Moroccan Jews constitute an ancient community. Before the founding of Israel in 1948, there were about 250,000 to 350,000 Jews in the country, which gave Morocco the largest Jewish community in the Muslim world, but fewer than 2,500 or so remain. Jews in Morocco, originally speakers of Berber languages, Judeo-Moroccan Arabic or Judaeo-Spanish, were the first in the country to adopt the French language, and unlike the general population, it remains the main (and in many cases, the exclusive) language of members of the Jewish community there.

Contents

1 History
   1.1 Under the Romans
   1.2 Arab Conquest and the Idrisids (703–1146)
   1.3 Under the Almoravids
   1.4 Under the Almohads (1146-15th century)
   1.5 Under the Marinids
   1.6 The Spanish Expulsion of the Jews
   1.7 Under Saadi dynasty
   1.8 Under Moulay Rashid and Moulay Ismail
   1.9 In the 18th century
   1.10 In the 19th century
      1.10.1 Montefiore's journey to Morocco
      1.10.2 Pictorial essay of Jewish community
   1.11 Modern times

2 See also

3 Further reading

4 Notes
   4.1 References

5 External links
Under the Romans

The Jewish presence dates back over 2,500 years, to the time of the Carthaginian state. The Hebrew or Aramaic languages used by Jews were closely related to the Punic language of the Carthaginians; many Jews also settled amongst Berbers and adopted their languages. When the Jews began to disperse throughout the Roman empire after the Roman conquest of Judaea (in 6 CE/AD), many settled in Mauretania including part of modern-day Morocco. These settlers engaged in agriculture, cattle-raising, and trades. They were divided into bodies akin to tribes, governed by their respective heads, and had to pay the Romans a capitation-tax of two shekels. Later, under the dominion of the Romans and (after 429) the Vandals, Mauretanian Jews reportedly increased in number and prospered.

As Christianity was adopted by the Roman state, the church Councils of Carthage adopted policies that discriminated against adherents to Judaism. The Justinian edict of persecution for North Africa, issued after Vandal rule had been overthrown and Mauretania had come under the dominion of the Byzantines (534), was directed against the Jews as well as the Arians, the Donatists, and other dissenters.[4]

In the 7th century, the Jewish population of Mauretania received as a further accession from Iberian peninsula those who wished to escape Visigothic legislation. At the end of the same century, at the time of the great Arab conquests in northwestern Africa, there were in Mauretania, according to the Arab historians, many Jews.

Arab Conquest and the Idrisids (703–1146)

It was a supposedly Berber Jewish woman Dahiyah, or Damia (mistaken identity),[5] better known as Kahina, who aroused her people in the Aures, the eastern spurs of the Atlas Mountains in Algeria, to last although fruitless resistance to the Arab general Hasan ibn an-Nu'man. As in the Hellenic lands of Christendom, so also in Mauretania, Judaism involuntarily prepared the way for Islam; and the conversion of the Berbers to Islam took place so much the more easily. Berbers also accepted Islam while others were persuaded by the fact that the other side had been successful. The Jews were largely accepted.

However, the theory of massive Judaization of the Berber population is called into question by the recent study on the mtDNA (transmitted from mother to children). In the study carried out by Doron et al.[6] indicate that Jews from North Africa lack typically North African Hg M1 and U6 mtDNAs. Hence, the lack of U6 and M1 chromosomes among the North African renders the possibility of significant admixture between the local Arab and Berber populations with Jews unlikely.

Since the city of Fez was founded in 808 AD, it attracted a diverse kind of population from all around the area, among those new newcomers came the Jews who contributed their commercial capabilities to the new developed economy. They settled in the medina of Fez, and formed a stable community, which was an integral part of the city life.[7]
The golden age of the Jewish community in Fez lasted for almost three hundred years, from the 9th to 11th centuries. Its yeshivot (religious schools) attracted brilliant scholars, poets and grammarians. During the 12th century under the rule of the Al-muwahhids, the preferential status of the Jews stopped to exist and a section of the community was deported to Algeria in about 987.[8]

Between 1035 and 1068, the invasions of the Almoravides and Almohades, fanatic Muslim sects caused destruction, fear and chaos to the Jewish community in Fez. It is estimated that about 6,000 Jews were massacred during those events. Al-muwahhids, was a militant dynasty who was determined to expel all those who did not share his religious beliefs, such as Jews. The Jews were forced to convert to Islam; those who refused were exiled. Some of the Jews who converted to Islam still kept in secret their faith and kept both identities together.[8][9]

**Under the Almoravids**

The Almoravids (Arab. Al-Murābiṭūn; "Warrior-Monks"), confederation of Berber tribes of the Sanhajah group who lived in the Moroccan Sahara Desert. Their religious fervor and fighting capabilities enabled them to establish a formidable empire in the Morocco and Muslim Spain in the 11th and 12th centuries. Their theological Islamic zeal is attributed to Yahya ibn Ibrahim, their spiritual leader, as well as to the 'alim (religious scholar) 'Abd Allah ibn Yasin. Imbued with Islamic zeal, the Almoravids conquered Morocco and major sections of western Algeria between 1054 and 1092. In 1062 they turned Marrakesh into their base of operations and religious capital. Thenceforth, their main leaders embraced the title of Amir al-Muslimin ("commander of the Muslims") but nevertheless continued to recognize the legitimacy of a still higher authority in Islam: the Abbasid caliph in Iraq upon whom the title Amir al-Mu'minīn ("commander of the faithful") had been bestowed. It was toward the end of the 11th century that the Castilian Christians who held on to parts of Spain began challenging the authority of the Almoravids and encroaching on their territories. The Almoravid leadership succeeded in temporarily repulsing the Christians and foiling their plans to conquer such key cities as Córdoba and Toledo.

