TOWARD A POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE SEPHARDIC DIASPORA

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The Zionism of the Sephardic world was based more on a vision of restoring traditional Jewish life in the ancient homeland than one of revolution which sought to replace tradition with some modern ideology. Unlike their Ashkenazi brethren, Sephardim always saw themselves as actors in the political arena, not only within their communities but in the larger entities of which their communities were a part. This essay represents a first cut at what we know about the political history of Sephardic Jewry and especially the exiles from the Iberian peninsula in the years between 1492 and the demise of their communities in the twentieth century. Special attention is given to the Sephardic world's pre-Iberian antecedents, the involvement of Jews in imperial Iberian politics, the styles of Jewish community organization in Spain, and the various forms of political participation and involvement after the Expulsion.

Two Experiences

One of the major arguments of the revolutionary Zionism that animated the primarily Eastern and Central European-based Zionist movement was the argument that exile from their land had pushed the Jews off the stage of history. This argument held that, without a state of their own, Jews could only be passive, and certainly did not have any political involvement or

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capacity as a collectivity.[1] This was a powerful argument on
behalf of the Zionist case and is not one to be ignored. There is
no question that without political sovereignty over some por-
tion of the earth's surface, Jews could not adequately protect
themselves and were limited in their ability to secure justice for
themselves in an indifferent or, more normally, a hostile world.

This claim was especially potent in Ashkenazic Europe where
Jews had long been farthest removed from political power and
had little or no ability to even try to influence their environment
and the course of events affecting them through political means.
During most of the years of exile they did have substantial
control over their internal community life, the autonomy of
imperium in imperio, but, beginning in the early eighteenth cen-
tury, even that was increasingly denied to them as the polities in
which they lived abolished the pluralistic corporatism of the
Middle Ages in favor of the centralized nation-state.[2] In both the
Russian and German empires, the centers of early Zionism, Jews
had lost their autonomy much earlier. In Germany, by the
nineteenth century, Judaism was defined simply as a religion
and many Jews, seeking to become full Germans, abandoned its
national dimensions, while in Russia the authorities sought to
drive the Jews either to conversion or to emigration or, if those
failed, to death, and systematically assaulted all Jewish institu-
tions that might interfere with their policies, most particularly
those of the autonomous *kahal*.[3] West of Germany, autonomous
Jewish communal polities have never existed.[4] Only in the
backward parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire did shadows of
such communities still survive at the time of the emergence of
the Zionist movement.

Not so in the Sephardic world. Covering both banks of the
Mediterranean and southwestern Asia as far as India in its
medieval heartland and reaching to new worlds from Seattle to
Hong Kong by the twentieth century, it was not by accident that
the Zionism of the Sephardic world was based more on a vision
of restoring traditional Jewish life in the ancient homeland than
one of revolution seeking to replace tradition with some modern
ideology.[5] Unlike their Ashkenazi brethren, Sephardim were
always involved in the political life of the world in which they
lived, to a greater or lesser extent it is true, and without any
more ultimate control over their destiny. But the Sephardim,

individually and in their communities, always saw themselves as in some respects actors in the political arena, not only within their communities but in the larger entities of which their communities were a part.[6]

This has been noted in the past by historians of Sephardic Jewry, often in romantic ways. It deserves more systematic exploration than it has received as part of the continuity of Jewish history. On the 500th anniversary of the exile from Spain, we have every incentive to make the effort to do so. This article represents a first cut at generalizing from what we do know about the political history of Sephardic Jewry and, most especially, the exiles from the Iberian peninsula in the years between 1492 and the demise of their communities in the twentieth century.

Fortunately, much monographic work has been done in the last century, especially in recent decades, to provide a basis for what it attempts to do.[7] This article makes no claims to being able to enlarge the monographic literature. It can only claim to rest on it and to apply the methods and insights of political science analysis to capture its larger political meaning. Much more work needs to be done to present something close to a comprehensive picture.

Pre-Iberian Antecedents

The first important point to note about the Sephardic world is that for most of its history as a separately identifiable segment of world Jewry its base was in the Middle East or in the Islamic extensions of the Middle East, where the pattern of separate peoples permanently intertwined with one another was the norm.[8] With the demise of the early southwest Asian nation-states in Roman times or before, the great empires that succeeded them inherited the patchwork quilt of peoples that resulted from the many wars and exiles. Many of these peoples refused to assimilate and acquired permanent character, often with only the loosest connections to an earlier territorial base.

The Jews were not the only ones in this situation. Hence, while the Jews stood out religiously, they were normally able to find ways and means for political expression in their corporate

capacity as a nation, within whatever limits were imposed upon them by the governing power. Sometimes the latter was perfectly happy to have the Jews govern themselves and even gave the Jewish authorities a prominent place among other parts of the imperial government, as in the days of the Roman and later Babylonian empires. At other times, Jewish political aspirations were heavily suppressed by more powerful rivals as in the case of the Byzantine empire.

