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Aspects of the Jewish Experience in Northern Europe, 800 to 1096

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ASPECTS OF THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE
IN NORTHERN EUROPE, 800 TO 1096

by
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Bachelor of Arts, Michigan State University, 1983

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

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This Thesis submitted by Andrew G. Ziny in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

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This Thesis meets the standards for appearance and conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

A. William Johnson 5/3/88
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Department History

Degree Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The course of Jewish history in western Europe is varied. Beginning in small communities located in the Roman provinces at the beginning of the Common Era, the Jews spread northward into Germany and France and slowly increased both their population and the number of towns in which they were settled. The expansion of Christian influence among the Gothic tribes created hardships for the Jews, but the rise of the Carolingian empire, Charlemagne's abilities as a statesman, and his desire to create an empire in the style of Rome, helped to enhance the stature of the Jews.

But the advent of the feudal period provided an obstacle to the development of Jewish culture. Feudalism embodied Christian values, utilized an oath heavily laced with Christian symbolism, and granted landed estates to officials of the feudal hierarchy. These elements of the feudal system excluded non-Christians. Jews presented an exceptional problem, however; Roman tradition and Church policy supported the existence and autonomy of the Jewish people, but the social system froze them out of the landed economy. To keep their culture alive, the Jews had to adapt their lifestyle to these new social conditions.

The Jews responded economically by engaging in trade. Some Jews traded in slaves. Others distributed the products of Europe by peddling merchandise around the continent and by trading at commercial fairs. Jewish businessmen also imported the merchandise of other continents--Africa and Asia--to Europe, and exported European products to these areas. Through these endeavors, the Jews helped to promote commerce among the Europeans and increase their knowledge of other peoples worldwide.

Culturally, the Jews responded by developing institutions to structure and regulate the communities in which they lived. Jewish scholars were instrumental in this process. They established the principle of majority rule, developed an effective judicial system, and strengthened the role of the community in Jewish government. The creativity of these scholars enabled the Jews to adapt to the feudal environment and flourish in northern Europe.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Jewish people around the world, and especially in western Europe, is at once a story of both triumph and tragedy. It represents triumph at the personal and societal levels, for, despite tremendous social and political pressure exerted by numerous societies that used their own methods to worship their own gods, large numbers of Jews have been able to remain wholly committed to Judaism. But it also represents tragedy, for these same societies--ancient, medieval, and modern--have found innumerable ways to inflict cruel punishments on the Jews for worshipping differently. The triumph lies in the high degree of self-discipline that allowed the Jews to continue their worship even though submission to more powerful religions would often have been a much simpler option; the tragedy is embodied in the societies' abilities to inflict cruelty on so broad a scale.

During the medieval period Christian Europe presented little exception in the long established pattern of accepting or rejecting the Jews based on profit and convenience. As the Jews arrived in western and northern Europe after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 B.E., they met

little or no opposition to their ways of life and unique styles of worship. In fact, many Roman Catholic popes issued bulls protecting the Jews and preserved the rights they had inherited from the Romans to worship God differently than Christians did. Of all the non-Christian religions, they alone were allowed to worship legally and openly. Over time the Jews evolved a complex pattern of living and established and maintained a type of parallel society (alongside that of their Christian neighbors) based on their sacred writings. Despite this initial acceptance, however, the emerging Christian society eventually grew dissatisfied with the close proximity of the Jews to themselves.

Non-Jewish historians tend to diminish the role of Jews in western society and often ignore their contributions to European civilization. Surveys of western history usually mention the Jews in their analyses of the Roman period and the early development of Christianity, but most ignore any presence of Jews in western Europe until about the twelfth century, when the Jews became active as moneylenders. Thomas Greer, in A Brief History of Western Man, summarizes the course of Jewish history through the crusades in four paragraphs. Greer touches on the separation of the Jews from the Christians, the transition of the Jews into the towns, and the persecutions of the Jews by the Crusaders. In The Middle Ages:

395-1272, historian Dana Carleton Munro limits his discussion of the Jews to their engagement in moneylending during the twelfth century and the persecutions of the Jews during and after the Crusades. Carl Stephenson, in Medieval History: Europe from the Second to the Sixteenth Century, discusses the imposition of distinctive clothing on non-Christians in the thirteenth century and the utility of the Jewish moneylenders to the monarchs. Likewise, John L. LaMonte, in The World of the Middle Ages, comments briefly on the ruling of the Fourth Lateran Council regarding distinctive clothing and on Jewish moneylenders, and Richard W. Southern, in The Making of the Middle Ages, comments that the Jews continued to make scholastic contributions even after the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence by the crusaders. None of these authors address Jewish contributions to European civilization, the extent to which the Jews engaged in international trade, or the intricate community life that the Jews developed. The problem is not limited to American historians, however; The Medieval European Community, by Donald Matthew, and An Introduction to Medieval Institutions, by Norman Zacour, do not mention Jews at all.

Jews, admittedly, even when tolerated as citizens, were subordinate to Christians and, for the most part, were not important secular leaders. Although some Jews were appointed to high political offices, certainly

there have been no Jewish kings or emperors in western society. Instead of seeking political power, the Jews followed their religious teachings devoutly. For the Jewish culture to have coexisted for many millenia within societies that were hostile to it, required a great deal of flexibility and adaptability, and, to achieve this combination, talented leaders. Their very survival indicates that the Jews, as a group, are due much more attention than is usually given them.

This paper will attempt to demonstrate why the Ashkenazi¹ Jews of northern Europe were able to flourish through the Middle Ages, specifically during the early feudal period, despite their lack of political power. After tracing the roots of Jewish culture in western Europe, I will turn to the activities of the Ashkenazi Jews from the ninth to the eleventh centuries and examine their economic and cultural developments. The Jews conducted trade within Europe and between Europe and other continents. In these centuries, too, the Ashkenazi Jews achieved high levels of scholarship, which enabled them to develop a detailed community structure.²

The study of Jewish history within a Christian context presents two difficulties. Both concern basic assumptions about the passage of time. The first deals with the calendar. The Jewish calendar measures and numbers the years differently than does the western calendar.

It provides different names and lengths for the months of the year. In this paper, the dates will follow the western system, with C.E. (Common Era) and B.C.E. (Before Common Era) substituted for the more familiar A.D. and B.C.

A second problem deals with organization. The history of western civilization is often categorized neatly into three general units: ancient, medieval, and modern. Jewish history, alternatively, can be divided into seven areas: the Patriarchal age (from the time of Abraham to the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites), the First Commonwealth (from approximately 1200 B.C.E. to 586 B.C.E.), the Second Commonwealth (from 586 B.C.E. to 70 C.E.), the age of the Jews in the East (which covered approximately the first millenium C.E.), the age of the Jews in western Europe (from 100-200 B.C.E. to the end of the Renaissance), the age of the Jews in eastern Europe (from the end of the Renaissance through the eighteenth century), and the modern age (from the end of the eighteenth century to the present). The implication is that for the Jews, the "middle ages"--the fifth stage--began roughly 400-500 years before the fall of Rome, which is usually used to mark the beginning of the medieval period for western society. Interestingly, the medieval period ends at approximately the same time from either perspective; in any case, the Jewish and the non-Jewish "middle

ages" are certainly not interchangeable. The focus of this study has been discussed above, but it is important to realize that the Jewish and non-Jewish cultures view history from different perspectives.

NOTES

¹Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing Co., 1971) 3: 718-720, and Luitpold Wallach, "Ashkenaz=Germany," Historia Judaica, 3 (1941): 102-106. The term Ashkenazi (singular: Ashkenazim) refers to the Jews who lived in northern Europe during the Middle Ages and to the Jewish culture that they developed. The term, which originated in the Bible, was applied to the Jews of Germany, beginning in the tenth century, by Jewish writers of Arabic background, and by German Jews themselves from the thirteenth century. The other Jewish culture in Europe was the Sefardic culture, which evolved in Spain and southern Europe. The Ashkenazi Jews emphasized the Palestinian tradition, while the Sefardic Jews retained the Babylonian custom.

²The sources for the first two chapters, which deal with the political setting in which the Ashkenazi culture developed, are secondary sources of Jewish history. While some deal with the course of Jewish history from the ancient era through the modern period, others concentrate on the medieval period. I have also utilized sources concerned specifically with the development of feudal society. For the final two chapters, I have utilized sources that provide details of the development of Ashkenazi culture. The primary source material for the evolution of this culture are the responsa of the rabbis to queries from Jewish communities. I have also referred to the Encyclopaedia Judaica for specific details. Throughout, I have attempted to put the evolution of Ashkenazi culture into the context of the surrounding Christian society, rather than simply providing the details of its development.

CHAPTER I

THE ARRIVAL OF THE JEWS IN WESTERN EUROPE, TO 800

The Jews have a long cultural history, stretching back to the second millenium B.C.E. Throughout this long period, the Jews have experienced intervals of peaceful tranquility and intervals of defeat and rejection. Originally making their home in the Middle East, many Jews were ejected from their homeland by the Babylonians in 585 B.C.E. Although they were later allowed to re-settle in their homeland, many chose to settle elsewhere. By the time the Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem in 70 C.E., more of the world's four and a half million Jews (approximately eighty percent) lived outside, rather than inside, Palestine, and therefore away from their religious capital and authorities. Many of them lived in Europe.¹ The Jewish influence was apparent in Rome as early as 76 B.C.E., but it is highly unlikely that there were Jewish settlements in other portions of Europe before the Christian era.² However, after the Roman defeat of the Jews and another expulsion from Palestine, more Jews were forced into exile and many settled in Europe.³

The presence of Jews in southern Europe grew slowly and intermittently in the first few centuries of the Christian Era. Titus deported thousands of Jews to the western provinces of the Roman empire. Many drifted from Rome to other parts of the Italian peninsula and other Jews were employed in the mines of Sardinia. By 305 C.E., there was enough of a Jewish presence in Spain to cause the Council of Illiberis to enact four decrees intended to limit the intimacy of interaction between Christians and Jews.⁴

In northern Europe, too, the Jewish population grew sporadically. In France, groups of Jews found their way to Vienne (in 6 C.E.) and Lyons (in 33 C.E.). These pioneers laid the early foundations for both Jewish and Christian communal life in Europe north of the Pyrenees.⁵ A portion of the Theodosian Code, compiled between 425 and 435, which was addressed to the prefect of Gaul, mentioned Jews, indicating that by the fifth century there were substantial settlements of Jews scattered about Gaul and Belgium.⁶ Likewise, there were no Jews living in the German cities in the first centuries of the Christian period. The earliest settlement occurred in Cologne, in the fourth century; by the tenth century, there were Jewish communities in Madgeburg, Merseburg, and Ratisbon; and by the eleventh century, the Jews had established

additional communities in Mainz (Mayence), Speyer, Worms, and Trier (Treves).⁷

The nuclei of many of these communities were formed by Jews who had trailed the Roman army into the interior of Gaul and Germany. Seeking to escape Rome, its ever-growing Jewish population, and the economic competition caused by the crowded conditions, these Jews established trading posts coincidentally with the camps set up by the Roman army. By transporting the merchandise of the Italian cities north, they had helped to establish the initial commerce of these areas.⁸ There were, in the time of the Crusades, legends that the Jewish settlements in Germany had antedated the Christian era, but these legends were established falsely, in the hope that they would shield Jews of Germany from the accusations of the Crusaders that these Jews had descended from crucifiers of Christ. By asserting that their ancestors had lived continuously on European soil since before the time of Christ, the Jews had hoped to cause the Crusaders to bypass them.⁹ Unfortunately for the Jews, the attempt failed.

The result of this Jewish emigration into and around Europe was the gradual settlement of Jewish communities throughout the continent during the closing centuries of the classical period, a time in which European civilization experienced the erosion and

dissolution of the Roman Empire, and, consequently, nearly anarchical political conditions. The Jews are therefore shown to have taken up European residence prior to the barbarian invasions. The significance of this is that the Jews became settled members of the European continent before the Gothic invaders arrived from the East. When the tribes of Goths and Franks established their European kingdoms, finding the Jews already present within Europe, the presence of Jews came simply to be a fact of life, as it had become in the Roman empire.

In addition, it is important to note that during this period Christianity was in its infancy. Ironically, for the first three centuries of what is now referred to as the Christian Era, the Christian Church was itself a relatively weak institution, trying to establish at once both its right to exist and its internal organization. At this early time, the Church was unable to dominate rival religions. The Jews, at that point, were simply one religious group among many--Jewish, Christian, and pagan. They felt senior to the Christians because Christian doctrine had developed out of the older Jewish doctrine. The Jews therefore had little trouble justifying their existence in western Europe; unlike the Christians, they were not a new phenomenon in the world.