With the exception of Valencia, Muslim Spain remained under Almoravid control. Notwithstanding, perhaps the weakest aspect of Almoravid rule in Spain and the Maghreb is the fact that they were a Muslim Berber minority in charge of a Spanish-Arab empire. With the passage of time, they found it increasingly difficult to protect all their territorial possessions from the Christian reconquest, especially in the aftermath of the fall of Saragossa in 1118. Moreover, in 1125 the Almohads (those who advocated the "Unity of Allah"), a confederation of rival Berber tribes, began to rebel against them in the Atlas Mountains. Following a protracted struggle and relentless fighting, the Almohads defeated the Almoravids in 1147; they transformed Marrakesh into their own capital and extended their authority into Muslim Spain.
The position of the Jews under Almoravid domination was apparently free of major abuses, though there are reports of increasing social hostility against them – particularly in Fes.[10] Unlike the problems encountered by the Jews during the rule of the Almohads (the Almoravids' successor dynasty), there are not many factual complaints of excesses, coercion, or malice on the part of the authorities toward the Jewish communities. It is known, however, that Yusuf Ibn Tashfin forbade Jews living in the capital city Marrakesh. It was allowed for them to trade there, but if a Jew was caught in the city during night hours it was punishable by death.[11]

Under the Almoravids, some Jews prospered (although far more so under Ali III, than under his father Yusuf ibn Tashfin). Among those who held the title of "vizier" or "nasi" in Almoravid times were the poet and physician Abu Ayyub Solomon ibn al-Mu'allam, Abraham ibn Meïr ibn Kamnial, Abu Isaac ibn Muhajar, and Solomon ibn Farusal.

**Under the Almohads (1146-15th century)**

The tolerance of the jizya (the tax demanded of dhimmis) paying Jews and Christians in the cities of Morocco came to an end under the intolerant dynasty of the stern Almohades, who came into power in 1146. Here, as in other parts of North Africa, many Jews who shrank from emigrating pretended to embrace Islam. For example, names such as Benchekroun (initially Chokron or Choukrour or Chekroun depending on the pronunciation), El Kohen, and Kabbaj were Jewish in origin. Maimonides, who was staying in Fez with his father, is said to have written to the communities to comfort and encourage his brethren and fellow believers in this time of oppression.[12] In the above-mentioned elegy of Abraham ibn Ezra, which appears to have been written at the commencement of the period of the Almohads, and which is found in a Yemen siddur among the kinot prescribed for the Ninth of Ab, the Moroccan cities Ceuta, Meknes, the Draa River valley, Fez, and Segelmesa are especially emphasized as being exposed to great persecution. Joseph ha-Kohen[13] relates that no remnant of Israel was left from Tangier to Mehdia. Moreover, the later Almohads were no longer content with the repetition of a mere formula of belief in the unity of God and in the prophetic calling of Muhammad. Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Mansur, the third Almohad prince, suspecting the sincerity of the supposedly converted Jews, compelled them to wear distinguishing garments, with a very noticeable yellow cloth for a head-covering; from that time forward the clothing of the Jews formed an important subject in the legal regulations concerning them. The reign of the Almohads on the whole exercised a most disastrous and enduring influence on the position of the Moroccan Jews. Already branded by their clothing as unbelievers, they furthermore became objects of scorn and violent despotic caprice from which there was no escape.

An account by Solomon Cohen dated January 1148 AD describes the Almohad conquests:

"Abd al-Mumin ... the leader of the Almohads after the death of Muhammad Ibn Tumart the Mahdi ... captured Tlemcen [in the Maghreb] and killed all those who were in it, including the Jews, except those who embraced Islam. ... [In Sijilmasa] One hundred and fifty persons were killed for clinging to their [Jewish] faith. ... One hundred thousand persons were killed
in Fez on that occasion, and 120,000 in Marrakesh. The Jews in all [Maghreb] localities [conquered] ... groaned under the heavy yoke of the Almohads; many had been killed, many others converted; none were able to appear in public as Jews."[14]

Under the Marinids

The Marinid dynasty (Berber: Imrinen, Arabic: Marīniyūn) was a dynasty of Zenata Berber descent that ruled Morocco from the 13th to the 15th century.[15][16]

