

Jews under Muslim Rule in the late Nineteenth Century

by David Littman

Introduction

'... they shall return and be as the Koran said of them: *condemned to humiliation and misery* . . . we shall send them back to their former state.'¹ These words were used before the Yom Kippur War by Egypt's President Anwar El Sadat (Radio Cairo, 25.4.1972) and are clearly based on a passage from the Koran (Sura 9, verse 29) and on subsequent Muslim oral tradition.

Till the last decades of the nineteenth century, and even into the twentieth, the Jews in many parts of the Maghreb—as in most other Muslim lands—were still obliged to live in isolated groups amidst the general population. They resided in special quarters and were constrained to wear distinctive clothing, the carrying of arms was forbidden to them and their sworn testimony was not accepted in any Muslim Court of Law. Their discriminatory status remained that of *ahl al dhimma*: a 'protected' people, i.e. people enjoying the protection of Islam and the Koran, while at the same time subject to the disabilities and humiliations laid down in specific regulations known as the Pact of Omar (634–644 C.E.), which degraded both the individual and the community.

The archives of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*² relating to Muslim lands are an indispensable source of information on the situation of the Jews from Morocco to Persia during the half century preceding World War I. A few of the many hundreds of documents which vividly illustrate the wretched condition of the common folk have been selected at random.³

The choice was limited to one source and one region: the Maghreb, except Algeria, which was controlled by France. The Jews, although economically indispensable, formed less than 3 per cent of the region's population. However,

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they were widely dispersed over this vast area during the nineteenth century, accounting for roughly one-quarter of the inhabitants of almost every sea-port from Tripoli on the Mediterranean to Mogador (Essaouira) on the Atlantic. Numerous in many large towns of the interior, they had, from immemorial times, also been dispersed in smaller communities throughout the hinterland and furthest oases. By natural increase, the approximately 100,000 Maghreb Jews of 1850 had multiplied to about 250,000 by 1900 and over 500,000 by 1948. In 1850, there were approximately 250,000 Oriental Jews living in the Maghreb and the East (Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Iraq, Persia); and their descendants, who numbered over a million in 1948, never represented more than 5 per cent to 10 per cent of World Jewry.

By contrast, from antiquity down to the Roman-Byzantine era and including the first three centuries of Arab expansion, the vast majority of Jews had been living in the Orient and North Africa.

The Jews were the only *dhimmis* tolerated in the whole of North Africa, the indigenous Christian populations having been virtually eliminated by the middle of the twelfth century during the Almohad persecutions. Maghrebini Jewry had resisted exile, had survived martyrdom and forced conversions. For centuries, they were obliged to accept their indignities, but in the nineteenth century, special political and commercial conditions and facilities were becoming available which enabled a few of them to pass from Muslim 'protection' to the more effective protection of a foreign power. It should be remembered that all those Christians who had been authorized latterly to reside in the Maghreb States were fully protected subjects of European powers.

It would not be difficult to provide comparative documents from the *Alliance* archives and other sources confirming the equally precarious situation of many of the numerous

Jewish communities in the eastern Muslim lands, even as late as the early twentieth century. Abbé Léon Godard, who visited North Africa, Egypt, and Palestine in the fifties of the last century, graphically summed up his feelings and those of other travellers before and after him, who had observed the degradation of Oriental Jewry under Muslim domination: '*On dit qu'à Rome, ils [les Juifs] ne passent jamais sous l'Arc de triomphe de Titus, mais, s'ils gardaient de pareilles rancunes en pays musulmans, je ne sais quels chemins ils devraient prendre.*'⁴

The endeavours made by the Jews to gain the protection of a Christian power, in order to escape from chronic oppression, are more easily understood in the general context of the long struggle by the Christians of the Orient for equal rights with the Muslims, which reached its climax during this period.

Throughout the nineteenth century the large indigenous Christian population of Egypt and the Syria-Lebanon-Palestine region began to benefit from European pressure on the Sublime Porte. In Egypt, the brief French occupation under Bonaparte (1798–1801) gave the Christians an ephemeral taste of equality. This was the beginning of a gradual uphill struggle towards social equality with their Muslim neighbours. Significant improvements were achieved during the long reign of Egypt's ruler, Mohammed Ali (1805–49), who frequently looked to France for support in his controversies with the Ottoman Sultan to whom he officially owed suzerainty. Christian emancipation continued to gather momentum under Mohammed Ali's descendants and the small Jewish communities inevitably profited indirectly, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. After the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, effective legal equality with Muslims was granted to both Christians and Jews. Ibrahim Pasha, Mohammed Ali's son, abolished the discriminatory laws against Christians during his military occupation of the Syria-Lebanon-Palestine region (1832–40). Under his rule, Christians (and to a lesser extent Jews also) enjoyed full equality and complete security of life, property and honour.⁵

Real emancipation, in theory if not altogether in practice, came with the *Hatt-i Hümayun* of 1856 which granted full rights and equality to the 'Christian communities and the other

non-Muslim subjects.' This imperial decree was the direct result of strong pressure on the Porte, by the British, French and Austrians after the Crimean War, in favour of all the Christians of the Ottoman Empire. The latter numbered about half a million in the provinces of Syria and Palestine, i.e. roughly 30 per cent of that area's total population. The Jewish communities adopted a low profile and being less conspicuous avoided the backlash from fanatical groups of Arabs and Druses, hostile to this liberalization, which culminated in the 1860 massacres of thousands of Christians in Damascus and the Lebanon. Following energetic protests, France was given a mandate to intervene and when she evacuated her expeditionary force, a special constitution was obtained from the Porte which provided a certain degree of internal autonomy to the Lebanese Christians.