Christianity, however, progressed quickly through the Roman Empire, and soon became a fierce rival of

Judaism. Christianity made fewer demands on its adherents than did Judaism. The Jews, calling themselves a 'chosen people' imply a certain degree of exclusiveness. The Christian Church, alternately, accepted anyone who was willing to believe in God. Conversion to Judaism required the painful operation of circumcision, while the Christian baptism was a simple (but significant) and painless ceremony. Becoming Christian carried implications regarding an individual's future lifestyle and conduct, but was still a simpler matter than conversion to Judaism. The Christian religion was more accessible to those of lesser dedication.¹⁰

Politically, Christianity also had made good progress. In 311 the position of the Christian religion was significantly improved when Galerius issued from Nicomedia an edict of toleration, granting Christians permission to hold religious assemblies, provided that they did not disrupt the good order of the state.¹¹ This elevated Christianity to the same level that the Jews had enjoyed. Neither religion was officially sanctioned (although Christianity was on the upswing), but neither were they officially persecuted. More importantly, on a practical level, each had a large number of enthusiastic supporters. On 15 June 313, Constantine decreed, in especially friendly terms, that Christians should enjoy complete and entire freedom of worship, and he granted

the immediate return to Christians of all confiscated goods. This undoubtedly was a political maneuver on the part of the emperor, since he did not become a Christian for another twenty-three years, but Christianity reaped its reward despite Constantine's lack of piety. Christian symbols appeared on the coinage by 315 and the last of the pagan representations disappeared from the coinage in 323.¹²

In fact, the Church lost little time in asserting its new authority against the Jews. The Council of Nicaea, convened in 325 by Constantine, whose most famous edicts addressed the schism which had overtaken the Church regarding the doctrine of the trinity, also saw several edicts issued regarding the Jews. Hereafter, Christians were forbidden to eat matzah on Passover or to celebrate the holiday when the Jews did. In an effort to limit the influence of Jewish theology on the Christians, the council prohibited Christians from visiting synagogues or listening to Jewish preachers. Presumably to further widen the gulf between Jews and Christians, it was at this time that Sunday was established as the Christian sabbath. The bishops also prevailed upon the emperor to prevent pagans from converting to Judaism.¹³

The Jews were, however, fully integrated members of European society, independent of any particular

status that may or may not have been conferred upon them by the emperor. Until the Roman legacy faded more completely from western Europe, the Jews continued to enjoy their citizenship in the empire. As the barbarian tribes overtook western Europe and established their kingdoms and principalities, the Jews lost the privileges that they had enjoyed under the reign of the Romans, but this happened gradually, over a period of centuries. It was not as a result of any particular act or edict that they lost their rights en masse. Rather, it was in the political maneuverings of the secular and ecclesiastic rulers that the Jews saw their rights and privileges being bargained away by leaders who had little interest in their well-being.

In these centuries following the collapse of the Roman empire, the ecclesiastical leadership desired to further restrict the capacity of the Jews to influence Christians and to limit their ability to proselytize among the pagans. Restrictions on proselytization may have been more confining mentally than physically, but they nevertheless indicate the attitude of the Church regarding conversion to Judaism. The clergy desired also to exclude the Jews from any position which would give them authority over Christians. This attitude was popular because it possessed Roman sanction, and because it was not inconsistent with the autocratic type of

society that existed in Europe at that time. Many elements of society (such as women and the destitute) were excluded from holding public office and other forms of social intercourse, so the exclusion of the Jews as a group would not have seemed excessive to contemporary Europeans. The Christian clergy simply wanted to ensure that a proper respect for the dignity of the Church was observed by all, including the Jews.¹⁴

The papacy of Gregory I "The Great" (590-604) brought about a slight respite for the Jews. He was completely and vigorously opposed to all forms of paganism, Manichaeism, and Christian heresy, and sanctioned the use of force in eliminating them, but he opposed applying similar methods to the Jews. While he was as fundamentally opposed to the Jewish position as were his predecessors, he believed that violent persecution and forced baptisms could never result in genuine conversions. Such activities could have caused even the most devoted Jews to have feigned embracing Christianity, but they would have been motivated by physical convenience, rather than by spiritual convictions. Instead, Gregory desired that Christian missionaries use education to enlighten the Jews and persuade them to genuinely abandon their religion and embrace Christianity.¹⁵

Following his accession to the papacy, Gregory learned of Baptisms that had been forced upon the Jews

of southern France. Writing to the bishops of Arles and Marseilles in June, 591, he applauded the devotion that had led to the forced baptisms:

But unless that intention [he added] be accompanied by a corresponding influence of Holy Scripture, I fear that the act will bring no reward hereafter, and that the result in some cases will be the loss of the very souls we wish to save--which God forbid! For when anyone is led to the baptismal font, not by the sweetness of instruction but by compulsion, if he returns to his former superstition he perishes the more grievously from the very cause which seemed to be for him the beginning of a new life. I therefore beg your Fraternity to preach frequently to these persons and to appeal to them in such a manner that the kindness of the teacher more than anything else may make them desire to change their former mode of life.¹⁶

Gregory was willing to provide commercial, as well as scriptural, enticements (such as reductions in rent) to the Jews in order to attract them to Christianity. Realizing that such policies would not necessarily result in sincere converts, he reasoned that the children and grandchildren of such converts would eventually become mature Christians, so that over the long term the results would be very positive.¹⁷

In human society, official declarations notwithstanding, individuals decide what is best for themselves. The proclamations of the Christian authorities that Christians should avoid contact with the Jews often proved to be unenforceable. Individual Christians recognized that the Jews shared many of the values that they held

very dearly themselves and that Jews were peaceful people. The Christians also recognized that Jews, however humble they may have been, were the most educated element of European society. Although much of their heritage had been passed on orally, a great deal of Jewish practice involved daily readings of prayers and rituals. As a group, the Jews maintained a far higher literacy rate than did the Christians and continually studied the Bible and other sacred writings. Locally, the Christians recognized the Jews' honorable character and better education. They interacted with Jews in many ways and called on them to perform their annual rituals, such as the blessings of the soil and crops.¹⁸ The Jews' educational achievements had made them indispensable members of society. Their ceremonial services to the Christians illustrate one manner in which the Jews were able to peacefully interact with the prevailing Christian culture. Furthermore, the zeal with which the Christian clergy attempted to separate Jews from Christians serves to reinforce the idea that Jews and Christians cooperated frequently and to illustrate the clerics' insecurity in the presence of Jews.

At the end of the sixth century, politics was again used against the Jews. The Visigoths who had controlled Spain since 412 followed the Arian form of Christianity, and were very tolerant of the Jews. Throughout the

early middle ages many of the Teutonic tribes had adopted the Arian form of Christianity rather than the Roman Catholic doctrine. This doctrinal distinction led to a peculiar state of mind which allowed the acceptance of the Jewish presence and autonomy.¹⁹ Jewish wealth grew and the Jews were highly respected members of the community. In 589 Reccared ascended the throne of the Visigoths. In an effort to win the support of the Spanish clergy and consolidate his power, he abandoned Arianism and embraced Roman-Catholicism. Despite the disunity of the Spanish nobility and the inconsistent enforcement of the laws, this act made the lives of the Jews more difficult. By 700 it was decreed that anyone convicted of practicing a Jewish ceremony would be sold into slavery and his children raised by the Catholic clergy.²⁰ It is a tribute to the local importance of the Jews that it took over 110 years to effectively enforce the anti-Jew laws, but in the end, they were put into effect.

A similar series of events occurred to the north of the Pyrenees, in the kingdom of the Franks. Early in the seventh century, relations between the Roman-Catholic Franks and the Jews had been cordial. But in 613 Clothar II reunited the Frankish possessions, subjecting the Jews to unified control and increasing the level of popular hostility among the clergy and laity.²¹

Later, in 629, when Dagobert ascended the Frankish throne, he followed the example of the neighboring Visigoths and actively sought the support of the Roman-Catholic clergy. He also expelled the Jews from his territory. Many of the displaced Jews moved east to join the Jewish communities of the Rhineland--Trier, Mainz, and Cologne--or south to Narbonne. There is no further evidence of a Jewish presence in central France for the next century or so.²² In the mid-seventh century, Jewish life in western Europe reached its first nadir.²³

It was during this same century that events outside of Europe were to have an important impact upon European Jews. To fully understand this impact, we need to return to the first century C.E. and the Roman defeat of the Jews in 70 C.E. After the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of Titus, a great Jewish civilization evolved in Mesopotamia (it was this culture that guided the development of Jewish culture throughout the Muslim world). In the seventh century, this Mesopotamian Jewish civilization entered a period of decline. Depressed economic conditions in the East caused many Jews to seek better living conditions elsewhere, and the resultant wave of migration reinforced Jewish communal life in many areas.

The Jews left Mesopotamia by four major routes. First, many traveled by a caravan route that stretched westward from Palestine across North Africa towards

Morocco, across the narrow Straits of Gibraltar, and into Spain. Along the way, at Kairwan (located in Tunisia) and other important cities and trading centers across northern Africa, the Jews reinvigorated the culture and trading activity that they found there. Second, expansion also drove many Jews northward out of Mesopotamia, and into Persia and southern Russia. Here the Jews found a welcome reception, as the Khazar Khans (modern Kazakhstan, USSR), who had recently embraced Judaism, were grateful for the Jewish emigrants. A third important route, reminiscent of historic trading patterns, took the Jews north of Palestine, across Asia Minor and northern Greece, and across the Adriatic Sea into Italy. These Jews then traveled north through Lucca, at that time an important Italian trading province, and crossed the Alps to travel to France and the Rhineland. A fourth route followed the previous one into Asia Minor, then diverted northward out of Byzantium, following the Danube into southern Germany. On each of these routes, there were numerous Jews who never completed the journeys northward and westward. Many decided to settle in established communities along the way or to found new trading centers and villages of their own.²⁴

This wave of emigration was important to the Ashkenaz Jews of northern Europe for two reasons. First, the influx of new Jews into Europe reinforced the

Jewish communities already established there. Secondly, as the Jews were beginning to engage in trade on an ever-increasing scale, the reinvigoration of Jewish communities throughout western Europe and northern Africa--the trading partners of the European Jews--could only result in reciprocal benefits for each of the communities involved.

Trade had been gaining importance for the Jews from the fifth century onward. Initially, European Jewry comprised an agrarian society (as did the remainder of Europeans), but the Jews were gradually divorced from the soil, and turned to trade and commerce for their livelihood. As the homogenous fabric that the Roman empire had provided to the European continent dissolved, the Jews alone were able to move freely about the continent and find friendly greetings and a similar language spoken elsewhere. It was a common culture and language that provided for the Jews the kind of homogeneity that the plethora of barbaric tribes lacked. Additionally, the spread of Islam resulted in separate, exclusive spheres of religious influence and language on either side of the Mediterranean. Again, it was the Jews who were able to move freely between the two cultures. And so, as ownership of land and employment of servants by Jews was increasingly regulated and restricted, the Jews gradually turned to craftsmanship, artisanship, and finally to the commercial trading to make their livings.

The rise of the Carolingian dynasty (800 C.E.) brought numerous benefits to western Europe. The political quagmire that had developed following the fall of Rome was, for a brief period, sorted out as unified control was exerted over much of Europe. The position of the Jews, as well, was greatly improved during this dynasty. Charlemagne, the greatest of the Carolingian kings, was an aggressive, determined, and utterly ruthless leader. He continued the expansion of the Frankish empire that Pepin had begun, and by the time of his imperial coronation on Christmas Day, 800, he had fought victoriously against the Saxons, the Lombards, and the Bavarians, and had captured the Spanish March.²⁵ This brought a sizable portion of Europe under the control of one ruler. This political unity could have resulted in disastrous policies of persecution for the Jews; that it did not is a tribute to the character of Charlemagne.

Besides expanding the size of the Frankish empire, Charlemagne desired to increase the educational level of society and desired to make learning generally available. He brought together in his palace many scholars and learned men from all over Europe--the Saxon Alcuin, from the York; Peter of Pisa and Paul the Deacon, both from Italy; Theodulf, from Spain; and Einhard, a Frank. Together, these men worked toward a revival of classical studies, taught the elements of logic and Latin grammar,

and adopted from Cassiodorus the division of the arts into seven categories.²⁶ Despite the basic crudeness of life in Europe in the eighth and ninth centuries, Charlemagne had recognized the triumphs of the past and tried to emulate them.

Although in the Frankish kingdom the Church continued to subject the Jews to the kinds of restrictive legislation that only an isolated minority would be required to endure, the restrictions seem to have been easing, perhaps providing for the Jews the most hospitable environment since their arrival in Europe. They were still treated with contempt for their refusal to assimilate into the Christian society; they were barred, like slaves, pagans, and heretics, from pressing criminal charges; they were prohibited from renting land to or from Christians; and they were required to conform to the general marriage laws. But their commerce and other aspects of their lives were unhindered. The greater literacy of the Jews was also recognized by the offices that they occupied. In this period, in which the kings, nobles, and even many of the clergy often were unable to write their names, the Jews were physicians and ministers of finance to many nobles and monarchs. As physicians, perhaps they alone were responsible for maintaining the knowledge of medicine and drugs, which had come down through the Greeks and the Eastern civilization, since

it had been earlier generations of Jews who had instructed the Arabs in medical sciences.²⁷

The medical profession, however, sometimes proved to be a double-edged sword for the Jews. When the Jewish physician was able to treat his patient successfully, he occasionally was accused of employing witchcraft. When, on the other hand, the Jew was unable to cure the patient, he was open to accusations of having poisoned him. In an age as scientifically ignorant as was medieval Europe, the Jew was unable to protect himself against such manifestations of religious prejudice.

Perhaps the pinnacle of the respect and tribute paid to the Jews during the Carolingian period was reached in 797, when Charlemagne decided to send an emissary to meet with the Kaliph of the Muslim empire, Harun al-Rashid. A Jew, named Isaac, accompanied two Christian counts on the journey (which lasted about three years), as an interpreter of the political correspondence between the courts of Aix-la-Chapelle and Baghdad. The two Christian emissaries died along the way, but Isaac returned to Aix-la-Chapelle with wonderful gifts from the East, including an enormous elephant (which so fascinated the Europeans that its death was recorded by the monkish annalists), jewels, spices, gold, apes, a clock, and some robes. Legend held that he also brought the keys to the

Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. Isaac had shown such remarkable ability that he was entrusted by his imperial protector with another, similar mission to see the Kaliph of Baghdad.²⁸

During the Carolingian period, the economic system of western Europe began to change in a very fundamental way. With the re-establishment of a unified empire, the leadership of western Europe demanded a greater degree of loyalty from its warriors than had been the case previously. Also, the more powerful ruler used the economic resources of his empire to reward the most loyal and productive of his vassals. As the feudal system became increasingly refined, land became the symbol of greatest worth in European society and its ownership continued to be taken out of the hands of the Jews. In the agrarian society of northern Europe, these developments presented a new economic challenge to the Jews. It is to these developments that we now turn.