The Marinids overtook the Almohads controlling Morocco in 1244,[17] and briefly controlled all the Maghreb in the mid-14th century. They supported the Kingdom of Granada in Al-Andalus in the 13th and 14th centuries; an attempt to gain a direct foothold on the European side of the Strait of Gibraltar was however defeated at the Battle of Salado in 1340 and finished after the Castilian conquest of Algeciras from the Marinids in 1344.[18]

The Marinids proved themselves particularly friendly toward the Jews. When the still-fanatic mobs attacked them in 1275, the Merinid sultan Abu Yusuf Yaqub ibn Abd Al-Haqq intervened personally to save them. The sovereigns of this dynasty benevolently received the Jewish ambassadors of the Christian kings of Spain and admitted Jews among their closest courtiers. Of these Jews, Khalifa b. Waqqāsa (Ruqqasa) became steward of the household of the sultan Abu Yaqub Yusuf an-Nasr and his intimate counselor. A victim of palace intrigues, he was put to death in 1302. His nephew, who was also named Khalifa, held the same office and suffered the same fate (1310). However, there were no repercussions against the Moroccan Jews as a result of the execution of their powerful coreligionists. They were the principal factors in the prosperity of the country. The Sahara gold trade, which was of primary importance, and the exchange with the Christian countries were completely under their control. Their relatives and associates in the kingdom of Aragon financed, when necessary, the navies which defended the Moroccan ports. In addition to the jizya(poll tax), they paid enormous sums to the treasury in customs duties for their imports and exports. In the outlying areas, particularly in the Atlas region where there were large concentrations of Jews of early origin, the Jews wielded great influence in both the political and spiritual domains. Jewish physicians enjoyed well-deserved renown. The study of Kabbalah, as well as philosophy, was then in vogue. The last Moroccan philosopher of the Middle Ages was Judah b. Nissim ibn Malkah, who was still alive in 1365.

The last ruler of the Marinid dynasty, Abd al-Haqq II, appointed many Jews to high positions. This angered many Muslims and was one of the main causes for the 1465 Moroccan revolt, in which the entire Jewish community of Fez was massacred.[19]

The Spanish Expulsion of the Jews

By 1249, the Spanish Reconquista had concluded its main phase. During the murderous scenes which were enacted in 1391 in Spanish-controlled Seville, and were repeated in a large part of Spain and then across the sea in Majorca, the Sephardi Jews of Spain were glad to seize the first opportunity to emigrate
to North Africa in order to escape the persecution. A hundred years later, Ferdinand and Isabella decreed the Edict of the Expulsion of the Jews. The Jews were then driven from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1496. Their sudden inroad upon Morocco and the whole of North Africa was then repeated on a very much larger scale. A group of natives of Fez fled to Spain in the course of the fifteenth century and returned to Fez after 1492, served as a unique bridge between the natives and those who arrived from Spain ("Sephardim"). The most outstanding representative of this group was the Ibn Danan family. The family was among the intellectual and financial elite of Fez for centuries for example, they maintained their own synagogue in Fez.\[7\]

The arrival of these refugees brought important rolls in the city life and inside the Jewish community, for example they held and established the office of Nagid (the head of the Jewish community in a Muslim country). Among them there were famous dayanim such as the Ibn Danans whose authority was recognized by Jews of the whole country.\[7\][20] However the influx also caused overcrowding in the larger cities of Morocco, aroused uneasiness both among the Muslims, who feared an increase in the price of necessities, and among the Jews already settled there, who had hitherto barely succeeded in gaining a livelihood by following handicrafts and in petty commerce. In addition to this, unfriendly reception, the newcomers had to endure much from both great and small rulers eager for booty, as well as from the Moorish population.\[21\] In Sale, in 1442, many Jewish women were raped; and in Alcazarquivir, the Jews were robbed of all they possessed. Many died of hunger and some returned to Spain;\[22\] most fled to Fez, where new trials awaited them. A terrible conflagration occurred in the Jewish quarter of that city, from which the historian of these events, Abraham ben Solomon of Torrutiel, then eleven years of age, escaped.\[23\] A famine broke out soon after the fire, during which more than 20,000 Jews died in and around Fez. Notwithstanding these untoward events, the secret Jews or Marranos who were left in Spain and Portugal and who were determined to remain true to their faith under all circumstances so little feared the dangers and trials of removing to a foreign country that Manuel I, King of Portugal (1495–1521), felt obliged to forbid the Jews to emigrate without express royal permission. This prohibition was contained in two ordinances dated respectively April 20 and April 24, 1499. Nevertheless, with the aid of money and the exercise of shrewdness many Marranos succeeded in escaping to Africa. A certain Gonçalo of Loulé was heavily fined because he secretly transported Neo-Christians from Algarve to Larache on the coast of Morocco.\[24\]