The French conquest of Algiers (1830) and the gradual pacification and colonization of the country had a profound effect on developments in Tunisia and Morocco. The Algerian Jews benefited overnight and in 1870 they collectively obtained full French citizenship by decree.

In 1857 the Bey of Tunis was forced by external pressure to give his country a modern constitution. Although it was abrogated in 1864, it marked a step forward and was one of the chief factors of Tunisia's early Westernization. France established her protectorate over the country in 1881, after which the security of the Jews was fully guaranteed.

In Morocco, modest and hesitant attempts at reforming the ineffective government resulted from the humiliating defeats at the hands of the French in 1844 and of the Spaniards in 1859–60. However, the mass of the Jewish population had to wait another 50 years until the division of the country into French and Spanish Protectorates (1912–13) afforded them effective protection from arbitrary oppression. In spite of this, they remained under the jurisdiction of the Sultan and were thus never collectively freed from the juridical inequalities of the local Islamic law courts where the sworn testimony of *dhimmi*s—as in Tunisia—had no validity.

During the troubled period prior to the French occupation of the country, thousands of inoffensive Jews were brutally attacked in different parts of the country by hostile tribesmen and uncontrolled soldiery. Settat and Taza (1903

& 1907), Casablanca (1907), Fez (1912) are but four of the places where the most serious incidents took place, in which hundreds were killed and wounded and thousands fled; in Casablanca, 300 women and girls were abducted and later ransomed with great difficulty. These *Mellahs* (in which thousands of Jews lived), were totally pillaged and in great part burned to the ground.

In Tripolitania the Porte resumed direct control from the semi-independent Caramanli dynasty in 1835. The Jews of Tripoli profited from the passing of the 1839 *Gulhané* and the 1856 *Hatt-i Hümayun* decrees, but in most of the rest of the country, where the Imperial Writ did not run, these edicts were largely meaningless. Equality with Muslims came only after the Italian occupation of 1911.

The regular intervention of foreign Jewish institutions from 1860 onwards (the first intercession was in 1840 over the notorious Damascus blood-libel accusation), besides being aimed at improving the educational, social and juridical position of their Maghrebini brethren, afforded opportunities for reporting on frequent injustices. The archives of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in Paris contain endless complaints on behalf of the lower strata of the population about acts which were iniquitous even according to Islamic law. The documents which follow are intended to give the reader a glimpse into the harsh reality of Jewish life under Muslim rule.

1864 *The Looting of Jewish Quarters on the Island of Djerba*

Another disaster to report! Muslim fanaticism, tolerated, if not encouraged by the local authorities, has once more been unleashed against our brethren on the island of Djerba. They are in the greatest misery: a whole people, having undergone all the excess of unspeakable barbarity, is today sunk in despair and the most dreadful destitution.

The Arab tribes of Akara and Ourghamma invaded the rich and populous island of Djerba. After attempting to lay waste the markets, from which they were repulsed by the resistance of the Muslims, these violent men turned upon the weakest, falling upon the Jewish quarters, which they sacked, destroying everything.

This happened on the tenth of this month, the day of Yom Kippur; the synagogues were invaded, profaned, and defiled. The Scrolls of the Law torn in pieces and burnt; the men injured and trampled upon, all the women and girls were raped, and my pen refuses to set down the terrifying tale of atrocities in all its horror, which these unfortunate people have undergone.

It is worth noting that the Governor of the island refused to intervene to re-establish order; need one say more than that the pillage did not cease for five days and nights, and that the invaders' rapacity was not satiated until the last rags had been stripped from the Jews of Djerba.

From a letter (28.10.1864) by Salomon Garsin in Tunis to the President of the AIU Paris (AIU Tunis I.C.3).

1866 *Forced Conversions*

. . . We have welcomed and lodged in a private house at our expense an old man of eighty who, forced long ago to embrace Islam, wishes to return to the religion of his fathers. The Regional Committee has granted assistance in satisfying this justifiable desire, and at the moment is engaged in enabling other co-religionists in the same position to cross over into Algeria, for such a thing is not tolerated here; it might be helpful to ask the Bey's representative in Paris why freedom to practise one's religion is forbidden in Tunisia . . .

The Sovereign of Tunis found nothing better to do to pass the rest of Ramadan than to take by force—on the pretext that he had become a Muslim—a Jewish youth of good family, not yet 15! He had the victim shut up in his men's seraglio and obstinately refuses to give him up to his parents . . .

From a letter (23.3.1866) by Salomon Garsin, President of the Tunis AIU Committee, to the President of the AIU Paris (AIU Tunis I.C.3).

1869 *Eighteen Jews Killed, Murderers Unpunished*

Every epistle requires a preamble, but this needs none. The enclosed document in Hebrew signed by rabbis, by prominent merchants, and countersigned by the Chief Rabbi will explain all. It is the cry of an entire nation abandoned to its own devices in the face of Muslim ferocity.

Eighteen Jews have already fallen in a few months to the knives of fanatical murderers; and His Highness's Government, far from punishing the guilty, protects and apparently encourages them.

