

North Africa

INTRODUCTION

THE LARGEST Jewish communities in the Moslem countries were situated in French North Africa during the period under review. Including Libya, which was under British military occupation, there were 525,000 Jews in North Africa, or roughly over one-half of the total number of Jews in Moslem lands (excluding the Asiatic part of the Soviet Union).¹

The nationalist agitation and social unrest that followed the events in Palestine affected French North African Jewish communities and led to violence and pogroms. In some respects, however, the Jews in French North Africa² were better off than their co-religionists in other Moslem lands. Even the establishment of Israel and the military victories of the Israeli in the ensuing war had milder repercussions in French possessions than in the independent and semi-independent states of the Middle East. This was due, at least to a certain degree, to the traditional French policy of colonial assimilation and the moderating influence the French exerted on the local Arab authorities.

The friendly attitude of the French government toward the Jewish community may be understood in terms of practical necessity and certain cultural affinities. The Jews in North Africa not only represented the strongest pro-French sector, but were also economically and, to a degree, socially, the most active and dynamic group in the area. The policy of French cultural assimilation, diversified as it was in various areas, found a sympathetic and helpful understanding in the Jewish communities.

French North Africa was divided into three different political structures: Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. The unique legal status of Algeria had an important bearing on the Jewish situation in that country. While Morocco and Tunisia had semi-independent status as French protectorates (under a Sultan and Bey, respectively), Algeria was an integral part of the French republic, having the same administrative and political set-up as existed in metropolitan France.² This difference in political status also profoundly affected Jewish-Arab relationships. For a time Arab nationalist leaders representing the Destour and neo-Destour parties in Tunisia, and Istaklal and Assanians in Morocco, tried to enlist Jewish support in their fight for national rights. Jews were promised equality and brotherhood—on the condition that they would not engage in support of Jewish Palestine. In Algeria, where the Jews enjoyed French citizenship under the Cremieux Law of 1870, the Arab

¹ Based upon *JDC Review*, IV, 23 (1948); and V, 1 and 2 (1949).

² Except for the "southern" territory, which was under a special semi-colonial regime.

nationalists associated them to a certain extent with the French. It may be interesting to recall that the re-establishment of the Cremieux Law by General Charles de Gaulle in October, 1943, met with no opposition from Arab circles.

During the war between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, Arab tempers rose high and nationalist groups throughout North Africa threatened both Jews and French with reprisals in the event the Jews should share Zionist aspirations and the French should favor the Jews by recognizing the state of Israel. At the time of writing, when the shock of Jewish victory in Palestine was over, local observers reported a marked slackening of anti-Jewish hysteria on the part of the Arabs and the disappearance of racial tensions. The following report from Morocco may be of interest by way of illustration: During the Summer of 1949, Jewish, Arab, and French camping groups spent their vacations side by side in the area of Ben Smin, Ein Kerzouza, and Ras el Ma, in the mountains about two hundred miles from Casablanca. There were Arab-Jewish games and exchange visits to one another's campfires, and a generally friendly atmosphere prevailed.

MOROCCO

THE JEWISH population of Morocco numbered some 280,000—of whom about 250,000 were located in French Morocco and the international zone of Tangiers, and some 30,000 in the Spanish zone.

Although the general condition of the Jews in Morocco had improved considerably after the country became a French protectorate (1912), the legal status of the Jews was still unclear and awkward. Jews were not full-fledged citizens. As subjects of the sultan, they were largely dependent on the good will of the local authorities.

As a result of the war in Palestine, anti-Jewish riots and violence occurred in several cities. In June, 1948, 43 Jews were killed and 155 wounded in Djerada and Oujda, two small cities with Jewish populations of 8,000 and 130, respectively. The authorities took measures to punish the participants in the violence, and in February, 1949, two perpetrators of pogroms in Oujda were condemned to death; eleven other defendants were given various prison terms, and twenty-one were acquitted. Furthermore, twenty-eight defendants in the trial of the participants in the Djerada pogroms received varying sentences, and thirty-one were acquitted (JTA, February 15-28, 1949).

Communal Organization and Education

Jewish communal life in Morocco was regulated by special laws enacted by the local authorities. In 1945 the Jews had received the right to elect their own communal council. However, only persons who contributed a minimum of 100 francs annually to the community were allowed to vote.³ The subsequent creation of the Council of Jewish Communities in Morocco was an important step in the direction of a more democratic organization of communal affairs. In 1948 six delegates of the Jewish communities were admitted to the native

³ *Défense*, Paris, February 4, 1949.

Moroccan section of the Consultative Council of the government. Although this assembly had no legislative functions, the presence of Jewish delegates added considerably to the prestige of the Jewish community.

