

# HISTORY OF THE JEWS

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Reprinted from the *New International Encyclopedia*  
3/9/67

Jewish history is a complex phenomenon that resists a simple and concise summary. Its beginnings are to be traced back to the early civilizations of the ancient Near East: while its development involves an interaction with many empires and civilizations. It displays a bewildering array of contradictory manifestations that defy facile generalizations. Jewish history is the history of a people, living in its own land and enjoying independence; it is also a history of a people living on its own land, but subject to the sovereignty of powerful empires. It is the history of religious communities affirming their viability in a world-wide diaspora (dispersion), long after the land of Israel had ceased to be a major area of Jewish settlement. Yet it is also the history that includes the emergence of the modern state of Israel. Wherever one turns, Jewish history confronts the historian with diverse and contradictory phenomena. Jews have created tribal, monarchical, theocratic, aristocratic, oligarchical, republican, and democratic forms of self-government. They have espoused innumerable religious formulations: prophetic, priestly, pharisaic, rabbinic, rationalistic, mystic: they have spawned heresies; they have embraced secularistic and nationalistic ideologies. Jews have been nomads and peasants, shepherds and craftsmen, warriors and scholars, statesmen and pariahs, slave owners and slaves, creditors and debtors, capitalists and proletarians, rich and poor. They have been literate and illiterate, provincial and cosmopolitan, naive and sophisticated, rationalistic and mystical, legalistic and moralistic, heretical and traditional, liberal and reactionary, nationalistic and universalistic. Such a welter of diverse and conflicting manifestations would present formidable problems for the historian even if they followed one upon the other, but they almost defy generalization when they are continuously intermingling, resisting neat classifications and categories.

To find our way through this bewildering maze, we shall approach Jewish history as a process displaying two major features:

- (1) An evolution of interdependent forms in the direction of greater and greater complexity. This evolution accounts for the differentiated character of Jewish history—that which makes it distinct and separate, and which justifies the giving of a single name, Jewish, to so contradictory a process.
- (2)
- (2) A relationship with larger societies, cultures, and civilizations which is so interlocked in character that every phase in the history of the Jews bears the ineradicable stamp of these larger units. Yet the impress of the larger world is so absorbed and reworked by the prevail-ing Jewish forms that the end result is the maintenance of a distinctively Jewish pattern. Jewish history can thus be thought of as a process that elaborates ever more complex and interdependent forms through an intellectually

selective interaction with the larger social, cultural, and civilizational complexes within which this history developed.

### Ancient Near Eastern Phase (2000-332 B.C.)

Patriarchal Period (2000-1020 B.C.). The history of the Jews had its origins in the migration of seminomadic Amorite tribes into the Fertile Crescent, c.2000 B.C. Some of these tribes, under their patriarchal chief Abraham, maintained their tent-dwelling culture in Canaan (Palestine), a land viewed as promised to them by their protector-God, El-Shaddai.

Compelled by famine to seek food in Egypt (c.1700), some of the tribes settled in Goshen. Reduced to servile status, they responded to the leadership of Moses, fled from Egypt c.1280, and at Mount Sinai covenanted themselves to Yahweh, the God whom Moses identified with Shaddai. They swore exclusive loyalty to Him and accepted legislation that Moses promulgated in His name.

Taking advantage of the weakening of Egyptian imperial control in Canaan, the tribes, under the leadership of Joshua, conquered a considerable part of Canaan c.1250-1200. A century of semi-anarchy followed these exploits. It was marked by occasional coalitions against external enemies, led by military chieftains, such as Gideon, called Judges.

### Monarchial Period (1020-587 B.C.)

The emergence of an agricultural-urban society transformed the semi-nomadic tribal structure, and ushered in a monarchical order. Confronted by the Philistine menace and the need for dependable state power, the prophet-priest Samuel first selected Saul (1020-1005 B.C.) and then David (c.1004-965) to unify the tribes under a monarchical system. David's son Solomon (c.965-926) consolidated the structure through heavy taxation, a bureaucratic hierarchy, a mercenary army, and an elaborate cultus in the Temple that he built at Jerusalem.