A new group of Marranos was brought to Morocco through the definite establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal under Pope Paul III in 1536.\[25\] But in spite of all the suffering which Portugal had brought upon the Jews, there yet remained enough patriotism in the hearts of her rejected Jewish sons to cause them to help their former oppressors to preserve their old possessions on the Moroccan coast and to gain new ones. Through the strategy of a Jewish physician the Portuguese in 1508 succeeded in conquering the old seaport town of Safi, which had a large number of Jewish inhabitants and which, chiefly through them, had become an important commercial center.\[26\] Two years later, in the same city, upon the
reconquest of which the Moors had been steadily intent, was besieged by a large Moorish army. Thereupon two Portuguese Jews, Isaac Bencemero and a certain Ismail, brought assistance to the besieged with two ships manned by coreligionists and equipped at their own cost.[26] In Safi, the Jews were allowed to live as such by Emanuel's permission; also in Asilah after 1533, which had long been a Portuguese possession. In the quarrels which afterward took place between the Moors and the governors of Azamur in 1526, Abraham ben Zamaira and Abraham Cazan, the most influential Jew in Azemmour in 1528, served the Portuguese as negotiators.[27] The Jews Abraham and Samuel Cabeça of Morocco also had dealings with the Portuguese generals.

Under Saadi dynasty

The Saadi dynasty or Saadian dynasty was a dynasty of Arab descent that ruled Morocco from 1554 to 1659.

From 1509 to 1554 they had ruled only in the south of Morocco. While still recognizing the Wattasids as Sultans until 1528, Saadian's growing power led the Wattasids to attack them and, after an indecisive battle, to recognize their rule over southern Morocco[28] through the Treaty of Tadla.

Their reign over Morocco began with the reign of Sultan Mohammed ash-Sheikh in 1554, when he vanquished the last Wattasids at the Battle of Tadla. The Saadian rule ended in 1659 with the end of the reign of Sultan Ahmad el Abbas. When, in 1578, the young king Sebastian with almost his whole army met death, and Portugal saw the end of her glory, at Alcazarquivir, the few nobles who remained were taken captive and sold to the Jews in Fez and Morocco. The Jews received the Portuguese knights, their former countrymen, into their houses very hospitably and let many of them go free on the promise that they would send back their ransom from Portugal.[29] Numerous newly immigrated Jews, whose descendants faithfully adhere to the use of their Spanish dialects, Ladino and Haketia to the present day and who surpass older Jewish Moroccans in education and intellectual achievement, subsequently become prominent in Moroccan history. With their skill in European commerce, arts, and handicrafts, hitherto largely unknown to the Moors, and with their wealth, Jews have contributed conspicuously to the rise and development of the Alaouite Dynasty since its beginning in 1666.[30] At first the Sa'dis appeared to be fanatical religious zealots who were intolerant of non-Muslims. They imposed heavy taxes on the local Jewish community. As they consolidated their authority in the country, however, they gradually evinced greater toleration toward the Jewish minority. Like their Wattasid predecessors, the Sa'di sultans now employed Jews as physicians, diplomatic emissaries, and interpreters. Beginning in 1603, Abraham bin Wach and later Judah Levi served as ministers of the treasury. Members of the Jewish aristocratic Cabessa and Palache families were recruited by the sultan's court as agents and negotiators with European merchants who entered the country. Whereas the authorities increasingly proved to be friendly toward the Jews, the same could hardly be said of the Muslim masses as well as local urban and rural chieftains and governors.[31]

Under Moulay Rashid and Moulay Ismail
The Jews suffered much during the great conquests of Moulay Rashid, who united the separate parts of Morocco into one single state, and wished to add to it all northwest Africa. According to Chénier, when Al-Raschid took the city of Marrakech in 1670, at the desire of the inhabitants he caused the Jewish counselor and governor of the ruling prince Abu Bakr, together with the latter and his whole family, to be publicly burned, in order to inspire terror among the Jews. He also tore down the synagogues of the city, expelled many Jews from the Berber region of Sus and treated them tyrannically. His demands on the Jews in the way of taxes were enormous; he had them collected by Joshua ben Hamoshet, a rich Jew, to whom he was under obligations for various services and whom he appointed chief over the Jews. He even ordered the Jews to supply wine to the Christian slaves.

In 1668 the Jewish community of Chaouya, settled in Fez after Mulai Rashid attacked the town of Chaouya. They were given 3 days to leave, and they left with their rabbi Maimon aflalo, they numbered around 1300 households and possessed great wealth. After they moved to Fez they were granted their own synagogue.

Moulay Rashid's successor was his brother Ismail (Moulay Ismail) (1672), one of the cruelest of tyrants. On his accession Ismail appointed his Jewish adviser Joseph Toledani, son of Daniel Toledani, Moulay Raschid's counselor, to be his minister, in which capacity Joseph concluded a peace between Morocco and Holland. Under Ismail's rule the ruined synagogues were rebuilt, although his taxes on Jews were oppressive. One day, he threatened to compel them to accept Islam if their Messiah did not come within a definite time. The Jews understood the hint and satisfied his pious zeal with a very large sum of money. The Jews, who served as tax-collectors on the whole coast, used to give Ismail a golden riding-outfit as an annual "present"—an inducement to keep them in office—and a hen and a dozen chickens fashioned in gold as a tax payment for the whole Jewish community. Ismail had another way of securing money: for a certain sum he would sell to an aspirant for honors the position and wealth of one of his favorites. In one such transaction Maimaran, who was chief ruler over the Jews of the realm, feared a rival in Moses ibn 'Attar, and offered the sultan a certain sum for his head. Ismail then let Moses ibn 'Attar know how much had been offered for his head, whereupon Ibn 'Attar offered double the sum for the head of his opponent. The sultan took the money from both, called them fools, and reconciled them to each other, whereupon Ibn 'Attar married a daughter of Maimaran and shared with his father-in-law reign over the Jews. The same Moses ibn 'Attar was Moorish plenipotentiary in the making of a compact with Great Britain in 1721.

