

EXILE AND RETURN

*The Struggle for a
Jewish Homeland*

Martin Gilbert



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Israel Dispersed

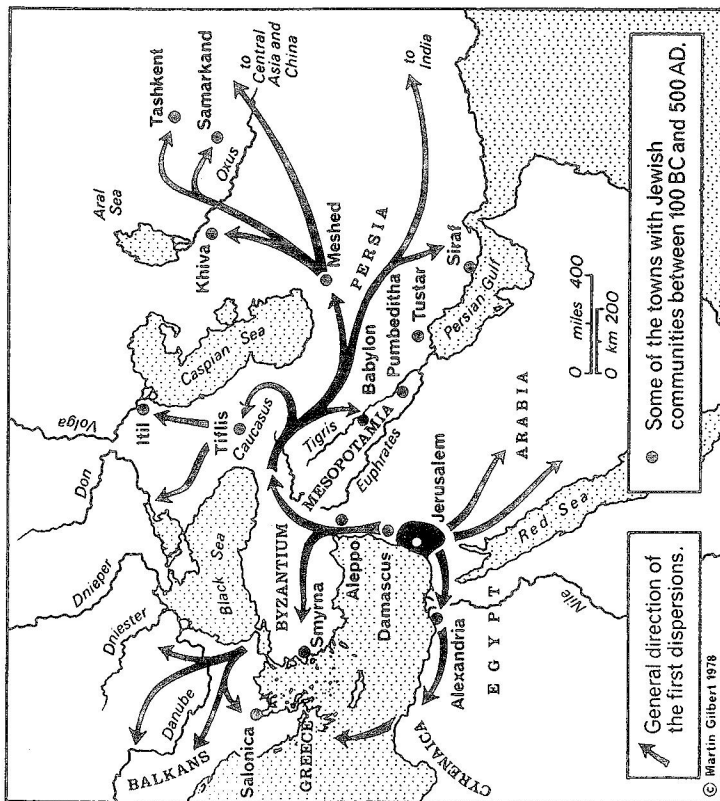
THE Jews were living in Canaan three thousand years ago. They were first parted from their land in 722 BC with the Assyrian conquest of the northern Jewish kingdom of Samaria, and the deportation of thousands of Israelites eastwards to Mesopotamia. The Bible gives the number of captives as 27,290. Less than 150 years later the Babylonians conquered the southern Jewish kingdom of Judaea, together with its capital, Jerusalem. The Temple of Solomon, the holiest site of Judaism, was destroyed, and the Jews were once more taken eastwards, as slaves and captives, to the river Euphrates.

The Bible records the lament of these early exiles: 'By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept. Yea, we sat down and wept, as we remembered Zion.' From that moment, Jewish existence was threatened in every decade, both for those who continued to live in the Land of Israel, and for those in exile who sought a secure haven in the ever-increasing circles of the dispersion. For many, no real haven could be found, and in each generation they would repeat the lament of the Psalmist:

How shall we sing the Lord's song
In a strange land?

Fifty years after the Babylonian destruction of the Temple, some Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem. Others remained in exile, sometimes, as in Babylon itself, winning wide measures of self-government. Some, in search of a decent livelihood, pushed out even further eastwards to the shores of the Caspian Sea, some northwards to the Black Sea, some south-east to the Persian Gulf. In every port and village that was prepared to accept them, Jews formed small communities, and through their synagogue services and Holy Days, preserved their Judaism both as a religious faith, and as a way of life.

From the towns and villages of these first dispersions, the Jews travelled throughout the known world. From the Land of Israel, too, they ventured in search of a livelihood to all the ports and market towns of the civilized world, first to those of Egypt and of the Persian Empire, then to Alexander's Macedonian domains, then to the scattered City States of ancient Greece, and to the maritime emporia of ancient Carthage.



In the age of Greek supremacy, Jews were to be seen in their new homes all along the Mediterranean coast of Spain, France and North Africa. Westwards, they settled in the islands of Djerba, Majorca, Sardinia, Sicily and Malta. Eastwards their efforts took them to the furthest shores of the Black Sea. Everywhere their small but vibrant communities, their close family life, their love of learning within the family, their schools, their prayers, their sabbath, their Holy Days and their Bible, gave them a unity and an inner strength despite the vast distances of their dispersal.

In Jerusalem itself, the Temple had been rebuilt by a growing Jewish community. Indeed, throughout these early years of the dispersion, the Temple served as a beacon to re-ignite the faith, and was a point of regular pilgrimage. On each of the three pilgrim festivals, the Passover, Tabernacles, and the Feast of Weeks, Jews flocked to Jerusalem to celebrate. In 40 AD the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, noted: 'Countless multitudes from countless cities come to the Temple at every festival, some by land, and others by sea, from east and west

and north and south.' Twenty-six years later the Jewish historian Josephus recorded that, when the Roman Governor of Syria entered the town of Lydda, he had found it deserted, 'for the whole multitude were gone up to Jerusalem for the feast of the Tabernacles'.

From the earliest times, the desire of the Jews to maintain their traditions and culture was a difficult and even dangerous one. Not only the challenge of trade and frequent economic hardships, but renewed persecution and expulsion, continued in every generation to drive the Jews to the most distant regions of the known world. Following the eclipse of Egypt, Greece and Carthage, the Syrian armies conquered the Land of Israel, but in 168 BC were driven out by a Jewish revolt led by Judah Maccabee, and for a hundred years the Jews were again independent. But in 63 BC their land was conquered again, this time by Roman troops, and the Jewish homeland was once again ruled by strangers. Some Jews followed in the wake of the Roman armies, trading precariously but tenaciously as merchants, across the Alps to the Rhine, and across the Carpathians to the Danube. As the authority of Rome spread outwards, a few Jewish families would stop to live and trade in each of the forts, and at each of the river crossings, along the many new roads of the growing Roman Empire.

Despite the military power of Rome, Jewish independence was not easily destroyed. In 66 AD the Jews of Judaea rose in revolt, holding out in several towns and fortresses for more than four years. But, the power of Rome was formidable, and in 70 AD the Temple was destroyed. Three years later, in 73 AD the defenders of the fortress of Masada, the last stronghold to hold out, chose suicide rather than surrender.

Before their suicide, the leader of the Jews on Masada, Eleazar, told his followers, as the historian Josephus recorded: 'I cannot but esteem it as a favour that God hath granted us, that it is still in our power to die bravely, and in a state of freedom, which hath not been the case with others who were conquered unexpectedly.' Eleazar added:

As for those that were already dead in the war, it is reasonable that we should esteem them blessed, for they are dead in defending, and not in betraying their liberty.

But as to the multitude of those that are now under the Romans, who would not pity their condition? And who would not make haste to die, before he would suffer the same miseries with them?

Eleazar also told his colleagues of the fate of the Jews at Roman hands. 'Some of them have been put upon the rack', he reported, 'and tortured with fire and whippings, and so died. Some have been half-devoured by wild beasts, and yet have been preserved alive to be devoured by them a second time, in order to afford laughter and sport to our enemies....'

The Roman vengeance was indeed terrible. Tens of thousands of Jews were

killed, many villages razed to the ground, and thousands of Jews sold into slavery, some even pitted against wild animals in the arena, as 'sport' for their captors. The destruction of the Temple was to remain a traumatic memory for succeeding generations of Jews, who looked back on it with fear and trepidation.