In any case, not only did the Jews preserve their internal political institutions and powers substantially intact from the days when they had a state of their own, but after the Islamic conquest of southwest Asia and North Africa in the seventh century, the national authorities of the Jewish people, the Resh Galuta and the Yeshivot of Babylonia, were able to serve as a single national government for the well over 90 percent of the Jews in the world living within the Caliphate.[9] When the great Caliphate broke up in the tenth and eleventh centuries, among the first pressures that the local caliphs brought upon their Jewish communities were to cut off organic connections with Babylonia or risk being considered fifth-columnists. Much of what we have recorded about the customs and practices normative to Babylonian Jewry at the time survives because it was transmitted through rabbinical responsa to the Iberian Jewish communities when it became apparent that they would have to take their destiny into their own hands.[10]

The Jews in Imperial Iberian Politics

One of the best-known aspects of the history of the Jews of Sepharad is their involvement in the imperial politics of both the Muslim and Christian states between the eighth century and their expulsion. Names such as Shmuel Hanagid, Hasdai ibn Shaprut, and Don Isaac Abravanel are among the best-known in Jewish history and there were many more Jews who occupied similar positions in both the gentile court and the Jewish community whose names are known to specialists in the field. What was characteristic of these political leaders was their combination of high formal position in the courts of the kings they served, coupled with a similar high formal position in the Jewish

community, not merely because they were *shtadlanim* with access to the foreign suzereign, but because of their activities within the community.[11]

This, indeed, became a hallmark of Sephardic politics. Maimonides exemplified it in Egypt in a slightly different way (he was the king's physician while heading the Jewish community) and there were many less well-known figures throughout Italy, North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and eastward.[12] It may have reached its high point in Spain and Portugal, and perhaps its very highest point in Muslim Spain when Shmuel Hanagid was the *nagid* or chief magistrate of the Jews and a civil and military leader in the government of the king, and Hasdai ibn Shaprut, occupying similar positions on the civil side, actually was able to orchestrate an alliance with the king of the Khazars to undertake joint action to try to protect the persecuted Jews of southern Italy, then under Byzantine rule. Moreover, these were "renaissance men" before the Renaissance — poets and philosophers as well as statesmen, and Jewish scholars as well as generals. Thus, by the end of the tenth century, a pattern of Jewish political involvement had been developed which was to continue in Spain for another 500 years and then for 500 years after that in the regions of the Sephardic diaspora.[13]

The Governance of Sephardic Communities

While this class of Sephardic statesmen was taking shape, the Sephardim were also developing a style of community organization within the context of the Jewish political tradition as they received it. Actually, two different styles developed: a characteristic kingdom-wide organization in the Muslim world, including Muslim Spain, and a characteristic local community organization in Christian Spain.[14] In the Muslim world the Jews were organized in both local and provincial arenas, with *negidim* the principal leaders of the *keter malkhut* countrywide and the senior rabbis the principal leaders of the *keter torah*. Local *kehillot* were clearly subordinate to this countrywide structure.[15] In this respect, Muslim Spain was simply a continuation of the system developed earlier in Egypt and North Africa which continued in

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those countries after the expulsion more or less until modern times.

In Christian Spain organization and governance was basically local through the Aljama, the Jewish municipality which existed alongside Christian and Muslim municipalities in cities reconquered from the Muslims or newly founded as a result of the Reconquista.[16] In that respect, the Jews of Christian Spain actively participated, even led, in the constitutional revolution which took place in Christian Europe in the high Middle Ages whereby leading rabbinic scholars, in Spain Rabbi Solomon ben Aderet, known as Rashba (c.1235-c.1310), and Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel, known as Rosh (c.1250-1327), played a leading role in adapting the *halakhot* of governance inherited from the imperial structure of the Resh Galuta and the Yeshivot of Babylonia to a situation in which every local community had to govern itself independently and new local communities were springing up all the time with the need to be able to constitute themselves for communal self-government within a proper *halakhic* framework.[17]

There and in medieval Ashkenaz (the two regions were in regular contact on these matters) they developed a constitutional basis for Jewish self-government. In the new system (shared by Sephardim and Ashkenazim alike) any *minyan* of Jews could constitute themselves a community by drawing up *haskamot* (articles of agreement), in effect covenanting with each other to found the community and acquiring the powers of a *beit din* (*halakhic* court). This enabled them to adopt *takkanot* (ordinances) formally subsidiary to *halakhic* law but, in fact, often so far-reaching as to suspend established principles of *halakhah* because of the needs of the times, and then to administer justice.

The responsa of the times which we have in our possession give us a substantial picture of this pattern of community organization and how it developed. Books such as *Sefer HaShtarot* of Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai of Barcelona (late eleventh and early twelfth century) provide us with model *haskamot* and *takkanot* which were made available to any group of Jews founding or maintaining communities.[18]

Almost simultaneously with the initial round of community organization, the Jewish communities of Christian Spain began to explore the establishment of constitutionalized regional linking arrangements. These were mostly through confederations of

communities as in the Kingdom of Aragon in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but also through a confederation of communities in Castile in the fifteenth century, some sixty years before the Expulsion. Under this arrangement the communities retained full powers except for those delegated to the confederation, mostly in connection with representation for the external authorities, that is to say, foreign affairs and defense.[19]