Resentful of this despotic system, the 10 northern tribes rebelled in 926 and established the kingdom of Israel. In contrast to the stable Davidic dynasty of the kingdom of Judah, the kingdom of Israel's history was marked by violent dynastic changes.

The cementing of commercial relations by the dynasty established by King Omri (882-871) with Tyre evoked the wrath of Elijah, who denounced Ahab (871-852) for introducing the Tyrian Baal. Elijah's insistence on the exclusive worship of Yahweh bore fruit when his successor Elisha supported Jehu bid for the throne.

The Elijah-Elisha type of guild prophet was gradually superseded by a new kind of prophet. Amos was the first of these.

Dissatisfied with the limited vision of the Yahweh exclusivists, he denounced the elaborate Yahwistic cult patronized by Jeroboam II (787-747) of Israel. He insisted that Yahweh was the God of justice, who abhorred the exploitation of the lower classes, and who would punish both Judah and Israel. The new prophetic message was spread in Israel by Hosea (c.747-735) and in Judah by Isaiah (c.740-701), Micah (745-700), and Jeremiah (626-585).

The rise of Assyria brought an end to the kingdom of Israel in 721, while the triumphant Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple in 587. The Judeans, however, were spared the fate of the lost Ten Tribes, for though exiled to Babylonia, they were not annihilated.

Since these catastrophic events had been predicted by the new prophets, the Jews accepted them as evidences of Yahweh's anger and not His weakness.

#### Exile and Restoration (587-445 B.C.)

This notion was fortified by Ezekiel (c.592-c.570) who interpreted the destruction and exile as deserved punishment for disloyalty to Yahweh and for the profanation of His house by an impure priesthood. He prophesied a glorious reconstruction of the Temple cult. The Second Isaiah (c.550), however, placed greater emphasis on the cosmic power of Yahweh and conceived the restoration as an opportunity to spread His teachings throughout the world.

Persia's imperial successes were followed by Cyrus's permission for a restored Judaea in 538 B.C. Although the Temple was rebuilt around 516, the restored society remained unstable until a durable system—associated with the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra and based on the canonization of the Pentateuch—was achieved (c.445).

#### Persian Domination (445-332 B.C.)

As Persian imperial governor, Nehemiah set up a society that was centered around the Temple priesthood. Power was concentrated in the hands of the Aaronide priesthood, presided over by a high priest of the Aaron-Eleazar-Phineas-Zadok line, which sought its support from a free peasant class.

The authority for such far-reaching structural changes was the canonized Pentateuch. This remarkable document has for millenniums been accepted as divine revelation by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Although modern scholars hold it to be a composite consisting of at least three distinct strata, it functioned from the time of its canonization (445 B.C.) as a unified work. As such, it stresses the efficacy of a sacrificial cultus, and it accords the Aaronides supreme authority. Though never attaining the rank of the Pentateuch, other writings, such as those of the prophets, were also venerated.

The newly established hierocracy proved to be a very durable system till the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.).

## Greco-Roman Phase (332 B.C.-425 A.D.)

### Hellenistic Domination (332-142 B.C.)

Alexander the Great and his successors, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, radically transformed the structural patterns of the Near East, primarily through the introduction of the Greek city-state and the Greek culture that accompanied it. Though the Aaronide hierocracy easily accommodated itself first to Alexander (336-323) and later to the Ptolemies (323-197) and the Seleucids (Antiochus III, 197-187), it could not but be affected by the quickened tempo of trade, commerce, urbanization, and cultural change. The integrity of the priesthood was severely undermined when Hellenistically oriented priests (Jason, Menelaus) vied with one another to buy the high priestly office from Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Favoring the extension of Hellenistic forms, Antiochus attempted to obliterate Judaism in 168 B.C. The majority of the Jews, however, were stirred to revolution, and rallied around the priest Mattathias, the Hasmonean. Under the effective military leadership of his sons Judas Maccabeus, Jonathan, and Simon, they were able to purify the temple and secure independence in 142 B.C.

