

COMITÉ FRANÇAIS DES ÉTUDES BYZANTINES

ACTES DU VI^e CONGRÈS
INTERNATIONAL
D'ÉTUDES BYZANTINES

PARIS

27 JUILLET - 2 AOUT 1948

TOME I

Publié avec le concours du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

AU SECRÉTARIAT DU COMITÉ :
ÉCOLE DES HAUTES ÉTUDES, A LA SORBONNE
RUE DES ÉCOLES, PARIS-V^e

—
1950

THE STATUS OF THE JEWRIES OF THE LEVANT AFTER THE FOURTH CRUSADE

During the age of the Crusades and the waning Middle Ages the rulers of Europe had frequent occasion to deal with the Jewish problem. By and large, after the middle of the 12th century the principle of toleration retreated in the face of irresistible pressure. Between the late 12th century and the end of the 15th, several states and numerous towns officially excluded all adherents of Judaism. The period, in which this trend became dominant, also saw the historic expansion of Latin hegemony throughout the Balkan peninsula and the Aegean islands.

To cite a concrete instance, the first expulsion of the Jews by the King of France (1189) was virtually simultaneous with the inauguration of French rule over Cyprus. Theoretically viewed, the coincidence was ominous, for Cyprus was the home of a large Jewish population, perhaps greater than that of any other Greek island. In reality, however, the Lusignan rulers of *France de Chypre* did not emulate the extremism of the King of France. The status of the Jewries of the Levant was only rarely affected by the rising tide of intolerance, which characterized the Latin West¹.

Let us examine the situation produced by two types of regime :

1. The Greek states of the 13th century and thereafter.
2. The Colonies of Venice.

1. *The Greek States*

Both directly and otherwise the Fourth Crusade dealt a severe blow to a considerable portion of Byzantine Jewry. The largest community, the Jewry of Pera, was destroyed in 1203, and in the aftermath of the partition of the Empire the practice of

1. This brief survey is based on the author's detailed studies : « Jewish Life in Crete under the Rule of Venice, » *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 1942; *Romania: The Jewries of the Levant after the Fourth Crusade* (Paris, Éditions du Centre, 1949).

Judaism was banned in the Despotate of Epirus and the Empire of Nicaea. (No decree of this type had been promulgated since the reign of Romanos Lekapenos, 250 years before). Although the geographic scope of the decree expanded as the Greek reconquest progressed, the only major Jewish community exposed to persecution was Thessalonica. One may accordingly surmise that the destruction of Constantinople was a more serious blow than the persecution initiated by Theodore I of Epirus and John Vatatzes of Nicaea.

A national crisis often precipitates action, which in a period of reconstruction becomes recognized as pointless or detrimental. The program of Michael VIII for the rebuilding and repopulation of Constantinople called for a new policy. After recovering his capital (1261), this great emperor restored the toleration of Judaism, in the fullest sense, a policy from which none of his successors departed.

Did this new policy mean that the Jews were again restricted to a compulsory ghetto, similar to the one which existed in Pera until 1203? We do not hear of a Jewish quarter in the capital until the reign of Andronicus II (1282-1328), and from the complaint of Patriarch Athanasius it appears that more one synagogue could be seen in the city. The Jewish quarter occupied a new site, adjacent to the Venetian colony, and the Jews were no longer excluded from residence inside the walls of Constantinople. This site was assigned to a group of Jewish subjects by Andronicus II, who was concerned not with limiting their freedom of residence but with governing his capital according to an established system. Just as every craft guild and every colony of foreigners occupied a designated part of the city, so did the Jewish group receive its quarter.

The residents of the Jewish quarter consisted of artisans, engaged in tanning and the dressing of furs. This arrangement worked so well that a second Jewish group, this time subjects of Venice, applied for admission and was duly authorized to settle. These « Venetian » Jews leased space from the Emperor (or Empress), with the understanding that they could proceed to erect buildings; in due time they could expect to occupy the premises without payment (*emphyteusis*). The terms governing the settlement of these « Venetian » Jews, we may assume, were similar to those granted to the original group, except that the subjects of the emperor had to pay a collective tax. There is, therefore, no reason to consider the Jewish quarter a discriminatory device. From the legal standpoint, it falls into the same category

as the colonies of foreign merchants in Constantinople. The internal picture of the Jewish quarter, on the other hand, resembled that of the separate streets occupied by the respective artisan guilds, as depicted in the well-known account of Ibn Battuta.

There are but few traces in the sources of the Jewries of the provinces, but the community of Janina is an interesting case. The recorded history of this Greek-speaking community, which extends from the 14th century to our own day, opens with a remarkable clause in the town's charter. According to this document, the Jews of Janina shall be free and secure from molestation : ἕνα δὲ εὐρίσκωνται καὶ οἱ ἐν τῇ τοιαύτῃ πόλει Ἰουδαῖοι εἰς ἐλευθερίαν καὶ ἀνενοχλησίαν κατὰ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἐποίκουσ ἀυτῆς. This was by no means a condition imposed by the imperial official, who granted this charter (Syrgiannes, governor of the West), but part of the terms proposed by the town's representatives, and duly confirmed by Andronicus II in 1319. It would be going too far to claim this passage as evidence that the Jews were politically or socially on a par with their Christian neighbors, but surely it indicates that in the provinces, as well as in the capital, the Jews enjoyed the basic rights of the urban population at large.