NOTES

¹Encyclopaedia Britannica, fifteenth edition, thirty-two volumes (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1986), 4: 68, and Judah Goldin, "The Period of the Talmud (135 B.C.E.-1035 C.E.)," in The Jews: Their History, Culture, and Religion, ed. Louis Finkelstein, third edition, two volumes (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1959), 124.

²David Philipson, Old European Jewries (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1894), 5.

³As indicated earlier, most histories of western civilization ignore the developments of Jewish culture in the medieval period after the emergence of the Christian Church. But a number of sources do deal with the evolution of Jewish culture and their relations with gentile authorities. Salo W. Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, examines Jewish history worldwide, as does Solomon Grayzel's A History of the Jews. James Parkes, writing from a Christian perspective in The Jew in the Medieval Community, concentrates on the history of the Jews within western Europe, from the beginning of the Christian era through the late fourteenth century.

⁴Philipson, Old European Jewries, 6-7.

⁵Salo Wittmayer Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, second edition, eighteen volumes (New York: Columbia University Press: 1957), 3: 47-48.

⁶Philipson, Old European Jewries, 8-9.

⁷Ibid, 10.

⁸Solomon Grayzel, A History of the Jews (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), 295.

⁹Philipson, Old European Jewries, 9-10.

- ¹⁰ Grayzel, A History of the Jews, 297.
- ¹¹ Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, fifth edition, seven volumes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 2:71.
- ¹² Jean Danielou and Henri Marrou, The Christian Centuries: A New History of the Catholic Church, trans. Vincent Cronin, two volumes (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 1:235-236.
- ¹³ Grayzel, A History of the Jews, 298.
- ¹⁴ James Parkes, The Jew in the Medieval Community, second edition (New York: Hermon Press, 1976), 28-29.
- ¹⁵ Grayzel, A History of the Jews, 302, and Baron, Social and Religious History of the Jews, 3:28.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, 28.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Grayzel, A History of the Jews, 301.
- ¹⁹ Baron, Social and Religious History of the Jews, 3:26.
- ²⁰ Grayzel, A History of the Jews, 302-303.
- ²¹ Baron, Social and Religious History of the Jews, 3:47.
- ²² Grayzel, A History of the Jews, 301.
- ²³ The second nadir would come later, beginning late in the thirteenth century and stretching until late in the fifteenth century, when the Jews were expelled from the various emerging nation-states of Europe.
- ²⁴ Cecil Roth, "The European Age in Jewish History (to 1648)," in Finkelstein, The Jews, 1:219.

²⁵Brian Tierney and Sidney Painter, Western Europe in the Middle Ages: 300-1475, third edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 116-117.

²⁶Ibid, 121.

²⁷Henry Hart Milman, The History of the Jews, from the Earliest Period Down to Modern Times, three volumes in two (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1886), 3:141-142.

²⁸Ibid, 144, and Grayzel, A History of the Jews, 312-313.

CHAPTER II

JEWES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEUDAL SOCIETY, 800 TO 1096

Beginning in the eighth century, the economic foundation of western European society underwent a fundamental transformation. After the fall of the Roman empire, as the Roman legacy of law and order was lost and the Teutonic invaders began to establish realms and cultures of their own, there was little centralized rule throughout Europe. The various invader groups, in primitive fashion, based the boundaries of their realms, and of their control, on existing tribal and familial relationships. During the Merovingian period in France, however, the Franks gradually began to increase their political organization, to reduce the anarchy within their realm, and to introduce greater political control and stability. This was largely a response to the introduction of the stirrup to western Europe during the reign of Charles Martel. This simple, yet effective device enabled soldiers to fight from atop horses, and led to the development of cavalry and its use in military operations. The equipment of the cavalry--horses, swords, lances, and shields--was very costly, and the cavalryman's ability to fight efficiently depended on expert training and long hours of

practice. Since the Frankish state had little money in circulation, the nobility was unable to purchase outright the services of an army of mounted cavalrymen. Searching for a method to fund such an army, Charles Martel took steps that were to begin the gradual reorganization of the tribal European society into a new, feudal society.¹

Charles established a large army of warriors who swore their fidelity to him. These warriors became vassi dominici, or vassals of their lord, Charles. In return for their pledges of loyalty, the vassi dominici were each granted a beneficium or fief, a large estate to support him while he served the king. Besides providing military services, the vassals had a number of other feudal obligations. They formed juries to decide the cases that came before the king's court. They sat in council to advise the king on matters which affected the good order of his realm, as well as serving as the feudal lords of their own estates. They also provided revenue--in the forms of aid and relief--to the king's treasury.²

The development of the feudal system continued throughout the Carolingian period. As loyal adherence to an oath was considered to be one of the highest virtues among the barbaric tribesmen, Charlemagne, following revolts against him in 786 and 782, ordered that all his warriors renew their pleges of allegiance to him (in

person or through one of his representatives). Throughout the realm of the Franks, noblemen flocked to their nearest churches and publicly swore their fidelity over holy relics in the following manner:

I promise that, from this day forward, I will be the most faithful man of the most pious Emperor, my lord Charles, son of King Pepin and Queen Bertha; and I will be so in all sincerity, without deceit or ill-intention, for the honour of his kingship, as by right a man ought to behave towards his lord and master. May God and the saints, whose relics lie here before me, grant me their help; for to this end I shall devote and consecrate myself with all the intelligence that God has given me for the remainder of my life.³

It is important to point out that although feudalism is customarily referred to as an economic system, it was far from systematic. Over time, as the Frankish kingdom was enlarged, subdivided, and re-united through endless series of warfare and alliance, great deviations in form sprang up throughout the continent in different places. Many layers of leadership were built into feudal society, especially as some vassals turned out to be stronger and more assertive of their rights (legal and otherwise) than others. The vassals tried to enlarge their own holdings and became lords by dividing their possessions and granting them as fiefs to other warriors through the process of subinfeudation. The knights also discovered that they could increase their wealth and holdings by swearing their own fidelity to more than a single lord. Consequently, many of the king's subjects found themselves

entangled in varieties of allegiances that could easily come into conflict with one another.⁴ Because the knight owed military service to each of his lords, warfare became a continual part of his life.

Over time, the feudal system expanded beyond the boundaries of the Frankish empire, eventually spreading over much of the European continent and into Britain. In the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it was the vassals of the feudal lords who took up the crusading spirit and attempted to rescue the Christian holy lands from the Muslim infidels. Although the details of the feudal arrangement varied from location to location, the system retained a similar overall form. With the king at the pinnacle of the political hierarchy, the kingdom was divided into increasingly smaller parcels and held by a series of men who were each at once lord to the men below him and vassal to the one above.

In summary, the feudal period was characterized by a new type of political control. As war became more technical and greater skill was required to engage in it, the sovereign needed an army of soldiers that could devote its energies to preparing for war rather than to the daily search for sustenance. Land became the medium of the economy, since the king and lesser lords granted landed estates to those who bound themselves through loyal service. The warrior class--the knighthood--held

the most political power. The sovereign also attempted to expand his unified political control over a larger kingdom, which grew beyond a tribal domain. At the peak of his power, Charlemagne controlled a large portion of the European continent, including France, Germany, much of eastern Europe, about one-half of the Italian peninsula and the Spanish marches.⁵

Finally, and most importantly for the Jews, as evidenced by the oath of allegiance required by Charlemagne and reproduced above, feudal society was a Christian society. The oath of allegiance, by stressing that God and the saints were the witnesses to the vassal's pledge of fidelity, clearly emphasized the centrality of the Christian religion in the everyday lives of medieval Europeans. A belief in Christ was (perhaps arrogantly) assumed to be correct and therefore necessary. Furthermore, feudal armies were often employed in the interest of furthering Christian influence. This purpose was most actively demonstrated through the crusading spirit, but less intense endeavors were also prevalent. (In fact, it was the zeal which accompanied the crusaders that led to a decline of Jewish culture in western Europe.) Because of the emphasis placed on Christianity, any person unwilling to adhere to it could not participate in the feudal system.

Therefore, the advent of feudalism provided an obstacle for the continued development of Jewish culture in northern Europe. The Jews' refusal to assimilate into the religion of the majority held several consequences for them. The Jews preferred to keep their private lives to themselves (worshipping privately, rather than openly minimized abuse and harassment), so they lived in areas of the community separated from the Christians. Popular prejudice had led the Christians to distrust the Jews and therefore to generally exclude the Jews from the judicial system. And the oath of allegiance, based as it was on Christian virtue, was distasteful for the Jews who dedicated their lives to the precepts of the Talmud and the Old Testament. Equally distasteful was the idea of engaging in warfare to further the interests of the gentiles or for the spread of Christianity. Many aspects of the emerging social order limited the opportunities of the Jews.

It is a fact, however, that most changes in human society occur slowly, sometimes nearly imperceptibly for the generations involved. Such was the case in the spread of feudalism. Although modern historians can study an event such as the fall of Rome and discover the enormous contrasts between Roman society and the anarchy and cultural abyss that followed it, the transition from the former to the latter lasted many

generations. Likewise, the transition from inter-tribal rivalry among the barbarians to the emergence of a Christian empire opposed to Jewish doctrine took several generations to complete. Furthermore, the feudal order did not span all of northern Europe simultaneously.⁶ Feudalism developed and expanded gradually, allowing the Jews to adapt to its presence. The exclusions of the feudal system, however challenging they were, did not introduce any new idea of confinement of the Jews. The development of Jewish life was not simplified by the advent of feudalism, but neither was it made impossible.

In fact, it is important to note that by the middle of the ninth century, within the Frankish dominions, relations between Christians and Jews had grown cordial enough to arouse the concern of the clergy. The Council of Meaux (845) was called by leading churchmen of northern and central France, to address this very issue.⁷ Their interest focused on three main points: Jewish possession of, and trade in, Christian slaves; Jews holding positions of authority over Christians; and the proximity of Jews to Christians during the Holy Week. The Council essentially sought to reaffirm positions previously held by the church in these areas: that the Jews should not be allowed to control Christians, either as slave owners or civil officials, and that they should respect the authority of the Church. The decisions of the council

were never put into effect by the king, but, once again, the insecurities of the clergy and the attention paid by them to Judeo-Christian relations indicates that a high degree of cordiality existed between Christians and Jews. It also indicates that the Jews were able to flourish despite the difficulties presented by evolution of feudal society.

Viewed from a perspective of control over the Jews, the onset of feudal society marked a turning point in Judeo-Christian relations. As a greater proportion of European land came under the control of the feudal authorities, Jewish ownership of land continued to decrease (although the Jews continued to own small amounts of land), and the Jews gravitated toward urban residence. However, the towns as well as rural land became feudal property. Hence, whatever the setting--urban or rural--the Jews came under the influence of the feudal authorities. Religiously, they remained free to worship and organize their communities as they wished, but otherwise they became the possession of the feudal ruler. With the Jews, whom he could tax freely, as his property, the ruler had a direct interest in protecting them. But his other subjects could appeal to the lord to have their debts to the Jews officially cancelled. In either event, the fate of the Jews became more closely linked to the will of the ruler than before.

In Germanic society, aside from their freedom of faith, the Jews had few rights.⁸ They required the assistance of feudal officials to move freely about Europe to conduct their business. This assistance was rendered through the medium of charters, which were granted by the king, first to individuals or to small groups of Jews, and later, as urban life became more developed, to Jewish communities. The earliest charters were granted to Jews by Louis the Pious. These were similar to the charters granted to Christian merchants. Of these protective documents, three still remain, each dating from about 820. One was issued to Rabbi Domatus and his nephew, another to David and Joseph of Lyons and their family, and the last to Abraham of Saragossa. These passports notified "all bishops, abbots, counts, prefects, governors, district officers, toll collectors, government commissioners, and all our faithful subjects"⁹ that these particular Jews were protected by the emperor. These officials, their associates, and their successors were directed not to

disturb the above mentioned Hebrews on any unlawful occasion whatsoever or to bring them into disrepute, or to deprive them of any of the property of which they appear to be lawfully possessed, or to demand from them either tolls, post horses, food and shelter for passing soldiers or officials, gratuities, contributions for the upkeep of road, river or bridge, transport dues or customs.¹⁰

In addition, these documents set forth conditions of commerce and residence for the Jews. They were granted

freedom in commerce and the right to participate in the slave trade. Each was granted the right to "live according to their own law." In lawsuits between Jews and Christians, each party was required to have persons of the opposite religion to corroborate his case. The emperor threatened to punish anyone who did them violence.

No further charters issued to Jews are extant until 1084, when bishop Rudiger Huotzmann of Speyer "thought that the glory of our town would be augmented a thousandfold if I were to bring in Jews."¹¹ Seeking to attract Jews to his town to enhance its commercial activity, the bishop offered the Jews a walled neighborhood containing both hillside and valley, and granted them the right to engage in trade and to change money throughout the city. He also allotted the Jews space in the Church cemetery and provided them freedom to organize their community as they wished. The bishop recognized that additional revenue would be generated by a Jewish settlement, in addition to the three and one-half pounds that the Jewish community was to pay annually "for the shared use of the monks."¹²

During the intervening centuries between the issue of documents of protection to Jews by Louis the Pious and the first of the charters issued to the Jews by the overlords of the European cities, conditions for the Jews were, with a few exceptions, generally tranquil.

