it might be planned to impose new taxes or new discriminatory restrictions. Flamand nevertheless succeeded, with the assistance of M. Monsonogo, a teacher at the local Alliance school (whose signature appears beside that of the author at the end of the book, p. 151), in circulating a series of questionnaires and obtaining figures and other data on the economic, social and cultural structure of the Jewish community.

In 1950, only half of the men and women of working age were active in economic life, and the 370 families included only 12 "well-to-do" ones. On the other hand, Demnat had 12 "professional" beggars and 500 inhabitants—i.e. 20 per cent of the total number—in need of assistance. Most of the economically active were primitive craftsmen, who hardly used tools worthy of the name and who supplied products to the Berber

*By that time P. Flamand's article, "Quelques renseignements statistiques sur la population israélite du Sud marocain," *Hespéris*, 1950, pp. 363-397, had long been published, and proved very useful to the Center. It should be noted that Moroccan Jewry has received much attention from French and Spanish (non-Jewish) scholars and writers, as well as from army officers and senior officials in the various branches of the administration. They have devoted numerous studies to the historical and social problems of that Jewry during the last two generations—far more than to those of the Jewries of Algeria and Tunisia. The chapter "The Mellah" in L. Voinot's book on Oujda and his book on Jewish-Muslim *pèlerinages* in Morocco, Goulven's description of the mellāhs of Rabat-Salé, José Benech's book on the Jews of Marrakesh, several chapters of Le Tourneau's book on Fez, among others, are indispensable aids to the reconstruction of the life of Moroccan Jewry. Detailed bibliographies of North African Jewry have been published by R. A. Attal in *Sefunot* V, IX and *Bitfuzot Hagolah* (Jerusalem 1961-1965).

population of the town and district, which lived under even more primitive conditions.

A great deal of space is devoted to the life of the individual and the family, while another chapter describes public life, religious life, customs, communal institutions and schools. Most interesting is the chapter, "The Mellah and the Outer World" (pp. 137-151). In 1950, the sense of a common economic fate of Jews and Muslims still prevailed in Demnat. The town still belonged to the sphere of control of the Glawi Pasha family, which cared for the well being of its *dhimmī*. But Flamand emphasizes that relations were not limited to the economic field. He paints an almost idyllic picture of Jewish-Berber friendship (p. 145):

The Muslim beggar comes almost daily to knock at the hospitable doors of the *mellāh* (the reverse is not true—the Jewish beggar never leaves the *mellāh*). And the Arab sheikh has "his" Jew, traditionally surnamed his *skāra* (purse), who is his person of trust, who informs him of the prices of commodities, procures the money he needs and concludes all business transaction in his place. The sheikh never travels without his representative, in whom he has such firm confidence that it is said jokingly in the *mellāh* that he would never bestow the like upon an Arab. Thus, from the sheikh to the beggar, from the merchant to the fellah who wishes to use his land profitably and to the artisan who wishes to bind his son apprentice, there are very few Muslims who have not some commerce with Jews. These relations, so beneficial to both sides, required concord. This concord, in turn, though based on self-interest, presupposes understanding and sometimes engenders friendship. Several Demnati Jews frequently play host to Muslims (it should not be forgotten that Muslims are permitted Jewish food), and the latter give them presents on the occasion of religious festivals, lend them their tents for pilgrimage camps, etc.

I came to Demnat in May, 1955, a few weeks after the great exodus, when about 600 Jews left the town for Israel. The echo of that event still lingered in the air. Indeed, the walled *mellāh* had not been emptied of all its veteran inhabitants, of whom about 1,100 remained. The deserted dwellings had been occupied by Jews from the small neighboring *mellāhs*, known collectively as Ait Bou Oulli, from the name of the Berber tribe in whose midst they live. They had taken advantage of the opportunity to obtain housing in the district town. It had not been difficult for them to take their few belongings—two or three rugs, two pots and a tin plate—to load them, together with their children on a donkey, and to march upon Demnat. In the house of the head of the community, with whom we were staying, a young Ait Bou Oulli couple had found accommodation in a room without a window. He was about twenty, and she twelve, according to her own statement, and perhaps ten, to judge from her appearance. It was market-day. The town was all astir. In the non-Jewish section and in the *mellāh*, Jews were running about to earn a few pennies. In all the *mellāh* courtyards we entered, young women were sitting on the ground sewing dresses and suits with small hand-operated ma-

chines, and Berber customers stood looking on. Some old women carded wool with hand combs, others wove carpets. Some specially skilled women distilled *mahya*, i.e. fig or date brandy. In the alleys, beside rubbish heaps, cobblers were sitting, mending shoes and making donkey saddles. In the *mellāh* market, shopkeepers were sitting in their shops—two ells square, two-and-a-half ells high—attending to their business. On the whole, the atmosphere of a typical Jewish townlet of the region.

In a second book, *Les communautés israélites du Sud marocain* (Casablanca, 1960), Flamand deals with hundreds of small, medium-sized and large *mellāhs*, scattered over an area of 200,000 square kilometers, about one-third of the territory of Morocco. In 1950, that area was inhabited by approximately 50,000 Jews.