In 115 AD it was the Jews of the Diaspora who rose in revolt, fighting against the Romans in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Cyprus, and along the north African coast. As the revolt spread, the Jews of Judaea also took part in it; but within two years it had been crushed. The Moorish commander Lucius Quietus, having suppressed the Mesopotamian rebels, was sent by the Romans to Judaea and the Galilee, where he re-imposed the Roman rule with marked severity; and, having done so, set up an idol on the Temple Mount as an act of deliberate provocation.

Even so, the powers of Jewish resistance were not entirely destroyed, and in 132 AD the Jews of Judaea, Samaria and the Galilee rose in revolt once more, under the leadership of Simeon bar Kokhba. The Roman governor was defeated, Jerusalem regained, and fierce battles fought as Roman reinforcements advanced ruthlessly from the coastal plain. For three and a half years the Jews resisted, but one by one their forts were captured, and their villages burnt to the ground. Once more, thousands of Jews were sent as slaves to all the slave markets of the Roman world. In the Galilee, Jewish olive plantations were destroyed. Elsewhere Jewish farms were confiscated, or laid waste.

The suppression of Bar Kokhba's revolt was completed by 135 AD. The persecution that followed was a time of suffering. Many learned men were murdered. All synagogues and prayer meetings were forbidden. No Jew was allowed to live in Jerusalem; indeed, Jews were only permitted to enter the city once a year, on the fast of the ninth of Av, to weep over the ruins of the Temple. The Romans even changed the name of Judaea, hoping to eliminate all Jewish memories and links: henceforth it was to be known as Syria Palaestina: thus 'Palestine' came into being.

The memory of these cruel events was to be a central theme of Jewish history and survival. Here began the tradition of martyrdom. A contemporary Jewish sage in Babylonia caught the spirit of lament when he wrote:

Why are you being led out to be decapitated?

Because I circumcised my son.

Why are you being led out to be burnt?

Because I read the Torah.

Why are you being led out to be crucified?

Because I ate unleavened bread.

By 150 AD, despite the ferocity of Roman persecution, the Jews were living scattered, but with their faith intact, in a vast region stretching from the Straits of Gibraltar to the borders of India; from the Black Sea to the Red Sea; from the river Loire to the river Indus. Those who were allowed by the Romans to remain

in the Land of Israel, although refused entry to Jerusalem, set up communities both in the coastal plain and in the Galilee; at Jabneh; on the coastal plain south of Jaffa, scholars and rabbis gathered after the fall of Jerusalem, and for nearly a century Jabneh remained a centre of rabbinical scholarship.

Numbering at least three millions, the Jews of the Roman Empire constituted more than 5 per cent of the Empire's population, and followed a wide variety of occupations. In Mesopotamia they were farmers; in Egypt, traders; in Italy, weavers, garment-makers and even actors. Everywhere they were as much at ease farming as trading. Everywhere they guarded their Hebrew alphabet and language, and their devotion to one God. Each Passover they recounted the story of their flight from Egypt, from slavery to freedom, and prayed with fervour: 'Next year in Jerusalem'. Each Day of Atonement, in meditation and fasting, they sought forgiveness for their sins. In their daily prayers they sought peace for us, and for all Israel'. The ethical code of the Bible and its history of their wanderings, the warnings of the Prophets and their belief in a messianic redemption, gave them a unity which no dispersal or persecution could destroy, and forged a link with the land of their Patriarchs which no distance could break. In Palestine itself, the archaeological evidence from biblical times shows much rebuilding of synagogues, at Bet Alfa in the Jezreel valley, at Hammat-Gader in the shadow of the Golan heights, at Jericho in the Jordan valley, and on the Mediterranean at both Ashkelon and Gaza.

During these early years of the Christian era, Jewish life flourished, particularly in Babylonia. It was at the academies of Sura and Pumbeditha that the Babylonian Talmud was compiled; its wisdom and precepts were to guide Jews all over the world in all subsequent generations, providing them with a comprehensive law by which to live their daily lives, and preserve their customs and their faith. But while the Jews of Babylonia flourished both in number and spirit, westwards, with the fall of the Roman Empire, the Jews of Byzantium faced a fanatical Christianity which demanded conversion, or expulsion, sometimes even conversion or death, and treated them as aliens, as enemies, and as a people with no rights to a fair trial or a quiet life. Only fifty-four years after the completion of the Babylonian Talmud, the Emperor Justinian brought all the power of Byzantium against the conduct of Jewish worship.

Each change in the political structure of Europe, of Asia, of Africa put the Jews at risk. Such changes were frequent, sudden, violent, and widespread, bringing death and dispersal to hundreds of Jewish communities throughout the inhabited world in each of the nineteen centuries that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire.

With the sudden and whirlwind conquest by Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries, those Jews who lived in a wide arc of lands from Spain to India found once more a new master. In places the Jews welcomed Muslim rule. Having been cruelly persecuted by the Christians, both the Jews of Caesarea, in Palestine, and

Governors. At Tustar in Persia, a Jewish carpet industry flourished. At the port of Siraf, on the Persian Gulf, a Jewish Governor ruled. In Egypt, one Jew became Minister of Taxation and Finance, while another became Inspector of the Affairs of State. Protected by such successful figures, the Jewish community could take its full part in the life of the State. Wherever their rulers allowed them to live unmolested, the Jews brought prosperity, skills and talents to the life of the State.

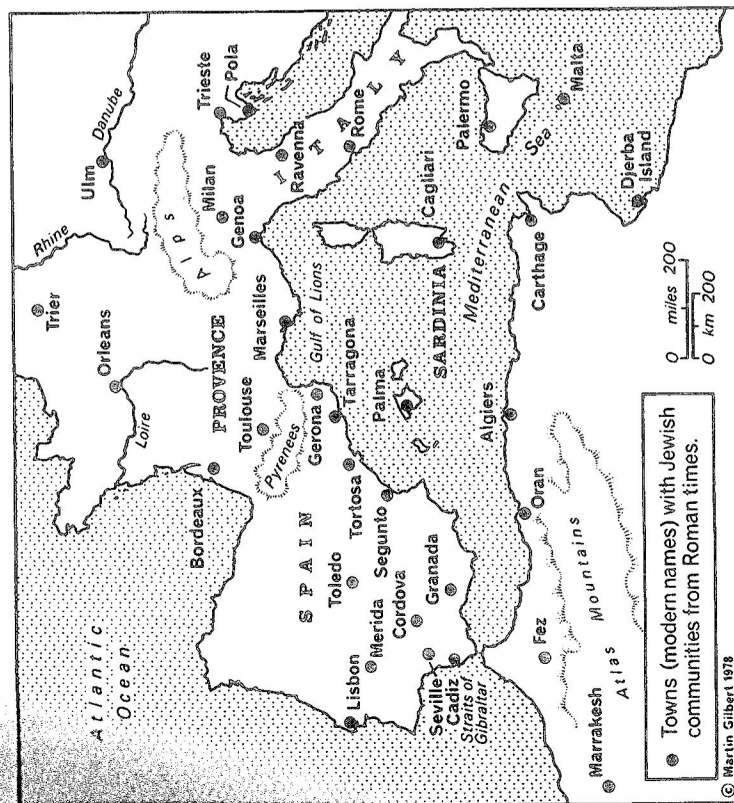
Yet even under Islam, the scale of tolerance could quickly turn, and with grim results. To the Muslim, the Jew was always a 'dhimmi', or second-class citizen, and anti-Jewish violence could have terrible results, particularly when one of the more fanatical Muslim sects was in the ascendant. One such sect, the Almohades, came to prominence in 1033, when more than six thousand Jews were massacred at Fez in Morocco. In 1066 a further five thousand Jews were killed in the city of Granada, in Muslim Spain. Even under more tolerant Muslim rule, the Jews in every town and village of the Muslim world, including Palestine, had to take second place under the Muslims. Yet in many such towns their ancestors had been living there for many centuries before Islam's conquests.