The Government's conduct towards us is machiavellian beyond words. We are not directly persecuted, but such is the scornful treatment we receive when we ask for justice from the Bey or his ministers that open persecution would be a hundred times better. Acknowledged persecution, however, would expose the executioner and his victim to the world, and the Tunisian Government wishes to appear impartial, whilst masking killers surreptitiously; and all these efforts tend to overlook the victim in presenting to us merely an unskilled and powerless judge!!!

Under such a policy, corpses multiply: impunity encourages the murderers.

The Tunisian Jews, simply as Jews, are constantly exposed to stringent measures on the part of the local authorities; they have no legal rights, and are treated by the population with the utmost hostility.

We cannot refrain from stating that the situation appears to us to be extremely black: our goods, our lives, our honour, today all are in jeopardy.

The enclosed document was composed under the sway of this fear: it is the cry of anguish from an oppressed people seeking help from their European brethren, and especially appealing to you, sir, who have long shown yourself as an indefatigable champion in the crusade of justice against fanaticism, you who have always held high the banner of an unjustly oppressed nation.

Eighteen victims have already fallen, but the sword of justice has not been raised to impose a salutary lesson of fear! . . . Eighteen! . . . What then will be our future if the present is so monstrous?

The time for deliberation is past, the future is exemplified by the past; and if you do not come to our aid, the Jewish condition in this area will be so unnatural that there will no longer be time to remedy it. And besides, dead men do not return! Your support can never be more effective for us than at this moment.

With our ever-characteristic mildness, we do not seek an eye for an eye, blood for blood, but that the guilty should be condemned and

legally condemned. Then the present state of our despair will cease and, in this country, our nation will once again take its proper rank amongst the civilised nations.

Instinctively pacific, we demand peace and justice. Shall they be denied us in a century of progress such as ours? . . .

Letter (14.2.1869) by all the members of the Tunis AIU Committee to Adolphe Crémieux, President of the AIU, Paris (AIU Tunisia I.C.3).

1877 *Turkish Victories in Balkans*

. . . the Jews of Tunisia are full of anxiety at present. The Turkish victories in the Balkan Peninsula have inflamed the Muslim population's fanaticism. There are all the more grounds for this anxiety, for if they [the Muslims] believed themselves no longer restrained by the Western powers, they might indulge in all manner of excesses against us, above all when those who ought to protect us set a sad example . . .

From a letter (21.8.1877) by Abraham de M. Bocara, President of the Tunis Regional AIU Committee to Adolphe Crémieux, President of the AIU in Paris. (AIU Tunisia.)

1880 *Seven assassinations in Nabel*

. . . Thanks to the steps you have been good enough to take on behalf of the Séiou family of Nabel, M. Roustan, our Minister Plenipotentiary, has intervened with the Tunisian Government which ordered the murderers of the unfortunate Séiou, who took refuge in a mosque of the town, to be chained there. In my opinion, this is a derisory measure, inasmuch as the head of the mosque, while chaining the Arabs during the day, unchains them at night, so that the inhabitants shall believe that the saint of the mosque has worked this miracle. In this way, the murderers become objects of their veneration, because they believe that the saints protect them for having murdered an infidel.

Nabel is a town of fanatics, and we must unfortunately record six other murders of our co-religionists, the perpetrators of which have not been punished . . .

From a letter (22.9.1880) by A. Daninos, Vice-President of the Tunis Regional AIU Committee to the President of the AIU, Paris (AIU Tunisia I.C.3).

1867 *The Destruction of the Zliten Synagogue*

Immediately after receiving the news of the burning of the synagogue of Zliten and all its contents, I went to H. E. Assèm Pasha (who had received the news at the same time) and begged him in the name of the Alliance Israélite Universelle which I had the honour to represent, to safeguard the lives of our co-religionists in Zliten. He replied that he would do all in his power and even promised me that he would send cavalry to protect the Jews . . .

Seeing that the matter was quite serious and not wishing such a deed to go unpunished, I thought it in the Committee's interest also to inform Sir Moses Montefiore and Mr Camondo, both of whom, on various occasions, have shown their goodwill regarding our problems. I myself, as a subject of Her Britannic Majesty, felt it my duty to inform Mr Drummond Hay, Consul-General of H.B.M. who immediately made the necessary *démarches* with the local authorities, who promised to give ample satisfaction . . .

Fortunately for our co-religionists, this act was not without precedent; otherwise the Arabs would try to convince others of what they are now saying, that the synagogue caught fire by itself, on account of the lamps; but everyone knows what the Arabs, the Cadi, the Ulema were doing to the Israelites up to the eve of the fire in the Synagogue. So the blame rebounds on those who have always molested Jews and forbidden the work of enlarging the synagogue; thus about 15 people have been arrested, among them the Cadi, who is already implicated by the depositions he made before the grand council . . .

If the Governor here had rendered justice to the Jews of Zliten, both with regard to their cemetery and their synagogue, the people of Zliten would not have dared to carry out this latest disgraceful act, and if, God forbid, they do not obtain ample satisfaction, as is hoped, the Jews will be obliged to emigrate to save their lives and their few possessions.

Extracts from a letter (21.7.1867) in Italian by Saul Labi, President of the Tripoli AIU Committee to Adolphe Crémieux, President of the AIU, Paris (AIU Libya (Tripoli) I.C.4).

