

## THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN FRANCE IN THE 18TH CENTURY

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The history of the communal life of the Jews in France under the *ancien régime* has yet to be written.<sup>1</sup> The task is a difficult one and it becomes more and more so as the years go by. Oral tradition, this important source of local history, is fading away. The generation that created it is dying out. Family archives, diaries, private correspondence, all that scatters and vanishes. The same can be said of the archives of the consistories, of the synagogues, and of the various communal institutions. The French rabbis have made a great contribution to the history of the Jews in France. Disciples of Isidore Loeb, Hartwig Derenbourg, Michel Bréal, Oppert, Zadock Kahn, Israel Levi, the French rabbis figure among the authors of outstanding historical works. Unfortunately, they have not been trained in the methodology of historical documentation and research. Preoccupied with their religious

<sup>1</sup> Isidor Loeb, a scholar of great historical intuition and with a profound knowledge of the Jewish past, undoubtedly might have done the job had he not been taken away by an untimely death: See his *Statuts des Juifs d'Avignon, 1779* (Versailles 1881). Léon Kahn has written several monographs on the Jewish community of Paris, its institutions, schools, charities, etc., but for the most part these are brief summaries of documents drawn from archives or from the records of the consistory and one learns little from them concerning the communal life of the Jews of Paris. M. Ginsburger is noted for his indefatigable research in the domain of the history of the Jews of Alsace and his merits in this respect are of great significance. His articles in the *Revue des Etudes Juives*, in his little review of Strasburg and in the *Bulletin* of the consistory of that city, have invariably been extremely interesting. Ginsburger is also one of the rare Jewish historians of France who follow closely the course of the internal life of the Jewish communities in Alsace. Thus far, however, he has not assembled the results of his investigations into a history of the Jewish communities in Alsace.

We also possess a certain number of monographs concerning the communities of other regions of France, those of Bordeaux, for instance, of Bayonne, of Narbonne, Béziers, Nîmes, Avignon, Carpentras, Metz, Nancy, etc. All that can be said about these works is that their authors very often stop the narrative at the date of the general expulsion of the Jews from France (1394), and that if they do continue it further they rarely go on up to the 18th century.

and communal duties they often neglect the archives of the community. The latter, as Robert Anchel points out,<sup>2</sup> are almost everywhere in a pitiful state.

It is not intended in this essay to fill the gap just indicated. We have set both chronological and geographical limits to this study. We will be concerned with the social life of the Jewish communities at the close of the eighteenth century, almost on the eve of the Great Revolution, and we shall draw for our documentation only upon two or three communities of the Portuguese Jews at Bordeaux, Bayonne and Peyrehorade, upon those of the Comtat-Venaissin, Avignon and Carpentras as well as those of north-eastern France, Metz and Nancy, and lastly upon some small localities of Alsace. But even within this restricted frame we shall be unable, for lack of space, to draw a complete picture of Jewish internal life. Our aim will be rather to outline the most salient traits, to survey the various elements of which the community was composed, to explain their interrelation—in short, to bring to life once again the communal life of the Jews in France at the end of the *ancien régime*.

#### *French Jewry Under the Ancien Régime and Its Communities*

French Jewry under the old regime and up to the Revolution did not form one organic whole. The Jewish groups which were settled in the various provinces of France were united neither by the bonds of an organization of their own nor by the ties of national solidarity. They had no supreme council for the regulation of the functions of the local communal institutions or for the solution of differences arising among the communities of the different regions of the country; nor did they hold periodic congresses of their representatives, as had been the case during the Middle Ages. The Jews of Bordeaux were not concerned with the condition of their brethren in Alsace, and the Jews of Avignon and of Carpentras did not trouble about what was going on among the Jews in Metz and Nancy, and so on. There was no feeling of being parts of one body, members of an entity that share common interests and have a common cause to defend against common enemies.

To this feeling of unconcern was added at times one of actual animosity. In the 14th century the condition of the Jews in France had

<sup>2</sup> Anchel, R., *Napoléon et les Juifs*, pp. xiii-xiv.

been much more difficult since they were facing expulsion from the royal territories; still, thanks to the vision and energy of their leaders, Manecier de Vesoul, Denis Quinon, and Mattathias Provenci, the Jews of the north and of the south were able to achieve the fusion of all communities into a single unit. This was not so at the end of the 18th century. Instead of standing together the Jewish communities quarreled one with another. Attracted by the commercial prosperity of Bordeaux, Jews from Avignon were quick to begin moving over to the great maritime city. Their presence was not much to the taste of the Christian merchants there, nor was it much to the taste of the Portuguese and Spanish Jews.<sup>3</sup>