The Jews of Arab lands learnt to accept their permanent lowly status, in return for the right to lead humbler lives relatively unmolested. In Muslim-ruled Spain, Jewish culture blossomed into a 'golden age'. Philosophy, literature, poetry, trade and commerce, costume and architecture made those years memorable in Jewish history. Jewish physicians and diplomats were prominent and, with the first Christian conquests, Jews acted as mediators between the two warring communities. As Christianity spread, however, the status of the Jews of Spain worsened; for the Church was often unwilling to allow the Jew even second-class citizenship.

The Jews of Byzantium were, in the end, no less fortunate. Forced to flee by Byzantine persecution, they had come to rest in northern Europe. At first they were protected by the local rulers, and even granted privileges in certain towns, living for five hundred years after the fall of the Roman Empire in relative peace along the Rhine, the Moselle, the Danube and the Main. But in the eleventh century they met, along each of these German rivers, the fierce persecutions of the first Crusaders.

The religious bigotry of the eleventh century expressed itself in violence and slaughter. Within the course of a few years it left thousands of Jews dead, and drove thousands more eastwards. As they were driven towards the marshes and swamplands of eastern Europe, these Jews of Germany, or of 'Ashkenaz', as they themselves called it, still clung to their houses of study, to their sages, to their religious regulations, and even to their local Germanic dialect, Yiddish, by which they were to be known, recognized and even pilloried for nearly a thousand years.

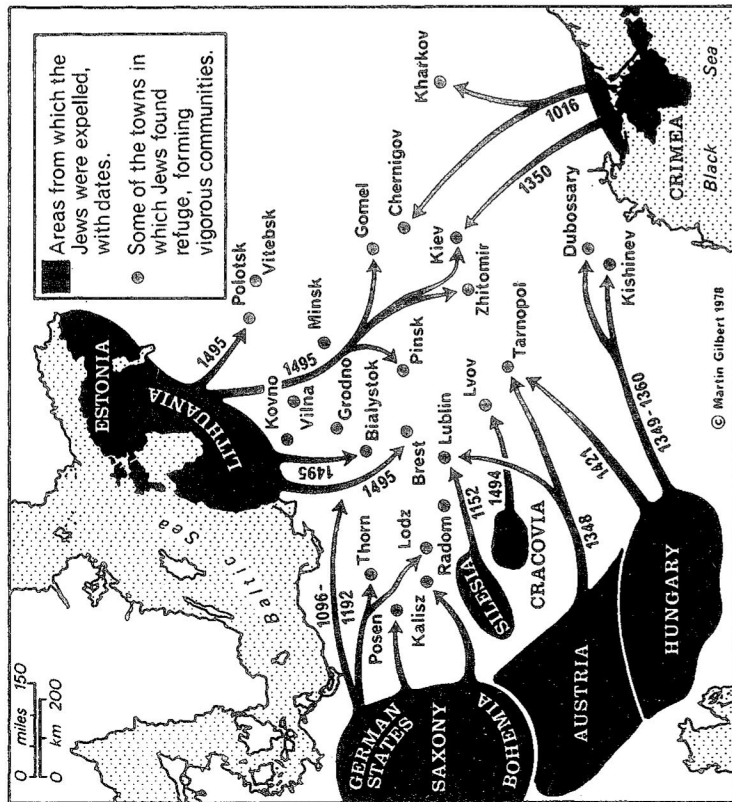
Uprooted by Crusader persecutions, the Jews of Ashkenaz travelled from



the Jews of Toledo in Spain, opened the gates of their cities to the Muslim invader.

With the Arab conquest of Palestine between 636 and 641 AD, the Jews of Palestine recovered from the hardships imposed by Byzantine rule, and were active as weavers, growers of cereal, and fishermen. Not only were there active Jewish communities in the Galilee, at Jerusalem, in the Jordan valley on both sides of the river, and in the Gulf of Elath on the Red Sea; but many Jews returned to Palestine from other lands under Muslim rule. One of the leading Jewish families in tenth century Jerusalem came from one of the extremities of the Muslim world, Fez, in Morocco: one of their number, Solomon ben Judah, was head of the rabbinical academies in both Jerusalem and Ramla, and maintained relations with the Jewish communities of Damascus, Aleppo, Tyre, and even Seville in Spain.

Within the Muslim world, at certain times, the Jews found positions of authority, and the chance of prosperity. Both Mosul and Azerbaijan had Jewish



town to town, first eastwards, some westwards again, some to the Baltic, some to the Danube, content whenever they were unmolested, glad whenever a town opened its gates to them, yet repeatedly and suddenly thrown out time and time again by the whim of a local lord, or converted to Christianity under the threat of death, or murdered by a mob incited against them. The map of Europe was criss-crossed by the expulsion of Jews from country after country: from the Crimea in the eleventh century, from Silesia in the twelfth, from England in the thirteenth, from France and Hungary in the fourteenth, from Austria, Bavaria, Saxony and Lithuania in the fifteenth.

The map of these expulsions has no pattern: it is a chaos of tragic uprootings, of bloodlettings, of torture, of homes abandoned, of hope suppressed. For the Jews of Ashkenaz no century was free from the furious zeal of those who had the desire, and the power, to drive them out. But the very intensity and frequency of medieval persecution seemed to strengthen the bonds of Jewishness and spirituality. In every town in the Rhine valley and northern France, houses of study

brought the Torah. The aspiration of learning and education became widespread. Learned rabbis and sages were highly regarded by Jews throughout northern Europe, their wisdom studied, their words pondered. One of the greatest Jewish scholars of all time, Rashi, flourished at Troyes towards the end of the eleventh century.

Throughout the Middle Ages the homeless wandering Jew was a feature of Christian Europe. One of the greatest of all Jewish philosophers, Maimonides, was born in Spain in the twelfth century, but was forced to leave his birthplace, Cordova, when it was seized by a fanatical and barbaric Muslim conqueror. He went first to live in Fez, in Morocco; then he travelled to Egypt, where he became personal physician to the Caliph. Yet the influence of Maimonides was not confined to the towns in which he lived; like Rashi before him, and like many of the Jewish sages in the centuries to come, his personal contribution to Judaism in one corner of the dispersal benefited the whole Jewish world.

The Crusader conquests in the eastern Mediterranean posed a grave threat to the Jews of that whole area. Reaching Beirut, the Crusaders showed what would be the fate of the Jews of Palestine when all thirty-five Jewish families living in the city were massacred. At Haifa, the Jews joined the Muslims in the port's defence. But the Crusaders swept all before them, and thousands of Jews were murdered in the Galilee, on the coastal plain, in Samaria, and Judaea. Many of those who were not murdered were either sold into slavery in Europe, or ransomed to the Jewish community in Egypt.

