

# North Africa

## INTRODUCTION

THE history of North African Jewry in the last few decades offers the historian, philosopher, and sociologist the most extraordinary example on record of the westernization of a particular group. The starting-point of the communities of the Maghreb was incomparably lower than that at which the emancipation movement of the eighteenth century found the Jews of Europe. The general movement of the Jews of North Africa from the Moslem East of their origin to the modern West led to their integration into the French community of North Africa or, in the case of a small number, to emigration to France or Israel.

In Algeria, one could regard emancipation as achieved. Most Jews were completely integrated into European life, where they occupied an enviable position. (Thus they supplied 22.08 per cent of the dentists, 21.5 per cent of the doctors, 18 per cent of the administration, 16.30 per cent of the lawyers, 15.2 per cent of the midwives.) More than a fourth of the Jewish women worked and paid taxes. This last fact is undoubtedly most impressive when one considers the cloistered state of the Jewish woman before 1830.

Sociological and statistical studies in Tunisia show a situation comparable to that in Algeria but with a less striking degree of emancipation. Politically the great majority of Jews living in Tunisia remained subjects of the Bey. The *hara* (ghetto) of Tunis, with its 65,000 inhabitants, sometimes offered scenes repugnant to modern sensibilities. In the southern part of the country it was possible to discover Jewish communities scarcely touched by the new influences introduced by France.

In Morocco, where it was impossible for a Jew to acquire French citizenship, as he could in Tunisia, the areas of wretchedness were even greater. The *mellah* (ghetto) of Casablanca with its 75,000 inhabitants offered scenes as painful as can be imagined. In the communities of the interior one still found conditions unchanged in respect to housing, hygiene, and education. But for all that, there was a tremendous ferment in the younger generation, which was learning the new ways of emancipation in an inconceivably short time. In achieving this it was greatly aided by the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the ORT technical training, and OSE health organizations. These in turn were subsidized by the French government and by the American Joint Distribution Committee. It should be mentioned at this point that the school problem, so serious in Morocco, was on the way to a definitive solution.

The inclusion of the Tunisian question on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly in the spring of 1952 gave an urgent character to the dilemma confronting North African Jewry. The Jewish position was not

a simple one, nor an easy one to take, in the conflict between the Tunisian and Moroccan nationalists and the French Government. The Jews had lived for centuries among the Moslem masses. The problems of emancipation for these masses were, on a different scale, the same as theirs. They were concrete problems which required not talk but hard daily work. And the Jews were profoundly concerned in the processes of the emancipation of the Moslem masses. Very fundamental ties united the Jews and Moslems of North Africa, so that nothing which affected the interests of the Moslems could leave the Jews unmoved. But on the other hand, the Jews of North Africa unanimously recognized that they owed the degree of culture and of security which they had achieved to the work of France, whose presence had made possible the emancipation of North African Jewry. This had redounded to the benefit not only of the Jews, but also of the great mass of the Moslems, who had also been progressively affected by the great changes that had revolutionized the social structure of North African Jewry.

The example of Libya did not encourage the Jews of North Africa to look with a favorable eye on the more extreme nationalist aspirations. The independence of Libya, proclaimed on January 1, 1952, resulted in the completion of a historical process which began with the massacres of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica on November 4, 1945, and June 12 and 13, 1948. There remained in Libya only 4,000 Jews. The rest had emigrated to Israel.

The future of the Jews of North Africa depended on the future of the countries in which they had been living for more than two thousand years. The situation required a pacific solution not only for the sake of the future of the great mass of North African Jews and Moslems, but for the security and stability of Europe itself.

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## ALGERIA

SINCE 1947 Algeria appeared to have achieved that unstable political equilibrium which Tunisia and Morocco were still seeking. Algeria was the first of the North African countries to be the beneficiary of French influence, and it was the one where the influence of the West had made itself most widely and profoundly felt. The ideas and techniques of the West, represented by France, had penetrated deeply into the farthest parts of the country. Even Algerian nationalism had been fundamentally influenced by French thought. Ferhat Abbas, the leader of the Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto, remained an admirer of France even while he sought autonomy as a solution of Algeria's political problems.

For Algeria, in contrast to Tunisia and Morocco, the year under review (July 1951 through June 1952) was one of profound calm. It was marked by no significant political or social developments. The internal evolution of the country had not gone beyond the Statute of 1947, under which all the Moslems were admitted to French citizenship. The events in Tunisia aroused little interest, and the extreme nationalist parties, such as that of which Messali Hadj remained the leader, had not succeeded in winning the sup-