### Hasmonean Dynasty (142-63 B.C.)

Simon the Hasmonean, in becoming high priest and ethnarch, ushered in not only a period of independence, but also a new high priestly dynasty. This was a momentous change, for hitherto the high priest had been from the family of Zadok, which traced its right to Phineas, to whom God (Num.25:10-13) had promised the high priesthood as an everlasting possession.

The legitimists (that is, Zadokites, whence "Sadducees") at first rejected the Hasmonean line, but subsequently they modified their opposition and supported the Hasmonean John Hyrcanus (135-104 B.C.) when he broke with the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were a revolutionary scholar class that had supported the claims of the Hasmonean high priesthood. This they were able to do because they posited the ultimate authority of an oral law that had been revealed by God simultaneously with the written law. Since this affirmation of an oral law subordinated the Zadokite hierocracy to a non-Aaronide scholar class, it was rejected by the Sadducees, who denounced these Sopherim ("scholars") as Perushim ("separatists," "heretics"; whence the name "Pharisees").

The masses, however, enthusiastically supported the Pharisees, the oral law, and the legitimacy of the Hasmonean high priesthood. Indeed, they sided with the Pharisees when the rupture occurred with John Hyrcanus, and they violently resisted Alexander Jannaeus (103-76) attempt to consolidate a monarchy with Sadducean support. Only after Salome Alexandra (76-67) restored authority to the Pharisees and their oral law did the masses acquiesce in the monarchy. Thenceforth the Pharisees and their successors, the rabbis, were sovereign in the realm of Jewish law.

### Roman Domination (63 B.C.-425 A.D.)

Judaean independence was brief (142-63 B.C.). The collapse of the Hellenistic monarchies enabled Rome to take over the Near East, and Rome maintained imperial control over Palestine after the destruction of Jerusalem, either through puppet kings (Hyrcanus II, 63-40; Herod, 37-4 B.C.; Agrippa I, 41-44 A.D.), procurators (7-36 A.D., 44-66), through the scholar class (Sanhedrin, 70-132), or the patriarchate (145-425).

Heavy taxation coupled with provocative acts by the Roman authorities twice threw the Jews into bloody rebellion (66-70 A.D. and 132-35 A.D.) The first of these ended with the destruction of the Second Temple.

The turbulent years 7 to 70 A.D. encouraged a variety of dissident movements within Judaism, one of which grew up around Jesus of Galilee (c.4 B.C.-c.30 A.D.), who preached the imminent coming of the kingdom of God, and was himself deemed by his most devoted disciples to be the Messiah. Although the Procurator Pontius Pilate crucified Jesus (c.30) for the challenge to Roman sovereignty that a messianic “King of the Jews” implied, a small handful of Jesus’ disciples, led by Peter, believed that he would return to usher in the kingdom. The movement made little headway among the Jews, but Paul, by rejecting the law, offered the message of the redemptive power of Christ, which had great appeal to the Gentiles. This rupture with Judaism, however, could not eradicate the historical consequences of the umbilical relationship.

### Triumph of Oral-Law Judaism (70 A.D. on)

The destruction of the Temple ended once and for all the cultus and the power of the Aaronides, and elevated to supremacy the Pharisaic scholar class. In the following centuries the majority of the Jews accepted the leadership of the scholar classes, whose authority was rooted in the concept of a twofold law, written and oral. Also, the synagogue form of religious expression made the cultus unnecessary.

The leadership of this scholar class was recognized by Rome when it permitted the reconstitution of its legislative body, the Beth Din Ha-Gadol (now called Sanhedrin), under the aegis of Johanan ben Zakkai (70 A.D.). Although the participation of some members of the scholar class in the unsuccessful Bar Kokhba revolt against Hadrian (132-35 A.D.) induced Rome temporarily to declare illegal the ordination of scholars, the Antonine emperors underwrote the authority of a strong patriarch, Judah ha-Nasi (“the Prince”) (170-217). The latter effectively curbed the independence of individual members of the scholar class by curtailing ordination and by promulgating in the Mishnah an authoritative rendition of the oral law. Although the Mishnah, the patriarch’s lawbook, bears—in its systematization and its logical-deductive mode of thought—the impress of Greco-Roman forms, it came to enjoy a sanctity almost equal to that of the Pentateuch.