The culmination of this confederal tendency came on the very eve of the expulsion where and when, in response to the demands of the King of Castile, the Jewish leadership (*Hachamim* and *Tovim*: schooled and "good men," that is, the civil leadership) of that kingdom gathered in Valladolid (the seat of Castile's government and its Cortes) in 1432, between April 4 and May 2, in what had been called a synod. Actually what took place was a constitutional convention that promulgated the *Takkanot* or Ordinances of Valladolid as the basic constitutional foundation for Jewish community organization in Castile.[20] Five separate sets of ordinances were issued. They are presented in translation in Louis Finkelstein's *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages*.[21] Other than Finkelstein, they have not been as well studied as they should be. That constitutional referent was taken by the exiles into the Sephardic diaspora where it continued to serve as the basis for Jewish community life throughout the great part of the Mediterranean world.[22]

To date there has been no significant research done on the impact of these *Takkanot* on the communal organization of the Sephardic diaspora. We have only snatches of information. For example, the Va'ad Adat HaSephardim b'Yerushalayim, the Council of the Sephardim in Jerusalem, claims that its structure and legislation, which lasted from the end of the fifteenth century until the British conquest of Eretz Israel in 1917, rested explicitly upon the *Takkanot* of Valladolid.[23]

The Politics of Resettlement

The Jews were expelled from a Christian Spain triumphant. The Reconquista had been completed in March 1492; the decree of expulsion was issued at the end of the same month, to take effect four months later. The marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon

and Isabella of Castile had unified the crowns of the two biggest Iberian kingdoms. While Columbus's discovery of the new world was still to occur, Spain and Portugal had been engaged in almost a century of exploration and were already in the process of colonizing the path to both the west and the east off the west coast of Africa. Thus the united kingdoms could feel that they were on their way upward even without the Jews.

A second empire further to the east, the Ottoman empire, was also moving from triumph to triumph. In 1453 the Ottomans had captured Constantinople, bringing down the last bastion of the Byzantine empire, and were in the midst of a major territorial expansion in the Balkans and Middle East. As a warrior-governed empire, its leadership needed the Jews and sought them as an asset to advance the Ottoman economy and its commerce. Thus, horrible as it was, the expulsion did not leave the Jews without a place to go. The problems of getting there were at times formidable for individuals, but once the exiles reached Ottoman territory they could reestablish themselves with the blessings of at least the imperial authorities.[24]

Similar opportunities existed on a smaller scale in northern Italy. In that band of cities which, several centuries before, had begun to achieve prosperity because of the formation of a proper associational basis, there were opportunities for Jews, especially in international trade, and even in political life. There was room for at least small numbers of Spanish Jewish exiles to settle and make their contribution.[25]

The closest area of resettlement to the Iberian peninsula was North Africa where the existence of an indigenous Jewish population meant that Jews were not strange to the local rulers. They took in a significant share of the *megurashim* (expellees). There they helped North Africa to better participate in the Mediterranean trade, including efforts to seize it from the Christians, forging contacts with their exiled brethren in the Italian states and further eastward. Since Jews had always had a commanding position in the Mediterranean trade this was not particularly difficult.

Exiles also reached western and southern Asia. Eretz Israel became a target for the Sephardic diaspora and within a century was revived as a world Jewish center from whence flowed a burst of religious creativity that was to reshape the entire Jewish

world. Sephardic Jews settled in Syria and Mesopotamia where they were involved in the Far Eastern trade.

Small numbers of Sephardic Jews went even further afield over the next generation or two. First of all, the New World, after it was open for settlement, beckoned Marranos seeking opportunity and escape from the Inquisition. So, too, with northern Europe a generation later. After the Lowlands became possessions of Spain through imperial marriage, it was relatively easy for Marranos to get to Antwerp or Amsterdam from Spain or Portugal and from there return to Judaism as soon as it became possible to do so.[26] Others reached Cochin in India, where, as Jews, they influenced the religious and civil patterns in those communities. Marranos accompanied the Portuguese colonizers of Goa, Ceylon, Indonesia, and even Formosa and the Spanish colonies of the Philippines.

Thus one of the results of the Spanish Expulsion was to extend the scope of Jewry world-wide within a hundred years after 1492. One could encounter Jews not only in the more prominent countries of Jewish settlement in Africa, Asia, and Europe, but throughout Latin America and in small numbers in the Far East as far as the Philippines. While there were no organized Jewish communities west of Latin America's Atlantic rim or east of South India, within that compass the Jews were sufficiently organized to receive *shlichim* (emissaries) from Sephardic institutions and communities in Eretz Israel seeking support for the institutions of the Holy Land and at the same time teaching Judaism to the locals. As the fifteenth century ended, the Ashkenazim began to follow in the wake of the Sephardic pioneers, but it would be another one hundred years before that trickle of individuals would acquire a more substantial momentum.

The constitutional development of post-exilic Sephardic Jewry followed along the lines of earlier patterns within the Iberian Peninsula. Those communities where Jews from Aragon predominated, principally in the Balkans, adopted the pattern of separate communities bound by confederal links established in Aragon, except that the communities were not necessarily geographically independent but congregational communities within the same geographic locale. At the same time, the communities formed by Jews from Castile, predominantly in Morocco and

North Africa, were more united under a single communal orga-
nization. The respective environments of each of the resettle-
ment areas encouraged what was already established practice.