Even during the harsh years of Crusader rule, the Jews looked to the land of Israel with a special longing. The Spanish-born Jew, Judah Halevi, expressed this longing when he wrote, of Jerusalem:

Beautiful heights,
 Joy of the world,
 City of a great king,
 For you my soul yearns,
 From the lands of the west.
 My pity collects and is roused
 When I remember the past:
 Your story in exile,
 Your temple destroyed.
 I shall cherish your stones and kiss them,
 And your earth will be sweeter
 Than honey to my taste.

In 1140 Halevi himself set out from Spain for the Land of Israel. According to legend, he was approaching the walls of Jerusalem when an Arab - or, some said, a Crusader horseman - trampled him to death. As he lay dying he is said to have recited one of his own poems: 'Zion, shall I not seek thee?'

From 1099 to 1187 the Crusaders were sovereign in Jerusalem. They drove the Jews from the Jewish quarter of the city, and brought in Christian Arab tribes from east of the river Jordan to settle in the Jewish homes and alleyways which they had so brutally cleared out. But the Jewish love of the Land of Israel could not be blotted out so easily, and in 1210, when Crusader rule ended, more than 300 rabbis from Flanders and Provence travelled to Palestine to help build up again the Jewish communities which had been decimated by Crusader massacres and expulsions.

In 1267 the Spanish-born scholar and philosopher, Nahmanides, who had been born in Gerona, near the Pyrenees, was forced to flee from Spain because of his successful biblical disputation with Christian theologians. He travelled to Palestine, arriving there only seven years after a further tragedy, the Tartar invasion from central Asia, in which thousands of Jews and Christians had been murdered, and Jerusalem devastated once more. From Jerusalem, Nahmanides wrote to one of his sons who had remained in Spain, that the city 'has no master; and he that wishes may take possession of its ruins'. Nahmanides, a man of courage and vision, set to work to help restore the shattered community, explaining to his son:

We have procured, from Shechem, Scrolls of the Law, which had been carried thither from Jerusalem at the time of the Tartar invasion. Thus we shall organize a synagogue, and shall be able to pray here.

Men flock from Damascus, Aleppo, and from all parts to Jerusalem to behold the Place of the Sanctuary, and to mourn over it. May you, my son and your brothers, and the whole of our family, see the salvation of Jerusalem.

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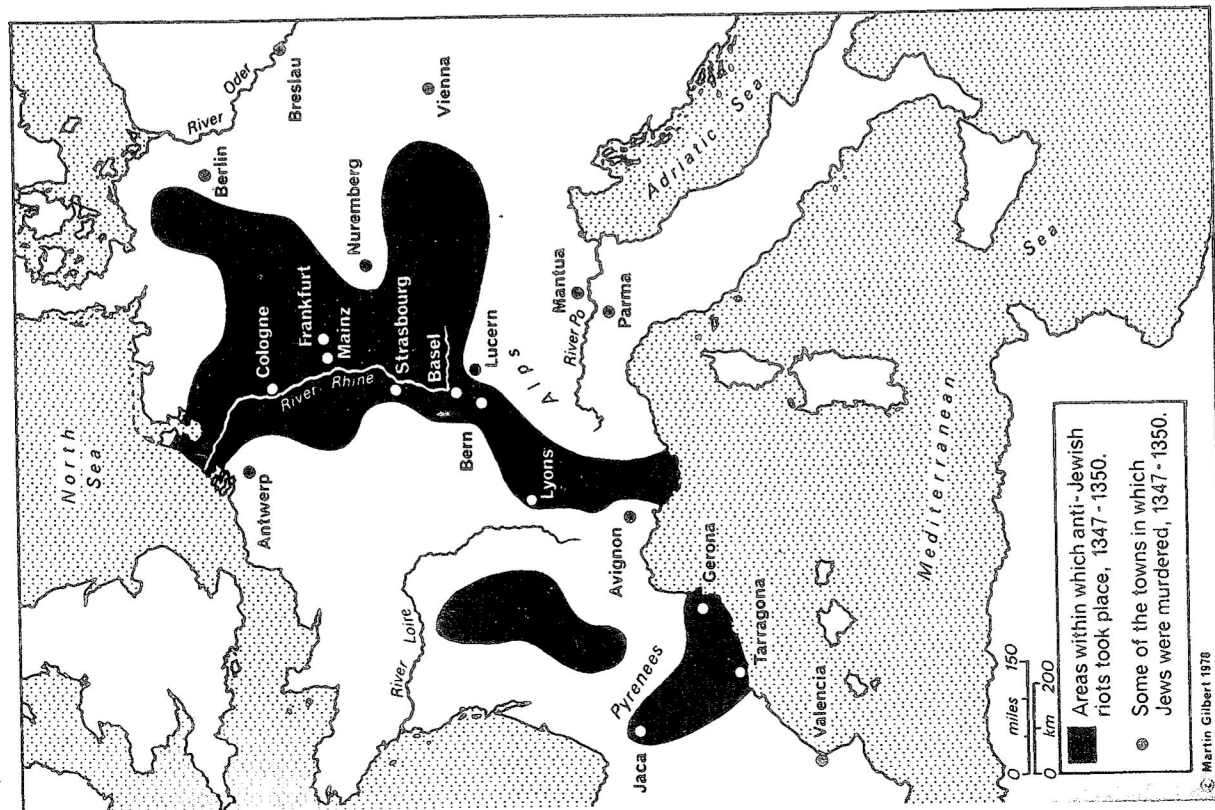
Medieval Persecutions, Flight and Hope

DURING the thirteenth century the Jews were ferociously persecuted in Morocco and Tunisia, two main centres of the once tolerant Muslim world. In the fourteenth century they were likewise persecuted throughout Christian Europe, where they were blamed, totally without cause, for the spread of the Black Death. Under torture, individual Jews were forced to confess to deliberately spreading the disease. Between December 1347 and June 1350 anti-Jewish riots took place wherever the Black Death struck. More than 300 Jewish communities were attacked, from Valencia in Spain to Breslau on the Oder; from Antwerp on the river Scheldt to Mantua on the river Po.

The Jews were not passive in the face of these repeated onslaughts, and Jewish self-defence was a noted feature in several communities: Cologne, Mainz and Frankfurt among them. In some towns the Church protected the Jews from the mob. But the slaughter was nonetheless terrible: in Strasbourg alone, in February 1349, two thousand Jews were burnt to death on a massive scaffold set up in the Jewish cemetery. A few were spared death by accepting baptism, but even some of these were murdered four months later, when the Black Death actually reached the city.

Throughout central Europe a stereotype of the Jew, even more vicious than earlier stereotypes, gained wide circulation. Following the Black Death killings, the Jew was portrayed as a spreader of disease, and as a sinister force of corruption and destruction. This crude image was to survive and flourish for six centuries, making it easy for those who wished to do so to rouse simple-minded people against the Jews in many lands.

Following the Black Death riots, even more Jews fled eastwards, joining those who had fled across the Oder at the time of the Crusader massacres three hundred years before. At first they were welcomed in these eastern lands: in 1364 Casimir the Great of Poland issued the first of a series of charters to protect the Jews within his realm. 'If the Jew enters the House of a Christian', one of these charters decreed, 'no one has a right to cause him any injury or unpleasantness.' Twenty-four years later Grand Duke Vitovt of Lithuania granted privileges to the Jews who came to live in Brest-Litovsk, one of the towns under his rule.



Further south, in Galicia, the Jews were granted full autonomy in their communal affairs.