There was a large number of Jewish religious schools in Morocco—*hedarim* and *yeshivot*—some of which were affiliated with *Ozar Hatorah*, an agency promoting religious education in Oriental countries. In the Spring of 1949 about 4,400 children were attending various *Ozar Hatorah* schools. The activities of the Alliance Israélite Universelle were deserving of particular mention, for its schools in Morocco not only comprised the largest Jewish educational system but also played a considerable role in educating a more active and progressive Jewish generation to Western ideas and French culture. In June, 1949, the Alliance was conducting 60 schools with an enrollment of 23,320 pupils in Morocco (including Tangiers).⁴ These schools enjoyed the sympathetic support of the French government and were financed by the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). JDC was promoting a special children's feeding program in various schools, at the time of writing. New school canteens were functioning in Mogador, Sale, Safi, Mazagan, and Marrakech.

Welfare Activities and Medical Aid

The economic status and living standards of the majority of the Jews, particularly those living in the *mellahs* (ghettos), were very low, and large numbers were living on charity. Quite recently (October, 1949), the French authorities decided, in accordance with plans submitted by the Alliance, to start a vast slum clearance project in the *mellah* of Casablanca. It was expected that new buildings for 12,500 inhabitants of the *mellah* would be erected within eighteen months (JTA, October 13, 1949). When completed, the housing project was expected to ameliorate considerably the housing and sanitary conditions of the Jewish population. At this writing, however, overcrowding and disease were still prevalent, and a recent study by the Jewish health organization OSE showed a 30 per cent incidence of trachoma among Jewish school children in Casablanca. Other diseases which were widespread among both children and adults included tuberculosis and favus. JDC, which was engaged in a medical program in Morocco in cooperation with OSE, was financing a number of projects in preventive medicine, in the establishment of clinics, and in conducting anti-tuberculosis campaigns. Deserving of mention among the local agencies active in the field were *Maternelle*, the Anti-Tuberculosis Center, and the Jewish Association to Fight Tuberculosis. This work was sympathetically received by the government, which made forty beds available for tuberculosis cases in a government hospital at Casablanca and allocated 400 grams of streptomycin, which JDC supplemented with another 500 grams. During the period under review the JDC relief program in Morocco was expanded to include support of homes for the aged, vocational training, and increased cash relief allowances.

⁴ *Les cahiers d'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, Paris, June, 1949.

TUNISIA

THE TUNISIAN Jewish community was diversified in composition. Numbering altogether about 90,000, it included some 70,000 native Jews who were subjects of the Bey of Tunisia. The rest were mostly of either French or Italian nationality. The largest Jewish centers were in Tunis, with a population of some 50,000 Jews, and in Sfax, Sousse, Djerba, and Gabes, with 5,500, 5,000, 4,500, and 4,000 Jews, respectively.

Communal Organization

Before 1921, the Jewish communities in Tunisia had been directed by the welfare committees (Comité de Bienfaisance) whose members were designated by the authorities. By the decree of August 30, 1921, the Jewish community of the city of Tunis received the right to elect twelve members to the Community Council. This arrangement existed up to 1937 and was re-introduced after an interruption of ten years, by a decree of March 18, 1947. The Council of the Community of Tunis, elected on June 8, 1947, was attempting to organize a countrywide Federation of Jewish Communities and to include the communities of such important cities as Sfax, Sousse, Bizerte, and Nabuel, under the liberalized election system. The efforts of the Tunis community council were crowned with some success, and the new electoral system was introduced in Sfax by a decree of August 4, 1949.⁵ The Jewish community in Tunisia was well organized and operated a number of welfare agencies patterned on the French Jewish community system. Deserving of note in the field of educational and youth activities were the Alliance Israélite Universelle which was conducting five schools with an enrollment of 3,000 pupils; the Eclaireurs Israélites Français (Jewish Boy Scouts); Sport and Joy; and others.

ALGERIA

IT is estimated that the Jewish population in Algeria in 1949 was about 130,000. Available data based on the 1931 census throw light on the social organization of the Jewish community.⁶ In 1931, the Jewish population of 110,000 was distributed among 257 localities: There were 78 in the district of Algiers, including the Ghardaia territory; 75 in Constantine, including the Touggourt territory; 104 in Oran, including the Ain-Sefra territory. Jewish occupational data for 1931, covering some 28,700 gainfully employed persons, indicated that 16,000 were artisans, merchants, and commercial employees, 6,000 were manual laborers, 2,700 were in the professions, 2,500 were in civil service, and 1,500 were in courts, police, and public utilities.

⁵ *La terre retrouvée*, Paris, April 1, 1949.

⁶ *Les Juifs de l'Afrique du Nord*, by Grand Rabbi Maurice Eisenbeth, Algeria, 1936.

Communal Organization and Welfare

Although geographically in North Africa, the Jewish community in Algeria belonged socially and culturally to France. Following the French law of separation of church and state, the communal life of Algerian Jews was centered around the *cultuelles* (voluntary religious associations), which were under the jurisdiction of the Consistoire Central Israélite de France et d'Algérie. In 1947 the establishment of the Federation of Jewish Communities constituted an important step in the evolution of Jewish communal life in Algeria by bringing a large measure of coordination and planning into Jewish religious activities in Algeria. Because the functions of the *cultuelles* were limited to religious matters, there was a number of welfare agencies in Algeria dealing with various social service activities. Among them were the Association d'Etude d'Aide et d'Assistance, Polyvalent Dispensary, ORT, Ecole Maimonide, Bikur Cholim, and the Training Project for Girls. All these agencies were receiving financial assistance from the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).