The immigrants from Avignon, Comtat-Venaissin, and north-eastern France did not disturb in any way whatever their opulent co-religionists and did not compete with them. Busy mostly with trade in old clothes or dry goods they grouped themselves in separate communities. In 1722, however, the Portuguese Jews of Bordeaux petitioned for and were granted a decree by the municipal authorities which ordered the expulsion from the city of all the "*tudesques*," or "German" Jews, i.e., those who came from the north-eastern provinces of France. The decree was not carried out completely. The leaders of the "Portuguese nation" intensified their efforts and a new decree was issued on January 21, 1734, which ordered the expulsion from the entire province of Guyenne not only of the "Teutonic" Jews but of the Jews of Avignon as well. The measure was renewed in 1739. In 1751, the intendant of Bordeaux, de Tourny, proposed to annul the decree of 1734 so as to allow Jews from Avignon to reside in the province upon individual authorization. However, the agent of the Portuguese Jews in Paris, Jacob Rodrigues Pereire, a man of vast culture, member of several academies in Europe and first teacher of deaf-mutes in France, marshalled all his connections at the court and in the chancelleries to help him defeat the proposal of de Tourny.<sup>4</sup>

Time did not mend the attitude of the Portuguese Jews toward their co-religionists in the other regions of France. When, at the beginning of the Revolution, the problem of putting up a serious fight for Jewish

<sup>3</sup> Dubnow, S. M., *Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes*, vol. v, p. 288.

<sup>4</sup> La Rochelle, E., *Jacob Rodrigues Pereire* (Paris 1882), p. 120 and pp. 123-25; Bonnasieux, *Conseil de commerce et Bureau de commerce 1700-1791* (Paris 1900), pp. 218 b, 220 a, 233 b, 234 b, 238 a, 247 a; Malvezin, Th., *L'Histoire des Juifs de Bordeaux* (Bordeaux 1875), p. 189.

civil and political emancipation arose before the leaders of French Jewry, they proved unable to overcome the psychological barriers which divided them, their distrust and indifference, and they acted separately. In the petition they addressed on January 22, 1790, to the members of the National Assembly, the representatives of the "Portuguese nation" persistently stressed their distinction from the Jews of the North-East and warned the Assembly against confusing them.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the Jews settled in France during the 18th century did not form a homogeneous part of the population of the country and were not considered as such by the non-Jewish inhabitants. The general French literature of the period devoted very little attention to Jews, other than from the theological or religious viewpoint. Voltaire, who did not dare to attack openly Catholicism, assailed the Jews because, according to the ecclesiastical doctrine formulated by Bossuet and taken over by Rollin and several other writers, the Jews occupied the center of the world up to the advent of Christ, and because their Law, and their institutions, according to the Church, are divine. Voltaire was an antisemite not by conviction but by accident, his antisemitism being an instrument of war directed against the structure of Christianity. The Jews of France of his own day interested Voltaire very little. When Isaac Pinto, author of distinguished works on philosophy and economics, took up the defense of the Jews against Voltaire, the latter addressed a letter to Pinto in which he admitted "having been wrong in ascribing to an entire nation the vices of several individuals" and promised to make the necessary rectification in the new edition of his work. Voltaire, however, did not keep his promise.<sup>6</sup>

*The Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, in the article "Jews," treats only the history of the Jewish people, which, the author says, "adheres so steadfastly and so devotedly to its old religion, and which marks so clearly the cradle, age and progress of ours." There are further brief remarks concerning the number of Jews, their dispersion all over the world and their "attachment to the Mosaic faith despite opprobrium

<sup>5</sup> For similar conditions in Avignon see Chobaut, M. H., "Les Juifs d'Avignon et du Comtat et la Révolution française. La fin des quatre carrières," in *Revue des Etudes Juives*, n.s., vol. i (ci) p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Emmerich, *Das Judentum bei Voltaire* (Breslau 1930); see also *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. xc, pp. 105-109, and La Rochelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-417.

and vexations.”<sup>7</sup> There is almost no information regarding the Jews of France in the article. Those writers of the last quarter of the 18th century who treated the Jewish problem, such as Mirabeau, Abbé Grégoire, Thiéry and others, do deal with the situation of the Jews in France, but they do not recognize a homogeneous Jewish population, and they speak separately of the Portuguese Jews, the Jews of Avignon, the Jews of Alsace, etc. The term “Jewish nation” begins to be used as a designation for all the Jews of France only after the Revolution, under the First Empire. Before this period official documents referred only to the “Portuguese Jewish nation,” “the Jewish nation established in Alsace,” “the Jewish community of Lorraine,” the “Jews of Metz,” etc.<sup>8</sup> Legislative action was always concerned with the Jews of a definite region.

The civil, political, not to speak of the economic status of these various Jewish communities in France was not the same. The best and most favorable situation was that of the Portuguese Jews. The letters patent of August 1550, granted by Henry II, had assured to the Jews from Spain and Portugal the right of free residence in Guyenne, with the right of trading there, acquiring and owning all kinds of property, and enjoying all the privileges which the Christian inhabitants of the province possessed. These letters patent were ratified, from one reign to another, by each new king: by Henry III in November 1574, by Louis XIV in December 1656, by Louis XV in June 1723, and by Louis XVI in June 1776. These last letters patent introduced an important change in the juridical status of the Portuguese Jews. They not only confirmed the “privileges, franchises and immunities” of those Jews already settled in Bordeaux and its immediate environs, but in addition, they permitted them to transfer their residence to any other districts, territories, and seigneuries subject to the allegiance of the king. Moreover, they granted the rights just mentioned to other Jews, these, without doubt, also members of the Portuguese nation, “who might desire to move there in the course of time.”