After 1700 Fez no longer attracted as many Jews as in the previous centuries, while others still continued to arrive, other retained residence in Fez, while spend their time elsewhere.
In 1703 a controversy happened between the Jews of Chaouya residing in Fez to the rest of the Jewish community. They demanded from their communal leaders that the governmental taxes will be assessed for them separately. Furthermore, they had a bad relations with the rest of the community, and tried to form separate agreements with the government. Those two events, did not passed on eventually.[20]

The two communities, those who came from Spain (megorashim) and the locals finally melded together, the Arabic language was the main language, while the unique Spanish rituals was kept and been practiced. The number of the community members fluctuated, through the following years. From times of relative peace to times of epidemic and different crises as for example in 1723, an extended drought transformed the mellah into a ghost town, as many Jews escaped and abandoned the area "The houses of the rich are empty, their inhabitants have disappeared, the gates of the courtyards are closed, weeds grow up and robbers enter, stealing the doors and the beds. Many houses have been demolished, their stones and rafters taken away.... Most of the streets of the mellah are deserted." The hunger took the lives of more than 2000 people, and a thousand more converted their religious from Judaism to different religion.[9][20]

**In the 18th century**

The condition of the Jewish community was unchanged under Mohammed III (1757–89), who distinguished himself by his attempt to introduce European culture into his kingdom. His eldest son, Moulay Ali, governor of Fez, courageously opposed his father's suggestion to impose a tax upon that city in favor of his other brothers, which tax was to be paid by the Jewish community. He stated that the Jews of Fez were already so poor that they were unable to bear the present tax and that he was not willing to increase still further their excessive misery.[35] His minister was the Jew Elijah ha-Levi, who had at one time fallen into disgrace and had been given as a slave to a smuggler of Tunis, but had been restored to favor.[36] The accession to the throne of Yazid, on the death of Mohammed III in 1789, led to a terrible massacre of the Moroccan Jews, having refused him their support in his fight with his brother for the succession. As a punishment the richer Jews of Tetouan, at his entry into the city, were tied to the tails of horses and dragged through the city. Many were killed in other ways or robbed. Jewish women were raped. The Spanish consul, Solomon Hazzan, was executed for alleged treachery, and the Jews of Tangier, Asilah, and Alcazarquivir were condemned to pay a large sum of money. Elijah, the minister of the former king, who had always opposed Yazid in the council, quickly embraced Islam to avoid being persecuted; but he died soon after. The cruelty of the persecutors reached its climax in Fez. In Rabat, as in Meknes, the Jews were ill-treated. In Mogador, strife arose between the Jews and the city judge on the one hand, and the Moorish citizens on the other; the dispute was over the question of Jewish garb. Finally the Jews were ordered to pay 100,000 piasters and three shiploads of gunpowder; and most of them were arrested and beaten daily until the payment was made. Many fled beforehand to Gibraltar or other places; some died as martyrs;
and some accepted Islam.\[37\] The notables and the Muslim masses then rose to intervene on behalf of the Jews. They hid many of them in their houses and saved a great many others. In Rabat, the governor Bargash saved the community from the worst.\[38\] The sanguinary events of the year 1790 have been poetically described in two kinot for the Ninth of Ab, by Jacob ben Joseph al-Mal? and by David ben Aaron ibn Husain.\[39\]

From the second half of this century various accounts of travels exist which give information concerning the external position of the Jews. Chénier, for example, describes them as follows:

"The Jews possess neither lands nor gardens, nor can they enjoy their fruits in tranquility. They must wear only black, and are obliged when they pass near mosques, or through streets in which there are sanctuaries, to walk barefoot. The lowest among the Moors imagines he has a right to ill-treat a Jew, nor dares the latter defend himself, because the Koran and the judge are always in favor of the Mohammedan. Notwithstanding this state of oppression, the Jews have many advantages over the Moors: they better understand the spirit of trade; they act as agents and brokers, and they profit by their own cunning and by the ignorance of the Moors. In their commercial bargains many of them buy up the commodities of the country to sell again. Some have European correspondents; others are mechanics, such as goldsmiths, tailors, gunsmiths, millers, and masons. More industrious and artful, and better informed than the Moors, the Jews are employed by the emperor in receiving the customs, in coining money, and in all affairs and intercourse which the monarch has with the European merchants, as well as in all his negotiations with the various European governments."\[40\]

There were, indeed, quite a number of such Jewish officials, negotiators, treasurers, councilors, and administrators at the Moroccan court, whom the European is inclined to call "ministers", but whom in reality the ruler used merely as intermediaries in extorting money from the people, and dismissed as soon as their usefulness in this direction was at an end. They were especially Jews from Spain, the megorashim, whose wealth, education, and statesmanship paved their way to the court here, as formerly in Spain. One of the first of such ministers was Shumel al-Barensi, at the beginning of the 16th century in Fez, who opened the "state career" to a long succession of coreligionists ending in the 19th century with Masado ben Leaho, prime minister and representative councilor of the emperor in foreign affairs. It would be erroneous to suppose that these Jewish dignitaries of the state succeeded in raising the position
and the influence of their fellow believers, or that they even attempted to do so. They were usually very glad if they themselves were able to remain in office to the end of their lives.