1879 *Profanation of Zawiya Synagogue and various assaults in Tripolitania*

. . . On the evening of 2 January last, at Zliten,

some Muslims attacked the house of a Jew, and stole all he had after seriously injuring him. On the evening of 24 February, at Amrus, they entered the house of another Jew, stripped him of all his possessions, struck and injured both him and his wife, and killed his son aged about 20. On the evening of March 29, at Taguira, they robbed a Jew of all his belongings, injured him, and killed a young child at its mother's knees. Finally, on the evening of 25 June, at Zawiya Gharbiya, only 7 hours away from here, the Sacred Synagogue was plundered, and profaned in every conceivable way; they threw all the Torah Scrolls into the street, trampled on them, after making away with three of them, and they would have burned everything if the women's repeated screaming had not put these wretches to flight.

As soon as these facts came to the knowledge of the very reverend Eliau Hazan, the Chief Rabbi of that Community, he hastened to ask His Highness Mahmud Geradden Pasha, the Governor General, that those guilty of the various crimes should be punished. Unfortunately, up to now it has not been possible to obtain justice—this is why the Muslims, emboldened by their impunity, still threaten a people who do them no harm.

Considering the dangers to which the Jews in the towns and neighbouring villages are exposed, because of the unsatisfactory attitude of the local Authorities, I have considered it necessary to let the members of the Committee ask for protection from my colleagues representing Britain, France, Italy and the United States of America, as I cannot do this myself, acting as I must in my capacity as Representative of Austria-Hungary.

From a letter (10.7.1879) by Saul Labi, President of the Tripoli Regional Committee to Adolphe Crémieux, President of the AIU, Paris (AIU Libya (Tripoli) I.C.7).

1897 *Jews Totally Unprotected Throughout Tripolitania*

. . . The situation of the Jews in all parts of Tripolitania is very dangerous. From all the rights which, from his known goodness and generosity, His Imperial Majesty the Sultan has granted to all his subjects without distinction of

race, we are unfortunately excluded by reason of extreme ill-treatment and persecution at the hands of the Muslims in our country, under the government of our present *Vali* (Governor), Hamik Bey, who does not wish to aid us, nor protect us against the cruel and inhumane Muslim population. . . .

Some months ago, the Jews of Idder, part of the village of Misurata, sent a letter to the Chief Rabbi, begging him to speak to the Governor on their behalf so that the latter would order the *Kaïmakam* (lieutenant) of the village to restore the night guards, who had been removed from the Jewish quarter for some considerable time, having been stationed there, on imperial orders, for about 15 years. The Chief Rabbi told H.E. the *Vali* of this request but as usual he did not reply. Unfortunately, last Saturday, some Arabs entered the Idder synagogue, having broken the doors and windows. They stole all the valuables they found there, money, ornaments and the crowns of the *Sifarim*, and what is even more dreadful, they tore the Scrolls of the Law to pieces. On being informed of all this, the Chief Rabbi notified the crime to the Governor, but still received no response.

A similar occurrence had taken place some time beforehand in the village of Zliten, where Arabs destroyed the synagogue and stole everything in it. Forty of these robbers were discovered and imprisoned by the Court, but a few days later they were set free without the slightest punishment; not only that, but, unbelievably, they were not even made to return the objects stolen from the synagogue and discovered in their houses.

Last Thursday, a Jew on the way to his village was killed by Arabs and his companion was injured. This happened at some distance from the capital, and the authorities have not attempted to find the criminals.

It is quite understandable that, to the Muslims, Jews are of no account, and our personal safety is in jeopardy and our belongings are not our own.

This is why we beseech you to have pity on your unhappy brethren languishing under the weight of all these misfortunes and come to their aid to alleviate their affliction and suffering. The Consul-General of Her Britannic Majesty has already visited the Chief Rabbi asking for

information about matters in Misurata, and the Rabbi has told him of all our persecutions.

From a letter (21.2.1897) by the 'Comunità Israelitica di Tripoli di Barbaria' (Saul Labi, Mesoud Nahum, Mos. J. Hassan, Abr. Nahum, Aug. Arbib, Clemente Tajar, I. Hassan) to the President AIU, Paris (AIU Libya I.C.11).

1897 *Misery of the Tripolitanian Community of Idder-Misurata*

We are in receipt of your letter in which you inform us that, having spoken on our behalf to the Governor, his reply to you was that we have only 30 houses in our quarter, and that we live in perfect harmony with the Muslims, who according to him protect us from malefactors. Our reply to this is that in the past we had more than 60 houses, but after several Israelites had been killed and their houses robbed, most of the other Israelites abandoned their houses and fled. Some of them bought houses at Amabène and settled there with their families; but those who were poor joined up with us, so that every house contained and still contains four or five families, such was their fear of being killed by the Arabs. It was at that time that we informed His Imperial Majesty the Sultan by telegraph of our miserable situation. He sent orders to mount a nightly guard of 18 men in our quarter and for about 15 years we lived in perfect safety. However they were taken away last year, for what reason we do not know. When the *Kaïmakam* said to us, 'Give me three napoleons secretly, and I will install guards for you', we made the greatest sacrifices, in view of our plight, to give him the money required. The guards were posted but three days later they were taken away again. A few days after the arrival of the *Binbachi* (Mayor), he made us contribute 5 napoleons for the purchase of a plot of land on which to build barracks. You cannot imagine how great was our joy in thinking we should soon have a barracks. However it did not last long, for three days later orders came from the *Vali* to stop the building of the barracks and to take away the guards from our quarter. Further, to prove to you that the Muslim population of Idder, far from feeling cordiality towards us is, on the contrary, our most implacable enemy, we want you to know that all the robberies and murders committed in our quarter are the work of the Arabs our neighbours. That is why we implore you, sir, to seek

some way of saving us, for our situation is really miserable, and if it were not that the synagogue would fall into the hands of our enemies, we would already have abandoned our dwelling-places and our belongings to settle wherever fate might lead us.