“The Portuguese Jews enjoy in France the same privileges as do the French natives,” one reads in the prayer for the king by the chief rabbi

<sup>7</sup> See vol. xix, pp. 192-93. The article is signed with the initials D. J.

<sup>8</sup> Ginsburger, M., “Un emprunt de la nation juive d’Alsace,” in *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. xxxi (1925) 85-86; Anchel, R., “Les lettres-patentes du 10 Juillet, 1784,” *ibid.*, vol. xciii (1932) 134.

of Bordeaux, Athias. This statement was obviously an exaggeration. If at Bordeaux the Jews indeed did get status almost equal to that of the Christian population, at Bayonne, the second largest center in Guyenne, the Jews did not have the right of residence, and had to live in Saint-Espirit, a suburb; they were forbidden to own real estate, the right of trade was extremely limited, etc.<sup>9</sup> The Jews of Avignon enjoyed free exercise of their religion, the right to the possession of private and public property within the limits of their district (*la carrière*), the right of self-administration under the supervision of the government; they were subject to all the taxes imposed upon the other residents of the towns in which they resided, and, in addition, to a special tax that assumed various forms. They were subjected to all kinds of obligations and prohibitions, very often disturbing and always humiliating, as Chobaut correctly remarks. For instance, up to the days of the Great Revolution they had to wear the yellow hat, which they replaced by a black hat only during their travels and only outside inhabited localities. Another degrading institution, which continued down to the end of the 18th century, was the obligation to attend, on Saturday, a sermon by a Catholic preacher, who was paid by the Jews. In Carpentras this was required twice a month; in other cities of the region it was less often. In all matters which did not concern religion the Jews were subjected to Roman law, which was in force in the province and amenable before Christian courts of justice.<sup>10</sup>

The situation of the Jews in the provinces of the North-East has been described by the author in an earlier article published in this journal.<sup>11</sup> To what has been said there, must be added, that the last decree published on the eve of the Revolution concerning the Jews of Alsace (the letters patent of July 10, 1784), expelled from the province all Jews who had no permanent or known dwelling-place or who did not pay off the taxes assessed by the king, the feudal lords, or the towns. The admission of foreign Jews was forbidden, and marriage among Jews was pro-

<sup>9</sup> Posener, S., articles "Bayonne" and "Bordeaux" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*; Malvezin, *op. cit.*; La Rochelle, *op. cit.*, p. 278; Crémieux, A., "Pour contribuer à l'histoire de l'accession des juifs à la qualité de citoyens français," in *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. xcv, pp. 45-46, 47.

<sup>10</sup> Chobaut, *op. cit.*, pp. 26, 28, 29.

<sup>11</sup> "The Immediate Economic and Social Effects of the Emancipation of the Jews in France," in *JEWISH SOCIAL STUDIES*, vol. i (1939) 271-76.

hibited except upon the authorization of the king. The law allowed Jews, provided they did not use Christian help, to rent farms, land and vineyards, to exploit mines and contract private or public works, but not to subcontract markets. They had the right to establish factories, engage in banking business and wholesale and retail trade but were forbidden to use Hebrew for their accounts. They were allowed to own real property, but only for their personal use. Their contracts had to be made before two Christian tax officials who witnessed the counting of the cash. A certain number of clauses regulated loans of money. The law recognized the juridical status of the Jews residing there and permitted them to act collectively. In some respects it even recognized the entire Jewish population of Alsace as a juridical entity and created the office of Jewish syndics, whose function it was to look after the general interests of the Jews of the province and to take care of the assessment and collection of the royal taxes among the Jews. All these measures are found in the letters patent of 1784, in which the authors tried to assemble and co-ordinate all the previous legislation and regulations concerning the Jews of Alsace. On the eve of the total annulment of this legislation an effort was made to compose a first draft of a code destined to regulate the life of the most important center of French Jewry. "But by its very character," Robert Anchel rightly observes, "the attempt could be nothing but a mediocre product which only consecrated the blunders and persecution practices of the past."<sup>12</sup>

As for the Jews of Lorraine, an insight into their condition may be found in the *Réponse* of Louis Isaac Berr and Benisaacson to the "Address of the Community of Strasbourg to the National Assembly against the Jews." "The laws which regulate the position of the Jews," the authors say in refuting the calumny of the antisemitic municipal council of Strasbourg, "have always been very severe, and the way in which they were enforced made them even more rigorous. If a Jew, finding his paternal house cramped, dared change it for more comfortable quarters, or if a father took his son-in-law into his house in order not to be separated from his children, a royal official was sure to appear and insist upon the enforcement of the decree of 1755, and he had the authority to issue an order for expulsion. In certain small towns of the

<sup>12</sup> Anchel, "Les lettres-patentes . . ." pp. 113-15, 133.

province the Jews were permitted to reside only in isolated houses chosen for them by the authorities. If a Jew took the liberty to move into another house his belongings were immediately thrown out into the street and he himself was sentenced by the judge to an arbitrary fine."