Activity in the International Arena

Until the very last, Jews on the Iberian Peninsula were
involved in general politics. Some, indeed, like Abraham Senior,
were so involved that they could not bear to leave Spain and
converted at the last moment. Others, such as Don Isaac
Abravanel, faithful to their religious traditions above all, left
sadly but proudly, to resume their political activities in their
new lands of settlement, in his case Italy, where he quickly rose
to a position of influence and, as before, used his influence to
help his brethren.[27]

What is worthy of note is that the Sephardic political class
did not pause more than momentarily before reinserting itself in
international affairs, nor did it ever cease that involvement.
From Abravanel at the end of the fifteenth century to Gedalia
Abulafia, a Young Turk activist 400 years later, one of the
leaders of the 1908 coup against Abdul Hamid in Turkey and
member of the Young Turk cabinet, they continued to be both
leaders of the Jewish community and involved in general politi-
cal affairs. At times they tried to use their influence not only to
protect the Jews but to advance larger Jewish goals.

Perhaps foremost among those who followed the latter course
was Don Joseph Nasi, a second generation Portuguese Marrano
who escaped and returned to Judaism in the Ottoman empire in
the mid-sixteenth century. Nasi rose rapidly in the service of the
Sultan Selim, helping him in his efforts first to secure the throne
and then to flex Ottoman muscles. His foreign policy always
sought to maintain a successful Ottoman-Jewish alliance against
Spain. He encouraged the Netherlands' revolt against Spanish
rule, promising Ottoman support in 1569, and organized the
Ancona boycott (see below). He encouraged the Ottomans' war
against Venice for Cyprus. Made the Duke of Naxos and Count
of Andros for services rendered, Nasi took the lead in trying to
reestablish an autonomous Jewish commonwealth in Eretz Is-
rael under the suzereinty of the Ottoman empire. He tried to

rebuild the city of Tiberias just down the mountain from Safed and set it on a sound economic footing so that Jews would be attracted to it and lay the foundations for Jewish resettlement of Eretz Israel.[28]

In international relations, Jewish leaders such as Don Joseph Nasi and his extraordinary mother-in-law, Donna Gracia Mendes, sought to support Jewish interests in the Mediterranean by supporting Ottoman interests.[29] In some cases, the Ancona boycott, for example, they even sought to mobilize international Jewish economic power on behalf of Jewish interests, with or without Ottoman support. In the case of Ancona, a city on the eastern side of the Italian Peninsula under papal rule in the sixteenth century, several Marranos were arrested by the Inquisition and burned at the stake for openly resuming the practice of Judaism. The Mendes-Nasi family proclaimed a boycott of the port of Ancona in retaliation, but the other Jews of Ancona complained that this not only destroyed their livelihoods but also endangered them with the authorities. To make a long story short, the boycott collapsed because it was impossible to identify a single common Jewish interest in the matter. It was to be another several hundred years before a sufficiently high percentage of world Jewry could identify a single common interest and act on it collectively, but the effort reflects how powerful and self-confident the exiled grandees felt themselves to be.

The Political Tasks of the *Megurashim*

The Expulsion, with all its tragedy, released an extraordinary amount of energy among the *megurashim*. It was as if, in response to their despair, they were determined to create an even more vital and viable Jewish life than they had known in the Iberian peninsula after the pogroms of 1391. The *megurashim* set for themselves three great political tasks:

1. Rebuilding community life for themselves, their families and future generations in their new countries of settlement.

2. Reconstituting the world Jewish polity as more than a communications network for responsa, one which would be centered in Eretz Israel.

3. Initiating a foreign policy which would protect Jews wherever they were and would inflict such punishment as possible on Spain and Portugal.

To claim that these were the three great political tasks of the *megurashim* is not to suggest that a collective decision was made to that effect. Obviously, there was no vehicle for taking such a decision. Moreover, not all of the *megurashim* were equally committed to those three tasks. Indeed, as we shall see, there were conflicts involved with regard to each of them.

The first was the most widely accepted of the three goals. Almost instinctively the Jews wanted to rebuild their communal life. Perhaps this is because there was no other way for Jews to live in the world of that time and to remain Jews.

Thus the conflicts surrounding this task were confined to relations between the newly arrived *megurashim* and the Jewish communities previously established in the countries of resettlement. Frequently this was a struggle between an established communal structure, whether in the form of a single congregation serving a small community as was true in the Balkans or a more comprehensive communal structure for a larger concentration, as in North Africa, and the desire of the *megurashim* to reproduce the patterns they knew in Spain.[30]

In the Balkans, in particular, this meant the formation of multiple congregations based on city or regional origin in place of former residence in Spain, where long established local customs could be preserved even in a new environment. Thus wherever there was a sufficient number of Jews, separate congregations would be organized in the same city and would serve as comprehensive *kehillot* providing all services Jews sought. Links between the congregations, if any, were confined to the establishment of a body representative of the various congregations to intercede with the authorities and maintain good relations with them, and, in some cases, an appellate court to deal with civil and religious issues in Jewish law where the decision of the rabbi or *beit din* of a particular congregation was not accepted by the parties involved.