Arabic letter (17 Chebath 5657—received 5.3.1897) by members of the Jewish community of Idder—Misurata to the Chief Rabbi (D. J. Kamki) at Tripoli (AIU Libya I.C.11).

1900 *Humiliations Imposed on Tripolitanian Jews*

. . . In these out-of-the-way places (Sahara regions), the Jew may not ride a horse or ass in an Arab's presence. The Jewish rider, on seeing an Arab coming, must dismount quickly and go on foot, leading his mount, until the Arab disappears at the corner of the highway.

If the Jew forgets this or takes too long to dismount, the Arab brutally reminds him of 'good manners' by throwing him to the ground.

The Jews of Gebel (one of these regions) told me that within the last 20 years three Israelites had been killed in this way. The testimony of a Jew is not accepted and he would never dare to accuse anyone of robbing him.

Every family is under the suzerainty of an Arab termed 'Saheb'. This saheb, as you have already been informed by one of my reports, enjoys all possible rights over the Jew's household.

During Passover, I sailed to a coastal village called Tadjurah. There I found 30 Jewish families living in a sort of vast compartmented double-walled courtyard, the whole being made from sand without windows. The Jews there lived exactly the same life as that of Arab peasants. I could not distinguish them from the Arabs. Above all, the women, though more modestly dressed than those of Tripoli, strongly reminded me of the Bedouin women of Syria, with their brightly-coloured flowing caftans.

I gathered together some children and their parents in the little synagogue; there I struck up conversations with the children. I observed that some of them were very intelligent. They replied very well to questions on addition and subtraction. . . .

When I asked several men whether they suffered much from the Arabs, they answered: 'Ah, we are in the "Galuth", one must expect

to suffer'. They told me that some time ago, Arabs had plundered their little synagogue and stolen the Scrolls of the Law. The next day, they were dumbfounded to see an Arab riding an ass with a saddle made of the Torah parchment. They claimed it back, but to no avail. . . .

Along all this part of the Tripolitanian coast, small communities of Jews are to be found living amongst the Arabs, more or less subjected to them.

One small detail to end with. The captain of the small ship which took me to Tadjurah was a Jew. Among the Jewish population of Tripoli, 10,000 strong, he is the only one in that calling. Fishing, which is quite profitable here, does not attract any Jews. The Maltese, who here comprise quite a guild of fishermen, are capable of playing very nasty tricks on Jewish fishermen. Then, too, a Tripolitanian Jew will never have the courage to pass a night at sea, far from land.

From a letter (16.5.1900) by J. Hoefler, teacher at the Tripoli Boys' School to the President of the AIU, Paris (AIU Libya I.C.12).

1864 *Report from the Jewish Community of Chechuan*

1. . . . Chechuan is a small hamlet surrounded by Arab tribes whose members are given to permanent in-fighting and the anger generated by this ceaseless feuding often rebounds on us. Moreover, all government in this region is, so to speak, purely nominal and impotent.

2. Here, the feeling of being trapped leaves us neither by day nor by night; lucky those who manage to get away, never to return. As for the rest of us, we have almost abandoned any hope other than in the power of the Almighty.

To give you an idea of what we have to endure, we will proceed to relate some incidents which punctuate the drabness of our daily life.

3. Upon leaving the Jewish quarter we have to take off our boots and, as we cross the Arab part of the village, fully expect to be hit by some stones, aimed at us. Nobody will ever come to our assistance. Before the judge one argues, 'He is a Jew'. Thefts are very common here: 'An Arab buys something from a Jew but, instead of paying asserts, "I have already paid you, you Jewish son of a bitch."' Best for the poor, luckless wretch to keep quiet. The Jewish quarters are frequently entered surreptitiously.

In the daytime they infiltrate under the very noses of the abetting and indifferent guards by whatever means offer themselves. Any house found unlocked is entered and, having thoroughly looted it, the intruders leave again, not without having ill-treated any child or woman they find on the way.

At night they get into the houses by breaching their walls.

4. Since all this can be done with impunity, they go even further. Finding a Jewish woman in the street they make so bold as to tear away her head scarf [*foulard*], frightening her out of her wits so that she hardly knows what to do. It happens that Jews from the interior come to live in this town but, finding life here no improvement, prefer to convert to Islam. This happened last year. A married Jew with several children tried to escape martyrdom by becoming a Muslim. As usual this had grave consequences for us.

5. This renegade wanted to take his wife and children along but they refused to follow him, whereupon he sent some Arabs to track them down. However luckily, or perhaps unluckily, someone managed to spirit this family away from the howling mob to Tetuan. When the Arabs heard of this they went more or less for all of us and had us thrown into jail the day after Passover, compelling us to track down and deliver the fugitives into their hands. We had to do this although the people of Tetuan had refused to return the family.

6. After three days it was sent back to us, and managing once again to hide it from the Arabs, we had to raise 300 douros at an exorbitant rate of interest to allow the affair to be forgotten without the family actually being handed over.