"It is true," the authors continue, "that such cruelty has become less frequent during the last ten years. At Nancy, in particular, we have been treated with all the kindness compatible with the spirit of the decree of 1753." The Jews in that city had the right to live wherever they wanted. Those among them who could afford it had houses of their own, "with carriage and stable," in the main streets, but the majority of the Jews (two-thirds, approximately) were concentrated in the old rue Saint-François.

"Except for this case of improvement," Louis Isaac Berr and Benisaacson point out, "not a single civic right has been granted to us. We are excluded from all corporations. The exercise of arts and handicrafts is forbidden to us. We are even forbidden to own real property. In order to be able to acquire property, Cerf-Berr, Berr Isaac-Berr and Salomon Moïse Levi were obliged to secure letters patent."<sup>13</sup>

Like French Jewry in general, the Jews of the French provinces just considered, did not form a whole, and had no institutions to tie them together. The Jewish population of each province was divided into a certain number of communities which enjoyed full autonomy in their internal administration and which were absolutely independent. If some of these communities were regarded as central, as, for instance, that of Bayonne, in Guyenne, or that of Nancy, in Lorraine, they were so considered because of their numerical importance or their prosperous condition, but never on account of their juridical privileges or because they had the right to participate in the life of the other communities of the same region. The "Portuguese Jewish nation" was divided into six communities, those of Bordeaux, Bayonne, Biarritz, St.-Jean-de-Luz, Bidache and Peyrehorade. The Jews of Avignon formed four communities, or *carrières*—Avignon, Carpentras, Cavaillon and Isle-sur-Sorgue. In Alsace, under the First Empire, there were more than two hundred

<sup>13</sup> Berr, Louis Isaac and Benisaacson, *Réponse à l'adresse de la commune de Strassbourg à l'Assemblée Nationale contre les Juifs* (Nancy 1790); Ginsburger, M., "Nancy et Strassbourg," in *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. lxxxix (1930) 82-83; Godechot, G., "Les Juifs de Nancy de 1789 à 1795," *ibid.*, vol. lxxvii (1928) 4, 5, 6.



localities with a Jewish population. There certainly were no fewer number in the days before the Revolution, but we do not know into how many communities these Jews were divided as we do not have even approximate statistics on this point. The same applies to the situation in Lorraine, where the number of localities with a Jewish population under the First Empire was one hundred and sixty-eight.<sup>14</sup>

The community thus was the only form of collective existence of the Jews in France under the old regime known to themselves and recognized by the authorities. Facts such as the naming in 1761 of Jacob Rodrigues Pereire as "agent of the Portuguese Jewish nation in Paris," the letters patent of July 10, 1784, sanctioning an institution which had existed for a long time and granting to the Jews of Alsace the right to elect "syndics" charged with the duty of watching over their general affairs, the "syndics of the Jewish community of Lorraine"—all these facts would seem to indicate that the government was inclined to consider all the Jews of each province as an entity. Such a deduction, however, would be erroneous. These offices of "agents" and "syndics" were really created for fiscal and administrative purposes, in order to help the central and local authorities maintain surveillance of the Jewish population, particularly in Paris, and in order to levy taxes. If an "agent of the Portuguese Jewish nation," such as Pereire, as a "syndic" of the Jews of Alsace, such as Cerf-Berr, or that of the Jews of Lorraine, such as Berr Isaac-Berr, interceded with the government in behalf of the Jews in economic or political matters, they did so invariably, not in their capacity of agent or syndic but by virtue of their personal position as important purveyors of the army, or as great importers of wheat and fodder, or thanks to their connections in Paris and at the court. The same letters patent of July 10, 1784 which sanctioned the election of "syndics of the Jews of Alsace," Robert Anchel writes, "made an attempt not to consider the Alsatian Jews as a body in order to prevent their claims from being considered." When M. de Mirbeck, the attorney acting in behalf of the Jews, lodged with the Council of Dispatches their "most humble and most respectful representations" apropos of the letters patent of 1784, the Minister of

<sup>14</sup> Posener, S., articles "Bayonne," "Biarritz," "Bidache" and "Bordeaux," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, and "Les Juifs sous le premier empire," in *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. xciii (1932) 203-204; de Neyremand, "Dénombrement des familles israélites en Alsace au cours des années 1689 et 1716," in *Revue d'Alsace*, vol. x (1859) 564-68.