In almost every case the *megurashim* felt themselves superior to the locals. Where they were strong enough, they even forced the locals to assimilate to their ways to the point of learning Spanish. Where they were not strong enough, they formed

separate communities alongside and often competing with the established ones.[31]

One of the major aspects of this resettlement was the restoration of an active and influential Jewish life in Eretz Israel. Almost depopulated of Jews as a result of two hundred years of destruction, first as a result of the Crusades and then the Mongol invasions, only a handful of Jews remained in the land of their forefathers. While earlier representatives of Iberian Jewry had done something to revive Jewish life in the land of Israel — Nachmanides, for example, was instrumental in reestablishing a Jewish community in Jerusalem in 1268 after he succeeded in persuading Jews from Shechem to move to the Holy City and bring with them a Sefer Torah — it was only on the eve of the Expulsion and immediately following it that more significant numbers of Jews reached Israel. With regard to Jerusalem, the Eliachars arrived in 1485 and, according to tradition, seven additional families came directly from Spain in 1492. Others trickled in over the next generation.[32]

Even more significant was the settlement of the *megurashim* in Safed. There, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a concentration of Jews developed and a "world class" Jewish community was developed.[33] By the second generation of the sixteenth century, the Jewish community in Safed was on its way to becoming the world center of creative Jewish culture, excelling in matters religious, particularly in mystical religion. The works written there and the liturgies developed to express their ideas to the broadest possible Jewish audience led to the last major changes in traditional Jewish ritual. No further significant changes developed until the nineteenth century when nontraditional rituals were developed by Jews who placed themselves outside of the Orthodox framework.

The influence of the Jews of Safed was to have wide-ranging impact on the entire Jewish world, from the Ashkenazim in the Carpathian Mountains who a century and a half later produced the Baal Shem Tov and Hassidism on kabbalistic foundations developed in Safed, or the secret Jews of Mexico who received *shlichim* from Safed for at least two generations, or all of world Jewry whose liturgy was much enhanced by the creativity of Safed kabbalists. Safed in the fifteenth century was an important force in Jewish life. Nevertheless, it could not sustain itself as the

center of a worldwide Jewish communications network. Nor could it rebuild that network along the lines that its leading figures wished.

The Safed Jewish leadership attempted to assert its hegemony over the entire Jewish world by attempting to revive *semikhah*, the ordination of rabbis based on a single national source of authority located in the land of Israel. Their efforts quickly became a matter of internal conflict in the other Jewish communities and ultimately failed because they could neither impose their authority or win over the rabbinical leadership elsewhere. Their biggest stumbling block was Jerusalem, whose leaders did not want to see such authority rest in a community in Eretz Israel of "lesser" status. Their failure was one of the major elements in the failure of the effort to establish a more institutionalized world Jewish polity five centuries after the final collapse of the authority of the Resh Galuta and Yeshivot.

What Safed did manage to produce was a new constitutional referent for the Jewish people in the form of the *Shulhan Arukh*. The last traditional summary and synthesis of the corpus of Jewish law, in the two generations after it was completed it spread throughout the Jewish world and became authoritative in every community in regular contact with mainstream Jewish life. So it remains for traditional Jews to this day.

Unfortunately a combination of circumstances ranging from natural disasters to the shift in patterns of world trade as a result of the opening of the New World to European colonization ended the dynamic Jewish community in Safed and prevented any kind of meaningful revival in the long term.

The other Jewish communities of Eretz Israel fared less well. Hebron was renewed as a local Jewish center.[34] Tiberias had a certain regional influence stretching across the Galilee westward and northeastward into Syria.[35] Jerusalem, which continued to be the symbolic center of the Jewish people, was an isolated and impoverished city which offered little opportunity for Jews to support themselves. Nevertheless, its community was strong enough during the sixteenth century to play a "spoiler" role with regard to Safed Jewry's search for hegemony. Then it sank back into the doldrums and did not again play a significant role on the world Jewish scene until the nineteenth century.

From the Era of Exile to the Modern Epoch

Approximately 150 years elapsed between 1492 and the 1640s, when the modern epoch can be said to have begun. 1492, indeed, was the climax of the worst epoch of medieval persecution of the Jews which began with the Black Death in 1348 and reached its climax in the Expulsion. In the century and a half following the Expulsion, the medieval world reached its culmination and began its transformation to modernity, among the Jews of Europe as well as other Europeans, and, in a different way, among the peoples of the rest of the world influenced by a now extremely dynamic European civilization.[36]

After the mid-seventeenth century, the entire known world entered a period of change. In Europe and those parts of the world colonized by Europeans, the process was one of modernization.[37] In Africa and Asia, modernization was not to begin until after the French Revolution. Still, there too, there were a congeries of regime changes that changed the character of those parts of the world.

The reestablishment of communities of *megurashim*, i.e., the formation of the Sephardic diaspora, was the central feature of much of Jewish life for 150 years after 1492. Where they could do so openly, the *megurashim* reestablished their communities in a manner much reminiscent of those of Spain, seeking to be as faithful as possible to their past. The past began to be reshaped by new realities from the mid-seventeenth century onward. One could see it in the great Jewish communities of Salonika and Izmir where the pattern of congregational bodies based upon ancestral places of origin on the Iberian Peninsula began to give way to new, more institutionalized, confederations of congregations based upon local neighborhood of residence.[38]

Elsewhere in the Sephardic diaspora, new communities or new styles of communities were born with the arrival of the new epoch. For example, Marranos, principally from Portugal, settled in the Netherlands after the United Provinces of the Netherlands declared their independence from Spain in 1567. Comprehensive Jewish community organization came into being early in the seventeenth century and reached its highest development in mid-century. There Jews, because of their prior experience of living in general society as Marranos, developed a special syn-

thesis of external identification and appearance much like their neighbors, while internally developing a communal structure based on slightly modified, premodern patterns.[39]

In the Dutch colonies overseas, the Jews developed the first modern congregational communities. In Joden Savanne in Surinam, they even developed into what was in effect an autonomous Jewish territorial polity where the Jews maintained their own civil institutions and militia.[40]

The Modern Epoch

Thus the modern epoch brought as many changes to Jews in the world outside of Europe as to those of the European world except that many of them were not in the direction of modernization but reaction (as was the case in Eastern Europe, for that matter). Modernization for many came later; demographically — almost a century later, politically — it depended on when and where the European colonial powers had an impact, and in terms of migration and evacuation — a generation later than Ashkenazic Eastern Europe.

