

COMMUNAL ORGANIZATION OF THE JEWS OF TRIPOLITANIA DURING THE LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD

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The Jews of Tripoli, Libya, trace the formation of their community in modern times to Rabbi Shimon Lavi in the sixteenth century. Systematic information on communal organization is available from the late eighteenth century onward. This essay outlines the traditional communal structure, and analyzes changes within the community resulting from the Ottoman reforms over the course of the nineteenth century. Communal organization reflected local traditions as well as influences from Jerba to the west and the Land of Israel to the east. Within the framework of time-honored norms and external changes, individuals and groups sought to shape communal life in accordance with their interests.

The Spanish captured Tripoli in 1510 and ruled the city for about twenty years. They brought with them the Inquisition, which led to the city being emptied of Jews for a generation or more, though one source cites 40 Jews remaining. The Spaniards handed the city over to the Knights of Malta and in 1551 it was taken by corsairs flying under the Ottoman flag. The beginning of the Ottoman period, which was to last until the region fell to the Italians in 1911, was marked by the return of the Jews. The nature of Ottoman reign, however, varied throughout the pe-

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riod. From 1711 to 1835 the country was ruled by the Qaramanli dynasty which, while retaining nominal allegiance to the Porte, acted independently, making wars and concluding peace at its own initiative. In 1835, Tripoli was recaptured by the Ottomans and placed under direct rule. From the middle of the nineteenth century the reforms within the empire (*Tanzimat*) began to reshape the administration of the province. These reforms also had far-reaching effects on the Jewish community (Ha-Cohen 1978; Kahalon 1972; Simon 1979; Goldberg 1990). The present paper will describe organizational aspects of the Jewish community of Tripoli during the late Qaramanli period and consider some of the changes in communal life that emerged in response to the Ottoman reforms.

The Tripoli community attributed the founding of its local religious institutions, in modern times, to Rabbi Shimon Lavi. Lavi's origin was among the Spanish Jews exiled to North Africa, and he lived in Fez for a number of years. He is an important figure in the kabbalistic tradition, having authored a major commentary on the Book of the Zohar (Encyclopedia Judaica 10:1318-19; Huss 1990:51-84).¹ In the mid-sixteenth century, Lavi left Morocco, heading toward Palestine, where an active community of Spanish exiles had grown up. He passed through Tripoli close to the time that the city, following the rule of the Spanish and the Knights of Malta from 1510-59, had been taken by the Turks. Finding a Jewish community which, through lack of contact with other Jewish centers, was both ignorant and lax in observance, he decided to remain there and help rehabilitate Jewish life (Goldberg 1983:97). This brief account concerning Rabbi Lavi, reflecting the few facts known, served as a charter myth defining and legitimating the religious life of Tripoli's Jews. The story points to the influence of the other Jewish communities of the Maghreb on Tripoli, and it is noteworthy that a parallel tradition concerning Lavi exists among the Jews of Jerba (Udovitch and Valensi 1984:16). The story also indicates the centrality of kabbala as an expression of piety and underlines the orientation toward ultimate redemption in the Land of Israel shared with all Jews. In addition, as will be shown, orientations both West to Jerba and East to Eretz Israel, were sources of influence in the communal life of Tripoli's Jews.

Very little information on the Jewish community is available from the time of Rabbi Lavi until the late eighteenth century. There are echoes of a reaction to Sabbatean propaganda in the seventeenth century, from which Hirschberg (1981:163ff.) infers that the Jewish community was significant enough in size and organization to respond to the issue. Hazan's study (1989) of the poet Musa Bujnah has shown that one must assume the existence of an active Jewish community at the time. In the mid-eighteenth century, Rabbi Mas'ud Hai Raqah of Izmir, the author of a commentary to Maimonides' *Yad Hazakah*, took up residence in the city, becoming its rabbinic leader as well as the founder of a line of rabbis. It is only from the latter part of that century that there is some continuity of documents providing a consistent picture and glimpse into the organization of the Jewish community (Slouschz 1908; Hirschberg 1981; Goldberg 1987).

From the point of view of the Qaramanli rulers, the Jewish community was headed by an official called the *qaid*. This position enabled the government to place its tax-collecting burden on the shoulders of one man. Much of Jewish communal life revolved around raising funds, both for the external demands of the government and for internal needs (e.g., charity to the poor, the payment of teachers, and ritual functionaries).