The Jews who gathered in eastern Europe formed large and closely-knit communities. Keeping Yiddish as their daily language, they treasured their religious heritage, prized the virtues of education, of study and of charity, rejoiced with each Sabbath in their God and his works, and kept their close family life as the central guardian of their heritage.

To the west, another tragedy was looming. For the Jews of Spain and Portugal, the mild rule of Islam had been replaced by the harsh rule of Christian kings. In the face of Christian intolerance, the achievements of five generations of Jewish philosophers, scholars and statesmen of Spain now counted for nothing. In 1355 more than 12,000 Jews were massacred by the mob in Toledo. In the Spanish Cortes, the Jewish question provoked deep hostility: the Jews, the Cortes declared in 1371, were 'evil and rash men, enemies of God and of all of Christianity', who caused 'numerous evils and sow corruption with impunity'. In a vicious satire, the Royal Chancellor, Lopez de Ayala, portrayed the Jews as bloodsuckers:

Here come the Jews all alike
And present their detailed writing,
To drink the blood of the poor people
Promising jewels and gifts to the courtiers.

In 1373 anti-Jewish riots broke out in Lisbon. Five years later, in Seville Archdeacon Ferrant Martinez preached from the pulpit that any Christian who killed or harmed a Jew would be causing no displeasure to the king or queen. These sermons were repeated for thirteen years. The Jews, Martinez declared, should be expelled from the towns and villages, and their synagogues demolished. The venom of anti-semitism was successful: on 6 June 1391 the Jewish quarter of Seville was attacked by the mob. Every Jew had but a single choice, immediate conversion, or instant death. Agitators, trained by Martinez, travelled from town to town, and the mob took up the cry: 'Death or holy water for the Jews!' As the destruction of Jewish property spread northwards to Barcelona and the Pyrenees, Lopez de Ayala noted: 'The eagerness to plunder the Jews grew greater each day.'

As the anti-Jewish violence spread throughout Spain, 50,000 Jews were massacred on the island of Majorca alone, and 1391 was remembered as 'the year of persecutions and oppression'. In the new century, tens of thousands of Jews sought to save their lives by conversion to Christianity. In Tortosa, in 1412, the Jews were forced to 'defend' their religion in a public disputation, and the town's records give witness to 3,000 conversions within two years. But popular anti-Jewish feeling was not assuaged by such contrived spectacles, and further

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remain, many of them as 'secret' Jews, hiding their faith from all but their most intimate family circle.

More than 160,000 Jews were forced to leave Spain and Portugal altogether. These 'Sephardi' Jews - the Jews of Spain, or Sepharad - scattered in all directions. The havens they sought in their dispersal were to become the central points of a new Jewish renaissance in the next century. More than 25,000 reached Holland; 20,000 found a home in Morocco; 10,000 in France and 10,000 in Italy. Some 5,000 made the perilous journey to the newly-discovered land across the Atlantic Ocean, America. But the largest single group, 90,000 in all, went to the thriving cities and towns of the Ottoman Empire: to Algiers, to Alexandria, to Damascus, to Smyrna, to Salonica, to Constantinople, and to the urban and rural centres of Palestine. Many of those who went to Palestine settled in the Galilee: in 1495 they were reported in Safed trading in fruit and vegetables, cheese, oil and spices; and within a century Safed had become a centre of Jewish mysticism and rabbinical learning.

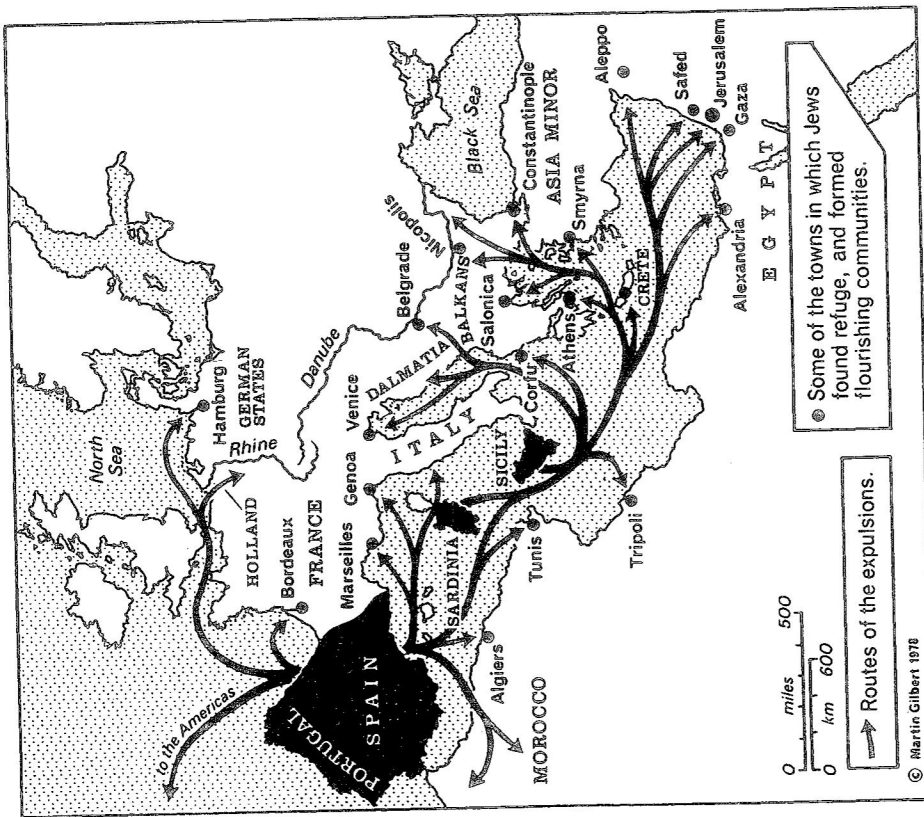
The Jews of Spain who reached Palestine found there a small but vigorous Jewish community, which had maintained itself, despite many difficulties, since the defeat of the Crusaders and the Muslim reconquest. It was under the tolerant rule of the Mamluk sultans of Egypt that the return of the Jews had gathered momentum: in 1322 a Jewish geographer from Florence, Ashory Ha-Parhi, had settled in the Jezreel valley, where he wrote a book on the topography of Palestine, while the Jews of Safed, Ramla and Gaza were even recommended by Christian travellers as ideal guides. Thus Jacques of Verona, a Christian monk who visited the Holy Land in 1335, not only noted the long-established Jewish community at the foot of Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, but wrote:

A pilgrim who wished to visit ancient forts and towns in the Holy Land would have been unable to locate these without a good guide who knew the Land well or without one of the Jews who lived there. The Jews were able to recount the history of these places since this knowledge had been handed down from their forefathers and wise men.

So when I journeyed overseas I often requested and managed to obtain an excellent guide among the Jews who lived there.