Justice, de Miromesnil, rejected them as unacceptable precisely because he had spoken in the name of all the Alsatian Jews.<sup>15</sup>

*The Jewish Communities and Christian Society*

The communities were thus the only Jewish organizations with which the Christian world has anything to do. The living pattern, however, was not the same in all parts of France. Thus, in certain provinces the ghetto had ceased to exist by the 18th century, whereas it still persisted in Avignon and in the Comtat-Venaissin. A traveller in France at the beginning of the 19th century writes as follows: "Before the Revolution the Jews (at Avignon) lived in a separate district, called '*la Juiverie*,' in sordid and infected streets; the place was closed by a special gate which was locked at eight in the evening." Chobaut, the keeper of the archives of the département of Vaucluse, gives us more details. He writes that in all the four towns which composed the papal possessions in France, Avignon, Carpentras, Cavaillon and Isle-sur-Sorgue, the ghetto, or *carrière*, was located in the center of the town, amidst the Christian population, probably in order that they might keep watch over the Jews more easily as well as to protect them. The appearance of the ghetto was everywhere identical: "A long and tolerably clean street, traversed by short blind alleys, and closed at each end by gates well locked at night. At Carpentras, the street was very narrow, lined with tall and not very sturdy houses up to ten stories high. Since the Jews were forbidden to spread out their buildings horizontally they had to extend them vertically. One house often had several proprietors. The poor occupied the highest stories. The lodgings were unsanitary, small, poorly ventilated and poorly lighted; the stairs were crooked, the chimneys badly constructed and dangerous. The tenants of the upper stories lifted up in baskets, by means of pulleys and ropes, the provisions left for them in the street. The situation was somewhat better at Avignon, Isle-sur-Sorgue and Cavaillon. Here the Jews lived in larger quarters; the houses were not so tall and less crowded and hence got more air and light."<sup>16</sup>

Metz, too, had preserved, up to the end of the 18th century, a special

<sup>15</sup> La Rochelle, *op. cit.*, p. 148; Godechot, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6; Anchel, *op. cit.*, pp. 127, 134.

<sup>16</sup> Milleri, *Voyage dans les départements du Midi*, 4 vols. (Paris 1807) vol. ii, p. 179; Chobaut, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

Jewish district, which it was forbidden to enlarge. This ghetto retained its specific character long after the Revolution. The prefect of the département of the Moselle described it, in the year X, as follows: "It is very low, the streets are narrow, the houses very tall. Formerly they (the Jews) could not move out beyond the boundaries that were assigned to them, and when their population increased in numbers they were as it were forced to pack together." In a letter addressed to the Minister of the Interior, the same prefect, Colchen, speaking of the Jewish district, described it as being "low, humid, narrow and unhealthy."<sup>17</sup>

At Nancy, the Jews had the right to live everywhere in the city and the wealthy Jews, as we said, resided in the new neighborhoods together with the wealthy non-Jewish bourgeoisie. About two-thirds of the Jews, however, writes M. G. Godechot, were concentrated in the old rue Saint-Francois, the site of the old ghetto. In the South-East, the Portuguese Jews did not know for a long time what a ghetto was. A district inhabited mostly by Jews still existed at Bordeaux, but this was purely voluntary. They were not forbidden to dwell in other neighborhoods of the city and they actually did so. At Bayonne, the Jews did not live in the city proper, but in the suburbs. At Peyrehorade, they owned houses in the city and in the country and also in the neighboring villages, where they tilled the land.<sup>18</sup>

The obligation imposed upon Jews to live penned up in one district was a permanent cause of protest by them and they constantly sought to evade this restriction. They left the ghetto and settled, on the sly, in other parts of the city, or, when compelled by economic reasons, they emigrated altogether. The regulation of the Holy Office of 1725 formally forbade the Jews of Comtat-Venaissin to rent rooms in villages "where they intend to eat and to sleep during their stay in the place." It further enjoined the landlords of those rooms to take them back from the Jews "at short notice and not under any circumstances to give any refund to Jews or Jewesses on pain of disobedience to the Holy Office." Two years in succession, in 1776 and 1777, several Jewish families asked the council

<sup>17</sup> Colchen, *Mémoire statistique du département de la Moselle* (Paris, Year X) p. 54; *Archives Nationales*, F 19-11009, Lettre du préfet de la Moselle du 6 decembre 1810.

<sup>18</sup> Godechot, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Furtado, A., *Mémoire sur l'état des Juifs en France* (Paris, n.d.) p. 44; Ginsburger, E., "Les Juifs de Peyrehorade," in *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. civ (1938) 49.

of the city of Avignon for authorization to create within the precincts of the city a second Jewish district. This request was turned down. If a great number of the Jews of Comtat engaged in trading in horses and mules, in peddling drapery, linens, lace, silks, jewels and perfumes, sometimes even of wheat, wine and oil, thus being absent for the most part of the year from their homes, running the highways of the Dauphiné, Languedoc, Provence, Vivarais, visiting every year the great fairs at Bordeaux, Béziers, Toulouse, Montpellier, even travelling to do business at Gien and in Orléanais, where fairs and markets were held every week and sometimes even several times each week, the motivation in all these peregrinations, apart from economic incentive, also included a psychological factor, namely the craving for a change of residence and the desire to get out of the ghetto.