The matter was more complicated that that, however. The *megurashim* were divided into two groups: those who went to Western Europe and the New World and those who moved southward and eastward within the Mediterranean Basin and spread further eastward from there.

The first group were the pioneers of modern Jewish settlement and modernization in their respective countries of new residence — the Netherlands, England, Surinam, the Caribbean islands, the British colonies in North America — influencing the future place of all Jews in those countries. Faithful to Sephardic ways, they did not reject involvement with the larger community, but they sought to preserve traditional Jewish institutions including institutions of governance as far as possible. They were able to do so during the first half of the epoch, albeit with considerable difficulty, even in places like British North America where all such ties were voluntary.[41]

It was only in the second half of the epoch that they had to give up the attempt in the face of pressures of modernity. In continental Europe, the accepted demands that everyone —

Christian or Jew — needed to belong to a religious community left the structures erected by the Sephardim in the seventeenth century essentially intact, although community enforcement of Jewish law on its members declined as modernization became more pronounced. In Britain, where there was no such associative requirement, the continued separation of Jews and Christians within the society and the lack of Jewish political rights tended to compel even modernizing individuals who no longer saw themselves as religious believers to stay attached to the community (or actually convert to Christianity), which increasingly became synagogue-centered. In the United States, all association was voluntary and all citizens had equal political rights in the larger polity. There the historical record is replete with efforts on the part of community leaders to enforce even such generally accepted standards as bans on prostitution and intermarriage, but they, too, met with failure.[42]

In the east, the period from the mid-seventeenth to the late eighteenth century saw worsening conditions, demographic stagnation, impoverishment, and many external regime changes as one local group of rulers overthrew another. Efforts at appropriate internal adjustments were made by the Jews, which included greater integration of the various segments of the communities.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a mixed pattern of change. There began a period of demographic growth which became a population explosion by the end of the nineteenth century.[43] By then the European powers either invaded the Muslim countries to colonize them or to make them protectorates, or exerted substantial pressure on them to make concessions of territory or power, through the system of capitulations, which had originated even earlier but was dramatically extended in the nineteenth century. Under the capitulation system foreign powers acquired legal authority over their citizens or subjects residing locally, initially fellow-countrymen, but by the nineteenth century, many natives who had acquired foreign citizenship. Here, too, the Jews had to make their internal adjustments, both maintaining integration of the "native" segments of the community and at the same time developing separate categories of Jews, those with foreign citizenship and those without.

For example, in Eretz Israel periodically Ashkenazim tried to settle in the country and, wherever possible, to remain outside of Ottoman jurisdiction by gaining the protection of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires from whence they came through the system of capitulations. The Sephardim, on the other hand, were for the most part Ottoman subjects and remained so, except for those who acquired British protection. As such, they continued to rule the overall Jewish community until the late nineteenth century by virtue of the authority vested in them by the Sultan.

After 1840 the Sephardic leadership allowed the Ashkenazi *kollelim*, each representing a different country or region of origin of central and eastern Europe, on the grounds that they should be able to follow their own customs, but actual authority was vested in the Rishon le-Zion, the Sephardic Chief Rabbi, and the Vaad Edah Sepharadit, until the leaders of the *kollelim* enforced changes through their respective protectors as the Ottoman empire grew weaker.

Common throughout all three periods from 1492 to the beginning of the postmodern epoch after 1948 were a number of shared characteristics. First of all there were certain limits to the integration of the *megurashim* with "native" Jews. In the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, the *megurashim* overwhelmed the preexisting local Romaniot communities whose own traditions survived only in isolated pockets (e.g., Ioannina in Greece), while most assimilated among the Spaniolim. In most of the countries of North Africa, where the pre-Expulsion indigenous Jewish population was much larger, the distinction between the two was maintained until the nineteenth century, in some places with more integration, in some places with less.[44]

In every case the Sephardim were better integrated with their external environment than was the case in the Ashkenazi world before Emancipation. Moreover, during the modern epoch they did not go through an indigenous reformation that divided Jewry into different religious streams. They continued their fundamental commitment to the common religious and constitutional framework including manifestations of all three *ketarim*, with the principal power struggle between the bearers of *keter malkhut* and *keter torah*.

The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Fundamental social change in the communities came at the end of the eighteenth century and in their structures in the nineteenth through modernization. In Algeria these were far-reaching because of the French colonial insistence on imposing the consistorial model on Algerian Jewry after 1850. While not as successful as in France, Jewish life was forced into a consistorial structure. French Jewry, in cooperation with the French authorities, elevated the position of a French-style rabbinate which reflected the *keter kehunah* more than either of the other two *ketarim*, to be the greater power.