The ad hoc nature of meeting these needs was striking. As has been discussed for Morocco (Bar-Asher 1981; Deshen 1989), the contingencies of collective life were met by an intricate meshing of individual leadership and communal initiatives, in which tradition and rabbinic authority were one set of factors, but wealth and closeness to the authorities were also of central importance. The *qaid*, for the time of his appointment, was probably the most preeminent of a set of individuals within the Jewish community who had access to the court. His duties probably were carried out in an irregular manner. Tully (1957:135), for example, mentions that the *qaid* of the Jews left the town in order to avoid the plague (see below). Occupancy of the position seems to have changed with relative frequency, for it could mean a financial drain on its holder and even bring mortal danger, as well as hold the promise of great benefit.

Most of the available documents (about a dozen) from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries relate to matters of taxation. Some of the taxes served to pay levies imposed by

the Muslim authorities, and others were for the purpose of internal communal affairs. In the latter category was a tax of 3 per mil called *khaba* placed upon merchandise imported from abroad or outside the region. Exempt from the tax were several towns to the west of Tripoli which were considered to be part of the province. The first version of this *haskamah* dates from the mid-eighteenth century. It was reconfirmed eighteen years later, and again in 1844 (Goldberg 1987:172).

While the above tax clearly was aimed at the active merchants, others affected the Jewish community more widely. One way of raising funds for internal needs was for communal leaders to "farm out" the right to tax an economic activity central to the Jewish community. This was done both with regard to slaughtering for the purpose of meat and to the production of alcoholic drinks (probably arak). Jews could openly engage in this activity in contradistinction to the Muslims. After the Ottoman takeover, the government created a monopoly over the manufacture of arak, and farmed out the right to produce it to a member of the Jewish community (Goldberg 1987:174-75).

With regard to the set tax paid to the Muslim authorities, the community would appoint three committees, each consisting of people from a variety of occupations. Every committee would assess the amount to be paid by each family in town, and these assessments would be passed on to the communal leaders. In case of differences between the various assessments, the average of the three assessments would be taken. One source indicates that the following categories of people were exempt from the tax: 1) members of the burial society; 2) *talmidei hakhamim*; 3) beggars; and 4) guests (Goldberg 1987:172-73).

The first category may refer to all those who were involved in caring for the dead, including those who sat at the side of a seriously ill person, those who washed the body, and those who were ready, on demand, to bury a corpse. Being available at a moment's notice to engage in these activities meant ignoring one's livelihood. It also should be noted that from 1784-86 Tripoli suffered a severe plague which, according to one report, devastated half the Jewish population. At that time, the government placed an additional tax on Jews for every burial. The same report claims that many Jews sought to avoid this tax by burying the dead inside their homes. This also may explain the large

number of people listed as exempt from taxes because of their activities in the burial society (Goldberg 1987:174).

Several documents indicate a process of negotiation between individuals and the community leadership over the assessment placed on them.² The existence of *haskamot* and unwritten traditions does not imply that individuals always accepted these decrees unquestionably. In fact, the periodic reaffirmation of some of the *haskamot* suggests the opposite: that people often sought ways to manipulate the "rules" to their benefit. This accords with the "negotiated" aspect of the social structure emphasized by students of both the Jewish (Deshen 1989) and non-Jewish segments of Maghreb society (Rosen 1984).

While some communal rules concerned straightforward fiscal matters, others carried with them the weight of tradition tied to central social and religious values. Among these were *takkanot* in the realm of inheritance law. One *takkanah* stipulated that when a woman died childless, her husband would not inherit from her but her property would return to her father's house. This ordinance was first agreed upon in 1712, reconfirmed in 1783, and was still in force in the mid-nineteenth century (Goldberg 1987:176-77).

The degree of control exercised by the Jewish community over its members was partially rooted in the fact that Muslim rule accorded power to the Jewish community in many internal matters. The strength of these arrangements is emphasized by the fact that there were aspects of rabbinic law that had an impact on the affairs of Muslims. The clearest example is found in the laws concerning the leasing of property within the Jewish quarters.

