

MUST BE STATED BEFORE EACH COUNTRY PROFILE

**NOT A DEFINITIVE HISTORY. OVERVIEW INTENDED TO REFLECT THE TENUOUS
SITUATION OF JEWS LIVING IN ARAB COUNTRIES**

ALGERIA

Jewish settlement in Algeria can be traced back to the first centuries of the Common Era.

Before the Roman Empire took over these remote coasts of northern Africa, descendants of Jews who had fled Palestine after the destruction of the first and second temples of Jerusalem had settled among the Berber tribes of central Maghreb.

Most Berbers were converted to Islam a few decades later, and the Jews of Algeria started their cultural and linguistic assimilation into the Arab world. Despite this deep penetration of the Arabic culture into Jewish habits, the Jews of Algeria remained committed to their religious tradition, and some of their rabbis became widely noted for their Talmudic commentaries and the contacts they had with Palestinian and Babylonian sages.

After 1391, refugees fleeing Catholic Spain arrived en masse into North Africa. They were rapidly integrated into the local Jewish leadership. Finally, more European Jews immigrated to Algeria in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, coming from Italy.

When, in 1870, Jews were given French citizenship, they began their progressive integration into French language, culture, and social values, principally by their entry into the French school system. During this period, Jews lived in relative calm, notwithstanding their dhimmi status as second-class citizens.

On the eve of World War II, there were around 120,000 Jews in Algeria. In 1934, incited by events in Nazi Germany, Muslims rampaged in Constantine, killing 25 Jews and injuring many more. Starting in 1940, under Vichy rule, Algerian Jews were persecuted socially and economically. In 1948, at the time of Israel's independence and on the eve of the Algerian Civil War, there were approximately 140,000 Jews living in Algeria.

Nearly all of the Algerian Jews fled the country shortly after it gained independence from France in 1962. The newly established Algerian government harassed the Jewish community, confiscated Jewish property, and deprived Jews of their principle economic rights. As a result of the desire of Algeria and Algerians to join in the wave of Pan-Arab nationalism that was sweeping North Africa, Jews no longer felt welcome after the French departure. The Algerian Nationality Code of 1963 made this clear by granting Algerian nationality as a right only to those inhabitants whose fathers and paternal grandfathers had Muslim personal status in Algeria.

Before 1962, there were 60 Jewish communities, each maintaining their own rabbis, synagogues and educational institutions. Since Algeria was granted independence in 1962, almost 130,000 Algerian Jews immigrated to France and, since 1948, 25,681 Algerian Jews have immigrated to Israel.



EGYPT



Jews have lived in Egypt since Biblical times. Israelite tribes first moved to the Land of Goshen (the north-eastern edge of the Nile Delta) during the reign of the Egyptian pharaoh Amenhotep IV (1375-1358 B.C).

Over the years, Jews have sought shelter and dwelled in Egypt. By 1897, there were more than 25,000 Jews in Egypt, concentrated in Cairo and Alexandria. In 1937, the population reached 63,500.

In the 1940's, with the rise of Egyptian nationalism and the Zionist movement's efforts to create a Jewish homeland in adjoining Israel, anti-Jewish activities began in earnest. In 1945, riots erupted – ten Jews were killed; 350 injured, and a synagogue, a Jewish hospital, and an old-age home were burned down. After the success of the Zionist movement in establishing the State of Israel, between June and November of 1948, violence and repressive measures by the Government and Egyptians began in earnest. Bombs were set off in the Jewish Quarter, killing more than 70 Jews and wounded nearly 200. Rioting over the next few months resulted in many more Jewish deaths. 2,000 Jews were arrested and many had their property confiscated.

In 1956, the Egyptian government used the Sinai Campaign as a pretext to order almost 25,000 Egyptian Jews to leave the country and confiscated their property. They were allowed to take only one suitcase and a small sum of cash, and forced to sign declarations “donating” their property to the Egyptian government. Approximately 1,000 more Jews were sent to prisons and detention camps. On November 23, 1956, a proclamation signed by the Minister of Religious Affairs, and read aloud in mosques throughout Egypt, declared that “all Jews are Zionists and enemies of the state,” and promised that they would be soon expelled (AP, November 26 and 29 1956).