The fifteenth century had seen no diminution of the Jewish presence in Palestine. Jews continued to return, typified by Elijah of Ferrara, an Italian rabbi who became spiritual head of the Jerusalem Jewish community in 1438, and by another Italian Jew, Obadiah of Bertinoro, also a famous rabbinical scholar, who settled in Jerusalem in 1488. As for Christian observers, they continued to be impressed by the Jews of the Holy Land. In 1486 a distinguished pilgrim, the Dean of Mainz Cathedral, Bernhard von Breidenbach, noted that the Jews of both Jerusalem and Hebron 'will treat you in full fidelity - more so than anyone else in those countries of the unbelievers'. But Muslim rule had become harsh and

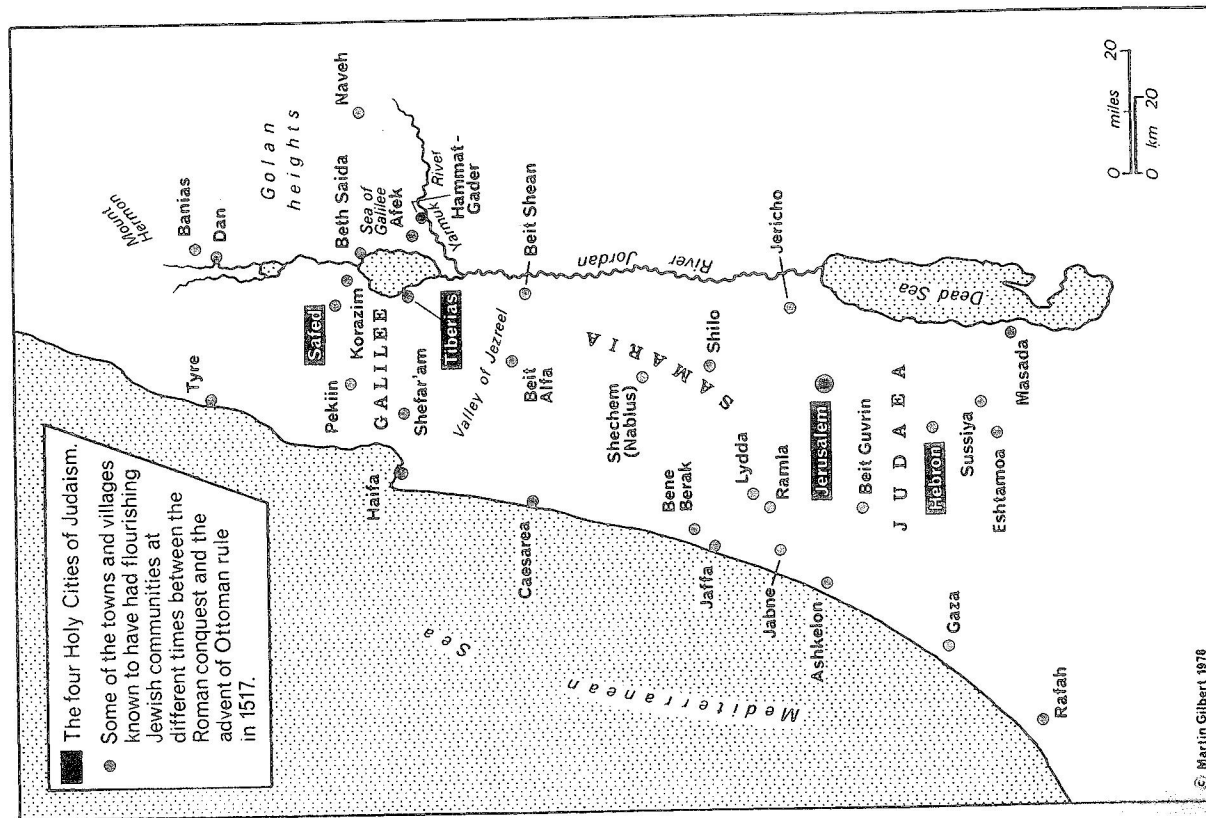
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vicious riots in Lisbon in 1449 and 1482 were an ominous hint of what was to come; the complete expulsion of the Jews from Portugal and Spain.

Yet, to the last year of Jewish life in Spain, Jewish creativity continued. In 1482 a Hebrew printing press, one of the earliest printing presses in Europe, had been set up in the Spanish city of Guadalajara, while five years later one was set up in Faro, in southern Portugal, and two years later in Lisbon, the Portuguese capital. But in 1492 the Jews were expelled *en masse* from Spain, and in 1497 from Portugal. More than 50,000 accepted Christianity, and were allowed to

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intolerant: in 1491 a pilgrim from Bohemia, Martin Kabtanik, recorded, in his book *Journey to Jerusalem*, how:

There are not many Christians but there are many Jews, and these the Moslems persecute in various ways. Christians and Jews go about in Jerusalem in clothes considered fit only for wandering beggars.

The Moslems know that the Jews think and even say that this is the Holy Land which has been promised to them and that those Jews who dwell there are regarded as holy by Jews elsewhere, because, in spite of all the troubles and sorrows inflicted on them by the Moslems, they refuse to leave the Land.

It was in the very year that Kabtanik's book was published that the Jews were expelled from Spain. Twenty-five years later the conquest of Palestine by the Ottoman Turks provided a new tolerance, and a new impetus to Jewish life. By 1530 as many as 10,000 Jews lived in the area around the Galilee town of Safed, trading in fruits and vegetables, cheeses, spices, and olive oil. Others were prominent in the weaving trade. In Jerusalem, the Jewish community built four fine synagogues, which were to see 400 years of continuous worship, until their destruction in 1948.

Christian visitors to the Holy Land noted the new Jewish prosperity during the early years of Ottoman rule. In 1574 a French doctor from Le Mans, P. Belon, visited the Galilee. In his observations on his visit he wrote:

We look around Lake Tiberias and see the villages of Beth Saida and Korazim. Today Jews are living in these villages and they have built up again all the places around the lake, started fishing industries and have once again made the earth fruitful, where once it was desolate.

In the four hundred years after their expulsion from Spain, from 1500 to 1900, the life of the Jews of western Europe and America was to be full of hope for long-term security, for acceptance of their particular customs and qualities, and for opportunities to serve the State within whose borders they had come to live. Their achievements, in whatever careers were open to them, were remarkable. Yet even with the growth of modern Europe and the New World, medieval superstitions still brought pain and suffering to the Jews. In some parts of South America the Inquisition sought out Jews with a bitter hatred, giving all 'secret' Jews whom it caught the choice between death or 'true' conversion. In Lima in 1570, in Mexico City in 1574, and in Cartagena in 1610, Jews were burnt at the stake for refusing conversion.

In Italy, a country of many small and warring States, the Jews, after nearly two thousand years of continuous existence and of wide cultural achievements, culminating in the first Hebrew printed book, produced at Reggio in 1475, sank deeper and deeper into the mire of Catholic intolerance, and were picked out decade-by-decade as the victims of an intense religious fanaticism. In 1415 Pope Benedict XIII had ordered the censorship of the Talmud, in 1427 the shipowners

of Venice and Ancona had been forbidden, by Papal Edict, to take on board any Jews wishing to go to the Land of Israel; in 1475 the Jews of Trent had been falsely accused of murdering a Christian boy in order to use his blood. Nor did the new century bring any improvement. In 1516 the Jews of Venice were forced to live in a few narrow streets of the town, known as the 'Ghetto', giving a new, and ominous word to Jewish history, and later to other oppressed minorities who lived in towns, but were not allowed to merge fully into urban life.

In 1550 the Jews of Genoa were expelled; in 1556 'secret' Jews were burnt at the stake in Ancona; in 1569 the Jews were expelled from the Papal States, and in 1597 from Milan.