Moroccan Jews were employed also as ambassadors to foreign courts. At the beginning of the 17th century Pacheco in the Netherlands; Shumel al-Farrashi at the same place in 1610; after 1675 Joseph Toledani, who, as stated above, concluded peace with Holland; his son Hayyim in England in 1750; a Jew in Denmark. In 1780 Jacob ben Abraham Benider was sent as minister from Morocco to King George III; in 1794 a Jew named Sumbal and in 1828 Meïr Cohen Macnin were sent as Moroccan ambassadors to the English court.[41][42]

Another event caused to a population decrease among the community was the two-year exile of the Jews from the mellah in 1790–1792, during the brief reign of sultan Malawy yazid. The whole community was forced to leave to Qasba Shrarda which was on the other side of Fez. This time the population of the Jews around the mellah was at the lowest stage of all time, and did not manage to "heal" itself. A mosque was built on the site of the main synagogue, under the order of yazid, tomb stones from a near Jewish cemetery was used to built the mosque, and the cemetery itself was moved to the entrance of the Muslim quarter along with the bones of the saintly rabbis. The exile lasted around for two years, and only after the death of yazid, the qadi of Fez ordered the mosque to be torn down and the Jews were permitted to return to their quarter.[7][8][9]

In the 19th century

The 19th century, which brought emancipation to the Jews of many countries, failed to fundamentally alter the status of Moroccan Jews, but produced new divisions among them and entailed new sources of trouble. Capitalist development and European economic penetration brought prosperity to many Jewish merchants in northern Moroccan ports, but cost many Jews in the interior their traditional livelihoods,[43] as industrial imports from Europe drove traditional Jewish crafts out of the market.[44] As a result, many impoverished Jews migrated to overpopulated urban mellahs (Jewish quarters), where they struggled to survive as shopkeepers, peddlers, artisans or beggars.[45][46] Morocco's instability and divisions also fueled conflicts, for which Jews were frequent scapegoats. Every new war in which Morocco became involved in that century with any foreign country sacrificed the Jews of one district or another of the sultanate to the general depression and discontent which an unsuccessful war usually calls forth in political and commercial life. The war with France in 1844 brought new misery
and ill treatment upon the Moroccan Jews, especially upon those of Mogador (known as Essaouira). When the war with Spain broke out on September 22, 1859, the Moors had nothing more fitting to do than to plunder the houses of friendly Jewish families in Tetuan. Most of the Jews saved their lives only by fleeing. About 400 were killed. A like result followed the conflict with Spain in 1853 in consequence of the violent acts of the cliff-dwellers in Melilla. During this century and up to 1910, around 1000 Moroccan Jewish families migrated to Amazon, in northern Brazil, during the rubber boom.

**Montefiore's journey to Morocco**

In 1863 Sir Moses Montefiore and the Board of Deputies of British Jews received a telegram from Morocco asking for help for a group of Jews who were imprisoned at Safi on suspicion of having killed a Spaniard. Two others had already been executed at the instigation of the Spanish consul; one of them publicly in Tangier, the other in Safi. Sir Moses, supported by the British government, undertook a journey to Morocco to demand the liberation of the imprisoned Jews and, as he said in a letter to the sultan, to move the latter "to give the most positive orders that Jews and Christians, dwelling in all parts of Your Majesty's dominions, shall be perfectly protected, and that no person shall molest them in any manner whatsoever in anything which concerns their safety and tranquillity; and that they may be placed in the enjoyment of the same advantages as all other subjects of Your Majesty." Montefiore was successful in both attempts.

The prisoners were liberated, and on February 15, 1864, the sultan published an edict granting equal rights of justice to the Jews. This edict of emancipation was confirmed by Mohammed IV's son and successor, Moulay Hasan I, on his accession to the throne 1873 and again on September 18, 1880, after the Conference of Madrid.

The persecution of Moroccan Jews was one of the motives for the foundation in 1860 of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), a French-based organization working for Jewish social and political equality and economic advancement worldwide. Morocco was one of the countries where the AIU was most active. Its very first school was founded in Tétouan, Morocco, in 1862, eventually it had 83 schools in Morocco, more than in the rest of the world combined. Over time the AIU in Morocco was more and more closely associated with French colonial influence; one of its assistant secretary-generals later noted that its "close, even organic relations with the Quai d'Orsay [the French foreign ministry] were an open secret.