The patriarchal absolutism of Judah ha-Nasi coincided with the last decades of Roman imperial splendor. The disastrous 3d century spelled not only mighty changes for the structure of empire but also for the viability of Palestinian Jewry. Although the

patriarchate continued under Judah's progeny until the 5th century, it held sway over growing poverty and disintegration. The development of Rome into a Christian state encouraged further deterioration. Palestinian leadership steadily eroded, so that the Palestinian Talmud, unlike the Mishnah, never came to enjoy uncontested authority. With the abolition of the patriarchate, Palestinian Jewry played a relatively insignificant role until the Islamic period.

#### The Diaspora *or* Dispersion (from 586 B.C.)

With the decline of the patriarchal system in Palestine in the 3d century A.D.,, the history of the Jews shifts to other parts of the world. Indeed, except for very brief interludes (in the 10th, 16th, and 17th centuries), Palestine is only peripherally involved in Jewish history until the emergence of the Zionist movement at the turn of the 20th century.

As early as the destruction of the First Temple in 587 B.C., viable Jewish communities were set up by exiles in Babylonia and refugees in Egypt. With the Hellenization of the Near East, Jews settled in all major cities. An especially virile community developed in Alexandria under the Ptolemies which produced a durable literature (for instance, the Septuagint, the Letter of Aristeas, and Philo) and enjoyed a vigorous life until the pogroms of the Roman period (38 A.D.). By the time of Paul's journeys, Jews were living throughout the cities of the Roman and Parthian worlds.

#### Jews in the Sassanian World (225-650 A.D.)

The Babylonian Jewish community of the Sassanian period, however, was the first Diaspora Jewry to dominate Jewish historical development for any substantial length of time.

Two Babylonian Jewish scholars, Rav (219-47) and Samuel (219-54), brought back with them from Palestine the patriarchal law book, the Mishnah, and adopted it as the fundamental law for the Baby Ionian Jewish scholar class. The decline in Palestinian fortunes, coupled with the favor shown the Jewish scholar class by the Persian Sassanian Emperor Shapur I (241-72 A.D.), enabled Rav and Samuel to free themselves from Palestinian authority, establish academies for the thorough study of the Mishnah, and determine the laws by which Babylonian Jewry was to be ruled.

The disintegration of Sassanian power brought with it deterioration of Jewish status, and led two scholars, Rav Ashi (375-427) and Rabina (474-99), to collect all the discussions (called Gemara) of the Babylonian Jewish scholar class into a massive work known as the Baby Ionian Talmud—no simple law book like the Mishnah, but a compendium of everything that the scholars had uttered.. Though the Mishnah serves as its text, the Talmud contains not only complex legal debates over the meaning of the Mishnah but also homilies, folklore, anecdotes, and much else. Though never meant to be a code, the Talmud attained an authority among Jews paralleled only by the Mishnah and the Bible.

### Jews in the Islamic World (650-1204)

Islam fell heir to Babylonian Jewry—as well as to the Jewries of the Byzantine Empire. Although Mohammed himself was hostile to the Jews, his successors accorded them autonomous rights. Under both the Umayyads (to 750 A.D.) and the Abbasids (750-10th century), the Jews were ruled by an exilarch of Davidic descent and by a scholar class (called the Gaonate) whose authority rested on the Babylonian Talmud. Forced out of agriculture by the discriminatory land tax, many Jews, especially in the Abbasid period, undertook an active role in the expanding international trade and finance. Most of the Jews entered a variety of urban occupations. This shift represented a significant economic change, for until the 8th and 9th centuries the majority of the Jews had earned their living from agriculture.