By 1957, the Jewish population of Egypt had fallen to 15,000. When war broke out in 1967, Jewish homes and property were confiscated. In 1967, after the Six-Day War, there was a renewed wave of persecution, and the community dropped to 2,500. By the 1970s, after the remaining Jews were given permission to leave the country, the community dwindled to a few families.

Jewish rights were finally restored in 1979 after President Anwar Sadat signed the Camp David Accords with Israel. Only then was the community allowed to establish ties with Israel and with world Jewry. Nearly all the estimated 200 Jews left in Egypt are elderly and the once proud and flourishing Jewish community is on the verge of extinction.



IRAQ



Iraq is the modern designation for the country carved out of ancient Babylonia, Assyria, and the southern part of Turkey after World War I.

It is also the place of the oldest Jewish Diaspora and the one with the longest continuous history, from 721 BCE to 1949 CE, a time span of 2,670 years.

By the 3rd century, Babylonia became the center of Jewish scholarship, as is attested to by the community's most influential contribution to Jewish scholarship, the Babylonian Talmud. Jews had prospered in what was then Babylonia for 1200 years before the Muslim conquest in 634 AD. Under Muslim rule, the situation of the Jewish community fluctuated. Some Jews held high positions in government or prospered in commerce and trade. At the same time, Jews were subjected to special taxes and restrictions on their professional activity. Under British rule, which began in 1917, Jews fared well economically, but all of this progress ended when Iraq gained independence in 1932.

In June 1941, the Grand Mufti-inspired, pro-Nazi coup of Rashid Ali sparked rioting and a pogrom in Baghdad. Armed Iraqi mobs murdered 180 Jews and wounded almost 1,000.

Additional outbreaks of anti-Jewish rioting occurred between 1946-1949. After the establishment of Israel in 1948, Zionism became a capital crime. Jews were subjected to arrest, charges of treason with instant trials. Many suffered severe torture; others simply disappeared.

The end of the war with Israel saw the defeated Iraqi army return from the front. Soldiers called upon their compatriots to avenge the death of their brethren on the battle field. Demonstrations were spread in the streets, about 6 Jews were killed, and 2 others were executed. About 10,000 Jews were dismissed from their jobs, which resulted in high unemployment. Jews were prevented from leaving Iraq, so in such a climate, thousands of them began to flee the country.

In 1950, Iraqi Jews were permitted to leave within a year, provided they forfeited their citizenship. A year later, however, the property of Jews who emigrated was frozen and economic restrictions were placed on Jews who chose to remain in the country. From 1949 to 1951, 104,000 Jews were evacuated from Iraq to Israel in *Operations Ezra and Nehemiah* and thousands of others immigrated to Canada, the United States, Britain, France and other countries. Another 20,000 were smuggled out through Iran. Thus a community that had reached a peak of some 135,000 in 1947 dwindled to a mere 6,000 after 1951.

Thereafter, the Iraqi government began to confiscate their Jewish rare religious books and parchment scrolls. Tens of Torah scrolls with their cases were taken from synagogues and kept in open school courts under the sun and rain for years and were severely damaged, while others were taken to the Iraqi museum or were left in the basement of the Iraqi Antiquities Authority.

In 1952, Iraq's government barred Jews from emigrating. With the rise of competing Ba'ath factions in 1963, additional restrictions were placed on the remaining Iraqi Jews. The sale of property was forbidden and all Jews were forced to carry yellow identity cards. Persecutions continued, especially after the Six-Day War in 1967, when many of the remaining 3,000 Jews were arrested and dismissed from their jobs. Around that period, more repressive measures were

imposed: Jewish property was expropriated; Jewish bank accounts were frozen; Jews were dismissed from public posts; businesses were shut; trading permits were cancelled; telephones were disconnected. Many Jews were placed under house arrest for long periods of time.

