

## E1. Jews of Morocco

Jews have lived in Morocco for several thousand years. Some lived in separate communities or neighborhoods; others intermarried with the native Amazigh (Berber) community. When Spanish and Portuguese Christian armies expelled the large Jewish community from southern Europe in the 1490s, many Jews came to Morocco. (These ‘Sephardic’ Jews often felt a common bond with Muslims of Spanish origin living in Morocco, sharing common traditions, memories, and the pain of expulsion from their homes in Spain.) Over the next centuries, Jews sometimes rose to prominence, sometimes suffered from persecutions, and sometimes lived under the direct protection of the sultan. The French Protectorate (1911-1956) did nothing to change the position of the Jews.

During World War II, life became especially precarious for Morocco’s Jews, who at that time numbered 250,000-350,000. When France fell to Germany, Morocco came under the rule of the Vichy French (collaborationist) government, which imposed restrictions on the Jews. Luckily, Moroccan Jews were spared the worst Nazi atrocities. This was partly because of their relative distance from the center of persecution (Central/Eastern Europe). However, the Moroccan sultan himself played a role in protecting the Jews, famously telling pro-Nazis demanding that Jews be singled out: “There are no Jews in Morocco. There are only Moroccan subjects.”

With the end of the war and the subsequent establishment of the state of Israel, Moroccan Jews began to emigrate. On the one hand, some Jews were attracted by greater job opportunities in Israel and by the chance to be part of a country in which they were not a minority. On the other hand, Arab indignation at the Israeli treatment of Palestinians made Jews living in Arab lands feel that they were no longer welcome.

Today, only about 2,000 Jews remain in Morocco. However, Jewish visitors are welcome in Morocco, and the Moroccan Constitution of 2011 specifically mentions the contributions of Jews to the country’s culture.

**Assignment:** Imagine you are living in Morocco in 1950. Write 2 diary entries, each at least one double-spaced page long. Choose names for your characters that are authentic. Also, include at least 5 facts or factual details drawn from the history/ geography of the area. (Be sure to look up additional information in addition to the information found in this reading.) Underline the pieces of information you include in each of your diary entries.

- In one diary entry, you are a Jew living in Chefchaouen, where your family has lived since leaving Spain centuries ago. Why are you leaving? (Look up reasons that North African Jews immigrated to Israel.) What will you miss about your home city? (Look up Chefchaouen to see what it looks like and what life is like there.)

- In another diary entry, you are a Muslim living in Chefchaouen. Your best friend is Jewish, and your family has always been close to his/her family. How do you feel about

the Jewish family leaving Morocco? Why do you think they are going? Do you agree with their decision? Are there other local Muslims with different ideas? (Why or why not?)