Efforts to do the same in the Ottoman empire in imitation of the consistorial model were aborted by the realities of the traditional Jewish constitution. It can be said that all disruptions of the normative constitutional order came from outside, just the reverse of what happened in the Ashkenazi world. In any case, the role of notables, especially *shtadlanim*, remained very strong.[45]

The spread of the British Empire eastward into South Asia in the eighteenth century, East Asia in the early nineteenth, and Africa in the late nineteenth stimulated a second migration of the Sephardim eastward. Jews from southwest Asia in particular were attracted by the British need for middlemen to engage in commercial activities in such places as India where Jews were prominent in both Calcutta and Bombay (two cities established or expanded by the British as commercial entrepots), Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai. These Sephardim established community congregations to be able to live as they felt Jews should live.

Sephardim moved into Africa in the wake of the British for similar reasons, especially into Northern and Southern Rhodesia where copper mining provided opportunity as well as commerce. Similarly, they followed the Belgians into the Belgian Congo. There, too, they established their community congregations and, particularly in Rhodesia, were augmented by Ashkenazim who followed their example.

By the twentieth century, modernizing and secularizing currents began to reshape the Sephardic world in the Balkans, southwest Asia, and North Africa.[46] The Jewish communities of

the new Balkan nation-states were forced into French-model
consistorial molds as in Bulgaria and Romania or German
Kultesgemeinde molds as in Yugoslavia while being swept up in
the Jewish and other political movements of the late nineteenth
century, particularly Zionism and socialism. These movements
introduced a non-traditional, often secular, dimension into Jew-
ish life, while at the same time bringing about a revival of Jewish
political interest and involvement.

This was particularly true in connection with Zionism, a
fully Jewish political movement with authentic, if secularized,
Jewish goals. This begins another short, final and at least partly
tragic chapter in the history of the Sephardic exiles, culminating
in the liquidation of the Sephardic diaspora, first as a result of
the upheavals in the Ottoman empire in the late nineteenth
century which led to the emigration of tens of thousands of
Sephardim, most to the West where they lost their organic
connection with Jewish society, then as a result of the Holocaust,
which did not distinguish between Jews in meting out the
terrible fate that it did, and finally to the establishment of the
State of Israel to which most of the survivors of those Sephardi
communities migrated after 1948.

The introduction of secular nationalism into the Balkans
affected the Jews no less than the indigenous peoples. The
Jewish communities of the new states were reorganized along
modern communal lines combining religious and secular Jews.
While most of the civil powers of these communities were lost as
the new states severely limited Jewish communal self-govern-
ment, the Jewish communities tried to preserve some elements
of their previous authority.

In fact, the Jews themselves were ambivalent. Most wel-
comed the chance to become part of the larger society as indi-
viduals, but unlike in the West where individual Jews rapidly
redefined themselves as citizens of their respective states, albeit
of the Jewish faith, in the East the linkage between civil and
ethnic identity persisted. Few if any Jews failed to see them-
selves as distinct from Romanians or Bulgarians, Greeks or
Turks, Serbs or Croats, even if they sought full state citizenship.
Thus both the Jews and the host peoples were interested in
preserving a broader communal base. All expected minority

communities to be more ethnic in character, only more secular than in the past.

Bulgaria was perhaps the fullest example of this.[47] Its was the first Jewish community in the world to be completely "captured" by the Zionist movement in the late 1890s, when the WZO was in its infancy and Herzl was still alive. By state decree, Bulgarian Jewry was organized religiously along the consistorial model, but it still retained a full range of communal activities which were substantially secularized, and for control of which the different Jewish political movements competed. The Zionists won, and with the acquiescence of the Bulgarians who recognized the Jews as a separate people, remade the community in the spirit and practice of Zionism. Bulgarian Jewry became a kind of a state within a state, with its own sports clubs and political parties as well as religious institutions and schools. The consequences of all this were that after the State of Israel was established, 90 percent of the 50,000 Jews in Bulgaria emigrated to Israel in a two-year period, where they were quietly absorbed into the life of the new Jewish state in exemplary fashion.[48]

There were similar developments in the other Balkan countries, although not as comprehensive or extensive. Secularized Jewish civil institutions from community councils to schools to sports clubs emerged throughout the Balkans, Zionism became important in every one of the communities, and modern Jewish community life emerged in all of them. In this respect, the Sephardic communities were similar to the Ashkenazic ones to the north, usually providing even a higher percentage of pioneer immigrants to Israel where they faded into the new Zionist Yishuv and lost their communal distinctiveness. (For example, half of the 80,000 Jews in Salonika when the Greeks occupied the city in 1912 left over the next thirty years — 20,000 to the west and 20,000 to Israel. Almost the entire remnant of 40,000 were destroyed by the Nazis in the Holocaust.)[49]

While in imitation of the West, the consistorial model of religious organization was imposed on most of these communities, only in Turkey where Kemal Ataturk led a forced secularization of Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike was there an effort to forceably eliminate the civil dimensions of Jewish life entirely. For the approximately thirty years of the interwar

period, Jewish civil leaders in Turkey essentially went under-ground, presenting themselves as leaders of social clubs rather than communal institutions, but after the 1950s the drive to-wards secularization eased up considerably in Turkey as a result of Muslim pressure and the Jews too began to reassert a commu-nity life that went beyond the synagogue.[50]