For Christian Europe, the sixteenth century was one of religious ferment, with the 'theses' of Martin Luther setting the course for the Protestant reformation. In 1543 Luther published a pamphlet entitled *Of the Jews and Their Lies*. Its tone gives a clear flavour of the antisemitic literature that circulated in Christian religious circles at that time. 'Let me give you my honest advice,' Luther wrote, and he continued:

First, their synagogues or churches should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread over with dirt so that no one may ever be able to see a cinder or stone of it. And this ought to be done for the honour of God and of Christianity in order that God may see that we are Christians, and that we have not wittingly tolerated or approved of such public lying, cursing and blaspheming of His Son and His Christians. . . .

Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed. For they perpetrate the same things there that they do in their synagogues. For this reason they ought to be put under one roof or in a stable, like gypsies, in order that they may realize that they are not masters in our land, as they boast, but miserable captives, as they complain of us incessantly before God with bitter wailing.

Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayerbooks and Talmuds in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught.

Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach any more. . . .

Fifthly, passport and travelling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to the Jews. For they have no business in the rural districts since they are not nobles, nor officials, nor merchants, nor the like. Let them stay at home.

Sixthly, they ought to be stopped from usury. All their cash and valuables of silver and gold ought to be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping. For this reason, as said before, everything that they possess they stole and robbed from us through their usury, for they have no other means of support. . . .

Seventhly, let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the ax, the hoe, the spade, the distaff, and spindle, and let them earn their bread by the sweat of their noses as is enjoined upon Adam's children. For it is not proper that they should want us cursed *Goyyim* to work in the sweat of our brow and that they, pious crew, idle away their days at the fireside in laziness, feasting and display. And in addition to this, they boast impiously that they have become masters of the

Christians at our expense. We ought to drive the rascally lazy bones out of our system.

If, however, we are afraid that they might harm us personally, or our wives, children, servants, cattle, etc., when they serve us or work for us - since it is surely to be presumed that such noble lords of the world and poisonous bitter worms are not accustomed to any work and would very unwillingly humble themselves to such a degree among the cursed *Goyyim* - then let us apply the same cleverness [expulsion] as the other nations, such as France, Spain, Bohemia, etc., and settle with them for that which they have extorted usuriously from us, and after having divided it up fairly let us drive them out of the country for all time.

Luther's pamphlet ended with an appeal to all princes and nobles with Jews in their domains to act 'so that you and we may all be free of this insufferable devilish burden - the Jews'.

Less than twenty years after Luther's anti-Jewish diatribe, a Turkish Sultan, Suleiman I, made it possible for a large number of Jews to return to the Holy Land, under the benevolent Muslim rule of the Ottomans. In 1561 Suleiman gave Tiberias, one of the four Jewish holy cities, to a former 'secret' Jew from Portugal, Don Joseph Nasi, who rebuilt the city and the villages around it. Jews from Italy, and from elsewhere in the Mediterranean area, came to settle there, attracted by the wool and silk industries which Nasi promoted. When, a hundred years later, the city fell into ruins, many Jews remained in the nearby villages of the Galilee, farming, fishing and trading. Elsewhere in the Holy Land in the sixteenth century, the tolerance of Turkish rule enabled several Jewish communities to maintain their cultural and spiritual unity: in Jerusalem, in Hebron, and in Gaza, Jewish life was also upheld with vigour. In Safed, in 1563, a Jewish printing press was established: the first outside Europe. In Hebron, the revival of Jewish life was particularly marked: in 1518, three years after the start of Ottoman rule, the prosperous Jewish community there had been plundered, many Jews killed, and the survivors forced to flee. But in 1540 the community was restored, the Jewish quarter rebuilt, Spanish Jews made welcome, and a tradition of religious discussion, laws and philosophy evolved under several famous teachers, among them Elijah de Vides, who had come from the Galilee, and whose major work, on the Jewish moral code, was printed in Venice in 1579.

Ottoman rule gave the Jews a chance of a relatively unmoled existence throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Throughout the seventeenth century also, one Christian power enabled the Jews to flourish, trade and live at peace with their neighbours; this was Holland. As the Dutch established their colonies in North and South America, in the Caribbean, in Africa and in the East Indies, numerous strong Jewish communities were established in these regions, and flourished. Protected by the flag and power of Holland, enterprising Jewish traders from Amsterdam brought prosperity both to their own communities and to Holland. By 1640 their trade and commerce spread to every corner of the

EXILE AND RETURN

globe; west to America, southward to the west coast of Africa and to Cape Town, eastwards to the Persian Gulf, to Mauritius, to India and Ceylon, to the Dutch East Indies, and even to remote Formosa, off the coast of China.

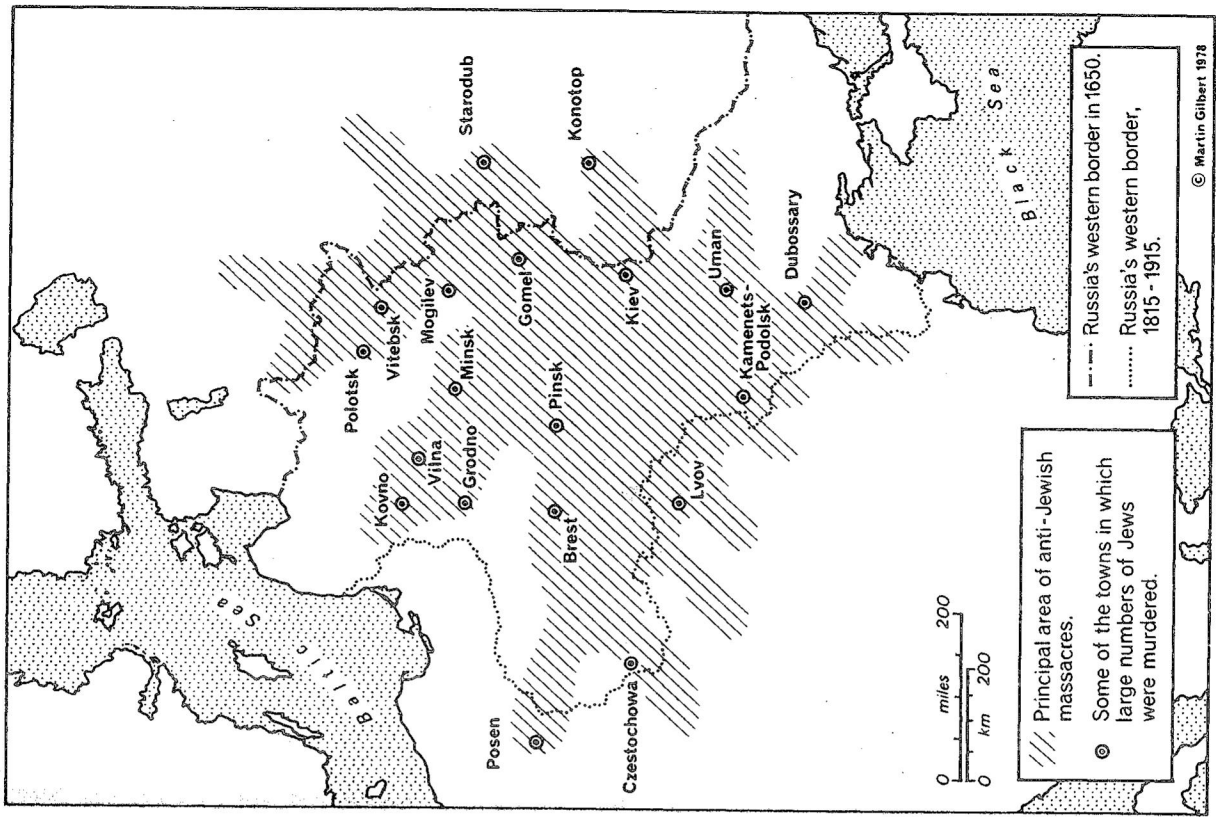
But, as happened so often in the history of the Jewish dispersal, no golden age in one part of the world seemed possible without a black age elsewhere. In 1648, while the Jews of Holland were at their most successful and most peaceful, the Jews of Poland, Lithuania, White Russia and the Ukraine - those who had found safety there more than three hundred years before from the Christian persecutions of Germany and Central Europe - were assailed by a violence and a hatred without parallel since Roman times. In two years, more than 100,000 Jews were murdered. Many thousands were tortured. Some chose conversion to Christianity in order to save their lives. Some were seized by the Tartars and sold into slavery thousands of miles away, across the deserts of central Asia. Many were murdered while fleeing. Tens of thousands of Jewish homes were set aflame, and more than three hundred communities were completely destroyed.