The fragmentation of the Abbasid empire in the 10th century undermined the hegemony over Islamic Jewry wielded by the exilarchate and the Gaonate from Baghdad. Jewish centers sprang up in Egypt, North Africa (Kairouan), and Andalusia, freed themselves from exilarchical and Gaonic controls, and developed their own autonomous communities on the basis of Talmudic law.

The Jews of Andalusia had an especially illustrious development (9th-12th centuries). Under the benign rule of the Umayyads (8th-10th centuries) and then under the various Emirs (11th century), Jews engaged in all occupations (including agriculture), attained high public office (even that of vizier), and produced works of the highest quality in philosophy, grammar, lexicography, and poetry. The invading Almohads (1148 A.,D.) , however, made a shambles of Andalusia and compelled the Jews either to accept Islam or to flee.

Among those fleeing was young Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides) (1135-1204), who settled in Egypt under the more tolerant rule of Saladin and wrote two works of enduring impact: the Mishneh Torah (1180), a systematization of Talmudic Jewish law, and the Guide for the Perplexed (1195), a brilliant adaptation of Aristotle to Judaism. With the death of Maimonides, the Jewries of Islam lumbered through a stagnant existence until the rise of the Ottoman power in the 16th century.

### Jews in Christian Europe (8th-18th Centuries)

The patterns of medieval Jewish history in Christian lands were an outcome of the relationship of the various Jewries to the vicissitudes of feudalism. Since these relationships varied from area to area, the historical experience of the Jews differed greatly. For this reason only one generalization can be made: in each Christian country the Jews enjoyed a positive status so long as their services were utilizable by the ruling classes, a negative status when disintegrative forces in society undercut their usefulness.

Germany, France, England. Because of their value as international merchants (8th-10th centuries), as town builders (10th-11th), and as large-scale moneylenders (11th-12th),

the Jews enjoyed a protected status in Germany, France, and England (from 1066). Even the church in these centuries utilized their services. In Germany, although the First Crusade (1096) was accompanied by violent pogroms, the Jewish communities continued to flourish throughout the 12th century.

A basic shift in policy occurred at the end of the 12th century in all three countries. Heavily indebted to Jewish financiers, the king, nobility, and church sought to escape repayment by subjecting the Jews to confiscatory taxation, debasement of legal status, and ideological vilification. This last was launched by Innocent III (1198-1216), who insisted that the Jews be reduced to servile status because of their rejection of Christ. As church policy (Fourth Lateran Council, 1215), this doctrine encouraged the masses to pillage and pogrom the Jews as alleged Christ-killers; desecrators of the Host, and murderers of Christian children for ritual purposes (the Blood Libel). This reversal of policy was most decisive in England and France where, after being divested of much of their wealth, they were expelled (England, 1291; France, 1306, 1322, 1394). Such a fate did not befall them in Germany only because the weakness of the emperor precluded a single act of expulsion. Instead, they were reduced to the status of serfs of the emperor (1235) and were bought, sold, bartered, and pawned by the ruling classes (13th-15th centuries).

During the years of privileged status, autonomous Jewish communities produced a highly creative scholar class. Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (Rashi, 1040-1105) wrote a commentary on the Talmud that was never equaled in lucidity and a commentary on the Bible which became a classic. Adopting Rashi as their model, his disciples (the Tosaphists) brought to perfection the casuistic-dialectic (pilpul) approach to the Talmud. With the decline of the Jewish communities, however, the quality of learning deteriorated.

Christian Spain. When the Jews were expelled from England and France, many found a welcome in Christian Spain. Here Christian rulers granted charters to the Jewish communities (aljamahs) and appointed Jews to responsible posts in recognition of their valuable economic services.

The bitter class struggles of the 14th century, however, in undermining the stability of society, unleashed a wave of anti-Semitic violence (1391) that made the aljamahs a shambles. The economic and social fate of the Jews was sealed soon thereafter (decrees of 1412), and finally they were expelled (1492).