While only Jews lived in these quarters, the land on which the houses stood often was owned by Muslims. The principle of *hazakah* gave individual Jews the right to lease property permanently from non-Jews. Other Jews were not allowed to rent that property without paying the holder of the *hazakah*, even if they could outbid the amount of rent being paid the Muslim owner. As indicated below, actual practice in the realm of *hazakah* on houses changed drastically in the nineteenth century, reflecting the new political and administrative changes under the Ottomans.

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In 1835 the Ottoman Empire established direct rule over Libya, and throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth took steps to introduce reforms there, parallel to modernizing efforts elsewhere in the empire (Anderson 1986). This involved, among other things, a change in the civil status of the Jews so that they became, in principle, subjects of the empire equal to all other subjects. These changes had an impact on communal organization in a number of spheres. They emerged over a long period of time, within which several steps are notable.

In the city of Tripoli, changes in the administration of justice were evident a decade after the Ottoman takeover. The *wali* (governor) Mehmed Emin Pasha (1842-47), appointed Rabbi Ya'akov Mimun head of the Jewish community and also assigned him a seat in the local court. This was a clear shift from the previous situation in which Jewish communal life was formally separate from that of the Muslims. At first,³ Mimun's chair in the court was placed to the side of the other magistrates. In 1846, as a result of his contribution to the court, a request was sent to Istanbul to enable Mimun to participate in judicial deliberations on an equal footing with the other justices. An affirmative reply was received in 1847, by which time Mimun had died. Nevertheless, the precedent of Jewish participation in a system of justice pertaining to all the citizens of the town was established.

Under the rule of Mahmud Nedim Pasha (1860-67), the court was reorganized in accordance with the Ottoman Provincial Reform Law, and separate courts — criminal, penal, and commercial — were established. Jewish magistrates were appointed to each, receiving salaries from the government. The pasha no longer sat in the court, as had been the practice during the Qaramanli period, or even during the time of Rabbi Mimun. The separation of executive from judicial power represented a further step in the demarcation of a domain of civil law, common to all citizens of the empire, distinct from the realm of family and personal status law. With regard to the latter, each religious community (*millet*) was governed by its own laws and ordained officials. These new arrangements both limited the sphere in which rabbinic rulings could be made with government backing, and formalized the position of religious authority in the new

regime. The new situation had a complex series of effects on the rabbinic courts and their authority.

In general, the rabbinic court was weakened. In the realms of commercial law and internal taxation, it retained jurisdiction only insofar as Jews voluntarily continued to submit to its rule. For example, in early nineteenth century Tripoli, the holder of a *hazakah* right (above) received about twice as much as he paid the Muslim owner. At the same time, communal ordinances (based on rabbinic precedents) could prevent *hazakah* holders from abusing their privileges (Ha-Cohen 1978:222). When the population of the Jewish quarter grew and prices for housing rose, community leaders prevented the amounts paid to the *hazakah* holders from becoming too high. By the third quarter of the century the payment to holders of *hazakah* rights had become a matter of voluntarily accepted custom, which some had begun to ignore (Ha-Cohen 1978:222, n. 58).

A similar process is evident with regard to internal taxation. The tax on the imports of Jewish merchants (above) was reconfirmed in the mid-nineteenth century but the amount accruing to the community from this tax waned. An attempt to revive communal discipline in the matter in 1912, after the Italian takeover, yielded no results (Ha-Cohen 1978:240-41, n. 59).

There were attempts to reform outdated features of the rabbinic court. Traditionally, there had been a division of intellectual labor in the study of rabbinic sources. The learned of the community were split into the scholars of the Talmud, the theoretical source of rabbinic law; and the judges responsible for practical decisions in the court.⁴ The former would refrain from studying the literature of the *poskim*, codes which contained concrete judgments (Ha-Cohen 1978:257). Within the court there existed the institution of *mursheh* or "licensee," who in principle could help argue the case of a litigant on the basis of the codes. In fact, however, these licensees never opposed the judges.

In the 1880s, one litigant challenged this system by bringing to court a scholar, acting as a licensee, capable of challenging the judges. This trend continued, becoming an embarrassment to the court. Mordecai Ha-Cohen (see n. 3) suggested that new arrangements should be put into effect whereby both plaintiff and defendant would be provided with a learned licensee to

argue on their behalf, but the practice was not initiated in his day.

