

# North Africa

## Introduction

IN EVERY part of the sub-continent of North Africa, which Arab historians call the Maghreb, 1951 saw the same struggle going forward between Western and Eastern influences for domination. The extreme Western point of the Moslem world, North Africa was nevertheless an essential element in the stability of Europe. Since the end of the war it had had a special interest for the Jewish world, not only because its half-million Jews represented the largest single group in the Diaspora after American Jewry, but also because it sharply posed the problem of the kind of existence possible to a Jewish community in a Moslem country.

It would be inexact to speak of *one* North African Jewry, for the Jewish communities of French and Spanish Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya differed markedly from each other, and differed even more perhaps within each country, according to region and social milieu.

### EAST AND WEST

In every country in North Africa there were remnants of the old Oriental past co-existing with the pervasive influences of the West.

Although there were very great differences in the stage of development of the different Jewish communities, the point of departure was everywhere the same—the North African ghetto (the *Mellah* of Morocco and Algeria and the *Hara* of Tunisia and Tripolitania). More than twelve centuries of absolute domination by Islam imposed upon North African Jewry distinctive characteristics whose traces were noticeable everywhere in spite of decades of Western influence.

It was against this uniform background of Islam that France in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco; Spain in Spanish Morocco; and Italy (until the end of World War II) in Tripolitania brought their varying influences to bear. These different Western influences caused differences to arise in the development of the Jewish communities of North Africa; and it was these influences which have shaped the character of contemporary North African Jewry.

### JEWISH POPULATION

In 1951 the Jewish population of North Africa was divided as follows: Morocco possessed about 260,000 Jews (or more than half of the Jewish population of North Africa); Algeria, 140,000 Jews (or more than one-quarter of the North African Jewish population); Tunisia, 105,000 Jews (or one-fifth of the North African Jewish population). These half-million Jews (to

which one must add about 6,000 Libyan Jews, most of whom were on the point of leaving for Israel in 1951) represented 4.35 per cent of the Jewish population of the world, and 60.2 per cent of the Jewish population living in Mohammedan countries.

## FRENCH NORTH AFRICA

**P**OLITICAL circumstances did not permit France to follow the same policy with respect to the Jews of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. The development of the Jewries of these countries was also conditioned by the length of French rule (which was established in Algeria in 1830, in Tunisia in 1880, and in Morocco only as late as 1912). In Algeria, this French-influenced development went deepest; in Morocco, fastest.

## ALGERIA

### *Jewish Population*

**T**HE growth of the Jewish population was constant in Algeria from 1831 on. From 1881 to 1931, the Jewish population increased by 215 per cent, while Algeria's general European population increased by only 96 per cent and the Mohammedan population by 97 per cent. Since 1931 population growth had been steady, thanks to Algerian Jewry's high birth rate and the immigration of other, mainly Moroccan, Jews. In the department of Constantine, which was more cut off from Western influences, the Jewish birth rate was the highest.

The Jewish population was widely scattered throughout Algeria. The results of the last census of Algerian Jews (1941), as revised in the light of the general census of 1948, showed that a total Jewish population of 140,000 was distributed among 253 urban centers. Nevertheless, the bulk of the Jewish population was concentrated in the cities of Oran (25,671), Algiers (25,591), and Constantine (13,037).

The table on p. 376 shows the distribution of the Jewish population of Algeria by department and district.

### ECONOMIC LIFE

The Algerian Jews were principally engaged in commerce and banking, textiles, and the liberal professions (dentists, 22.08 per cent; doctors, 21.50 per cent; administrative officials, 18 per cent; lawyers, 16.30 per cent; midwives, 15.20 per cent). An extensive survey conducted by the author revealed that about one-third of all Jewish women earned an income. This figure is a very important indication of the general advance of the population, which used to restrict the activities of women to cooking and bearing children.