

# North Africa

## INTRODUCTION

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

The nationalist agitation and social unrest that followed the events in Palestine affected French North African Jewish communities and led to violence and pogroms. In some respects, however, the Jews in French North Africa<sup>1</sup> were better off than their co-religionists in other Moslem lands. Even the establishment of Israel and the military victories of the Israeli in the ensuing war had milder repercussions in French possessions than in the independent and semi-independent states of the Middle East. This was due, at least to a certain degree, to the traditional French policy of colonial assimilation and the moderating influence the French exerted on the local Arab authorities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## MOROCCO

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

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

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

### *Communal Organization and Education*

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

<sup>3</sup> *Défense*, Paris, February 4, 1949.