Persecution was at its worst at the end of 1968. The first assassination of Jews during that period began when many of them were arrested, and killed in prisons. Scores were jailed upon the allegation of an alleged local “spy ring” composed of Jewish businessmen. Fourteen men—eleven of them Jews—were sentenced to death in staged trials. On January 27, 1969, all were hanged in the public squares of Baghdad. More Jews were hanged, kidnapped, executed or killed in prisons. The total number of those who lost their lives during the Baath regime was estimated at 55.

In response to international pressure, the Baghdad government quietly allowed most of the remaining Jews to emigrate in the early 1970’s, even while leaving other restrictions in force. In 1973, most of Iraq’s remaining Jews were too old to leave and they were pressured by the government to turn over title, without compensation, to hundreds of millions worth of Jewish community property (New York Times, February 18, 1973).

Today, it is estimated that there are only 5 Jews living in Iraq. A once flourishing Iraqi Jewish community of 135,000 has thus been virtually extinguished.

LEBANON

Jews have lived in Lebanon since ancient times. King Herod the Great, in the 1st century CE supported the Jewish community in Beirut.

During the first half of the 20th century, the Jewish community expanded tremendously due to immigration from Greece, and Turkey, and later from Syria and Iraq.

There were instances of rioting and incitement around the time of the establishment of the State of Israel.

In the mid-50’s, approximately 7,000 Jews lived in Beirut. Compared to Islamic countries, the Christian-Arab rule, which characterized the political structure of this country, conducted a policy of relative tolerance towards its Jewish population. Nevertheless, Lebanese Jews felt insecure and decided to emigrate in 1967, leaving for France, Israel, Italy, England and South America.

In 1974, 1,800 Jews remained in Lebanon, the majority concentrated in Beirut. Fighting in the 1975-76 Muslim-Christian civil war swirled around the Jewish Quarter in Beirut, damaging many Jewish homes, businesses and synagogues. Virtually all of the remaining 1,800 Lebanese Jews emigrated in 1976. Most Jews went to Europe (particularly France), the United States and Canada.

Today an estimated 150 Jews remain in Lebanon.

LIBYA

The Jewish community of Libya traces its origin back some 2,500 years to the 3rd century BCE.

Around the time of the Italian occupation of Libya in 1911, there were about 21,000 Jews in the country, the majority in Tripoli.

In the late 1930s, anti-Jewish laws were gradually enforced, and Jews were subject to terrible repression. Still, by 1941, the Jews accounted for a quarter of the population of Tripoli and maintained 44 synagogues.

In 1942, the Germans occupied the Jewish quarter and times were extremely difficult for Jews in Libya although conditions did not greatly improve following the liberation. During the British occupation, rising Arab nationalism and anti-Jewish fervor were the reasons behind a series of pogroms, the worst of which, in November of 1945, resulted in the massacre of more than 140 Jews in Tripoli and elsewhere and the destruction of five synagogues.

The establishment of the State of Israel led many Jews to leave the country. In June 1948, protesting the founding of the Jewish state, rioters murdered another 12 Jews and destroyed 280 Jewish homes. Although emigration was illegal, more than 3,000 Jews succeeded to leave to Israel.

When the British legalized emigration in 1949, and in the years immediately preceding Libyan independence in 1951, hostile demonstrations and riots against Jews brought about the departure of some 30,000 Jews who fled the country up to, and after the point when Libya was granted independence and membership in the Arab League in 1951.

After the 1967 Middle East War, the Jewish population of 7,000 was again subjected to pogroms in which 18 were killed, and many more injured, sparking a near-total exodus that left fewer than 100 Jews in Libya.

When Col. Qaddafi came to power in 1969, repressive measures were enacted against the Jewish community including the mass violation of civil and human rights, confiscation of Jewish property, arbitrary arrests and detention. etc. This marked the end of one of the world's oldest Jewish communities. Once home to a large and thriving Jewish community, there are no Jews left in Libya.

MOROCCO

Jews first appeared in Morocco more than two millennia ago, travelling there in association with Phoenician traders. The first substantial Jewish settlements developed in 586 BC when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem.

Prior to World War II, the Jewish population of Morocco reached 225,000. Although, Jews were not deported during the war, they did suffer under the Vichy government.