The same explanation to a certain extent can be given to the strong wave of emigration which took place in the papal possessions at the end of the 18th century. A census of the Jewish *carrière* of Carpentras, undertaken by heads of the community on September 2, 1788, established the fact that of a total of 226 families or 923 individuals, of which it was composed at the said date, only 188 families or 770 individuals had remained at Carpentras; 7 families (32 persons) were at Montpellier; 21 families (82 persons) at Nîmes; one family (4 persons) at Arles; 4 families (10 persons) at Aix-en-Provence. These emigrants, writes Chobaut, were mostly wealthy merchants and tradesmen.<sup>19</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, to believe that because they were compelled to live within the walls of the ghetto, the Jews of Avignon and Comtat were completely cut off from the non-Jewish world. From eight in the evening until dawn they had, it is true, to remain within the ghetto, but during the day most of them were outside the ghetto, attending to business but also enjoying themselves. They mingled with the Christian population. Indeed, we read in a document that on June 7, 1784, the great vicar Bournareau granted François Laurent, café keeper at Carpentras, permission to receive Jews in his establishment, on the condition that they remain separated from the Christians, that they are

<sup>19</sup> Bibliothèque of the Musée Calvet of Avignon, ms. 2441 f° 791 (Receuil Massilian); Rubin, "La vie commerciale des Juifs comtadins en Languedoc au xviii siècle," in *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. xxxiv (1897) 276, 278, 287; Chobaut, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 13, 40.

sent back at nightfall and that they are not entertained on days of services or solemn holidays. This permits the conclusion that all these prohibited practices were rather frequent in actual life.<sup>20</sup>

The regulation of the Holy Office, mentioned above, forbade the Jews of Avignon and Comtat to employ Christian help, "to have them light the fire on Fridays, Saturdays and on the other days of the week, to have them carry or cart water, wash dishes, knead dough, tidy beds, sweep rooms and schools (the synagogues. S. P.)." Christian laundresses could come to the house to call for the laundry, but the washing had to be done outside the ghetto. It also was forbidden to employ Christian nurses, mid-wives, or barbers. The other prohibitions stipulated by the regulation are as follows: "It is forbidden to drink, eat, play or dance with Christian men and women in saloons and other public places and it is particularly forbidden to carry on intimate conversation with them. It is forbidden for Christians to attend Jewish weddings, partake in Jewish meals, still less to wait on Jews during those meals or to be present in their synagogue or attend their holidays and ceremonies. It is forbidden for Jews to make any arrangements to hold goods of Christians, especially goods of clergymen. . . . It is forbidden for them to hire Christians, men or women, as journeymen in their homes and district during the week. . . . It is forbidden to go on holidays and Sundays, even in the daytime, to any place, city or village of the Comtat, or to leave the boundaries of the district, on said days, during religious services, or to work openly within their districts, without having closed the gates, or to buy from, or sell to Christians any merchandise on the said days."

The regulation went to still greater lengths in its attempt to cut off the Jews from the surrounding world and to isolate them altogether. Among the clauses there was one forbidding Jews to receive money from Christians, to conclude any agreements with Christian laborers, to hire them for carding wool or other work. This regulation, issued in 1725, shows clearly that at that time trading between the Jewish and non-Jewish populations of Comtat and Avignon already was very active; had it not been so there would have been no need for all these prohibitions. Some fifty years later, in 1781, the same Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office published a new decree concerning relations between Jews

<sup>20</sup> Chobaut, *op cit.*, p. 33 and note.

and Christians. It consisted of seven paragraphs. The first, which deals with Christian midwives, provided that if there were no Jewish midwives available one or several Christian midwives be designated to attend Jewish women in delivery. The second paragraph allowed Christian nurses to accept employment with Jewish families in "emergency" cases and only if confirmed by a Christian doctor. The decree also permitted Christians to carry water from the fountains and deliver washed linen to Jewish homes in the ghetto. Jews were given permission to rent stables and hay-lofts outside their district, on the condition that Christians and Jews were not to stay there together overnight. One can see that in the course of the fifty years the situation has noticeably changed.<sup>21</sup>

It must be remembered that Avignon and Comtat-Venaissin were not part of the French state, but belonged to the Holy See. In the Papal domains regulations regarding Jews were still in the tradition of the times of Innocent III and the Lateran Council of 1215, which aimed to eliminate the Jews from Christian society and completely isolate them. The Papal possessions in France were among the few states in Europe that continued to pursue a medieval policy regarding the Jewish question. Other Italian states, Piedmont, for instance, gave up this policy during the 18th century. In Nice (a community that properly belongs in this discussion because it was annexed to France in 1792) Charles Emmanuel III of Savoy gave permission in 1732, for Jews to hire Christian wet-nurses for their babies. A decree in 1738 allowed them to leave the ghetto at night in case of an emergency, such as to call a physician, a midwife, etc. It allowed them to hire Christian help "on the days when the Law of Moses forbids them to do their work themselves, and on the Day of Atonement to watch the lights." The letters patent of April 17, 1750, granted by the same king, abolished the "*ruelle*," formerly obligatory, and allowed the Jews the right to leave the ghetto during the night, to request the prefect to send them wet-nurses, to acquire land to build houses "for personal living quarters, stores, mills and factories," to extend and enlarge the ghetto at Nice, using the adjacent sites for this purpose, "provided the ghetto continues to remain separated from the dwelling places of the Christians, without, however, shutting it off by gates. All this was to facilitate trade and commerce. Finally, contrary to all the