Commenting on the overall developments, Ha-Cohen chided the judges of his generation. He criticized their delaying tactics and unwillingness to reach clear and quick decisions, even in cases of personal status which were still explicitly in their jurisdiction. He saw the situation as reflecting the moral fiber of the judges in his day. These men, however, undoubtedly were reacting to the ongoing erosion of their position. They were therefore reluctant to make unequivocal pronouncements, a tactic which further undermined their status and prestige.

An ancient practice, enforced in Tripoli throughout the nineteenth century, provided that payment be made to the judges by the winning litigant. This practice, in fact, had been explicitly prohibited in the *Shulhan Arukh*. In the late nineteenth century, pressure grew to change the local practice so that rabbinic judges would receive a salary from community funds. Actual reform in the matter took place only after the Italian conquest (Ha-Cohen 1978:255ff.; De Felice 1985:37; Khalfon 1986:166-68).

At the same time that the government circumscribed the spheres in which rabbinic decisions were binding, its appointment of religious officials also was part of an attempt to maintain power over its Jewish subjects. From that point of view, it at first reinforced rabbinic authority when it appeared to be in the interest of the rulers of Libya to support traditionalist claims within the Jewish community in the face of European cultural currents and political influence. During the days of Rabbi Ya'akov Mimun, we find the pasha upholding a rabbinic ruling applied to a foreign Jew who was "freer" in his behavior than generally accepted by local social and religious norms.

Later under the Ottoman reforms, tactics took a different turn for governors who attempted to promote social change and enlist rabbinic support for their program. After having instituted the post of *hakham bashi* (chief rabbi) of the empire (Lewis 1984:174-75), the Ottomans appointed, in 1874, a *hakham bashi* of Tripoli, Rabbi Eliahu Bechor Hazzan (Hirschberg 1981:176, 181ff.). Rabbi Hazzan was familiar with Jewish communities and general cultural currents in the Mediterranean world. His modernizing orientation was evident in the realm of education when

he sought to introduce the teaching of Italian as part of the standard education of young Jewish boys in the town.

This educational effort was very likely linked to an administrative reform instituted by Hazzan. He decreed that the right to tax the slaughtering of kosher meat be farmed out on a yearly basis (Ha-Cohen 1978:242). He may have hoped that the income derived therefrom would be used to finance the new school he was planning. This was a major source of income for the support of the Alliance Israélite Universelle school soon to be established in Tunis, where Hazzan had spent some time before his appointment to Tripoli. There were many who were in favor of Hazzan's educational effort, but there also was an opposing conservative element in the community, which claimed that European languages opened the door to the rejection of religion. The school he planned never materialized (see below).

The split between the conservative reaction of local religious figures, and the official rabbinic position promoted by the Turkish authorities, highlights another characteristic of religious leadership in Tripoli from the Ottoman period onward. While during the Qaramanli regime rabbinic leaders were usually local scholars, who were intertwined by family ties with the influential notables, under the Ottomans the trend became clear to appoint rabbinic officials who were somewhat "outside" and probably "above" the local religious milieu. This was the case with regard to Hazzan and the chief rabbis appointed after him (Hirschberg 1981:183; Simon 1979), but even a figure like Avraham Hai Adadi, who served as *av beit din* (head of the rabbinic court) in Tripoli in the 1850s, may be considered somewhat of an outsider. Even though Adadi was a native of Tripoli, much of his life, and the better part of his rabbinic training, took place elsewhere (Adadi 1976:5-10; Kahalon 1969). These appointees, therefore, only represented one level of religious guidance, and there were other, more localized, bases of religious legitimacy.

The Jews of Libya saw themselves as part of the larger Jewish world but also had a keen sense of the legitimacy of their own practices and customary forms. They shared a general cultural background with other Maghreb communities, but there were some features which gave Libyan Jewry a distinctive character. The community attributed the founding of its local institutions to Rabbi Shimon Lavi, even though there was little precise

information available concerning his activities. On the eve of *Yom Kippur*, it was customary for the Jews of Tripoli to recite a memorial prayer listing the names of many of the judges who had been appointed to the *beit din* from the days of Rabbi Lavi to that day.⁵

The influence of religion in Jewish life was not solely a matter of the rabbinic courts. In addition to the authority vested in official levels of leadership represented by rabbis, there also existed a more local tradition. It consisted of a set of practices viewed as binding and hallowed by years of observance, despite the fact that they may not have been firmly anchored in rabbinic literature. These two "levels of tradition," as diagnosed by an outside observer, were not conceptually distinct in the eyes of the Jews of Tripoli; they certainly would have resisted any notion that their own praxis diverged from the main norms of Jewish tradition. Rather, the distinction applies to a tendency to keep to familiar ways which had been handed down from one generation to another in communal contexts. This implied that it was not necessary to toe the line with exactitude concerning rules found in rabbinic texts, as these might be pointed to from time to time, even by a scholar of recognized learning and prestige.