By 1948, this ancient Jewish community, the largest in North Africa, numbered 265,000. In June 1948, after the establishment of the State of Israel, bloody riots in Oujda and Djerada killed 44 Jews and wounded scores more. That same year, an unofficial economic boycott was instigated against Moroccan Jews.

The waves of mass immigration, which brought a total of more than 250,000 Moroccan Jews to Israel, were prompted by anti-Jewish measures carried out in response to the establishment of the State of Israel. On June 4, 1949, riots broke out in northern Morocco killing and injuring dozens of Jews. Shortly afterwards, the Jews began to leave.

There were still large Jewish communities but their status was one of transition. During the two-year period between 1955 and 1957 alone, over 70,000 Moroccan Jews arrived in Israel.

In 1956, Morocco declared its independence, Jewish immigration to Israel was suspended and by 1959, Zionist activities became illegal in Morocco. During these years more than 30,000 Jews left for France and the Americas. In 1963, the ban on emigration to Israel was lifted bringing another 100,000 to her shores.

Before his death in 1999, King Hassan tried to protect the Jewish population, and at present Morocco has one of the most tolerant environments for Jews in the Arab world. Moroccan Jewish émigrés, even those with Israeli citizenship, freely visit friends and relatives in Morocco.

Today, the Jewish community of Morocco has dwindled to less than 3,500 people.



SYRIA



Jews have lived in Syria since biblical times and the community's history is intertwined with the history of Jews in the land of Israel. Jewish population increased significantly after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Throughout the generations, the main Jewish communities were to be found in Damascus and Aleppo.

In 1943, the Jewish community of Syria had 30,000 members. This population was mainly distributed between Aleppo, where 17,000 Jews lived and Damascus, which had a Jewish population of 11,000.

In 1944, after Syria gained independence from France, the new government prohibited Jewish immigration to Palestine, and severely restricted the teaching of Hebrew in Jewish schools. Attacks against Jews escalated, and boycotts were called against their businesses.

In 1945, in an attempt to thwart efforts to establish a Jewish homeland, the government restricted emigration to Israel, and Jewish property was burned and looted. Anti-Jewish pogroms erupted in Aleppo in 1947, stimulating 7,000 of the town's 10,000 Jews to flee in terror. The government then froze Jewish bank accounts and confiscated their property.

When partition was declared in 1947, Arab mobs in Aleppo devastated the 2,500-year-old Jewish community. Scores of Jews were killed and more than 200 homes, shops and synagogues were destroyed. Thousands of Jews illegally fled Syria to go to Israel.

Shortly after, the Syrian government intensified its persecution of the Jewish population. Freedom of movement was severely restricted. Jews were not allowed to work for the government or banks, could not acquire telephones or driver's licenses, and were barred from buying property. Jewish bank accounts were frozen.

In 1949, banks were instructed to freeze the accounts of Jews and all their assets were expropriated.

For years, the Jews in Syria lived in extreme fear. The Jewish Quarter in Damascus was under the constant surveillance of the secret police. Travel abroad was permitted in exceptional cases, but only if a bond of \$300-\$1,000 was left behind, along with family members who served as hostages. U.S. pressure applied during peace negotiations helped convince President Hafez Assad to lift these restrictions, and those prohibiting Jews from buying and selling property, in the early 1990's.

The continuing pattern of political and economic strangulation ultimately caused a total of 15,000 Jews to leave Syria, 10,000 of which emigrated to the U.S.A. and another 5,000 to Israel.

In an undercover operation in late 1994, 1,262 Syrian Jews were brought to Israel. The decision to finally free the Jews came about largely as a result of pressure from the United States following the 1991 Madrid peace conference. Today, no Jews remain in Syria.



TUNISIA



The first documented evidence of Jews living in what is today Tunisia dates back to 200 CE.

After the Arab conquest of Tunisia in the 7th century, Jews lived under satisfactory conditions, despite discriminatory measures (e.g. a poll tax).