Several thousand Jews, who were forced to flee from their homes, found safety by distant flight, to Holland, to the Balkans, and even back to the Germany from which their forebears had fled only a few centuries before. Strasbourg, the scene of the horrific mass murder of 1349, now, three centuries later, accepted the refugees, and gave them the chance to become active, prosperous citizens. Thousands of other victims of the Ukrainian violence sought to rebuild their lives in the same region, along the same rivers. But in the next fifty years, the wave of anti-Jewish hatred spread eastwards, to the lands newly conquered by Moscow, where Jews fell under the rule of yet another overlord intolerant of their presence.

The Jews of eastern Europe slowly rebuilt their shattered homes. They were filled, also, with a deep spiritual longing. At first it took the form of a search for some quick source of help and light, a self-proclaimed messiah, Shabtrai Zevi. The flame of this messianic movement spread as quickly as the flame of disaster had done. Not only in eastern Europe, but in the Balkans, in Italy, in France, in Morocco, in Holland, in the Ottoman Empire, in Egypt, and in the Land of Israel itself, the new messianic claim seized hold of the imagination, both of Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews whose future seemed insecure. Even in England, where the Jews had only recently returned nearly four hundred years after their expulsion, wagers were held as to when the new 'Messiah' would be crowned King of the Jews in Jerusalem, and thousands of Jews throughout Europe were seized by the hope that Zevi would lead them back to the Holy Land, and to a Jewish kingdom.

Tricked by the Turkish Sultan, Zevi accepted conversion to Islam, and the flame of his movement quickly passed. But it left behind it many sparks of longings, and it was not long before that longing received a further and horrific impetus. In 1734 the first of a new series of vicious outbreaks of Jew-hatred took place in the same regions which had been tormented by the Cossacks a century

MEDIEVAL PERSECUTIONS, FLIGHT AND HOPE



before. These were the Haidamak persecutions, in which Christian monks glorified the murder of Jews, and spoke of the confiscation of Jewish property as an act of piety. Propaganda by Russian Orthodox priests intensified the popular hatred of the Jew.

In 1734, 1750, and again in 1768, the massacre of Jews spread once more through the Ukraine. In 1768, in the town of Uman, the Jews defended themselves tenaciously, but most of them, including their women and children, were brutally murdered in the synagogue. Some, agreeing to pay a ransom, were brutally murdered after they had paid it. This slaughter of innocents, the destruction of synagogues, the burning of homes, not only failed to shake, but strengthened, the deep Jewish sense of community and spirituality. For in the wake of the Haidamak massacres, eastern European Jewry was swept by a deep, lasting, and spiritually uplifting revolution, Hassidism. Once more, Jewish creativity had found a remarkable focus.

Hassidism was a religious movement that appealed to the Jewish masses. It embodied a belief in the need to rejoice in religion, and to do so with song and dance, with zeal and study. Devoted to their charismatic leaders, the Hassids were a closely knit group whose enthusiasm spread rapidly, not only across the map of eastern Europe, but even westwards across the Carpathians. Henceforth, the Hassidic leaders, and the dynasties which they founded, sought through prayer and study a direct and intimate link between man and God. Above all, the Hassids believed that joy — *simhah* — was the prime factor in Jewish life, and the key element in divine worship.

Love of the Land of Israel played a major part in the Hassidic philosophy, so much so that in 1777 a group of several hundred Hassids, old and young, set off from Russia for Palestine, then under Turkish rule. Two years earlier, the Turks had imposed a heavy 'head-tax' on all Jews, while in 1720 the Ashkenazi synagogue in Jerusalem had been seized by local Arabs, and the scrolls of the law destroyed. But the Hassids were undeterred, and, together with many non-Hassidic Jews, they made the hazardous journey, led by one of their best-known learned men, the forty-three-year-old Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk. The Hassids settled in the Galilee, joining the thriving Jewish community of those whose ancestors had come from Spain and Portugal more than 250 years before. From the first mystic teachings of their leader, the Ba'al Shem Tov, to their mid-twentieth-century communities in Israel, Britain and the United States, the Hassids were an inspiring example of how religious faith can flourish despite some of the most prolonged, and in the end some of the most evil, persecutions devised by man.

As the Russian Empire spread westwards, in 1771, 1791 and 1815, not only the Hassids, but more than five million Jews, came under the rule of Tsarist intolerance and exclusion.

Parallel with the mounting misfortunes of the Jews of Russia, and almost un-

noticed by Europe, the strength and confidence of the Jews of the United States had grown with every decade, for they were able to share the challenges of a society which accepted them both as Jews, as patriots, and as equal citizens. As early as 1654, Jews had settled in the then Dutch port of New Amsterdam, later New York, and within fifty years there was a steady flourishing of Jewish life; the first synagogues were founded in New York in 1730 and in Philadelphia twelve years later, while in 1761 an American Jew, Joseph Ortolenghi, was elected a member of the Georgia State Assembly.

The opening year of the nineteenth century found the Jews of the United States moving steadily westwards, as far as Ohio by 1817; while in every walk of life Jews participated on an equal footing with non-Jews. In 1816 a Jew, Salamon, from Philadelphia, was appointed cashier of the Bank of the United States at Lexington, while overseas, another Jew, Mordecai M. Noah, served as United States Consul in Tunis from 1813 to 1816.

For the Jews of western Europe, the nineteenth century also opened hopefully. Under the influence of the French revolution and of Napoleon, the Jews of Frankfurt, Mainz, Venice and Rome found the restrictions on their dwelling places lifted, and the gates of the Ghetto torn down. In 1807 the Jews of Westphalia were granted full emancipation by Napoleon's brother Jerome, while four years later the Jews of Hamburg, Mecklenburg, Lubeck and Bremen were all granted full civil rights.

Even towards the Land of Israel Napoleon seemed to offer, albeit briefly, a new hope for a Jewish return when, in 1799, he advanced from Egypt towards Constantinople. In May 1799, when his armies, having captured Haifa, were being besieged at Acre by the Turks and the British, the official French newspaper reported from Paris that one of Napoleon's aims was 'to give back to the Jews their Jerusalem'. The newspaper also noted that: 'Bonaparte has caused a proclamation to be issued, in which he invites all the Jews of Asia and Africa to come and range themselves under his flags, in order to re-establish Jerusalem as of old.'