Such things occur so frequently and at close quarters that we have long ceased to worry about our financial misery.

Rather should we dwell on the condition of the Jewish quarter. This is a street of about 20 tumble-down houses in an advanced state of disrepair. We only leave them as rarely as possible. All in all, we are about 64 families with about 60 boys and 50 girls.

7. Of these 64 families, only about 10 can afford to give their children some kind of instruction; as to the others, they have to send their children into service and these are even more to be pitied than the rest of us.

'Please let us know what you have decided to do.'

This ends our report and we hope, as always, that God will improve our lot in future.

16 Adar 5664

Report from the Jewish Community of Chechuan. Sent to Monsieur Carmona on 3.8.1864.

1880 *Aged Jew Crucified in Morocco*

We hereby inform you of an act of injustice which occurred on the first of this month at Entifa (district of Morocco).

A certain Governor of six months' standing, named Hadj Abdellah Eznagui, seized an Israelite living in the neighbourhood, Jacob Dahan, an old man of 65, pious and well-to-do. This Governor had him nailed to the ground with two nails, after which the unfortunate man was beaten so severely with sticks that he died. Afterwards, the Governor commanded his soldiers to drag the body away, not allowing it to be handed over for burial to the victim's co-religionists.

The latter, after exhausting all imaginable means, including sacrificing seven animals, managed to induce the Governor to deliver the body to them on payment of 80 piastres (400 francs).

In addition to the 80 piastres paid over to him by some of the Community, the Governor confiscated the unfortunate Dahan's cattle and his mule.

The reason for this murder was the following:

During last year's famine, this Israelite, a very charitable man, took in a poor Moorish woman. He succoured her throughout that time, and in exchange, she worked in his house.

On learning this, the Governor summoned the Israelite before him and in a fearsome voice said: 'Can a Jew have a Moorish woman to serve him? He deserves to be burnt!' Thereupon, he ordered his soldiers to commit the acts we have spoken of above.

This news was told us by eight Israelites, who fled from Entifa fearing to be murdered

...
We send this by express post, so that you should all endeavour to ward off further calamities.

Arabic letter sent by Mojluf Aben Mohas, Hadan Ederhi and Mojluf El Harrar (9 Tamouz 5640—18.6.1880) to David Corcos, Mogador, from Marrakesh (AIU Morocco IV.C.11 (Tangier)).

1884 *Persecution of Demnat Jews*

I am in a position to give you some information about the Jews of Demnat. This information was given me this morning by David Amar, a member of the deputation which has come here to make their precarious situation clear to the Junta of Tangiers.

Demnat is a small town, four days' march to the south-east from Casablanca, and two days from Morocco [Marrakesh]. The Jews, some six or seven hundred souls, have their *mellah* (ghetto) in the middle of the town; the Arabs surround them on all sides. They are on very good terms with the Arabs, but both parties complain of the despotism, the exactions and the cruelty of their Governor, El hadj Djilali. I cannot tell you all that these unfortunate Israelites have endured for the last eight years from their present Caid. Not only does he burden them with heavy taxes whenever he is short of money, but he makes them work in his buildings, for there are carpenters, masons and blacksmiths among them; he pays them no wages, but he calls on them to pay their fellow Arab workmen out of their own pockets. It is only when the Governor has nothing to ask of them, that they may keep the Sabbath, or even the Holy days of Yom Kippur, as days of rest and prayer. The least resistance is cruelly quelled by the *bastinado*. Outside the *mellah*, they are obliged to go barefoot. Such few commercial dealings as the so-called rich among them maintain with Morocco, Casablanca and the neighbouring villages are carried on without the knowledge of the Caid, who is always on the watch to claim his share (the largest possible) of the value of the merchandise. I need not add that they are ruthlessly robbed, ill-treated and humiliated; the Governor is not one who will recognize the justice of their complaints, rather are they lucky if he does not reward their boldness by rough chastisement. In 1881, the heads of the Community appeared before the Governor in order to ask for more humane treatment in pursuance of the letter of the Sultan [Muley Mohamed Ben Hicham] which they possessed and which Sir Moses Montefiore had obtained for them during his voyage to Morocco (Marrakesh). His only reply was to imprison them and he freed them only on payment of a large sum of money. It was a rabbi from Jerusalem, travelling through Demnat to obtain *nedaba* [offerings] who urged them to present a complaint against Hadj

Djilali. And then, what precautions did they not have to elude the watchfulness of the Caid! Having bribed the watchmen at the gates, they left by night, 20 in number, without provisions of any sort, and, after fearful adventures, arrived at Casablanca. The consular authorities there sent them to Tangiers, from whence five of them left for Fez, furnished with letters from MM. Hay and Scovasso [British and Italian Ambassadors] addressed to the Sultan. They have now been there three weeks, and the Sultan has not replied to them. In any event, these unfortunate people find that a letter from the King to the Governor is insufficient, for they know from experience the value Hadj Djilali puts on such letters. They want something more effective, but they do not know what will serve. They are appealing to all men of good will, to the whole of Europe, to the Alliance, to the Ministers, to the Junta. If they knew how to speak, they say, they would go to you, so pitiful is their present situation.

Tears in his eyes, David Amar, an old man of 60, gave me these pitiful details. I pass them on to you in all their simplicity; you must decide yourself how to act.