<sup>21</sup> Bibliothèque of the Musée Calvet, ms. 2441. f° 791 and f° 825.

medieval ecclesiastical traditions, the Jews were allowed to leave the ghetto during Holy Week to attend to their business and they were allowed to sell their merchandise in their shops during this period, but the shops were to be "half-closed."<sup>22</sup>

In France proper the government did not practice for a very long time the policy of isolating the Jews. In regions of great concentration of Jewish population it followed an entirely different policy. In Guyenne, for instance, where it had to deal with the refugees from the Iberian peninsula, it tried to initiate them into the national life of the country; in Alsace and Lorraine, urged on by the merchant groups who were business competitors of the Jews, it had but one care, to impede the growth of the Jewish population. Everywhere else, the central administration allowed itself to be guided by its chief representatives on the spot, the intendants, their assistants, and the controllers-general. Except for the years when they were directed by Turgot, these officials had no consistent Jewish policy.

The general economic evolution of France during the second half of the 18th century was influenced by the new ideas in favor of freedom of trade and industry, and those départements, therefore, which provided the impetus to the economic life of the country also took the lead in the ways of emancipation. Trudaine, the controller-general at Saint-Priest, wrote in 1755 as follows: "The bureau of trade is now very favorably disposed to all that facilitates freedom of commerce. They have often rejected measures of exclusion aimed at Jews and I doubt that they are willing to curtail the measures that favor the latter in respect of commerce." Anxious to develop the material prosperity of their provinces, the intendants protected the Jews against assaults by their Christian competitors. "The competition of the Jews," the intendant of Languedoc, Berhage, wrote in 1740 to the controller-general, Orly, "can do no harm either to commerce generally or to our factories." To which Orly replied: "Should the Jews be excluded from the fairs, it would cause, I am convinced, a void that would bring damage to the factories." "It is under the shelter of the authority of the intendants," writes Rubin, author of an excellent survey of the commercial life of the Jews of Comtat

<sup>22</sup> Meiss, *A travers le ghetto. L'Université israélite de Nice 1648-1860* (Nice, n.d.) p. 12, 15-18.

in Languedoc "that the Jews of Comtat acquired permanent residence in the province, invested their capital there, were accepted by the population and awaited the day when the Revolution would grant them the right to live and trade there freely." The same phenomenon was observed in the other provinces, particularly in southern France.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, protected by the authorities, taking an ever more important part in the economic life of France, frequenting the fairs and markets which took place every week, sometimes even several times a week, in all the large cities as well as in some smaller towns and villages, the Jews necessarily drew nearer to the Christian population; they became associated with their life, in many places speaking only their language, or a Judeo-Provençal patois in the South, and Judeo-German in Alsace. They also took over some typical customs from their non-Jewish environment. Chronologically, assimilation preceded emancipation.<sup>24</sup>

This tendency toward rapprochement with Christian society is characteristic not only for individual Jews but also for Jewish communities as a whole. The Jewish communities, indeed, in their capacity as *de jure* representatives of the Jewish population, carried on business relations with the surrounding non-Jewish world, thus performing a valuable social function in the national economy.

A very good illustration of this type of function performed by Jews in France concerns the problem of annuities and pensions, which had become an important economic problem in France. Archive documents of the tenth century indicate the growth of a practice of making donations to monasteries and convents on the condition that annuities be paid to designated persons. According to Luchaire, the noted authority on medieval French history, the monasteries and convents, however, came to be very badly managed and kept getting into debt almost to complete ruination. In the face of such a situation, prudent people, seeking to set up annuities for the benefit of their families, turned to the Jews. This fact is to be observed in the 13th century under Philip Augustus and again during the course of the 18th century. The number of persons living on annuities which had been created either by themselves or by their parents

<sup>23</sup> Rubin, *op. cit.*, vol. xxxiv, p. 228n and 290-91; vol. xxxv, p. 99n; vol. xxxvi, p. 81, 89n and 97-98.

<sup>24</sup> Chobaut, *op. cit.*, p. 14; Posener, S., "Emancipation and Assimilation," in *Jewish Quarterly Review* (1941).



was considerable and the public authorities took great interest in the economic condition of these people. Called upon to give its opinion on the question of the rate of interest on annuities, the parlement of Provence recommended an increase in interest rate within the realm of its jurisdiction. "The lowering of the interest rate," it declared, "would cause perturbation in civilian society: the old parliamentary families are no longer able to supply sufficient members to the tribunals because of lack of resources, and they are compelled to give place to new men. The soldier has no means of subsistence in his old age, when his lack of strength prevents him from carrying out his generous ambitions. The father of a family, whose vigilance and thrift have increased the patrimony, is aggrieved to see the efforts of many years become useless for his children. Brave young men dare not marry because the parents cannot afford to give their children the increased dowry required. Finally, even regular communities, hospitals, women, minors, in a word all those who are not engaged in trade, would suffer equally from such a disastrous step. . . ." <sup>25</sup>