In 846, Amulo, the successor of Agobard as the archbishop of Lyons, continued his predecessor's anti-Jewish campaign. While in his writings Amulo urged Christians to abstain from directing violence toward the Jews, he also enlisted the aid of the French bishops in persuading "the princes in all their possessions to apply in that matter all that had been ordained by the sayings of our saintly fathers, their actions, and edicts."¹³ Furthermore, he expressed his concern that in the final judgment the secular rulers, as well as the clerics, would have to account for the actions of all of their subjects, Christian and infidel alike. He implied that Christian landlords could be judged harshly in the after-life if they tolerated Jews on their estates.

Others shared Amulo's distrust of the Jews. Across France, belief in a Jewish contempt for Christianity was widespread and contributed to chronicles of Jewish collaboration with Christendom's enemies. According to more than one chronicle, Jews had assisted with the Norman raid on Bordeaux and the Saracen capture of Toulouse, about 848. The fault with these narratives is that Toulouse was never occupied by the Saracens. Furthermore, the Jews would have gained nothing by assisting with a Norman mission of plunder and pillage. It would have been foolish for them to have antagonized the people who regulated so many of their activities. In

Toulouse, a local custom required one member of the Jewish community to publicly receive a slap in the face during the Easter holiday. In 1018, this slap was reported to have resulted in the Jew's death. At the beginning of the twelfth century, the Jewish community was allowed to substitute a money payment to the local clergy for the public display of humiliation.¹⁴

In fact, beginning in the tenth century, the Easter season in general was a traumatic period for Judeo-Christian relations. At this time of the year, the Christian community is especially aware of the passion of Christ and the roles of the Jews in that story, so the Easter season often sparked an increase in the anti-Jewish fervor. In Chalons-sur-Saone, the Jews were stoned by the Christians in memory of the Jewish stoning of Jesus. In Beziers, during a sermon preached on Palm Sunday, the bishop reminded the people that the Jews in their city were the descendants of those who had crucified Christ. He told them that for the next week, "when their hearts were agonized by the thoughts of the insults offered to their Saviour, they had his blessing, and the Governor's license, to revenge themselves upon the Jews--but only with stones."¹⁵ For one week each year, the houses of the Jewish quarter were bombarded with stones. Beginning in 1160, a payment of 200 solidi and a tax to be paid annually thereafter replaced this display of violence.

The first significant outbreaks of violence directed at the Jews of France during the feudal era occurred in the period 1007-1012. During this interval, the Jews of Limoges, Rouen, and Mainz were given the choice of accepting baptism or facing expulsion or death. In Limoges, bishop Adouin instituted an official program to convert the Jews or expel them from the area. To persuade the Jews to accept Christianity, he arranged a series of discussions between the clerics and the Jews. Adouin's campaign resulted in only a handful of conversions, but many Jews sought refuge elsewhere.¹⁶ In Rouen, Duke Richard of Normandy told the Jews that they would be baptized or be killed. One Jew brave enough to stand up to the duke, Jacob b. Yekutiel, told Richard that he was powerless to issue such an order without the consent of the pope. The king of France, Robert the Pious, held an attitude similar to Richard's, so he made the penalty for refusal clear: "If you refuse, I shall put you to death by the sword."¹⁷ These persecutions could have continued unabated, but for the actions of the aforementioned Jacob b. Yekutiel. He traveled to Rome and persuaded the pope to dispatch to the northern European communities an envoy carrying a papal order "not to kill, injure, or rob Jews, nor to deprive them of their religion."¹⁸ Many of the Jews of Rouen died under the sword or by drowning

before peace was restored to the region. Many of these Jews had taken their own lives for their religion.

In Germany conditions were generally better for Jews than in France. The legacy of the Carolingian era was stronger in Germany. As a result, the kings and emperors took steps to protect the Jews, despite delegations of authority over the Jews to lesser nobles. At the Diet of Erfurt (932-936), despite pressure from Constantinople, Rome, and Venice, Henry I and his associates enacted no measures hostile to the Jews. In one of his first enactments, Otto II in 965 granted the monastery of St. Moritz, at Madgeburg, jurisdiction over the city's merchants, Jews, and unfree inhabitants. Later the authority of the monastery was broadened to include all of the city's inhabitants. In 973 Otto granted the bishop of Merseburg "everything included in the walls of Merseburg with the Jews and merchants."¹⁹ These delegations of authority notwithstanding, the emperors seem to have considered themselves protectors of the Jews.

However, the protective tendency of the emperor was not absolute. In 1012, Henry II instituted an expulsion of Jews from Mainz, apparently in reaction to the conversion of a Christian cleric, Vecelin, to Judaism. The reconstruction of this event is not precise, however; it is possible that Vecelin's conversion occurred in 1005 or 1006 and that Henry II's order of expulsion

was a delayed reaction to allegations of Jewish involvement within the Fatimid empire, which from 1007-1009 had persecuted Christians, but not Jews. This decree of Henry may not have caused the departure or conversion of a great number of Jews. Most probably persisted quietly until the decree was either formally revoked or allowed to drift into disuse following the appeal of Jacob b. Yekutiel to Rome. Moreover, this isolated instance does not refute the emperors' usually protective attitude towards the Jews.²⁰

The great turning point in medieval Judeo-Christian relations occurred during the first crusade in 1096. The advent and expansion of the Muslim religion had precipitated political and religious struggles for domination of the peoples living along the shores of the Mediterranean. The religious portion of the struggle is clear; the political differences were embodied in the military defeats of the Europeans, Muslim raids into northern Europe, Muslim domination of shipping on the Mediterranean Sea, and the treatment of Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem. These strengths of the Muslims offended the sensibilities of the Christians who, spurred by religious animosity, attempted to break their grip. But before reaching Muslim territory, many of the crusaders directed their hatred toward the Jews they found along the route.

The crusading movement began in November, 1095, when Urban II, attending a council meeting at Clermont, presented an impassioned description of the dangers facing Christians in the East, and appealed to Europe's feudal lords to set aside their quarrels and battles and to unite in a march on Constantinople and Jerusalem. He appointed the Bishop of Puy, Adhemar, as the leader of the movement. Urban himself traveled throughout France preaching the dangers of Islam and generating support for the crusade. A large group of preachers followed in the wake of the pope, generating enthusiasm among the populace.²¹

While Adhemar's army of noble warriors prepared to begin its journey to the Middle East in August 1096, groups of paupers who desired to participate in the crusading movement assembled in the spring of that year. These men, motivated by the preachings of such men as Peter the Hermit, were poorly trained and equipped, and their financial resources were meager. In this condition, they began their journey toward Constantinople, perhaps assuming that God would enable them to provide for themselves along the way. Seeing the Jews, who were growing wealthy as traders, living in communities throughout France and Germany, these poorly educated paupers undoubtedly saw in them the opportunity to seize the resources they needed to complete their journey. These

bands were responsible for the massacre of countless thousands of French and Rhenish Jews. Many of these 'crusaders' were killed by the Hungarians and Bulgarians whose lands they had ravaged for their own use; those who eventually reached the East were destroyed by well-trained Muslim soldiers when they attacked a Saracen fortress near Nicaea.²²

The first group to have attacked the Jews was one which had assembled in Normandy. This group of crusaders attacked the Jews of Rouen. They were led either by Peter the Hermit or a French knight named Walter Sansavoir. Peter went to Trier early in April and preached the crusading cause from 12-19 April. Meanwhile, other priests collected together warriors and terrorized the Jews of many other communities. A priest named Volkmar moved from Saxony through Bohemia, massacring the Jews of Prague. Another priest, Gottschalk, traveled from the Rhineland to the Danube and massacred the Jews of Ratisbon. Yet another group was recruited in the Rhineland and attacked the Jews of Speyer, Worms, and Mainz. A band came from Flanders to join them and attacked the Jewish community of Cologne. A final band, possibly led by Godfrey of Bouillon, came from Lorraine and plundered Jews there and in Metz.²³

Despite the vigorous attacks on the Jews of many communities, in promoting the crusading spirit, the pope

had never called for the massacre of Jews. Urban II was concerned with the threat to Christianity of Islam. It was the preaching of men such as Peter the Hermit, Volkmar, and Gottschalk, who spoke to the lower classes of French society about the crusade, who imbued in them the idea of attacking the Jews. The motto of the crusading paupers soon became common: "We have set out to march on a long road against the enemies of God in the East, and behold, before our eyes are the Jews, His worst foes. To ignore them is preposterous."²⁴ These bands of poor men, beginning their long, difficult journey poorly equipped and motivated by the passionate appeals of the clerics, undoubtedly saw in the Jews the potential to take the financial and material support that they had expected God to provide.

How many of northern Europe's Jews were killed by these marauding bands cannot be precisely determined. That these massacres were not a part of the original program of the pope is clear, though. There is no record of terrorism against the Jews by any of the armies of the nobility led by Adhemar of Puy. The chronicles deal only with bands made up of paupers, who set out independently, but acted under the general inspiration and influence of Peter the Hermit and others.

The impact of the first crusade on northern European Jewry was significant. Physically, most of the

Jewish communities of northern France were not adversely affected by the crusaders, but they were well aware of the activities of the bands of paupers. Most of these men had been recruited in France. Terrible punishments were inflicted on many German-Jewish communities, however. The French communities of Lorraine and Metz, the German communities of Mainz, Speyer, Worms, Cologne, Ratisbon, and Trier, and, even further to the east, Prague were each ravaged by the crusaders. In these communities, many Jews were killed by burning, drowning, and at swordpoint; many took their own lives; and still others were forcibly converted to Christianity. Because of the atrocities committed by the crusaders, the Jews of these communities were unable to trust the Christians as other crusades were proposed, and many Jews were persecuted or stripped of their wealth during subsequent crusades. More immediately important, many of the Jews were at this time traversing the countryside as merchants; in the wake of the first crusade, their personal safety along the roads decreased as popular hostility toward them remained higher than before the crusade. The French Jews were not as adversely affected by the crusade, and their general prosperity continued until the early fourteenth century, when Philip the Fair first expelled the Jews from the royal domain. But for northern European

Jewry as a whole, the first crusade presented a turning point in Judeo-Christian relations.

The development of the feudal system ensconced Christianity as the religion of western Europe more strongly than it had been previously. This created for the Jews a potential roadblock to continued wealth and prosperity. Additionally, as the feudal system expanded, Christian control over the Jews grew ever tighter, since the towns as well as the rural areas were brought within the feudal system. But the Jews were able to prosper, to continue the development of their communal systems, and to establish a network of yeshivot (academies dedicated to the study of the Talmud and Torah), despite the development of feudalism. It is to the commercial and cultural activities of the Jews that we now turn.

NOTES

¹The sources used in this chapter are a combination of secondary sources which analyze political and social developments of feudal and Ashkenaz culture, and primary sources describing the suffering of the Jews at the hands of the crusaders. Feudal Society, by Marc Bloch, provides a comprehensive and detailed analysis of feudalism. The Jew in the Medieval Community, by James Parkes, and A Social and Religious History of the Jews, by Salo W. Baron, analyze the political and social developments of the Jews in Europe. Finally, The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades, edited and translated by Shlomo Eidelberg, provides a description of the anti-Jewish activities of the crusaders from the vantage point of the Jews.

²Marc Bloch, Feudal Society, trans. L. A. Manyon, two volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 163-175 and 219-224.

³Marjorie Rowling, Life in Medieval Times (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), 18.

⁴Bloch, Feudal Society, 211-218.

⁵Brian Tierney and Sidney Painter, Western Europe in the Middle Ages, third edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 115-117.

⁶Bloch, Feudal Society, 176.

⁷James Parkes, The Jew in the Medieval Community, second edition (New York: Hermon Press, 1976), 27.

⁸Ibid, 102.

⁹Parkes, Jew in the Medieval Community, 159.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages, ed. Robert Chazan (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1980), 58.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Salo Wittmayer Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, second edition, eighteen volumes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 4:54.

¹⁴Ibid, 55, and Parkes, Jew in the Medieval Community, 43-44.

¹⁵Ibid, 43.

¹⁶Baron, Social and Religious, 4:56-57, and Robert Chazan, "1007-1012: Initial Crisis for Northern European Jewry," in Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 37-38 (1970-1971): 107.

¹⁷Ibid, 109.

¹⁸Baron, Social and Religious, 4:57.

¹⁹Ibid, 65.

²⁰Ibid, 67.

²¹Parkes, Jew in the Medieval Community, 63.

²²Ibid.

²³The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades, trans. and ed. Shlomo Eidelberg (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 21-72. This is the "Chronicle of Solomon Bar Simpson," which relates the suffering of the Jews of Speyer, Worms, and Mainz. See also Parkes, Jew in the Medieval Community, 61-89, for a summary of violence against the Ashkenaz Jews during the first crusade.

²⁴Ibid, 65.