From this point of view, calling the local court "rabbinic" may be misleading. Even though judgments were in principle based on legal rules which evolved in the decisions and writings of rabbis over the generations, those sitting in the courts were experienced and respected members of the community who were often more versed in local precedent and tradition than in the scholarly tomes of Jewish law codes. Ha-Cohen complained that when the courts handed down decisions, they did not cite the sources upon which their judgment was based. On at least one occasion Rabbi Hazzan was vexed by judgments of the court which flew in the face of accepted rules (Ha-Cohen 1978:257), and Adadi, before him, also found himself differing with local practice at times (Kahalon 1969:19). Ha-Cohen described a case concerning himself in which he, as a licensee, demonstrated that a decision the judges had taken was at odds with an authoritative written opinion. He was then roundly berated for attempting to intervene in the local judicial process. The judges seemed to act both in terms of their knowledge of binding rules, and a

sense of the need for compromise. While the members of the court would not make an explicit claim to supersede the authority of the texts, they were convinced that their own practice was equally based on learned opinion (Ha-Cohen 1978:255-56, 258ff.).

Moreover, the local rabbis' strength, as representatives of a textually-based religious perspective, was attenuated by the fact that, traditionally, they did not have a base autonomous from that of the wealthy notables with ties to the Muslim government (Ha-Cohen 1978:148, 266). The attitudes and conduct of this latter class of individuals in various realms, including religion, had an influence on the wider community which rivaled that of formal rabbinic decision.

Yet another aspect of the local nature of religious judicial practices was that in some matters there was an overlap between rabbinic law and Muslim jural tradition. The account concerning Rabbi Ya'akov Mimun (above) indicates that the legal thinking for a decision that Rabbi Mimun took from rabbinic codes was accepted by the court headed by the pasha during the early phase of Ottoman rule. Mordechai Ha-Cohen himself was familiar with Muslim law and served as a licensee to individuals who had to appear in the Muslim courts as well as in the Jewish legal forum. It is likely that the well-to-do community elite was familiar with aspects of Muslim law, as commercial activities with Muslims, over the years, including involvement in cases brought to Muslim courts, would have resulted in a common fund of legal-economic understandings. This points to the existence of a kind of "customary law," not radically different from the norms found in rabbinic (or Muslim) legal tradition, but nevertheless carrying some weight as a significant tradition in its own right (Ha-Cohen 1978:149ff., 260, 269).

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This sense of local tradition did not make the Jews of Tripoli impervious to external influences. Above, it was suggested that they saw themselves linked to the Jewish world both to the West and to the East. The closest cultural cousins of the Jews of Tripolitania were the communities of Jerba and Southern Tunisia, and there were many contacts between the two groups. In

1832, before the Ottoman takeover, many Tripolitan Jews fled the city during the civil war that was raging among competing members of the Qaramanli family, and sought refuge in Jerba. As a result of this contact, new forms of communal taxation and organization were instituted upon their return to Tripoli, including some of the practices already cited (Ha-Cohen 1978:148-49).

Jerba emerged as an active center of rabbinic learning, and in the late nineteenth century a number of rabbis trained there took posts as teachers and religious leaders in the small Jewish communities of the Libyan hinterland (Ha-Cohen 1978:148-49; Udovitch and Valensi 1984:86ff.; Slouschz 1927:262).⁶

These and earlier contacts created an overlapping liturgical culture in which many special features were shared by the Jews of Jerba and those of Tripoli. The Jews of Tripoli were aware of a religious affinity to the Jews of Jerba, and this awareness was shared by the Jerbans as well (Udovitch and Valensi 1984:16). Jerba succeeded in resisting the penetration of external influences, and it may be that as the status of the Tripolitanian rabbis weakened throughout the nineteenth century, Jerba was more and more perceived as a center of religious inspiration and authority.