Pro-Jewish reforms were often not executed by local magistrates in the fragmented sultanate, however, and even if they were they reignited animosity toward the Jewish population. Thus, for example, the sultan Sulaiman (1795–1822) decreed that the Jews of Fez might wear shoes; but so many Jews were killed in the streets of that city as a result of the edict that they themselves asked the sultan to repeal it.

---

According to a statistical report of the AIU, for the years 1864–80 no less than 307 Jews were murdered in the city and district of Morocco, which crimes, although brought to the attention of the magistracy upon every occasion, remained unpunished.[54]

While the AIU failed to achieve much in increasing Moroccan Jews' political status, it did succeed in giving a significant minority of them modern French-language educations and in initiating them into French culture. This included a transformation of many Moroccan Jews' gender and sexual norms. For many centuries, Moroccan Jews and Muslims had shared such customs as polygamy, segregation of the sexes, early ages of female marriage, and a tolerance for men's love of male youths that was in contrast to both Jewish and Islamic scriptural prescriptions.[55] The AIU set out to Europeanize Moroccan Jews' marriage patterns and family forms, combating prostitution, eliminating Jewish women's traditional head coverings, and reining-in on what it saw as Jewish men's promiscuity and homosexual tendencies.[56] These changes required, in the words of an AIU alumni association in Tangiers in 1901, that Jewish mores be "disengaged from the Muslim spirit"[57] – thus helping, like the AIU's activities generally, to increase Moroccan Jews' distance from an emerging Moroccan national identity.

Pictorial essay of Jewish community

Early photographs of Moroccan Jewish families, taken in the early 20th century by German explorer and photographer, Hermann Burchardt, are now held at the Ethnological Museum of Berlin.[58]

Modern times

The status of Moroccan Jews was not substantially improved by the establishment in 1912 of a French protectorate over much of the country. By contrast with Algeria, where Jews obtained French citizenship en masse with the adoption of the Crémieux decree in 1870, the establishment of the French protectorate in Morocco cost many Jews the forms of European extraterritorial protection they had formerly enjoyed, relegating them once more to the status of "natives."[59]

In 1912, thousands of rebelling Moroccan soldiers entered and pillaged the Mellah (Jewish quarter) of Fez. More than 50 Jews were killed and hundreds of homes and shops were destroyed or damaged. The events were known as the "Tritel"[60]

By the 1930s increasing numbers of Moroccan Muslims began to graduate from schools taught in French and to demand access to jobs in the colonial administration and in French-owned businesses that had been filled by French citizens and by Moroccan Jews who, as a community, had been willing to send significant numbers of children to schools taught in French a generation or two earlier than Moroccan Muslims.[61]

In 1940, the Nazi-controlled Vichy government issued antisemitic decrees excluding Jews from public functions. Sultan Mohammed V refused to apply these racist laws and, as a sign of defiance, insisted on inviting all the rabbis of Morocco to the 1941 throne celebrations.[62]
In 1948, approximately 265,000 Jews lived in Morocco. Around 2,500 live there now, mostly in Casablanca, but also in Fes and other main cities.

In June 1948, soon after Israel was established and in the midst of the first Arab-Israeli war, riots against Jews broke out in Oujda and Djerada, and in Alcazarquivir killing 44 Jews. In 1948-9, 18,000 Jews left the country for Israel. After this, Jewish emigration continued (to Israel and elsewhere), but slowed to a few thousand a year. Through the early 1950s, Zionist organizations encouraged emigration, particularly in the poorer south of the country, seeing Moroccan Jews as a valuable source of labor for the Jewish State. From 1948 and on, a mass of Jews left Fez, as the state of Israel was declared, most of them immigrated to Israel, and some of them to France and Canada. In the 1950s and 1960s there were still active Jewish schools and organisations such as Alliance Israélite Universelle which later got closed as the Jewish population decreased.[7][8][9]

In 1956, Morocco attained independence. Jews occupied several political positions, including three Members of the Parliament of Morocco and a Minister of Posts and Telegraphs. However, emigration to Israel jumped from 8,171 in 1954 to 24,994 in 1955, increasing further in 1956. Beginning in 1956, emigration to Israel was prohibited until 1961, although it continued illegally until it was officially resumed.[63] In 1961, the government relaxed the laws on emigration to Israel, as part of an agreement with Israel that entailed a payment to Morocco for each Jew that left the country for Israel. When Mohammed V died, Jews joined Muslims in a national day of mourning. But over the next three years, more than 80,000 Moroccan Jews immigrated to Israel. By 1967, only 60,000 Jews remained in Morocco.