CHAPTER III

JEWISH ECONOMIC LIVELIHOODS

The economy of medieval Europe was agrarian. By the time of the Carolingian monarchies, villages and towns had begun to dot the landscape, but these were small and scattered. Farming technology was very crude by modern standards, so as farmers toiled through long days, their output remained low. As a result, agriculture was a labor intensive industry, employing many people--Christian, Jew, and pagan. Many large estates, including those operated by Jews, utilized slave labor. However, many Christians were opposed to the possession of slaves by Jews. As early as the time of Gregory the Great, Jews had generally been required to dispose of Christian and pagan slaves within forty days of their purchase. The clergy argued that it was dangerous to allow slaves to be controlled by Jewish masters for longer periods of time. Such private and intimate relations as existed between slaves and their masters, the clergy maintained, afforded the Jews ample opportunities to expose the slaves to Judean theology and to make indelible impressions upon them. Restricting the period that Jews were allowed to keep slaves, the Christian clergy simultaneously struck blows

at the economic and social status of the Jews. By the time of the Carolingian empire, ownership of land and operation of large farm estates by Jews, while not entirely prohibited, had already been made difficult by these restrictions. As feudalism evolved, the distribution of land by the nobility also worked to drive the Jews from the soil.

The Jews had already begun to overcome this separation from the land by engaging in trade, primarily in three categories: the slave trade (somewhat ironically, considering the opposition of the authorities to Jewish influence on slaves), the local retail trade, and 'international' trade. The Jews embraced this type of economic activity (albeit grudgingly) for several reasons, besides the fact that farming was becoming difficult for them. Within medieval Europe, the Jews' economic and personal security were never wholly certain. Although violence against the Jews was infrequent, prejudice and hostility were widespread and often resulted in the plunder of their estates. The medieval knight also plundered and looted the Christian and Jewish residents of the countryside. Immovable possessions, such as land and livestock, were often subject to seizure by unfriendly feudal lords or could be ransacked by roving bands of brigands and bandits. By switching their interests to trade in moveable property, such as retail items and, later,

currency, the Jews were able to quickly transport their property to safer locations on the occasions in which sufficient warning was received. European travelers often encountered bandits along the highways, but this was a risk that the Jews were willing to accept.¹

Slave-trading was a 'cottage industry' that accompanied the incessant warfare of medieval Europe. When the feudal lords employed their vassals in fights against neighboring territories, the conquering armies occupied the captured land and took the surviving men, women, and children prisoner. Many of these people were then removed from the battle area and turned over to the Jews, to be taken into the slave market. Men, women, and children became "a recognized article of commerce"² through the slave trade. This is not as shocking as it may seem to the modern mind, though. Slavery was not necessarily the cruel institution that it would seem by modern standards. The harsh life of the Middle Ages was difficult for everyone--slaves and freemen alike. Slaughtering the defeated would often have been a simpler alternative than transporting them to a market, so any economic utility for the victors of taking captives offered a reason for sparing the lives of the vanquished. This did not make the slave trade virtuous, but simply preferable to the alternative. The farmland that formerly had supported the captives was often destroyed

during the battles, leaving few resources for the former occupants to live on. Transforming the enemy into salable property offered an incentive (however crude it may have been) for introducing a degree of civility into medieval warfare.

The Jews were widely dispersed, as was warfare, so they were able to easily assume the role of distributors of the captives--purchasing them from the victorious armies, transporting them to markets throughout Europe, and selling them to Christian and Muslim masters. The Germanic armies took many captives while fighting in the Slavic lands and sold them to the Jews. The Jews also seem to have had little trouble controlling the slave market in Poland and the eastern portion of the empire, where conversion to Christianity should have resulted in a higher degree of protection for the native population.³ Recalling how the Europeans had treated them, and the religious principles which guided their lives, the Jews usually treated the slaves with care and consideration.⁴

There are scattered references to the slave trade and opposition to it. Early in the eleventh century there were many complaints of the Margrave Guizelin of Meissen selling Christian serfs to Jews, but Henry II was unable to stop him. The mother of Poland's Boleslav III (1085-1138) is said to have piously left money for the

redemption of Christians who had become the captives of Jewish slave dealers. The Duke Wladislav of Bohemia purchased any Christian he found possessed by Jews. Outside of eastern Europe, Agobard, bishop of Lyons, cited the theft of French children for sale to the Spanish Moors and another mid-tenth century chronicler recorded the castration of boys in eastern France and their sale as eunuchs to the Moorish harems.⁵ Indeed, there were many legitimate reasons for church officials to be upset by the varied activities of slave traders.

'International' trade, that is, commercial intercourse with peoples living outside of continental Europe, was another important activity of medieval Jewry. By the seventh century, Syrian Christians had settled in many towns around the Mediterranean Sea and developed trading patterns, bringing luxuries and spices of the East to western Europe. They sailed up the Rhine, the Rhone, and the Danube into the heart of Europe. The conquests of the Muslims spoiled this arrangement. Muslim control of the eastern Mediterranean spelled the end of the vigorous trade conducted by the Christians. Byzantine animosity towards the western kingdom served to increase the isolation of West from East.⁶

The Jews, as a cultural group, did not officially represent any of the factions that were involved in the East-West hostilities: they were neither Christians nor

a controlling element in the government of northern Europe. Therefore, given the distribution of Jews around the world, they were able to develop a trading network of their own with an 'international' character.

The Jews, sprinkled around Europe, northern Africa, and the East, were able to travel to and from, and establish effective trading networks with each of these varied areas of the world, with relative ease. During the ninth century, the Radaniya, or Radhanite international merchants, traveled from western Europe to eastern Asia and back again. According to a contemporary report of Ibn Khurradadhbih, an Arabic geographer and postmaster, the Radaniya (a label which Ibn Khurradadhbih seems to have invented) traveled widely and spoke many languages: Arabic, Persian, Greek, Frankish, Spanish, and Slavonic. Beginning their journeys in Spain or France, they sailed across the Mediterranean Sea to Egypt where they switched from ships to camels and traveled to the Red Sea. Reboarding ships, they continued on to India and China, bringing with them eunuchs, slaves, silk, castor, brocade, swords, and beaver and marten skins. They often returned by the same route, taking musk, aloeswood, camphor, cinnamon, and other products. It is possible that this group of merchants also introduced sugar to western Europeans. On the return journey, many traders

sailed to Constantinople to sell their products to the eastern emperor, while others went to the Frankish palace.

The Radaniya traveled east over a variety of routes. They occasionally disembarked at Antioch and crossed to the Persian gulf and sailed from there to China, or continued the land journey to the north to reach the same destination. The voyage across the Mediterranean from Europe to Egypt was sometimes replaced with a caravan route across northern Africa. Finally, the merchants sometimes took a more northerly route through the Slavic lands, across southern Russia, and through the capital of the Khazars. Then they went on to the Sea of Jurjan (down the Volga to the Caspian Sea) and then continued the overland journey to China.⁷

These tremendous journeys were undertaken at a time when methods of transportation were limited and required great amounts of human and animal labor and stamina. On land, caravans of merchants; noblemen moving between their castles; or armies, with their legions of servants, normally covered nineteen to twenty-five miles per day. Travel was made even more difficult as the network of roads established by the Romans deteriorated and the bridges at many river crossings fell into disrepair.⁸ The merchants brought to Europe a wide variety of products that otherwise would have been unavailable to Europeans. The Jews doubtlessly also brought with them

ideas of other peoples and civilizations and so helped to increase cultural levels of Europe as well as the places they visited. The Jews, owing to their greater levels of literacy, and a common culture shared with their brethren around the world, were uniquely suited to perform a service that other Europeans would simply have been unable to provide.

Contemporary rabbinical responsa provide a wealth of evidence regarding the type and the extent of the commercial activities undertaken by the Jews. Rabbinical responsa were legal inquiries that resulted from disputes that were presented to the local Jewish judicial officials. In cases where the community court felt itself unable to accurately sort through the claims and counter-claims of the litigants and issue a judgment according to sacred principles, it appealed to a more competent authority for a decision. The local court gathered together the pertinent materials: the claims of the competing parties, relevant documents, transcripts of the witnesses' testimony, and the judgments of the judicial officers regarding the character of the witnesses and the validity of their statements.

These materials were sent to respected Talmudic scholars, at yeshivot located in either Europe or the East, for detailed analysis and judgment. Cases were referred to pre-eminent scholars of Jewish law when the

local authorities were unable to identify the principles upon which the cases should be judged or when the litigants were dissatisfied with the decisions of the court. This was more than an appeals process, however; cases involving the application of biblical law to daily life were also referred to scholars. It is interesting to note that upon referring cases to higher authorities, the local officials did not completely surrender their participation in the judicial process. Along with the objective materials of the dispute, they included such subjective materials as analyses of the characters and performances of those who testified. The distinguished scholars then reviewed the materials and, guided always by the principles of the Talmud (discussed in the following chapter), determined the outcomes of the cases and transmitted their decisions back to the communities from whence they originated.

Through their descriptions of the disputes that developed among the Jews, these responsa provided insights into the daily affairs of the European Jews. Professor Irving Agus has edited a large collection of rabbinical responsa which provide details of many aspects of Jewish life in the centuries preceding the crusades.⁹

Jewish businessmen traveled extensively in search of commerce, around Europe and around the world. The Radaniya represented one extreme in the broad range of

commercial activities that the Jews were involved in. Many others were also involved in 'foreign' trade, but did not reach India or China in their journeys. Instead, they traveled to distant parts of Europe or across the sea to north Africa. An anonymous (indicating that the identity of the responding scholar is unknown) responsum written in the eleventh century related the journey of two Jewish businessmen whose eventual destination was an unidentified overseas country, possibly Britain, but more likely the important city of Kairwan (located in Tunisia). Their story, here summarized briefly, contains many important points.¹⁰

A Jewish businessman, preparing to depart on a business trip from an unspecified location, proposed to a fellow Jewish merchant that they travel together. As an incentive, he offered to share his profits with the second man. While traveling through Europe, the first man suddenly became imperiled. He successfully bribed the local overlord into providing protection. Later, upon safely reaching a coastal town, both men decided that they had more money in their possession than they should take overseas, so they sought a local Jew with whom they could deposit their money. Upon returning to Europe, one of the men returned to the coastal town and attempted to retrieve the money that was deposited there. (The other Jew returned to their hometown by an alternate route.)

Discovering that their money had been confiscated by the overlord, the Jew once again offered a bribe and was granted justice, in this case, the return of the money. (The occasion for the responsum was a dispute that developed between the men concerning which man was responsible for the payment of the bribes to the feudal overlords.)

This responsum illustrates several important points. First, the Jews felt responsible for each other's welfare. Despite the offer of a financial incentive, the second Jew was willing to travel in the company of the first to ease their burdens and increase the personal safety of each man. The ability of Jews in unfamiliar towns to find other Jews who were willing to lend assistance to passers through, in this case willing to hold excess money in safekeeping, further demonstrates the brotherhood that the Jews felt themselves to be a part of. Living in a land in which most people were hostile to them, the Jews recognized the necessity and benefit of sticking together.

Also evident here is the desire of the feudal official to profit by the administration of justice. He was willing to preserve the good order of the realm as long as it would benefit him financially. Thus, the Jews had to bribe him before he could either receive protection along the road or have his confiscated money returned.

The practice of taking payments from potential victims was not directed solely at Jews, though. Christians also paid for protection.

That Jews cooperated with each other is demonstrated in another responsum, this one centered on a market fair. During the twelfth century, the counts of Champagne recognized an opportunity to profit from the revival of town life and commerce by developing the market fair. They set aside property for fairgrounds adjacent to the major towns under their control, erecting booths and providing policemen and judges to enforce the rule of the market place. They also provided money changers to deal with the variety of currencies then in existence. The counts profited from the fairs by taxing each sale, renting the booths to the merchants, receiving the fines assessed on those who violated the rules of the fair, and by participating in the market.

The fairs were meeting places for merchants from near and far, who brought with them a great variety of products. Italian traders brought cloth, swords, and fine horses, as well as silk, sugar, and spices that they bought from Syrian traders. Merchants from northern Europe traded furs, honey and other products of the forests. Traders from Flanders provided fine Flemish cloth and the English, tin. During the twelfth century, as hosting a fair came to be regarded as a type of status

symbol among the nobility, a network of fairs evolved throughout Europe. These fairs ranged in importance from great markets, ranking with the fairs of Champagne, to cattle auctions attended by few peddlers.¹¹

The responsum told the tale of a Jew who had arrived at such a fair. He carried a large amount of cash, hesitated to take this sum of money to the marketplace. He sought out a resident Jewish shopkeeper who was willing to accept his money for safekeeping while he attended the fair. He then took a small amount of money to the fair, returning to the merchant's shop at frequent intervals to withdraw more of it. Apparently the resident of the town was willing to endure the frequent disruptions of his daily routine that resulted from the numerous transactions effected by the merchant.¹²

The scholar was consulted because the money had been stolen from the shopkeeper to whom it was entrusted. He was asked whether or not the shopkeeper should have repaid the traveler. In the absence of an organized banking system, the usual method of safeguarding large amounts of money was burial in the countryside. Because the transient merchant required frequent access to his money, the shopkeeper was unable to provide the usual protection; hence, the money was stolen. These events indicate that the relative insecurity which existed along the highways sometimes extended to the towns and the fairs,

as well. Under the circumstances, the shopkeeper was not required to repay the stolen money.

Another incident illustrates the responsibility that the Jews felt toward other Jews, even those merely passing through the community. This sense of duty often benefited the Jewish traveling peddler. Jewish merchants of the community of Rheims, while traveling to the fair at Troyes, were attacked and plundered along the way. Their enemies also took them captive. The Jews of Troyes, at the risk of their own lives, negotiated with the bandits for the release of the Jews from Rheims. They agreed to a ransom of thirty pounds for the prisoners. Although the captives were able to pay the majority of the ransom themselves, the French Jews assisted them. The Jews of Troyes levied a tax of one solidus per pound on themselves and the Jews of Sens and Chalon-sur-Saone.¹³

Responsa elucidate other details of Jewish patterns of commerce as well. Often traveling in groups for increased safety, the Jews were able to find companionship and aid in villages along the way. Traveling to fairs in groups, they occasionally formed partnerships to limit competition--agreeing not to bid against each other when selling their goods and each purchasing different commodities for sale in their home town. In this way, they sold their wares for the highest possible prices at the fair and prevented a situation in which several merchants

would return to the same village with similar goods to sell.¹⁴ From all across Europe they bought and sold every type of merchandise, including gloves, headdresses with gold woven into them, coats and other garments, cloth and dye, beaver pelts, and even salted fish. They also traveled to and from Russia, buying and selling garments. There also is evidence of cooperation in business among Jews and non-Jews, although the two groups often distrusted each other. As has been observed earlier about the coexistence of Christians and Jews, generalities are difficult to formulate.