While a traditionalist orientation existed among the Jews of Tripoli (as discussed), it never became, as in Jerba, a highly self-conscious principle and mark of communal identification. Rather, along with the attachment to their own traditions, Tripolitanian Jewish leaders seemed prepared to incorporate religious notions from a variety of directions, including Jerba but not exclusively from there. The other major source of rabbinic influence which had an impact on matters of communal organization was Eretz Israel (Goldberg 1985).

As in Jewish communities throughout the world, the arrival of *shlihim* (rabbinic emissaries) representing religious/charitable institutions in one of the four "holy cities" was a regular form of contact between the Jews of Tripoli and the Land of Israel. These emissaries would travel to the main urban centers to collect funds, and would also reach small outlying communities. In Tripolitania, as elsewhere in North Africa, these emissaries were popularly referred to as a *kollel*.

The emissaries worked to regularize the collection and transfer of funds to the institutions in Eretz Israel. This expectation, based on ancient religious values, demanded communal attention. In 1869, an emissary met a refusal to contribute based on a communal ordinance allowing contributions only once in five years (Ya'ari 1977:182). In a document cited by Raccah (1948), a *shaliah* from Jerusalem in the 1870s established a *takkanah* appointing Rabbi Zion Raqah as responsible for all the Eretz Israel funds, and set the percentages due to each community (40 percent to Jerusalem and 20 percent to each of the other three towns: Hebron, Tiberias, and Safed).

Aside from the collection of funds, *shlihim* engaged in activities which contributed to the spiritual life of the community. They might be consulted on matters of *halakhah*, or asked to write a *haskamah*, agreement or authority to the publication of a book by a local scholar. In one case cited by Ya'ari (1977:734), a *shaliah*, himself of Tripolitanian origin, suggested to Abraham Adadi that he send a responsum of his to rabbis in Eretz Israel for their reaction.

The emissaries were treated with especially great honor in the small communities, where they were a visible manifestation of a link to the spiritual center of Judaism, despite the remoteness of these places from institutions of learning and Torah (n. 6, above). Adadi (1865:62a) mentions a *shaliah* who passed through the region in his day and acted as a judge with regard to civil matters regulated by religious laws in the small towns. Slouschz (1927:96-103) came across a *shaliah* in his travels in 1906, and describes the enthusiasm and honor with which he was received in the small community of Khoms.

At the same time, the arrival of a *shaliah* could be problematic. When two emissaries arrived in Tripoli in the same year, the second was not permitted to collect funds. The community had adopted a *takkanah* that emissaries would be accepted once every several years (Ya'ari 1977:182). Rabbi Siqli Hakohen, on a visit to the small community of Misurata, describes how his appearance caused people to flee into their homes, instead of his receiving the normal enthusiastic welcome (Ben-Zvi 1964).

The last decade of the eighteenth century, as discussed above, is a period from which we begin to get a fuller picture of the internal structure of the community in Tripoli, and this

includes the activity of *shlihim*. Rabbi A. Khalfon, one of the communal leaders at that time, entered into his ledger a record of the arrival of *shlihim* (Racah 1948). The arrival of seven emissaries during that decade is noted.

The visits of emissaries continued throughout the nineteenth century. To survey this activity we have summarized the material from Ya'ari's work (1977) which relates to Tripoli. During the years 1800 to 1909 there were at least 27 *shlihim* who were sent from Eretz Israel to Tripoli. This, on the average, represents one visit every four years but the visits were not spread out evenly in time. Concentration of visits appears in two separate decades, the 1850s (six emissaries) and the 1870s (seven emissaries). It is only possible to speculate what may be associated with this concentration. In the 1850s, the Ottomans completed their pacification of the whole of Tripolitania, and in the 1870s they appointed the first chief rabbi (above). Both of these are developments which would seem to encourage more active institutional life within the Jewish community.

Several emissaries from Eretz Israel eventually became the spiritual leaders of the community in Tripoli. This was the case of Rabbi M. Raqah in the middle of the eighteenth century and of Rabbi A.H. Adadi, who in fact was born in Tripoli, in the nineteenth century (Adadi 1976:5019). The first rabbi to serve under the newly created Ottoman office of *hakham bashi*, Eliahu Bechor Hazzan, assumed the post in 1874, at the end of a mission as a *shaliah* in North Africa (Ha-Cohen 1978:147, 168).