The number of Jews in the walled *mellāhs* near the castles (*ksour*) in the cases of the desert steppe along Wadi Sous, Dar'a Ziz, i.e. the Pre-Sahara, was then 1,500 families, or approximately 12,000 persons. As to their social status, we should regard them still belonging to the *dhimmīs*, whose life and property are safeguarded only through the payment of protection money to the Berber sheikhs in whose area they live. As late as thirty years ago, deeds of sale were made in their respect as for property, apparently for the purpose of transferring the right to collect the protection money from one sheikh to another. Flamand concludes: "It is impossible to describe the condition in which the Jews of the cases lived until 1933 as slavery, but it is certainly possible to call it helotage" (p. 57).

Some 7,000 to 8,000 Jews, scattered over 110 *mellāhs*, lived on the High Atlas and at its foot in 1950. Unlike the settlements near the *ksour*, only a few of these *mellāhs* were surrounded by a wall. Though in the other localities, too, the Jews live in quarters of their own, they are no longer separated there from their neighbors by physical barriers. In this region, access to which is most difficult, the dependence of the Berber on the Jewish craftsmen is perhaps more marked than anywhere else. Of particular note is Flamand's description of the Jewish farmers, where for the first time we are given actual data, as opposed to the usual hearsay.

Flamand devotes much attention to the *mellāhs* of the five major towns in the region—Marrakesh, Safi, Agadir, Mogador and Tarudant, which in 1950 contained over 30,000 Jews, i.e. about two-thirds of the region's total population—and provides us with a wealth of industriously collected material on all aspects of Jewish social life. His account traces the movement from village to town; ethnological facts; clothing, housing, food and health. Nor does he neglect religious and intellectual life and the striving for the return to Zion. Still, in presenting these subjects, the author is more dependent than in other fields on guidance by his stu-

dents, and it seems that they, too, were not particularly conversant with the matter. The result, therefore, is somewhat colorless.*

In 1955, when setting down the impressions of my visit among North African Jewry, I pondered the future of that community, which then numbered 450,000, and noted:

North African Jewry twice underwent severe trials, in the Byzantine era (6th and 7th centuries C.E.) and in the Almohad era (12th and 13th centuries C.E.), followed by long periods of complete eclipse. We do not know what sorry fate would have befallen those Jews but for the intervention of outside forces, which retrieved them from oblivion and reintroduced them into the mainstream of Jewish history. The first time, they were reinvigorated by the Jewish centers in Babylonia, then flourishing under the Caliphs; the second time, they were saved from spiritual decay by the expellees from Spain. . . .

North African Jewry possesses positive forces, which brace it for the test awaiting it: long-standing immunity to attack and suffering; religious devotion; consciousness of its social superiority. On the other hand, it lacks experienced leaders and is backward economically. (*Me-Erez Mebho ha-Shemesh*, pp. 232-233)

I came to the conclusion that in the present instance, as well, Mahgreb Jewry could only be saved by outside help.

Two or three years after the above was written, Flamand summed up his study of the southern region as follows:

The prospects of southern Jewry seem gloomy. Little known, lost, as it were, on the borders of vast Morocco, enshrined within Berber communities themselves withdrawn and secluded, they held their own valiantly from time immemorial. Life receded from them imperceptibly, turning them into reliquaries, museums. Suddenly, the mountain and the sands become animated. A new destiny beckons to these Jews, but unfortunately its appeals are incoherent and sometimes contradictory. Are they capable of understanding these appeals? Will they sustain the shocks of innovations and the strain of adaptation to new situations? Stubborn beliefs and invincible patience in the face of misery—their former weapons—have become useless, and their metaphysical armor is cracking. They are unable to devise solutions to the problems besetting them, and the application of advice proffered by local administrators and foreign coreligionists is beyond their powers. Thus their present is miserable and their future uncertain. The most cautious forecasts see their chances evenly divided between abrupt transfer or slow disintegration. If those populations did not sometimes belie forecasts by their astonishing capacity for resistance and resurgence, one might predict for them the end of Baudelaire's "wounded man who is forgotten and who dies motionless amidst a supreme effort." Relying on the means of investigation at our disposal and on the present trend of events, one is at least tempted to conclude that the extinction of Jewish life in Southern Morocco is near. (*Les communautés israélites du Sud marocain*, p. 326)

Historical events do not repeat themselves along identical lines nor do they follow expected patterns. The overwhelming majority of North African Jews have left the countries in which their fathers lived for

* Flamand's *Quelque manifestations de l'esprit dans les juiveries du Sud marocain* (Casablanca, 1959) is similarly disappointing.

many generations. Those who remained did so of their own free will, partly because of advanced age and partly because they were unable to liquidate their property on favorable terms, or because the authorities had cared and continued to care for their personal welfare. At the same time it is evident that the life in the *mellāh* or *hāra*, as it had proceeded for so many centuries, is drawing to a close, however much we may regret this from a human and historical point of view.*

* It should be indicated that in the foregoing pages we could state only in general outline the ties between the *mellāh* (or *hāra*, *maḥalla*, etc.) and the *medina*, the Muslim town: Jewish history in Muslim lands is still largely *terra incognita*, waiting to be explored. However, it should also be noted that, at Bar-Ilan University, we are currently conducting a project, sponsored by the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, on "Materials for Jewish History in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam." Firstly, we register the available sources and bibliography. Then we index the names of all Jewish settlements and communities scattered over millions of square miles from India to the Atlantic. Finally, we prepare a card list of all personalities (Jewish and non-Jewish) occurring in the sources. But the most important part of our work is the Index of Subjects, which registers the various aspects of life in the communities in question. The project also includes the Balkan countries while under Ottoman rule (15th to 19th centuries). When completed, it will enable us to know much more about the Diaspora in Muslim lands than we do today.

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