The Jews also conducted local trade. According to a responsum of Rabbi Gershom ben Judah (a tenth and eleventh century Talmudic scholar who lived in Mainz and whose activities will be discussed in the following chapter), a particular Jew traveled and traded constantly among towns located within one or two days journey of his home. For several years, he traded extensively with the overlords of these towns, sometimes using cash, at other times accepting gold and silver pledges. Occasionally he bartered with them, taking cattle or horses in return for his merchandise. In these transactions, he would receive the animals for the least possible value and sell them later at great profit. The livestock had been plundered by the local nobility from their villagers, who became angry with the Jewish merchant for his

enthusiasm to accept the stolen animals. He was seen to be the cause of the villagers' troubles, by providing the nobles with an outlet for the stolen merchandise. The overlords also quarreled with him for charging high interest rates and for selling the gold and silver pledges against their will. Owing to the popular animosity that many of the Christians felt toward the Jews, other Jews of the same community were taken captive and held for ransom on his account.

The errant Jewish trader eventually met his demise at the hands of his enemies. The army of the King of France, together with the Burgundian army, attacked a city located half of a day's journey from the home of the Jewish trader. During a siege that lasted some three months, the Jewish trader, and other Jews as well, came to the soldiers, selling goods to them and purchasing loot taken during the battle. Many of these soldiers disliked the Jewish trader so, by the time the siege was lifted, he had disappeared. Many conflicting reports then surfaced, telling of his arrest, his capture and kidnapping by the soldiers, and even of his death. Several Jews went to investigate the reports and try to find the missing member of their community (or at least his body), but after a year of investigation, a large amount of money had been spent, but still he was not located. The dilemma for the Jewish community, besides having lost

one of its members, and the reason that the tale had been recorded for Rabbi Gershom to analyze, was whether or not the Jew's wife was allowed to remarry in light of the uncertainty surrounding the disappearance of the Jew.¹⁵

This responsum provides examples of points not illustrated previously. Some Christian noblemen expressed little concern for the peasants who worked their fiefs. In this case, they plundered their villagers, taking away cattle and horses. Adding to the anger of the villagers, the Jewish merchant willingly traded with these noblemen, recklessly endangering himself and the safety of his fellow Jews, who were kidnapped several times by the villagers. The king eventually intervened to restore order. In the confusion of the battle, the king's soldiers eliminated the Jew who had contributed to the unrest that had developed in the fief. The local population, well aware that the Jewish community would expend a great deal of effort and money to recover its lost member (their judgment of his character notwithstanding), circulated a number of rumors leading the Jews to believe that their abducted brother may have survived, and offered to assist in the search for him.

Another responsum analyzed by Rabbi Gershom also illustrates the lack of trust that sometimes existed between Jew and non-Jew. A Jewish businessman, preparing to depart on an overseas business trip, agreed to

purchase an elegant dress for a non-Jewish woman. She gave him thirty solidi (an extraordinary amount of money for any garment--ten solidi were enough to purchase an average vineyard) with which to purchase the dress, but only after receiving from him a collection of valuable items as collateral. The distrust was mutual, however; the Jewish merchant demanded that a third party be introduced into the transaction, to hold the pledge while he was away. The third party was instructed to give the items to the woman only if the merchant failed to deliver the dress to the woman within a specified period of time.¹⁶

In business, as in other spheres of life, though, the Jewish people and their non-Jewish neighbors were often able to cooperate and interact productively with each other. Ritually pure wine was an important element of Jewish religious ceremony. 'Ritually pure' wine has been prepared entirely by Jews, and has not come into contact with gentiles. A responsum of late in the eleventh century explained how a non-Jewish businessman purchased a cask of wine from a Jew leaving it in the Jew's wine cellar. He purchased the wine on credit, giving the owner a pledge to hold until the wine was paid for. A Jewish employee stayed by the cask and sold wine in individual portions to Jewish customers. After the last Jew had been served, the remaining wine (one-third or one-half of the barrel) was sold to non-Jews.¹⁷

In this episode we encounter a non-Jewish entrepreneur who had achieved an advanced level of mercantilism. He encountered an opportunity to purchase a cask of wine, without making a large cash payment. Hiring a Jew to distribute the wine for him, he sold some of the product to Jewish customers (the most difficult market to please, owing to their complex rituals) and, after that market was satisfied, sold the remaining wine in other parts of the community. Rather than simply selling handmade items, he actively sought opportunities to earn a profit, in an early example of capitalism. He even did it on credit. As long as the gentile did not physically contact the wine itself, his legal ownership of it (or the cask it was stored in) did not render it unfit for Jewish consumption. Here we see that in some areas Jews and Christians had come to trust each other sufficiently to be able to enjoy a rather intimate commercial intercourse.

Such was the state of Jewish commercial activity in the early centuries dominated by the feudal order. Increasingly cut off from traditional agricultural activities, the Jews turned to trade as an economic outlet. Taking advantage of the chasm that separated the eastern and western societies, the Jews devoted great energy to voyaging from the westernmost reaches of Europe to the eastern nations of India and China. This was possible,

of course, largely because Jewish cultures existed in nations all around the world, enabling Jews to travel extensively yet still find acceptance even in remote locations. Along with the luxurious products they brought to Europe, they doubtlessly brought knowledge of other cultures and societies, thereby increasing the value of the endeavors to European society far beyond the material advantages that accrued from their goods. On a less grand scale, the Jews engaged in intercontinental trade between Europe and Africa and within Europe itself. Slaves, captured in the eastern provinces, were distributed around Europe and sold to the Muslims. Jews, as well as Christians, attended the great fairs of Europe and bought and sold the products of European craftsmen. These items were distributed throughout the continent. As in any human endeavor, though, the dedication of the individuals to the principles that guided them (their devotion to Judaism) varied, so it is not surprising to discover that tensions occasionally developed between the Jews and their neighbors. These cases seem to have been in the minority, though, and the Jews, as a whole, were able to live relatively peacefully and prosperously in northern Europe and concentrate on the development of their communal styles of living.

NOTES

¹The sources for the previous chapters, those that deal with Judeo-Christian relations, contain some useful information regarding the commercial activities of the Jews. Lady Katie Magnus provides a useful insight into the utility of the slave trade in Outlines of Jewish History as does James Parkes, in The Jew in the Medieval Community. H. H. Ben Sasson, in A History of the Jewish People describes the activities of Jewish traders who traveled between Europe and the Far East (India and China). But the most useful information comes from Irving Agus's Urban Civilization in Pre-Crusade Europe. This two-volume work presents more than three hundred individual responsa of tenth, eleventh, and twelfth century Ashkenazi rabbis and scholars. Because most of the extant collections contain only summaries of the responsa--of both the queries and the responses--Agus presents and analyzes summaries of the individual responsa. The locations and dates of many of the events depicted in the responsa are unspecified because such details were not included by the copyists of the succeeding centuries. Nevertheless, these documents provide great insight to both the Jewish culture and Judeo-Christian relations of the tenth through the twelfth centuries.

²Lady Katie Magnus, Outlines of Jewish History, second edition (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1890), 106.

³James Parkes, The Jew in the Medieval Community, second edition (New York: Hermon Press, 1976), 45.

⁴Magnus, Outlines of Jewish History, 107.

⁵Parkes, The Jew in the Medieval Community, 45-46.

⁶A History of the Jewish People, ed. H. H. Ben-Sasson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), 397.

⁷Encyclopaedia Judaica, seventeen volumes (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing Company, 1971), 4:1495,

and Cecil Roth, The Jewish Contribution to Civilization (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1940), 253-256.

⁸Marc Bloch, Feudal Society, trans. L. A. Manyon, two volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 1:62.

⁹Irving A. Agus, Urban Civilization in Pre-Crusade Europe, two volumes (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 1:20-21.

¹⁰Ibid, 1:59-64.

¹¹Brian Tierney and Sidney Painter, Western Europe in the Middle Ages, 300-1475, third edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 249.

¹²Agus, Urban Civilization, 1:64-65.

¹³Ibid, 1:173-181.

¹⁴Ibid, 1:88.

¹⁵Ibid, 1:99-103.

¹⁶Ibid, 1:266-273.

¹⁷Ibid, 1:288-292.

CHAPTER IV

MEDIEVAL JEWISH COMMUNAL ORGANIZATION

As has been demonstrated, Jewish settlements were scattered across northern Europe and affected the overall development of European culture. To fully understand how the Jews were able to survive as a group, though, with their ideology, rituals, and culture intact, one must examine the society that the Jews developed for themselves. That is to say, the culture which the Jews had built for themselves, in the fashion of the ghetto cultures of minorities in modern America, which embody values and traditions that are not necessarily shared by the remainder of the society.¹ To begin with, despite the common heritage that connected Judaism and Christianity, there was a wide ideological chasm separating Christians and Jews. The Jewish community recognized that the Church, in desiring to restrict the Jews from gaining authority over Christians, also wished the Jews to be excluded from social relations with Christians. While the Church was not entirely successful in its endeavor, the cohesion of the Jewish community was enhanced by these attacks from the outside. As a result, a wide variety of needs was fulfilled by the Jewish community

for itself. Robert Chazan, in his study of eleventh and twelfth century French Jewry, enumerated four functions of the medieval Jewish community: to maintain good relations with its Christian overlords, to maintain its internal order and discipline, to control the economic opportunities of its members, and to provide specific religious and social services to its members.² These needs were filled by the community through a variety of mechanisms.

However well integrated Judaism had become into the overall European society, one potentially overwhelming obstacle developed as time progressed, stemming from the great distance that separated the European Jews from their roots and authorities in the East. Several events occurred there to alter the methods of Jewish worship. Until the third century C.E., the Mishna, a written compilation of Jewish oral law, tradition, and rabbinical literature, was the main source of guidance for the Jews. From the third to the sixth centuries, separate groups of scholars in Babylon and Palestine, the amoraim, worked independently to create the Talmud. The Talmud is a compilation of amoraic explanations and discussions of the Mishna. Each, Babylonian and Palestinian, group developed its own document. The Babylonian version was larger and more complete, so it was put into general use.

Then, in the seventh century, another institution was created. The geonim (singular: gaon) were the heads of the academies of Sura (located along the Euphrates river in the area of modern Syria) and Pumbedita (also located on the banks of the Euphrates, about fifteen days journey from Sura). More than merely the chiefs of these academies, though, the geonim were also civil leaders who levied taxes and appointed judges and other communal officers. More importantly, the geonim answered queries about the sacred material--haggada (composed of Jewish legendary matter and rabbinic literature), halakhah (Jewish legal material, including personal and social relationships and daily observances), the two divergent Talmuds, and the Mishna--that had come to dominate the lives of the Jews. It was the geonim who decided that the Babylonian Talmud was superior to the Palestinian Talmud, consulting the latter only when it did not contradict the former and for subjects that the former did not address.³ It was the men who occupied this hereditary office who determined which documents would dominate the daily lives of medieval Jewry, and provided guidance regarding the application of the divine instructions to everyday life.

The relatively crude living conditions of medieval Europe, especially with respect to transportation and communication, made it difficult for the European Jews

to solicit and follow the guidance and scholarship of these eastern authorities. Furthermore, as secular political boundaries were drawn on the map of Europe with increasing precision and complexity, they tended also to affect the patterns of intercourse between different groups of Jews. Therefore, as the European and Byzantine worlds grew apart and the Muslims gained control of Spain and the Mediterranean coastal areas, so too did northern European Jews find themselves increasingly isolated from their eastern brethren and religious leaders. This effect was mitigated somewhat by the commercial traffic that flowed between the West and the East, but for the purpose of refining the Jewish culture, was not completely eliminated. The Ashkenazi Jews of northern Europe possessed the Talmud and knew of the geonim and their work, but eastern leadership became less and less accessible.

To cope with this physical detachment, the leaders of Ashkenazi communities in northern Europe often interpreted the sacred documents for themselves, developing their own styles of worship and solving many practical problems that occurred in their daily lives. This interpretation required more than a casual understanding of the Jewish religion, so the Ashkenazi communities of northern Europe established yeshivot for the scholarly study of Judaism. Yeshivot were established first in

southern France in the tenth century, at Narbonne, and later at Ramerupt, Dampierre, Falaise, and Paris. In Germany, yeshivot were established during the tenth century at Mainz, and in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries at Speyer, Bonn, and Regensburg. The establishment of these academies provides further evidence of the cultural maturation that occurred among northern European Jewry at this time.

The European rabbis and other communal officials interpreted Judaism's sacred documents both independently, as a part of their communal duties, and later (beginning in the twelfth century) through synods⁴ (which often were convened coincidentally with the great commercial fairs). The prominent Jewish leaders and scholars also reviewed individual cases which the communal leaders had been unable to conclude properly, working from written records of the cases and providing their judgments via responsa.⁵ In this way, the Ashkenazic tradition of northern France and Germany was able to develop independently of the Sepharic tradition of southern Europe, Spain and the East. By means of these mechanisms, the structure of Jewish daily life throughout the world, and the flavor of local variations, was developed.