During the period under review, thousands of refugees from Morocco passed through Algiers en route to Israel. They were sheltered in the Bab-el-Oued Community Center. Later, a tent colony was provided for them seven kilometers from the city, near the village of Buzarea. In addition, the local community acquired the Hotel Atlantide with the assistance of JDC and established a control center where transients were given general medical examinations.

LIBYA

THE POLITICAL status of the Italian colony of Libya (Tripolitania and Cyrenaica) had been under consideration by the Great Powers since the end of the war. Although all the powers favored the independence of Libya, France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States were divided as to the terms of independence and the conditions by which it could be attained. The extreme strategic importance of Cyrenaica (the eastern part of Libya) weighed heavily in the deliberations. On September 16, 1949, in an independent move, the British granted some autonomy to Cyrenaica, and authorized Emir Sayid Idran el Senussi to establish a semi-independent rule in that area.

The problem of the Italian colonies was under discussion before the United Nations at the time of writing, and Maurice L. Perelzweig was empowered by the Jewish community of Libya to represent its interests before the international assembly. The Jewish demands included not only the protection of property and cultural rights but also the right of emigration. It must be recalled in this connection that a wave of pogroms which broke out in 1945 in Tripoli and some isolated places caused great loss of life and inestimable damage to property. Considerable anti-Jewish agitation was felt in the country after the establishment of the state of Israel. On June 12 and 13, 1948, another

pogrom took place in Tripoli. Twenty-six Jews were killed, 13 were wounded, and 298 families in all suffered from the violence.

Population

According to the 1931 census, there were 24,534 Jews in Libya—21,342 in Tripolitania, and 3,192 in Cyrenaica. The Jewish community rose to some 30,000 in 1948 and fell to some 25,000 in 1949 as a result of emigration. The unusual demographic structure of the Jewish population in the colony may be perceived from the fact that in 1948, 8,533 out of a total of 29,241 Jews were under 12 years of age. The size of the age group under 12 is indicative of the continuing growth of the small Jewish community.

Tripoli was the largest Jewish center, with some 20,000 Jews, or four-fifths of the present Jewish population of Libya.

Legal Status and Communal Organization

Under Italian rule, the Jews were divided into three separate citizenship groups: Italian, consisting of Jews residing in Libya; Italian-Libyan, consisting of the native Jews; and foreign Jews. The Jewish community had a recognized legal status, and the right to levy taxes and the jurisdiction over religious and family matters was left in the hands of rabbinical tribunals.

The educational organization of the community reflected the traditional mores of the population. During the period under review, about 2,000 children were enrolled in the half-day Hebrew school; the rest of the day was spent by the children in the Italian school, which fostered a general educational program. Five hundred and seventy boys attended the talmud torah classes, and some 85 students were enrolled in the yeshiva. A Hebrew seminary for teachers was founded in Tripoli in 1947 to train educational personnel for the Jewish schools.

Welfare Activities

Already shaken by the German occupation during the war, after the war the Jewish community was ruined by recurring violence and riots, and appealed to outside Jewry for help. In 1943, JDC initiated in Libya limited relief operations which soon developed into a large-scale program. In 1949, 1,200 families, totaling 6,000 persons, received cash relief from JDC, which in addition supported refugees from the interior who were living in the Tripoli Community House. Some 2,000 children benefited from the feeding and other child-care programs.

Emigration from North Africa

It is obviously impossible in a brief survey of the Jewish situation in North Africa to give a well-rounded picture of the forces that were changing the structure of the old Jewish communities, some of which antedated the Christian era. Suffice it to say that in the last two years, partly as a result of riots and

violence, and essentially under the impact of the establishment of the Jewish state, the Jews of Libya and Morocco were on the move. The creation of Israel exerted so strong a messianic appeal in Africa that thousands of Jews, particularly those from far-away cities and villages, began a clandestine movement toward Israel. JDC was forced to provide for the Moroccan Jews who went to Algiers, then were transported to Marseilles, and thence embarked for Israel. Thousands of Jews left for Israel from Libya as well—at first via Italian ports, then, after April 8, 1949, directly from Libya to Haifa. From the time of the establishment of the state of Israel to October 20, 1949, 34,000 Jews from North Africa had been helped to emigrate to Israel by JDC.⁷ This number, which included about 6,000 from Cyrenaica, indicated that practically all the Jews of this eastern province of Libya were evacuated.

LEON SHAPIRO

⁷ Statement made by Joseph Schwartz, European JDC chairman, to the "Conference of JDC Directors in Europe," Paris, October 10-14, 1949.