During the 1391 pogroms thousands of Jews, especially of the wealthy courtier class, had adopted Christianity. Accepted as bona fide converts (converses^ New Christians), they had intermarried freely with the nobility, and occupied high positions in church and state. Accused (1449) of being secret Jews and attacked violently (1470^), the converses soon found themselves subjected to the Inquisition (1480), established to investigate their Christian loyalty. Many were burned at the stake; many more were imprisoned and deprived of their wealth; all were stripped of the positive appellation converse and vitup



era lively renamed marranos (“pigs”). Some of these marranos returned to Judaism and became the founders of western Jewish communities in the 17th century.

Italy. The Italian states of the north that had previously excluded Jews (10th-12th centuries) permitted them from the 13th century to establish loan banks. As long as their services were essential, these bankers were protected and prospered; the communities that grew up enabled their more gifted members to reflect the Renaissance in their writings.

The decline of the Italian city-states (16th-18th centuries), accompanied as it was by a renewal of the papal denunciation of the Jews (bull *Cum nimis absurdum*), spelled economic stagnation and ghettoization for the Jews. Except for a brief respite in Venice (till 1648), the Jewries of Italy steadily deteriorated till the *Risorgimento*.

Poland. In the 13th and 14th centuries Poland, too, offered a haven for German Jews. Such Christian Polish Kings as Casimir the Great (1333-70) offered Jews charters of privilege and protection in return for the services the Jews rendered as fiscal agents, as administrators of the estates of the King and nobility, and as town dwellers. Jews fared well till 1648, developing effective institutions of self-government (the *Kahal*; the Council of Four Lands), and creating academies (*yeshivot*) that produced legal minds of rare brilliance (for example, Moses Isserles, 1530-72).

The economic disintegration of Poland in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was ushered in by the slaughter of the Jews (*Khmelnitsky massacres*, 1648). Left in a state of desperation, the Jews were easily victimized by the pseudo-Messiah of Izmir, Turkey, *Shabbetai Zevi* (1626-76). After the failure of this movement the Jews responded in large numbers (especially in Volhynia and Podolia) to the spontaneous piety of a new movement, *Hasidism*, ushered in by *Israel Baal Shem Tob* (1700-60). In emphasizing the inner spirit, it appealed not only to poor and semiliterate Jews of the towns and villages but to a segment of the scholar class itself. The desperate attempt of *Elijah*, the *Gaon of Vilna* (1720-97), to arrest the movement was only partially successful.

#### Jews in the Ottoman Empire (16th-17th centuries)

When the Jews were expelled from Spain, they were encouraged to settle in the Ottoman Empire, where their financial and commercial know-how could be utilized. Joined subsequently by marranos, the Iberian Jews engaged in international trade and in the 16th century developed the cloth industry in such Palestinian cities as *Safed*. The thriving Jewries of Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Salonika proved to be fertile soil for major developments in Jewish law, the most towering of which was a compendium, the *Shulhan Arukh*, by *Joseph Karo* (1488-1575), that came to be recognized by Jews the world over as definitive. Paralleling the achievements in law was the elaboration of the mystical doctrines (*cabala*) of the 13th century Spanish work, the *Zohar*, by such brilliant mystics as *Isaac Luria* (1534-72) of *Safed*.

The decline of Ottoman power in the 17th century proved disastrous to the Jews. Wracked by the consequences of dissolution, the majority of Ottoman Jewry—joined by

large numbers elsewhere—fervently accepted the messianic claims of the Jewish mystic Shabbetai Zevi (1626-76). His conversion to Islam (1666) at the sultan's insistence plunged myriads of his followers into despair and condemned Ottoman Jewry to stagnation.

### The Modern World (17th-20th Centuries)

The key to the history of the Jews in the modern world is to be found in (1) the development of capitalism, (2) the emergency of constitutionally grounded nation-states, and (3) the growth of secular scientific thought. Wherever these phenomena gained ascendancy, the precapitalist, medieval status of the Jews was radically altered for the better (Holland, England; France, United States, Germany, Austria, and Italy); wherever they were unsuccessful or only partially so (Russia-Poland, the Balkans, and Turkey) their degraded status continued; whenever they were challenged, as in France, in the Dreyfus case (1894-1906), anti-Semitism bared its fangs; wherever they were discarded (Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia) the survival of the Jews was jeopardized.