The first great Talmudic scholar of northern Europe was Rabbi Gershom ben Judah, who was born approximately 960 at Metz, in the province of Lorraine, and

died approximately 1028, in Mainz. Few details are known of his personal life. He apparently lived in Mainz, where he established the yeshivah, but studied first in Provence. During his life, he transcribed the Mishna and the Talmud. He also wrote many responsa and issued many halakhic decisions. Gershom's best-known students were Eliezer the Great, Jacob b. Jakar, and Isaac b. Judah--the last two became teachers of a later great European Jewish scholar, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaqi, or Rashi. The only teacher Gershom ever mentioned was Judah b. Meier ha-Kohen Leontin, "from whom I received most of my knowledge." Gershom had a son who probably was baptized by force but died before he could return to Judaism. Gershom fulfilled the laws of mourning for his son. These events occurred around 1012.⁶

The takkanot⁷ attributed to Gershom ben Judah covered a broad range of concerns to medieval Jews. Taking into consideration the environment in which he and his co-religionists lived, he prohibited people from reading mail addressed to others (this was important because most of the mail was carried by travelers or messengers), and discouraged the harassment by Jews of other Jews who had been forced to convert to Christianity and later were able to return to Judaism. He also advocated the right of the community to control, as a group, who could move into or out of it. He also worked at reforming

the customs of marriage and divorce. Rabbi Gershom based his writings and decisions on the Talmud and Bible, a preference he had learned from Judah b. Meier ha-Kohen Leontin. Gershom ben Judah became affectionately known as "Rabbenu Gershom," meaning "Our Teacher," and "light of the exile."⁸ But probably more important than the individual takkanot that Rabbi Gershom developed to improve and regulate the lives of European Jews (although the sum of the individual takkanot is quite significant) was a sort of "constitution" that he created to govern the conduct of the Jews.

Rabbenu Gershom's code contained five points. First, Gershom declared that the jurisdiction of the local court system, which was based on the community, applied to anyone in the area, residents and non-residents alike. The validity of this principle may seem obvious in the twentieth century, but it was a necessary innovation in the tenth century. Secondly, he recognized the right of an individual to interrupt the prayers of the synagogue⁹ in certain cases where he was unable to obtain justice. Thirdly, he declared that if a synagogue was owned by an individual member of the community, the owner was prohibited from discriminating against other individuals by refusing them permission to enter for services. He might only close the synagogue to the entire community. Fourth, Gershom permitted anyone who lost a possession to

publicly declare a herem¹⁰ in the synagogue, compelling anyone with knowledge of the location of the item, or knowing who now had it, to notify its rightful owner. Finally, Gershom established the principle of majority rule. This last item may seem to have been unnecessary, but in the tenth century it was a significant development.¹¹

Rashi--his name is an acronym derived from Rabbi Shomo Yitzhaqi--was an important French scholar and rabbi of the eleventh century, who lived about one generation after Rabbenu Gershom. Born in Troyes, Champagne, in 1040, he studied in Mainz and Worms, where he learned the methods of Gershom. He returned to the valley of the Seine approximately 1065. Troyes, an important commercial center in the department of Champagne, was home to a community of 100-200 Jews. Rashi, a vineyard operator, was the community's informal leader.¹²

Rashi's greatest contribution to the development of Jewish thought was an extensive commentary on the Babylonian Talmud, interpreting and explaining its impact on the lives of the Ashkenaz Jews. He did not render a great number of takkanot, although he did create a few regulations on the loaning and investment of money;¹³ instead, his work was comprised mainly of scholastic interpretations of holy documents. His work reflected the complex Judeo-Christian relations in business and

commerce, the emerging patterns of Jewish self-government relative to the feudal society and the developing urban civilization, the beginning of the crusades, and the increased precariousness of the dispersed Jewish settlements. He sought literal meanings, but also utilized parables, allegory, and symbolism to illustrate his points.

Rabbenu Gershom and Rashi were the pre-eminent Ashkenazi scholars in the centuries preceding the crusades. Many other students and rabbis studied in the yeshivah that Gershom had established at Mainz, served the many communities across northern Europe in which the Jews had settled, and continued to operate academies at Mainz (and elsewhere) long after Gershom's death. They played important roles in the formation of the many institutions, described in the following pages, that helped to shape the communal life enjoyed by the Ashkenazim of the ninth to the eleventh centuries and beyond. They were responsible for applying the five elements of Gershom's constitution to Jewish life. The rise of these men, particularly Gershom ben Judah, to pre-eminence, was as much out of necessity, owing to the need of their communities for the guidance and leadership that was unavailable from Palestine and Babylon, as any other factor. But it helps to illustrate the cultural evolution that occurred within the Jewish communities of northern

France and the Rhineland in the relative tranquility that they experienced after the Carolingian era.

As discussed earlier,¹⁴ the Jews were granted a great deal of autonomy in arranging their communities and their daily lives. This autonomy was based on two factors. First, the right to organize their lives apart from the remainder of the society and according to their theology had been a recognized condition of their citizenship in the Roman empire. After the fall of Rome in the West, the Jews had successfully maintained this right. Furthermore, the Gothic tribes that had established kingdoms within the European continent had adopted Roman-Catholicism at different times, and some initially embraced the hated Arian form of Christianity. This led to the creation of a heterogenous mixture of Christian and pagan religious doctrines around the continent and an atmosphere in which the Jewish doctrine seemed less distasteful than it might have had the church's attention not been diverted by other heresies. This does not imply that the church ignored the presence of the Jews; indeed, the opposite was true. The church was very aware of the Jews, but its energy was directed not at defining the theology of the Jews or arranging their daily lives, but at specifying the limits of the intercourse between Jews and Christians.

Hence, the Jews were able to develop an entire society (Jewish) within a society (Christian). There were similarities between the two cultures and contact between Christians and Jews, but in many respects the two were parallel structures which operated separately and distinctly: while the king's vassals sat at the king's court, the Jews dealt justice among themselves; while the king's tax collectors extracted money from his subjects, the Jewish officials assessed taxes among the members of the Jewish community to pay the king and to maintain the community; and while the Christian community worshipped in their churches, the Jews worshipped in their synagogues. In many ways, the Jewish community was indistinguishable from the Christian community. Until the Fourth Lateran Council decreed in 1215 that Jews must wear distinctive garments or special badges, Jews and Christians had similar outward appearances.¹⁵ On the streets and in the marketplaces, Jews and Christians spoke similar languages.¹⁶ The Jews sometimes chose to live in separate sections of the towns and villages, but this was not always the case. In villages with few Jewish families, this would have been impossible.

Probably the most important ramification of the autonomy granted to the Jews was their opportunity to dispense justice among themselves. In dispensing justice, the Jews attempted to follow the laws of the Talmud.

A natural result of this emphasis was the inability of the Jews to utilize the courts of the gentiles to settle their disputes.

The foundations of the Jewish judicial system had been established at the time of Moses, and, therefore, constituted an important segment of Jewish tradition. The ancient Palestinians had utilized three types of courts--the bet din, the sanhedrin kettannah, and the sanhedrin gedolah--to adjudicate their cases.¹⁷ The ancient tradition of appointing judges to Jewish courts was embodied in the ritual of semikhah, a ceremony in which the outgoing judge laid his hands on the shoulders of his replacement, just as Moses had laid his hands on Joshua to allow him to become Israel's supreme leader and judge. As this rite developed it became the duty of the president of the Great Sanhedrin to confer all newly appointed judges. An important element of this ritual was that it took place on the soil of Palestine, which held special meaning for the Jews. Obvious difficulties rising out of the diaspora forced the Jews to cease practicing the semikhah by the fourth century.¹⁸

The Jews desired their judges to be as widely experienced as possible. Their judges were to have such knowledge of secular subjects as would enable them to pass wise judgments. For Ashkenaz Jews, apart from the Sepharic tradition that was developing under the influence

of classical culture in southern Europe, knowledge of secular matters was not an end in itself; rather, education was sought only to increase one's understanding of scripture and the Tadmud, and knowledge of secular subjects was desired only to assist the Jews in applying Talmudic principles to their lives (and to enhance the wisdom of the judges). When deciding cases, the judges were expected to conduct themselves honorably, displaying patience, humility, indulgence, and respect for people. They had to listen to cases fairly, neither discriminating nor accepting bribery. Finally, the judge was required to appraise the evidence honestly. He was forbidden to shirk his responsibility by simply agreeing with the decisions of his fellow judges, rather than reaching his own conclusion independently. This was an appeal to his sense of personal honor.¹⁹

After establishing communities in northern Europe, the Jews attempted to develop their own system of courts based on the Palestinian model. As the strength of the Jews rested on their ability to turn inward, to their community, to have their needs filled, so, too, did the strength of the Jewish community have a foundation--the functioning judicial system, which allowed it to maintain its order internally, without turning outwardly to the gentile authorities for assistance. The Ashkenazi Jews had to modify the ancient system, though. The

physical separation between Europe and Palestine rendered impossible the ceremony of semikhah. European Jews therefore empowered their judges using a variety of methods. While Spanish Jews elected all their community officers, including judges, annually, communities in northern Europe may have collectively agreed to simply accept the authority of their rabbis. Particular rabbis may also have been authorized by the older academies of Babylon and Palestine to act as leaders of various communities. In the third century C.E., the first rabbi received such an authorization.²⁰

By the twelfth century, the Jewish communities of France had developed a system which emulated the institutions of ancient Palestine. This judicial system incorporated the bet din (the court of first instance), the bet ha va'ad, and the bet din ha-gadol. The smallest towns and Jewish communities employed the bet din, which comprised three laymen. Even though not all Jewish men were experts in the law, most were well educated in the religious texts. The bet din was convened when necessary in these small towns. In medium-sized communities, these three-man courts remained in session permanently. These were called the bet ha va'ad. The highest court of diaspora Judaism was the bet din ha-gadol, which sat in the largest cities and was comprised of three scholars. The bet din ha-gadol was not an appellate court; rather,

it heard the most important cases, including those involving municipal officials whose opponents feared that they may have been unable to get fair hearings in their own communities.²¹

The power of the Jewish court to function was embodied in the herem, or excommunication. Any Jew who ignored a summons to a court was subject to the herem, which excluded him from the community religious activities and resulted in his general social ostracism. The herem was also used to enforce communal decisions. Jews subjected to it were forbidden to participate in the religious life of the community, they were refused burial, and their sons were not circumcised. The herem was issued by the Rabbi, but in so doing, he required the concurrence of the community. For a people whose entire lives centered on the synagogue and the many different forms of daily ritual, this was a powerful means of ensuring the compliance of the people. The herem was sometimes implemented as a life sentence, but since the goal was reform rather than vengeance, it more often was imposed for a limited period of time. It could be enforced until a particular act of penance was accomplished, or until an individual simply agreed to abide by whichever of the community rules he had broken.²²

A significant limitation of the Ashkenazi judicial system was that the jurisdiction of each bet din was

based on the boundaries of the community to which it belonged. Residents of particular communities could not be forced to attend courts in other communities. The herem bet din empowered local courts to summon defendants from outlying communities, enabling the Jews to administer justice within a single community. According to a takkanah of Rabbi Gershom, if a man passed through a community empowered by the herem bet din and was summoned, in the presence of witnesses, to its court, the herem remained in effect until he appeared at the court. The herem was effective whether or not the summons was witnessed, but the Jew's failure to appear in the court could be held against him only after witnesses testified that the man had in fact been summoned.²³

The herem bet din illustrates that the Jewish judicial system operated with a high degree of sophistication. Under Jewish law, the community is the basic unit of sovereignty. Rabbis of particular communities could not enforce their takkanot on other communities (although other communities did voluntarily adopt each others' methods and rules), and disgruntled individuals were discouraged from taking their cases to the courts of neighboring communities, except in extreme cases. Following the institution of the herem bet din, residency was no longer the sole determinant of jurisdiction and communities could adjudicate their disputes more easily.

For a people who engaged in trade and traveled extensively in their commerce, the herem bet din was a useful mechanism for simplifying the administration of justice. Merchants who traveled great distances to fairs or simple peddlers who just passed through particular communities could now more easily be held responsible by the local court to account for their conduct.

Despite the presence of a sophisticated judicial system, individuals were sometimes unable to have their disputes resolved satisfactorily. On these occasions, the routine of the synagogue was disrupted to draw attention to the disturbance, in hopes of restoring peace to the community, because of a Talmudic passage which states that prayers conducted 'while the hands are bloody' is not effective. This phrase can be interpreted in two ways. First, it can be understood to mean that individuals cannot pray effectively if they have wronged others and not made amends. Or, it can be interpreted that the community as a whole cannot worship faithfully if any of its members are impure (whether or not the offender's neighbors know the truth). The underlying assumption is the fraternal nature of the religion. In either case, it is in the best interest of the community to correct the injustice as quickly as possible.

The bittul ha-tamid, the right to interrupt the prayers and Torah reading in the synagogue, was a method

of publicly bringing a complaint against another Jew when the usual judicial methods had failed. Its use was fairly simple, although specific rules varied by location. Anyone who perceived that he was the victim of an injustice--maltreatment by community officials, acts of violence, or the failure of another to respond to a legitimate summons from the bet din--arose during the service and declared the trouble. The activities of the synagogue were then halted until the problem was resolved. Twelfth century Ashkenazi takkanot sought to restrict the exercise of the bittul ha-tamid, but the precedent established by Rabbenu Gershom was to regulate the custom without eliminating it. Gershom had earlier reasoned that a man should not stop the morning prayers until he had stopped the evening services three times, but a particular book of customs allowed an orphan or a widow to interrupt the morning service without first interrupting the evening service.²⁴ The bittul ha-tamid further enhanced the security and peace of mind that the Jews found within their communities.