The story in North Africa is not dissimilar, although with the very different "wrinkle" of the impact of European colonization on fledgling local nationalisms. Since the principal Western European colonizer of North Africa was France, once again an effort was made to impose consistorial patterns on the Jews and once again the Jews had to find ways to maintain the civil aspects of their communities within that rather procrustean bed, having least success in Algeria which was annexed by France and more in Morocco and Tunisia which were French protectorates rather than direct colonies, most in Spanish Morocco and Egypt where the Spanish and British were prepared to leave older patterns more or less intact. Whatever the accommodation, after the great exodus in the fifteen years after the establishment of the State of Israel, Jewish community organizations effectively sur-vived only in Morocco and Tunisia, and then only in limited ways.

Those who went to Israel became part of the larger Jewish society and the Jewish state. Those who went elsewhere for the most part made an effort to recreate a truncated Sephardic way of congregational life in their new countries of residence, one which no longer had a significant political dimension of its own, since it, too, became part of the larger Jewish communities in those countries. That is another story.

Postscript

By the twentieth century, the political life of the Sephardic diaspora had been transformed in ways not dissimilar to that of the Ashkenazic diaspora. Modernization had effectively elimi-nated traditional Jewish communal autonomy. Jews divided into religious and secular groupings which were reflected in their institutions. Political movements took the place of commu-nal institutions as the main political mobilizers and actors, and

where communities were mixed, the distinctions between Ashkenazim and Sephardim were much weakened or disappeared altogether in the communal-political realm.[51]

Where the Sephardim remained in a majority, the political culture remained Sephardic. This had two pronounced characteristics. One, few Sephardim were truly secular. Most continued to pay at least minimal obeisance to traditional religious norms in public, whatever their private behavior had become, so that the public religion of the community remained within traditional Jewish boundaries and leaders of the community were expected to pay it due respect in their public capacities. In the second place, the fragmented character of communities and their leadership was probably even worse than among Ashkenazim as competition among subgroups in the community was increasingly replaced by the personal competition among those aspiring to leadership. Only with difficulty were country-wide and worldwide bodies developed among Sephardic Jews and increasingly they became subsidiary to other Jewish institutions as the separate Sephardic diaspora disappeared. By the end of the first postwar generation it was clear that a new Jewish politics had emerged, one which replaced the old politics of all the Jewish diasporas.

Notes

1. The most extreme and perhaps best known statement of this position is to be found in Haim Hazaz, "The Sermon" (*Hadrasha*), in *Avanim Rotchot (Sipurim)* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1968) (Hebrew), pp. 219-237.

   For a modified view, see Ismar Schorsch, *On the History of the Political Judgment of the Jew* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1977). See also Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (New York: Atheneum, 1977).

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    For a somewhat contrary view, see Rachel Elior, "Messianic Expectations and Spiritualization of Religious Life in the Sixteenth Century," *Revue de tu Juives*, 145 (1986):35-49; Haim Hillel Ben Sasson, "Exile and Redemption in the Eyes of Spanish Exiles," *Yitzhak Fritz Baer Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1960), pp. 216-227; and Elisheva Carlebach, "Rabbinic Circles as Messianic Pathways in the Post-Expulsion Era," *Judaism*, 163, Vol. 41 (Summer 1992):209-216.

7. Raphael Patai, *The Tents of Jacob* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971); Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (New York: Free Press, 1992); "The Expulsion from Spain: A Symposium," *Judaism* 41, nos. 2 and 3 (Spring and Summer 1992):111-300; Richard D. Barnett, ed., *The Sephardi Heritage* (New York: Ktav, 1971); Chaim Raphael. *The Road from*

Babylon — The Story of Sephardi and Oriental Jews (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

8. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews, op. cit.*, volumes 13, 17 and 18.

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10. Gershon D. Cohen, *Sefer HaQabbalah, op. cit.*

11. Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews in Muslim Spain, op. cit.*; Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain, op. cit.*

12. Shlomo D. Goitein, "Political Conflict and the Use of Power in the World of the Geniza," in Daniel J. Elazar, ed., *Kinship and Consent: The Jewish Political Tradition and Its Contemporary Uses* (Lanham, Md.: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and University Press of America, 1983); Shlomo D. Goetein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, Vols. I-V (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978-89); Joel Kraemer, ed. *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

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14. Daniel J. Elazar and Stuart A. Cohen, *The Jewish Polity: Jewish Political Organization from Biblical Times to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), Epoch 2.

15. S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society, op. cit.*, especially Vol. II, "Organization of the Jewish Community"; Mark R. Cohen, *Jewish Self-Government in Medieval Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

16. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews, op. cit.*; Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain, op. cit.*

17. Menachem Elon, "On Power and Authority: Halachic Stance of the Traditional Community and Its Contemporary Implications," in Daniel J. Elazar, ed., *Kinship and Consent, op. cit.*

18. R. Judah ben Barceloni, *Sefer HaShtarot* (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1898).

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20. Louis Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages* (New York: Feldheim, 1964). See especially chapter on *Takkanot Valladolid* and the text of the *Takkanot*.

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