The wording of the passage suggest that the Jewry of Janina was in need of protection ; perhaps because of an incident in the recent past — or possibly with a view to averting a recurrence of the persecution, which had ended some 80 years before. A more serious problem, however, is the silence of the charter in respect to the fiscal obligations of the community. In Constantinople and a number of other localities a spécial Jewry-tax was levied, a fact which has been interpreted by Prof. Franz Dölger as proof that the *Judensteuer* was the universal rule. If one accepts this thesis, it remains to find some explanation for the silence of the Janina charter. My own examination of the question has, however, led me to the conclusion that Jewry-tax was not a universal feature, either under the Palaeologi or earlier ; Janina was evidently one of the places in which no Jewry-tax was levied.

2. *The Colonies of Venice*

The possessions, with which we are concerned, included Crete, Euboea and Modon-Coron ; in addition, Jewish subjects of Venice also lived in Constantinople. Although the Republic had not yet granted the Jews the right of permanent residence at Venice itself, it never questioned their right of residence in the colonies.

The acknowledgment of the established status of the Jews is reflected both in the administration of the colonies and in foreign relations. When Greeks or others inflicted losses on the subjects of the Republic, the officials showed equal concern for the welfare of both Jews and Christians. On several occasions the grievances of Jewish subjects involved the Republic in extensive negotiations with the Emperor.

It may be difficult to generalise concerning the shifting colonial policy of Venice : the problem of governing the unruly island of Crete, for example, was entirely different from that of maintaining a merchant colony at Chalcis, while taking advantage of opportunities to annex entire island. Insofar as the treatment of the Jews was concerned, however, the Republic was guided consistently by economic interest.

The Venetians found highly skilled Jewish artisans, particularly in the silk and leather branches, who had long been established in the Byzantine world. These workers plied their craft without hindrance, despite the existence of guilds of Christian craftsmen. Elsewhere in the Christian world, it was only in Spain that a Jewish artisan class was permitted to work. Another important element were the Jewish merchants, who were welcome in the ports of these colonies primarily because they paid import and export duties, from which citizens of Venice were exempt. If these considerations were not quite enough to ensure the proper appreciation of the value of the colonial Jewish groups, there was the collective tax, supplemented by special imposts and by war levies.

It must, nevertheless, be recognized that Venice frequently demanded higher contributions, while the Jews complained against the excessive demands. The oppressive fiscal policy of the Republic was a serious matter, which affected all elements. As an extreme illustration, in 1361 the Italian colonists launched a full-scale rebellion in order to free themselves of the mounting tax burden. The exploitation of the colonial Jewries should be considered against the background of this general policy, rather than as a specific weapon wielded against an alien minority.

At any given date, in the city of Venice one might find a spokesman or delegation from a colony, bearing a petition. In this aspect of public life there was frequent collaboration between the Christian and Jewish subjects. At times the delegation would include a Jewish representative, but even in the absence of such a person, the petition would set forth the grievances of the Jewish group as part of the colony's need for alleviation.

There were, to be sure, occasions when conflicts disturbed the relations between the Jewry and the dominant population. The most serious of these developed in Crete during the 15th century, when the indebtedness of the Venetian noble class to the Jewish usurers reached an extreme stage. It is noteworthy that such conflicts were not handled by the colonial officials, but had to be submitted to Venice. This procedure usually resulted in a decision which took into consideration the claims of both sides.

As for the Jewry-tax, was this an obligation inherited from the period of Byzantine rule? Only in two localities — Durazzo and Thessalonica — is there a positive answer to this question. When Durazzo became a Venetian possession in 1392, the Jewry continued to deliver each year 16 *brachia* of the costly material known as *calasamitum*. For Thessalonica we have a document of the year 1425, from which it is clear that the Jewish community paid 1,000 hyperpera annually prior to the transfer of the city to the Republic in 1423. This tax must have been imposed under Byzantine rule, i. e. after the return of the Jews to the city during the reign of Michael VIII or later. It is, of course, possible that the Latin conquerors found the Jews accustomed to paying a special tax throughout the Byzantine area. This supposition, however, becomes less certain when we consider that the Venetians and other Westerners introduced various innovations in their possessions, and the Jewry-tax may well have been among these.

In the first place, under Latin rule the Jewish quarter became a compulsory ghetto. This became a feature not only of every Venetian colony, but of Rhodes and Chios, under Knights of St. John and the Giustiniani of Genoa, respectively. The influence of the West is further reflected in the custom of closing the ghetto gates during Easter Week, which we find in Corfu, Negroponte and Chios. The appearance of the compulsory ghetto may be contrasted with the situation in Patras, where Jews lived inside the town walls as well as in their own quarter outside. This freedom was probably typical of the provincial towns in the Byzantine area (even if it violated canon law), prior to 1204.

The Latins also introduced the yellow badge, or the distinctive Jewish hat. A century after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) decreed that the dress of Jews must be different from that of Christians, the yellow hat made its appearance in Cyprus. Venice and Genoa imported this fashion into their colonies at a later date.

The Latins, moreover, did not permit the Jews to carry on their work during Christian rest-days, a restriction which almost certainly was not a heritage from the Byzantine period. In some, if not all, of the colonies, the regulations required the Jews to desist from work not only on Sundays and the major religious holidays, but on various other days as well (Modon-Coron, Genoese Pera and Caffa).

The fact that Venice and other Western rulers introduced such changes, may serve to explain why the Jewry-tax apparently became the rule in the colonies, without resorting to the debatable thesis that tax was continued from the earlier period.

In conclusion, it is well to bear in mind that the three centuries following the Fourth Crusade were filled with strife and natural disaster. Consider, for example, the effects of the Black Death. This plague precipitated the ruin of a great series of Jewish communities on the Continent, but it had no distinctive significance for those of the Levant. This diversity is characteristic of the difference between the socio-economic development of the two regions. In our generation we may take some satisfaction in knowing that there was a large section of medieval Christendom in which the Jewish population found a *modus vivendi*, which was maintained in the face of many vicissitudes.

† Joshua STARR.