Tunisia was the only Arab country to come under direct German occupation during World War II. From November 1942 to May 1943, the Germans and their local collaborators implemented a forced-labor regime, confiscations of property, hostage-taking, mass extortion, deportations, and executions. They required thousands of Jews in the countryside to wear the Star of David, and they created special Judenrat-like committees of Jewish leaders to implement Nazi policies under threat of imprisonment or death. The community ultimately survived.

In 1948, the Tunisian Jewish community had numbered 105,000, with 65,000 living in Tunis alone.

After Tunisia gained independence in 1956, a series of anti-Jewish government decrees were promulgated. In 1958, Tunisia's Jewish Community Council was abolished by the government and ancient synagogues, cemeteries and Jewish quarters were destroyed for 'urban renewal.'

Similar to the conditions for Jews in Algeria, the rise of Tunisian nationalism led to anti-Jewish legislation and in 1961 caused Jews to leave in great numbers. The increasingly unstable situation caused more than 40,000 Tunisian Jews to immigrate to Israel. By 1967, the country's Jewish population had shrunk to 20,000.

During the 1967 war, Jews were attacked by rioting Arab mobs, and synagogues and shops were burned. The government denounced the violence and appealed to the Jewish population to stay, but did not bar them from leaving. Subsequently, 7,000 Jews immigrated to France.

Even as late as 1982, there were attacks on Jews in the towns of Zarzis and Ben Guardane.

In 1985, a Tunisian guard opened fire on worshipers in a synagogue in Djerba, killing five people, four of them Jewish. Since then, the government has sought to prevent further tragedy by giving Tunisian Jews heavy protection when necessary.

Today, the 1,500 Jews comprise the country's largest indigenous religious minority.

The Tunisian Government protects the annual pilgrimage to oldest Jewish synagogue in Africa, located in the village of Hara Sghira in Djerba, an island off the coast of southern Tunisia.



YEMEN (& ADEN)



The Jews of Yemen have various legends relating to their coming to that country, the most widespread of which states that they arrived there before the destruction of the First Temple (587 BCE). The first historical evidence of their existence in Yemen dates from the third century.

Jews had begun to leave Yemen in the 1880s, when some 2,500 had made their way to Jerusalem and Jaffa. But it was after World War I, when Yemen became independent, that anti-Jewish feeling in that country made emigration imperative. Anti-Semitic laws, which had lain dormant for years were revived (e.g. Jews were not permitted to walk on pavements – or to ride horses). In court, a Jew's evidence was not accepted against that of a Moslem.

In 1922, the government of Yemen reintroduced an ancient Islamic law requiring that Jewish orphans under age 12 be forcibly converted to Islam. When a Jew decided to emigrate, he had to leave all his property. In spite of this, between 1923 and 1945 a total of 17,000 Yemenite Jews left and immigrated to Palestine.

After the Second World War, thousands of more Yemenite Jews wanted to come to Palestine, but the British Mandate's *White Paper* was still in force and those who left Yemen ended up in crowded slums in Aden, where serious riots broke out in 1947 after the United Nations decided on partition. Many Jews were killed, and the Jewish quarter was burned to the ground. It was not until September 1948 that the British authorities in Aden allowed the refugees to proceed to Israel.

In 1947, after the partition vote, Muslim rioters engaged in a bloody pogrom in Aden that killed 82 Jews and destroyed hundreds of Jewish homes. The Jewish community of Aden, numbering 8,000 in 1948, was forced to flee. By 1959 over 3,000 arrived in Israel. Many fled to the U.S.A. and England. Today there are no Jews left in Aden.

Around the time of Israel's founding, Yemen's Jewish community was economically paralyzed, as most of the Jewish stores and businesses were destroyed. This increasingly perilous situation led to the emigration of virtually the entire Yemenite Jewish community - almost 50,000 - between June 1949 and September 1950 in Operation "Magic Carpet." A smaller, continuous migration was allowed to continue into 1962, when a civil war put an abrupt halt to any further Jewish exodus.

It is another example of the displacement of an entire Jewish community from its ancient roots in the Arab countries. It is estimated, there are about 1,000 Jews in Yemen today. They are held as hostages, and are kept in dire conditions and not allowed to leave.