Within the last hour, a letter has come from Demnat saying that, following the Governor's receipt of a letter from the Sultan, he has redoubled his cruelty. Shops have been looted, the doors of houses battered in, women raped, children butchered, the Chief Rabbi Joseph Elmaleh, an old man over 80, has been beaten to death by the Governor. In fact, the only men left in Demnat are in prison, all the rest have fled.

Letter (25.9.1884) by J. Matalon, head of the Tangiers AIU Boys' school to the President of the AIU Paris (AIU Morocco IV.C.11 (Tangier)).

1885 *Caid of Demnat Continues Persecutions*

Having arrived at Casablanca, we hasten to write to give you the names of the people murdered in the neighbourhood of Demnat by friends of Caid Ghilali. These Jews are Hazan Abraham Danino, Jacob Danino, Mordejai Amar, Abraham Cohen. Their bodies and their goods have disappeared. Our complaints have had no effect.

In our previous letter (it has not arrived) we also mentioned the two Jews, Mordejai Gabay and Joseph Benchetrit. Our Caid inflicted on

them the usual *bastinado* because they did not wish to work for nothing.

When we were near Demnat, we saw coming towards us a certain number of soldiers and a mob of Arabs armed with large sticks in lieu of sabres, clubs, and *coumiou* or curved knives. When they came near to us, they said threateningly: 'Dismount.' We did so. 'Take off your shoes.' We obeyed. In spite of our submission, they fell upon us and attacked us with sticks, knives and stones. Ten of us were left injured on the ground and our baggage and money was all plundered. One woman is dying from her injuries. The uninjured men fled in all directions far from Demnat, pursued by the infuriated populace. Once again we are scattered; some of us have gone to Tangiers to complain again, others have gone to Rabat to seek out the Sultan. Some Arabs whom we saw in our place of refuge told us that they had had instructions from Caid Ghilali to murder us all, and that they would have done us no harm had the Caid not urged them on with threats.

We have witnesses as to what happened; one of the Sultan's administrators was most indignant. We beg you to inform the *Alliance Israélite* of our distressing situation.

Arabic letter (12 Tammuz 5645—received Paris 27.7. 1885) by Jacob Rafael Cadosh to Salomon Beuoliel, Head of the Fez AIU Boys' school (AIU Morocco I.D.I).

1888 *The Need for Foreign Protection*

The arguments put forward by Sir John [Drummond] Hay, that Jews travel in dangerous areas, only echo Moroccan officials' statements made for the purpose of stifling the complaints of Jews seeking justice. These murders rarely occur in lonely places, but are usually committed in villages where the travellers pass the night, or else in the immediate neighbourhood where the victims are followed by those with whom they lodged the previous night. Several cases of murder have taken place in towns, but, as the authorities threaten with severe punishment any Muslim who should bear witness to the crime, while testimony by Jews is not admitted by Moroccan courts, it follows that the criminals evade justice . . .

Another suggestion would be that where the testimony of Muslims cannot be obtained, declarations under oath by non-Muslims should

be legally valid. Jews, from the rich merchants to the humblest pedlar, never travel alone, but always either with Arabs who go from one market to another, or in the company of several Jews; therefore the argument that they travel in unsafe places does not apply to them. If the testimony of Jews were to be admissible in law, the victim's travelling companions would be able to throw some light on many cases which have remained obscure for lack of evidence . . .

As you are well aware, the Sultan, whenever representations have been made to him on behalf of his Jewish subjects, has always replied that they are treated on an equal footing with the Muslims. That being so, melancholy indeed would be the fate of the unhappy Jews who fall into the hands of an Arab official, especially in the towns of the interior; they would be beaten to death, imprisoned for life without trial or sentence, stripped of all they possess, and tortured to satisfy the unappeasable desires of the governor; and to this end, the latter will find hundreds of witnesses who, out of fanatical hatred or else from fear, will declare the Jew to be guilty of some dreadful crime—however, the Sultan, and also the majority of foreign representatives, on being appealed to will reply that the Muslims suffer the like penalties, unmindful of all the disadvantages of the Jews at the mercy of venal and fanatical officials

Admittedly, the Arabs rarely attack a whole community; they begin by persecuting an individual to test whether anyone is protecting the Israelites. If not stopped in good time, they become emboldened by their impunity, and the outrages become ever more frequent, finishing in a general attack. What will happen to us, how many calamities must be accepted if we have to wait until the last moment before calling upon the representatives of the [foreign] Powers to intervene? . . .

Never before have the Moroccan Jews had more need of friends and protectors than now. It is now or never for all who have the good of mankind at heart to act zealously, energetically, effectively, if they wish to save this community from relapsing into a state more precarious than that which existed before Sir Moses Montefiore's visit to Morocco . . .

When the native Israelite had no other protector than the Arab, his persecutor, the Jew's natural humility won him the pity of his master.

This is no longer the situation: hundreds, by virtue of foreign protection, and thousands, by their education, have attained a position so superior to that of their Arab neighbours that the latter would, in exasperation, wreak a terrible revenge upon their victims once they knew them to be defenceless. . . .

The hatred instilled into the hearts of the Muslims against the Jews for not having remained in a state of submission, will find an outlet in persecuting those who for almost a quarter of a century have escaped their yoke; since ignorance and fanaticism know no bounds, the whole people, especially those of the interior, will suffer for the faults of a few—if, indeed, it can be called a fault that a man whose social position and education make free, should wish to be treated on an equal footing. . . .