The prestige attached to religious leaders from Eretz Israel did not mean that the community automatically fell in line with their expectations. We have already mentioned the differences between R. Hazzan and local leaders over the opening of a new school which planned to teach Italian. In 1875, various rabbinic leaders of the Tripoli community wrote to the chief rabbi (*Rishon Le-Zion*) in Palestine seeking to enlist his aid in their opposition to the school. Hazzan presented his own views in his *halakhic* writings, and called upon rabbinic leaders in Palestine, Smyrna, and Tunis, all of whom (including the *Rishon Le-Zion*, Avraham Ashkenazi) sent *haskamot* supporting his stand.⁷ Like other elements in the tradition, the religious aura of the Land of Israel could be situationally mobilized to strengthen one's position.

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During the course of the nineteenth century, Jewish communal life in Tripoli underwent significant change. In addition to the formal reorganization discussed, there were internal and external developments which provided new challenges. The Jewish population of Tripoli grew from about one thousand families in 1853 to well over 10,000 people at the time of the Italian conquest. It appears that the number of voluntary charitable organizations began to grow during this period. One noticeable development was a woman's organization which collected funds for caring for the sick, and which also seems to have approached the Rothschild family for assistance in its activities (Ha-Cohen 1978:242). These activities represented the initiatives of many individuals, not the coordinated steps of a central communal organization.

During the same period of time, the Jews of Tripolitania, as Jews elsewhere in North Africa, were becoming ever more deeply affected by developments in European society and within European Jewry. Not only were they linked to various sources of rabbinic and religious tradition, but they became more and more exposed to competing European models. The efforts of Rabbi Hazzan to start a new school took place in a context in which competing new frameworks for education were being suggested from a number of directions.⁸ This was a further centrifugal force within the Jewish population. The Jews remained formally a *millet* and still paid, as a unit, the *bedel il-askariye* to the Ottoman government, but otherwise were pulled in a variety of directions. They showed the capability of joint action more in their ability to oppose reforms which seemed harmful to them (Goldberg 1990), than in formulating and institutionalizing new directions. Only under the Italians, would there be an attempt, from above, to restructure the community in an extensive fashion (De Felice 1985), but that is the topic of another study.

Notes

1. Lavi was also the author of a hymn in honor of Bar Yohai, a central figure in the kabbalistic tradition. This hymn has become widespread in the liturgy of Sephardi groups and of the Eastern European Hasidim.
2. A well-connected Jew might use his ties to weaken the hold of the Jewish community on him, and one document may even indicate that a wealthy Jew fought the communal assessment of taxes by intimating that he had the option of converting to Islam (Goldberg 1987:182, n. 14). While such a step was indubitably rare, it underlines the nature of the dynamic social field in which Jewish life played itself out.
3. The story of R. Ya'akov Mimun in the court, and much of the subsequent material on the rabbinic court, are taken from the principal source of Jewish history in Libya during the nineteenth century, the book of Rabbi Mordecai Ha-Cohen (1978: see p. 151 for the incident concerning Mimun). Ha-Cohen (b. 1856) was himself a licensee in the rabbinic court (see below). Some of the materials on the changes in the nineteenth century have been analyzed in greater detail by Goldberg and Segrè (1989).
4. The first category may be exemplified by Rabbi Ya'akov Raqah (b. 1800), a scholar who published a number of books (Raqah 1987), but who never accepted an official position (Zuaretz 1960:73-74).
5. A similar custom, naming different rabbis, was found among some of the Jews of Jerba. On the influence of Jerban Jewry on the Jews of Tripoli, see below.
6. In the communities of the hinterland, religious leadership entailed leading the prayers, teaching the young boys in the synagogue, slaughtering animals in accordance with the laws of *kashrut*, and conducting marriages. Matters of a more complex legal nature, including divorces, had to be brought to the court in Tripoli. Individuals who carried out these basic religious tasks generally were addressed as *rebbe*, but were not considered full rabbis unless they had much more extensive training.
7. Hazzan's responsum is found in his *Ta'alumot Lev, Yoreh De'ah, Siman Dalet* (Hazzan 1879:14a-16b), and the *haskamot* are on pp. 17a-18a of that work.
8. Attempts to innovate in the realm of education are discussed by Goldberg and Segrè (1990).

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