Because of the prejudice that many Christians felt against Jews, Jews were especially vulnerable to theft of their property by brigands or seizures of their property by the local lords. A simple procedure for protecting their property from seizure or theft was that of transferring it to other individuals. The inherent

risk was that unscrupulous persons would offer to assist imperiled individuals, and then keep the property. An additional problem surfaced when the only available bailee had an outstanding claim against the owner of the property. In that case, he might retain the property after the danger had passed. The herem-ha-ikkul was an unwritten law that prohibited the bailee from retaining the property, despite any outstanding claims that may have existed. Since economic emergencies could whip up very quickly, the unfortunate Jew could not always seek out trusted friends or responsible bailees, so this law was necessary to protect his interests.²⁵

As has been shown, the Jews' economic well-being came to depend in large part on local commerce. The financial security of the Jews depended on their access to the local marketplace. To defend their local interests, European Jewish communities developed the herem ha-yishuv, which granted each community the right to regulate the movement of its residents. The original settlers of any given area were assumed to have created for themselves a right to the profit-making potential of their settlement, and this right was considered hereditary. Newcomers had to acquire rights of settlement, called hezkat ha-yishuv or hezkat ha-kehillah, from the community wherever the custom was adopted. Outsiders either purchased or hired this right for themselves.²⁶

The herem ha-yishuv was exercised by the Ashkenazim throughout northern Europe. Its exact period of origin is unknown, but it was employed in the Rhineland communities during the eleventh century and a case was recorded in the twelfth century. The development of the herem ha-yishuv paralleled similar trends in non-Jewish communities. In medieval Europe economic opportunities were restricted and taxation often oppressing. This was especially true for the Jews. Jewish pioneers who established trading patterns or sold their wares in particular communities were responsible for the payment of taxes and fees to the king, lord, or bishop, so they logically sought to eliminate the unfair competition of outsiders who were not responsible for helping to pay the community taxes. Because the herem ha-yishuv was instituted mainly to protect trade and economic opportunity, many categories of individuals were seldom affected by it; non-practicing rabbis, students, personal servants, rentiers who did not also engage in trade, and wholesalers. Non-residents attending local fairs were also exempt, but they were restricted from trading with local residents.²⁷

The closing of Jewish communities to fellow Jews was fundamentally offensive to many, so the herem ha-yishuv was never universally accepted. The herem ha-yishuv became a controversial institution, especially during the later middle ages, as European Jewry became

increasingly imperiled. It was especially unpopular with French rabbis and scholars, who sometimes abandoned its application for economic reasons, claiming that it had been intended for use only on moral grounds, against those who "denounce their brethren to gentiles and who refuse to accept their part of the tax burdens of the community."²⁸

The ability of the Jews to intricately organize their communities in northern Europe, within a substantially hostile environment, depended upon the high literacy level that they maintained. The ability to read was essential in conducting the daily prayers and rites. It also enabled a greater proportion of the community to study and learn about the religion. This need was not dissimilar to the need among the Christian clergy to conduct daily services, but the Jews considered it essential for all men to be literate, whereas in the Christian community, education was restricted primarily to the clergy. Jewish boys were taught to read at an early age and studied scripture, the Torah, and the Talmud. Jews were motivated to study secular subjects, such as the natural sciences,²⁹ primarily to enhance their understanding of the Talmud and its application to everyday life. While many Christians dedicated whatever knowledge they acquired to the accumulation of wealth, the Jews sought to dedicate themselves to the study and advancement of the

word of God. Of course, the Jews' commitment to learning proved advantageous to their commercial endeavors as well.

Such were the major institutions of the communities of the Jews of northern Europe. Since the community was the basic governing unit, and because no central Jewish authority existed to oversee the uniform development and implementation of the many institutions, there were variations from one location to another. But the strong foundation upon which the communities existed--the autonomy to live according to Jewish beliefs and the freedom to operate judicial systems which upheld these beliefs--provided the Jews a great deal of security in an otherwise hostile environment. It was a network of these communities that enabled Jewish traders and peddlers to carry out their commerce and provide a livelihood for themselves. The rise of Jewish scholarship likewise enhanced the development of Jewish communities by providing guidance regarding the instructions of the Talmud or relations with the Christian society. The existence of scholars and yeshivot in the Ashkenazi communities indicates that the Jews achieved a state of mental security within which they could express the creativity to develop the institutions they needed to live together. They were, for a time, able to overcome the persecutions of the church and provide for themselves a comfortable life.

Unfortunately for the Jews, their peace of mind was not long lived. The persecutions of the crusaders shattered the security of the Jews in the Rhineland and the prejudices of the French monarches ruined Jewish prosperity in France a little more than one century later.

NOTES

¹The sources used in other chapters do not, for the most part, support detailed analyses of Jewish community life. Political histories of the Jews do not describe the communal structure developed by the Jews, but generally limit themselves to analyses of Judeo-Christian relations. Louis Finkelstein's Jewish Self Government in the Middle Ages provides information on the institutions developed by the Jews. A History of the Jews, by Solomon Grayzel provides data regarding the lives of Gershom ben Judah and Rashi, as well as the takkanot of Gershom. Information regarding the evolution of the Jews' judicial system is provided in The Social Life of the Jews of Northern France in the XII-XIV Centuries, by Louis Rabinowitz. Finally, the Encyclopaedia Judaica supplements these sources with definitions of the terms and institutions, and in some cases, with details of historical development and biographical data.

²Robert Chazan, Medieval Jewry in Northern France: A Political and Social History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 18-20. Chazan borrows the first three points from Yitzhak Baer.

³Encyclopaedia Britannica, twenty-nine volumes (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1986), 22:430 and 434; Encyclopaedia Judaica, seventeen volumes (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing Company, 1971), 14:84; and Judah Goldin, "The Period of the Talmud," in The Jews: Their History, Culture, and Religion, ed. Louis Finkelstein, third edition, two volumes (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1979), 1:186-189.

⁴Encyclopaedia Judaica, 15:633, and Louis Finkelstein, Jewish Self Government in the Middle Ages (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1972), 41-47.

⁵Encyclopaedia Judaica, 14:85-86.

⁶Ibid, 7:511-512, and Solomon Grayzel, A History of the Jews (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), 318-319.

⁷Takkanot (singular: takkanah) are rabbinic ordinances establishing practices which are based indirectly on Biblical directives or oral tradition. These rules are intended to take into account the needs of the times or circumstances.

⁸Encyclopaedia Judaica, 7:512-513, and Finkelstein, Jewish Self Government, chapter three.

⁹See p. 89.

¹⁰Literally a 'ban of the court,' the herem was a type of religious and social censure which ranged in effect from an appeal to the Jews' consciences (as in this use) to the equivalent of excommunication. The herem is also discussed on p. 82.

¹¹Finkelstein, Jewish Self Government, 32-34.

¹²Encyclopaedia Britannica, 9:946.

¹³Finkelstein, Jewish Self Government, 37-38.

¹⁴See p. 37.

¹⁵James Parkes, The Jew in the Medieval Community, second edition (New York: Hermon Press, 1976), 49.

¹⁶Encyclopaedia Judaica, 10:923-924.

¹⁷Ibid, 4:720.

¹⁸Ibid, 4:722.

¹⁹Ibid, 4:723-724. Although this list of desired characteristics was enumerated by Maimonides, a Sephardic Jew who lived in Spain, similar qualities would presumably have been admired by Ashkenaz Jews living in northern Europe.

²⁰Finkelstein, Jewish Self Government, 7-10.

²¹Louis Rabinowitz, The Social Life of the Jews of Northern France in the XII-XIV Centuries, second edition (New York: Hermon Press, 1972), 78-80.

²²Ibid, 95-96.

²³Finkelstein, Jewish Self Government, p. 10, and Encyclopaedia Judaica, 8:355-356.

²⁴Finkelstein, Jewish Self Government, pp. 16-18, and Encyclopaedia Judaica, 4:1061.

²⁵Finkelstein, Jewish Self Government, p. 10, and Encyclopaedia Judaica, 8:356.

²⁶Finkelstein, Jewish Self Government, p. 14, and Encyclopaedia Judaica, 8:356-357.

²⁷Ibid, 8:357.

²⁸Rabbi Jacob Tam, quoted in Finkelstein, Jewish Self Government, 15.

²⁹Some examples of natural sciences useful to the Jews: the application of mathematics and astronomy to the fixing of dates of the calendar, physiology and medicine for maintaining good health, etc.

CONCLUSION

The history of the Jews in northern Europe, from the beginning of the Christian era through the early crusading period, is at once a story of preservation and accommodation. The Jews worked to preserve the methods to which they had grown accustomed in the ancient world, and adapted to the new environment in which they found themselves. This process became especially important as feudalism developed among the Christian peoples.

From the tiny communities they inhabited in the Roman empire, the presence of the Jews in Europe grew as they settled in other areas of the continent. Religion, when it proved expedient, was used by the secular rulers to increase political power; the Jews, as non-Christian bystanders, were caught in the middle of such maneuverings. Nevertheless, they were able to develop a complex community structure and establish academies dedicated to the promotion of Jewish scholarship. The Jews also engaged in intercontinental trade, enhancing the communication between different cultures of the world. Through their extended travels, the Jews helped to influence the growth of culture in western Europe.

Ultimately, the Jews were driven from western Europe. The popular prejudices which had surfaced occasionally during the eleventh century and exploded violently during the first crusade never abated. The Jews of France lived fairly securely through the next century, but the days of German and French Jews alike were numbered. Gradually increasing, Christian animosity toward the Jews made their lives and prosperity in western Europe more and more difficult, as the rulers who had been their protectors became persecutors. In 1290 the Jews were expelled from England. A series of expulsions from French territory began in 1306. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Jews were persecuted in and expelled from the various German city-states. In the centuries following these expulsions, European Jewish cultural development occurred in eastern Europe.

During the tenth and eleventh centuries, however, Ashkenaz Jewry flourished in northern Europe. These Jews sustained themselves economically throughout the feudal period by engaging in trade, both intercontinentally, traveling east (to India and China) and south (to northern Africa), and intracontinentally. In so doing, they brought to Europe tangible benefits--the merchandise of foreign lands--and intangible benefits--knowledge of other cultures and peoples. Spiritually, the Jews flourished through education, which enabled them to

maintain the devotion of their young and by establishing academies dedicated to Jewish studies. Finally, the Jews flourished socially by developing communal institutions that supported them daily in a world that was usually indifferent to their way of life and occasionally hostile and violently opposed to it.

Jewish scholars, such as Rabbenu Gershom, the "Light of the Exile," and Rashi, as have other important Jews throughout history, provided for their fellow Jews important and devoted service that enabled them to endure this difficult period. By providing direction for following Jewish beliefs in an unfriendly world, and by laying down a code on which the community could be based, these leaders helped to make possible the cultural development of Jews in the medieval period. They helped their co-religionists to preserve, to the greatest extent possible, the heritage of their ancestors, while providing necessary innovations to allow the Jews to operate in Europe, within the Christian society and far removed from the traditional capital of Judaism.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
GLOSSARY OF HEBREW TERMS

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GLOSSARY OF HEBREW TERMS

AMORAIM	Scholars of the academies of Sura and Pumbedita.
ASHKENAZ	Designation for Jewish culture that developed in northern Europe, which followed the Babylonian tradition. The term was first used in the tenth century, but was not used by northern European Jews until the thirteenth century.
BET DIN	Three-man court of first instance, comprised of laymen and convened when needed.
BET DIN HA-GADOL	Highest ranking court within Ashkenazi culture, composed of three scholars.
BET HA VA'AD	Similar to the <u>bet din</u> , but was convened permanently.
BITTUL HA-TAMID	The right of the individual to interrupt the prayers of the synagogue to draw attention to a perceived injustice.
GAON	(plural: <u>geonim</u>) Title of the heads of the academies of Sura and Pumbedita, beginning in the seventh century C.E.
HAGGADA	Legendary material and rabbinic literature of early Judaism.
HALAKHAH	Legal material of Judaism, covering personal, national, and international relationships, and daily observances.
HEREM	A form of social censure, ranging in effect from a general appeal to conscience, to outright excommunication.

HEREM HA-IKKUL	The right of the individual to announce that he lost (or had stolen from him) an item, thereby compelling those who had knowledge of the whereabouts of the item to the owner.
HEREM HA YISHUV	The right of the community to accept or reject new settlers and to inhibit residents from moving out of the community.
HEZKAT HA YISHUV	The right to reside in a given community.
HEZKAT HA KEHILLAH	The right to reside in a given community.
MISHNA	Sacred Jewish document, recording early oral laws and traditions and rabbinical literature.
RADANIYA	Radhanite international merchants, European-Jewish traders who traveled east to India and China and returned to western Europe.
RESPONSUM	(plural: <u>responsa</u>) Exchange of letters in which one party consults another on <u>halakhic</u> matters.
SEMIKHAH	The rite of appointing judges to office.
SEPHARDIC	Designation for Jewish culture of Spain, southern Europe, northern Africa, and the Middle East, which was heir to the Palestinian tradition.
TAKKANAH	(plural: <u>takkanot</u>) Ordinances or directives <u>issued</u> by rabbis, indirectly based on the Bible or tradition, which take into account contemporary circumstances.
TALMUD	<u>Amoraic</u> interpretation of the Mishna, developed and recorded from the third to the sixth centuries C.E.

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