In the present state of the Moroccan Jews, and at a time when we see great principles sacrificed by governments for political reasons, a mere intercession in the name of humanity might not suffice, while an appeal made on behalf of the common good, in the interests of commerce and industry, cannot be neglected and, considering that the Jewish question cannot stand in isolation—as they are subjects of the Sultan and consequently must be treated in the same manner as his other subjects—it will be necessary to add subsidiary points to this matter.

Extracts from a 16-page report (10.1.1888) by Mr L. A. Cohen, member of the Tangiers AIU Regional Committee and representative of the Anglo-Jewish Association, to the AIU Paris and the AJA, London. L. A. Cohen was a native of Morocco but a naturalized British subject. He founded Le Réveil du Maroc in 1883. His text was written in English and French (AIU Morocco I.C.1).

1892 *The Sultan of Morocco Forbids Maltreatment of Jews*

It has come to the knowledge of Our Sherifian Majesty that you do not maintain a proper attitude towards the Jews under your jurisdiction; that you mistreat them, that you beat them and load them with chains, without respect either for children or the aged.

These facts, which are notorious, have caused us surprise; for you are well aware of the punishment which, on the Day of Judgment, awaits those who mistreat a servant of God. The Prophet has said 'He who commits an

injustice against a Jew shall be my enemy on the Day of Judgment.'

Therefore commit this fault no longer; maintain good government in respect of the Jews. Behave yourself towards them in the same way as towards the Muslims whom you govern; do them justice in civil cases, and leave the burden of deciding religious cases absolutely to their rabbis.

As to Jews protected by foreign powers, act towards them in accordance with the provisions of the treaties and conventions in force. However, if one of these people refuses to submit to fair treatment, record his conduct in a declaration which you shall then send to Our Majesty in order that We may settle the matter with the foreign government which protects him.

Arabic letter (7th Djumada 1310—27.12.1892) by Sultan Muley Hassan to the Caïd Uida of Marrakesh (AIU Maroc IV.C.11).

1911 *Rabbi's Protest Against a Degrading Custom*

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your letter No. 1283 of 30 January, enclosing a letter from Rabbi Vidal Sarfaty. The rabbi asks you to intervene with Si Mohamed el Mokri, the Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs, at present in Paris, for the abolition of the degrading custom imposed on Jews, not to enter Dar el Maghzen except barefoot. Unfortunately, the facts given in Rabbi Vidal's letter are correct. Jews must take off their shoes at the gate of Dar-Maghzen. Quite apart from the humiliation involved in this measure, it is an intolerable suffering for our co-religionists to be obliged to stand many hours barefoot on the earth of the Palace courtyard, which is either cold and damp or white-hot from the summer sun. Rabbi Vidal, a regular visitor to the Dar-Maghzen in connection with community business or on behalf of individuals, has often returned ill from a rather too long sojourn in front of the offices.

It is my opinion that it would be impossible to obtain an order from the Sultan to allow Jews to enter the Palace with their shoes on. It is a concession which his pride would not permit, and one quite contrary to the Muslim conception of the relative positions of the Jews and themselves. But it is a right which the Jews could succeed in gaining by their own efforts. I have strongly urged some of our co-religionists from

Fez, who are citizens or subjects of European nations, to enter Dar-Maghzen boldly with their shoes on. I have even offered to accompany them the first time they went. I was sure that nothing would happen to them, and that, rather than provoke an incident with one consul or another, the Maghzen would have ignored the matter. After a time, distinctions between protected and unprotected Jews would have faded away and all native Jews would have had the right to walk about with their shoes on in the inner courtyards of the Palace. I have not been able to elicit from our co-religionists, even accompanied by me, the slight show of courage it takes to cross the threshold into the Palace grounds wearing their shoes.

Therefore, I do not enjoin you to make the approach to Mokri suggested by Rabbi Vidal, lest it should lead nowhere. In itself, the matter is neither serious nor urgent: with the passing of time and the penetration of modern ideas into the Muslim world, as well as the increase

in the number of protected persons, this mark of servitude imposed upon the Jews will eventually disappear; those able to adopt European dress would rid themselves of it immediately.

Letter (30.1.1911) by Abraham Elmaleh, Head of the Fez boys' school, to the President of the AIU, Paris (AIU Maroc XV.E.246).

NOTES

1. The full text of President Sadat's speech celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammed can be found in D. F. Green (ed.), *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel* (Geneva, 1974).

2. Cf. *AIU Monthly and Semestrial Bulletins* (1860-1913), the *Histories of the AIU* by N. Leven (1911-20) and A. Chouraqui (1965), G. Israel's article in the *Wiener Library Bulletin*, Vol. XXVII (1973-74) and the author's paper delivered at the International Conference on Jewish Communities in Muslim Lands (Ben Zvi and Asian and African Institutes, Jerusalem, April 1974).

3. A book, combining documentary material and a comprehensive introduction, in collaboration with Prof. H. Z. Hirschberg, is nearing completion. It will contain extensive quotations from European travellers to the Maghreb region from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, as well as a significant selection of documents from the *Alliance* archives. Unless otherwise mentioned the originals of the documents are in French.

4. Léon Godard, *Le Maroc; Notes d'un voyageur: 1858-59* (Alger, 1859), p. 52.

5. Moshe Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine (1840-61)* (Oxford, 1968), p. 17.

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