The triumph of Westernization brought about the dissolution of self-governing Jewries and weakened the millennial authority of the Bible and the Talmud. Jews as citizens were free to associate with or disassociate from other Jews and Judaism. Many were attracted to the new Western forms of Judaism (Reform, Conservative, Neo-Orthodox), or to secular ideologies (liberalism, nationalism, socialism).

### Western Europe and America

The Jewish communities of the West were new communities founded (from the end of the 16th century) by merchant capitalist marranos from Spain and Portugal. The communities were relatively small and lacking in complexity of social structure and in a previous history. As the various nations of their domicile adopted representative systems of government, the Jews gained citizenship rights (France, 1791; Holland, 1796; England, 1847). Although such status was challenged from time to time by anti-Semitic movements (especially in connection with the Dreyfus case in France), it proved durable.

The Westernization process manifested itself most clearly in the United States. Uncluttered by medieval legal restraints on the Jews, and unencumbered by precapitalistic modes and institutions, the United States was in a position to offer the Jews of Europe rare opportunities. Whether these Jews were from an Iberian mercantile background (1654-1820), from the cities, towns, and villages of Germany (1820-70), or from eastern Europe (1870-1914), they engaged in a variety of economic and professional activities and developed communities and institutions in keeping with the structure of American life. This adjustment was achieved, in part, through the growth of Reform Judaism, launched in the United States by Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900), and the later Conservative movement championed by Solomon Schechter (1850-1915). Though a large Jewish proletarian element sustained a strong labor union and socialist interest at the beginning of the 20th century, and an even larger number of Jews clung to the orthodox-

rabbinic Judaism of their east European origins, the steady rise of the Jews into the middle class, especially after 1918, encouraged the acculturation process.

### Central and Eastern Europe

Westernization in central and eastern Europe had to cope with Jewish communities which were an outgrowth of precapitalistic economic and political systems. As a consequence, there was stubborn conflict between the advocates of Westernization (Haskalah) and the upholders of traditionalism. In Germany a small group of Court Jews (17th century) emerged as wealthy merchant capitalists (18th century) and supported the “enlightened” Judaism of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86). Though the Napoleonic conquest briefly emancipated the Jews from their degraded status, the Congress of Vienna (1815) restored the old order, and anti-Semitic riots (1818) stunned the Westernized Jews. Although many converted to Christianity, most Jews sought a solution through the Westernizing of Judaism, either radically through the Reform Judaism of Abraham Geiger (1810-74) or more traditionally through the Conservative Judaism of Zacharias Frankel (1801-75) and the Neo-Orthodoxy of Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-88), and through efforts at political emancipation as proclaimed by Gabriel Riesser (1806-63). The unification of Germany by Bismarck ushered in full emancipation, and the Jews of Germany responded with a flush of creativity in all endeavors.

A somewhat similar development occurred in Austria-Hungary. The intellectual spokesmen for Westernization (Haskalah) in Galicia in the 1820’s and 1830’s had to fight bitter battles with the followers of Hasidism. Emancipation, in 1868, represented a great victory for the Westernizers, and Vienna became a center of Jewish intellectual and artistic ferment.

The slow arrival of capitalism in eastern Europe precluded emancipation. The tsarist regime, except for some short-lived reforms under Alexander II (1855-81), treated the Jews with extreme harshness and in 1882 expelled the Jews from the villages, restricting their residence to a Pale of Settlement. Consequently, the Westernizers abandoned hopes for emancipation held by Judah L. Gordon (1831-92), and turned to the nationalism of J.L. Pinsker (1821-91) and Peretz Smolenskin (1842-85) as a solution.