The Six-Day War in 1967 led to increased Arab-Jewish tensions worldwide including in Morocco. By 1971, its Jewish population was down to 35,000; however, most of this new wave of emigration went to Europe and North America rather than Israel. France for a time was a destination particularly for Moroccan Jews with European educations, who had economic opportunities there; one study of Moroccan Jewish brothers, one of whom settled in France and the other in Israel, showed that 28 percent of the brothers who settled in France became managers, businessmen or professionals (compared to 13 percent of their Israeli brothers) and only 4 percent unskilled workers (compared to over a third of their Israeli brothers).[64] Moroccan Jews in Israel, far more numerous, enjoyed less upward mobility: 51 percent were blue-collar in 1961 and 54 percent as late as 1981.[65]

Despite their current small numbers, Jews continue to play a notable role in Morocco; the King retains a Jewish senior adviser, André Azoulay; they are well represented in business and even a small number in politics and culture; and Jewish schools and synagogues receive government subsidies. However, Jews were targeted in the Casablanca attacks in May 2003. King Hassan II's pleas to former Moroccan Jews to return have largely been ignored.
As of 2004, Marrakech had an aging population of about 260 Jews, most over the age of 60, while Casablanca has between 3,000 and 4,000 Jews. Meanwhile, the State of Israel is home to nearly 1,000,000 Jews of Moroccan descent, around 15% of the nation's total population.

In 2013, it was revealed that there is a rapidly growing trend of Moroccan-Jewish families sending their sons to study at the Jerusalem College of Technology in Israel. Most of these students opt to take up Israeli citizenship and settle in Israel after graduating.[66] Conversely, a small trickle of criminals from Israel have been settling in Morocco, exploiting the lack of an extradition treaty between the two nations. However, most of these are not of Moroccan descent.[67]

See also

- Moroccan citron
- Maghrebi Jews
- History of the Jews in Carthage

Al Wifaq
List of Moroccan Jews
Sephardi Jews
Cicurel family
Pallache family

Further reading


Notes

4. Mercier (1888), p. i. 167
5. This is now widely thought to be a modern misinterpretation; see Kahina.
13. (see Ibn Verga Eme? ha-Baka", ed. Wiener, p. 20
17. (in French) "Les Merinides" on Universalis (http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/merinides-les/)
23. Abraham ben Solomon of Torruti, "Sefer ha-Ḳabbalah" in Neubauer, M. J. C." i. 112 et seq.
24. Kayserling (1865), pp. 143 et seq.
27. Kayserling (1865), p. 161
32. Chénier, "Recherches Historiques sur les Maures et Histoire de l'Empire de Maroc", ii. 351, Paris, 1787
34. Chénier, "Recherches Historiques sur les Maures et Histoire de l'Empire of Morocco", i. 326
35. Chénier, "The Present State of the Empire of Morocco", i. 341
36. Jost (1828), p. 45
37. Jost (1828), pp. 44 et seq.
39. D. Kaufmann, "Z. D. M. G." i. 238 et seq.; "R. E. J." xxxvii. 120 et seq.
40. Chénier, "The Present State of the Empire of Morocco", i. 157
42. Meakin, "The Moors", London, 1902
44. Mohammed Kenbib, Juifs et musulmans au Maroc, 1859–1948, Rabat: Université Mohammed V, 1994, 431-33
45. Schroeter (2002), p. 150
47. Jost, Neuere Gesch. der Israeliten, ii. 220, Berlin, 1846
48. H. Iliowizi, Through Morocco to Minnesota, 1888, p. 49
49. Parfitt (2000)
50. Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore". ii. 145 et seq., London. 1890: see also the account of
the journey by Dr. Thomas Hodgkin, the physician who accompanied Montefiore, entitled "Narrative of a Journey to Morocco", London, 1866
55. Drucker (2015), pp. 4, 15
56. Drucker (2015), pp. 7, 10–15
57. Marginlin (2011), pp. 595–596
61. Laskier (1983), pp. 286, 293
66. http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4354823,00.html

References


External links

- Moroccan Daily Halakha / La Halakha Marocaine Quotidienne (http://www.darkeabotenou.com)
- Dafina.net (http://www.dafina.net) Moroccan Jews Website in French and English: history, culture, food, forum...
- Jewish Virtual Library (https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/morocjews.html)
- Visiting Jewish Morocco (http://rickgold.home.mindspring.com/index.htm) A very complete and informative site about history and culture of Moroccan Jews
- Jewish Moroccan Heritage (http://www.judaisme-marocain.org/) The Museum of Moroccan Jews (French) very rich, a lot of interesting material.
- A list of Moroccan synagogues (http://www.kosherdelight.com/MoroccoSynagogues.htm)
- Moroccan Jews in the Amazon and the rubber trade (http://www.orthohelp.com/geneal/amazon.HTM)
- Chabad-Lubavitch Centers in Morocco (http://www.chabad.org/centers/default.asp?q=9318___Morocco)
- Moroccan Jews website, Darnna.com (http://www.darnna.com/)
- Agadir Jewish Community Website (http://www.communautejuiveagadir.com/) Pictures of Tombgraves of the cemetery of Agadir
- http://sites.google.com/site/moroccanjews/jews-in-morocco. Haim Cohen, leader of the Jews in Spanish Morocco, writes a report to Ahmed Belbachir Haskouri in November 1947 on the state of the Jews and recommends steps for enhancement of this community in Spanish Morocco. This decline was due to a substantial emigration of Jews from Morocco in the immediate wake of the partition in Palestine.
- Return to Morocco (http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeera-world/2015/01/return-morocco-2015120124346751467.html), Al Jazeera