The rise of Jewish nationalism in the East was paralleled by a similar awakening in the West. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), an emancipated Western Jew of Vienna, was convinced by the persistence of anti-Semitism in the West (for example, the Dreyfus case, 1894) that the Jews were a nation and that anti-Semitism would come to an end only when the Jews had a national home of their own, preferably in Palestine; as he explained in his book, *The Jewish State* (1896). His own strenuous efforts bore fruit, especially among the Jews of Russia-Poland, and he organized the World Zionist Congress in 1897. The hopes of the movement were especially heightened by the Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which the British government expressed itself as favoring a Jewish homeland in Palestine after the war.

### The Crisis Years (1918-1945)

World War I left crises of such great severity that they spawned totalitarian societies in Russia, Italy, Germany, and Spain, and threatened to overwhelm all but the most durable Westernized nations.

These developments proved to be fraught with danger to the Jews. In Russia the Soviet regime offered Bolshevik conformity to the Jews, and not emancipation. Precapitalist Jews, capitalist Jews, socialist Jews, and Zionist Jews—all suffered hardships.

In Poland the Jews were persistently subjected to discriminatory legislation, even though their status as a national minority was guaranteed by the Versailles Peace Treaty.

Even in the West the Jews found anti-Semitism to be highly popular when the depression of the 1930's brought into question the viability of capitalism and constitutional government.

The Jewish settlers in Palestine did not have an easy time either. The policies of the British mandatory administration raised painful obstacles to the construction of a national home, for these policies were anything but firm against rising Arab nationalism. The fate of the hardy Jewish settlement on the eve of World War II was very uncertain.

All these difficulties faded into minor problems in the face of Hitler's determination to exterminate the Jews. Crushed by the economic collapse of Germany (1929-32), millions of Germans accepted Hitler's analysis of the disaster: the Jews as international capitalists and international Bolsheviks had deliberately ruined Germany. Attaining the chancellorship. Hitler set about creating a totalitarian society free of Jews. He stripped them of their wealth and humiliated them (Nuremberg Laws, 1934). With anti-Semitic ideology thoroughly entrenched, the Nazi system used the mantle of war to wipe out the Jews of Europe. Systematically and efficiently about 6,000,000 Jews were destroyed.

### The Postwar World

Only the previous history of the Jews spared them total annihilation, for it had spread them among many lands (England, Canada, the United States, South and Central America, North Africa, South Africa, Palestine and the Middle East, India and the Soviet Union). In the postwar world only the Soviet Union took a negative attitude toward the Jews, and their position there steadily deteriorated.

It was otherwise elsewhere. The murder camps, the pitiful survivors, the Nuremberg trials—all documented the reality of the extermination process and discredited anti-Semitism in the eyes of the Western world.

The decline of imperial controls in the Near East afforded the Jews in Palestine the opportunity of winning their independence in 1948. Opening the doors wide to Jews the world over, the new state of Israel proved to be a haven for survivors of concentration

camps and for the Jews of North Africa and the Near and Middle East. These new settlers found themselves in a complex industrialized country with modern political institutions, the fruit of the years of Zionist adherence to their ideal of a viable nation.

In the United States, where more than 5,000,000 Jews live, they have enjoyed the freedom which the Constitution made possible. As citizens they have taken full advantage of the opportunities afforded them and have for the most part achieved middle-class status. They have developed a variety of philanthropic, communal, and scholarly institutions; they support three major religious denominations; they are active in government, politics, business, the professions, and the arts. And, with the exception of the Soviet Union and its satellites, conditions are now much the same for Jews the world over.

If, then, historical patterns are meaningful, it would seem that the well-being of the Jews once again reflects the well-being of the societies in which they live.

Consult Roth, Cecil, *A Short History of the Jewish People* (1948); *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible*, ed. by G.E. Wright and F.V. Filson (1956); Rivkin, Ellis, "A Decisive Pattern in American Jewish History," *Essays in American Jewish History* (1958); Bright, John, *A History of Israel* (1959) ; Rivkin, Ellis, "Modern Trends in Judaism," *Modern Trends in World Religions* (1959) , Roth, Cecil, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (1959); Tcherikover, V.A., *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (1959); Marcus, J.R., *The Jew in the Medieval World* (1960); Baer, Y.F., *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (1961).