These observations by the Supreme Court of Provence testify that the problem of annuities was among the most important in the national economy of France. Institutions that could provide them at favorable terms were very much esteemed and much sought after. The Jewish communities were among such. That of Avignon, for instance, paid annual pensions to a great number of Christian creditors, in all over 60,000 crowns. There is a list of such permanent pensions derived from capital owed by the community of Carpentras. Among the creditors were the episcopal abbey, the cathedral chapter and the almshouse. These are followed by the College of Carpentras, the Order of the White Penitents, the Order of the Holy Ghost, the Abbey of St. Bernard, the archdeaconry, the House of the Good Shepherd, the Fathers Doctrinaires of Avignon, the Hospitaller Sisters, the Ursuline nuns, the Minim Fathers, the hospital of Carpentras, the pawn-broker's shop, etc. etc. The high nobility is represented on the list by its most illustrious members, such as Marquis de Pernes, Baron de Thèse, Count d'Alleman, Marquis de

<sup>25</sup> Luchaire, A., *La société française au temps de Philippe-Auguste* (Paris 1909) p. 245, 253; Robert, Albert, *Les remontrances et arrêtes du Parlement de Provence au xviii-e siècle* (Paris 1912) p. 629, 631.

Donés, Marquis de Labarben, Marquis de Barbentane, Baron de Sainte-Croix, etc. The number of institutions, orders, and individuals who received annuities from the Jewish community ran up to 75. The amounts of the pensions varied from 11 and even 9 livres per year to 750 livres.

In the course of 20 years, from 1767 to 1786, the community of Carpentras thus borrowed, at various times, 110,000 livres, merely in order to repay old-standing loans. The annual interests on the borrowed capital rose, about 1780, to 7,000 livres for Avignon, 30,000 livres for Carpentras, and 2,840 livres for Isle; there is no date for Cavaillon. The total capital thus borrowed, according to Chobaut, most likely exceeded 800,000 livres, a very huge sum for the time. The Jewish community was, in this way, a sort of banking establishment in which church and lay people, organizations and individuals, members of nobility and commoners placed their money so as to secure for themselves an increased and steady income and one insured against any risk of loss. The Jewish community was, therefore, performing an important social function and playing an outstanding role in the general economy of the country. This also explains why a certain part of the Christian society often was opposed to too rigorous measures against the Jews and particularly to their expulsion, since this would have rendered reimbursement very difficult. In a certificate given to the Jews of Avignon on May 20, 1724 by a group of townspeople distinguished by birth, wealth or position, we read that the business carried on by the Jews afforded them "the means for paying off the annual pensions they distributed to a great number of Christians, their creditors, for a sum of over 60,000 crowns in the form of pensions, so that should this trade, which by its nature is lawful because it is useful to the public, be forbidden to the Jews, then not only would the public be defrauded of all the advantages it gets, not only would their non-Jewish creditors (among whom are religious communities, hospitals, widows and orphans) not receive full payment of their pensions, but they would also be exposed to the danger of losing their capital as well, as a result of the state of insolvency in which the Jews would find themselves on the day they would be deprived of the right to continue in business."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Chobaut, *op. cit.*, p. 24, Bibliothèque of the Musée Calvet, Mss. 2160 F° F° 121-123 and Mss. 2441.

The Jewish communities of Comtat and of Avignon were not the only ones to borrow money from Christians in exchange for annuities. Those in other provinces also resorted to the same practice in order to procure the necessary funds to parry a deficit growing bigger from year to year. They never had any difficulty in finding people willing to lend the sums asked for. "The wealthy residents of Metz," said Nathan Netter, chief rabbi of the community of that town, "willingly placed their money in annuities with the Jews since the community as a whole with all its possessions guaranteed repayment. Of their own will they came to offer their capital to the Jews." The community of Nancy, in 1783, in the same way borrowed a huge sum from the high society of the city in order to finance the building of a synagogue. The minutes of a conference of the superintendents of the Jews of Alsace, on January 6, 1778, state that "they know no other way of borrowing money than that by annuities, at a fitting rate of interest, even if it were a matter of a loan of 40 to 50 thousand livres. Cerf-Berr, now in Paris, might be in a position to find the sum more easily than in the province . . . by means of life annuities." Thus, even in Paris there were people willing to lend money to Jewish communities outside the capital in exchange for annuities. These financial operations undoubtedly rendered the communal taxes more burdensome. In 1789, the total amount paid out in annuities by the community of Metz exceeded 42,000 livres; in the course of thirty years it increased by 25,000 livres. The communal debt weighed heavily upon the consistorial budgets during the first half of the 19th century.<sup>27</sup>

### *The Organization and Administration of the Communities*

"Within the ghetto," writes Chobaut, "the synagogue was the center of Jewish life, together with the school, the offices of the council, the hospital and the prison." With regard to the last decades of the 18th century this assertion is questionable. Gone were the days when spiritual interests occupied the first place in the life of French Jewry and when the rabbis directed the entire internal life of the community. This had been the case in the 11th and 12th centuries but much water had gone

<sup>27</sup> Netter, N., *Vingt siècles d'histoire d'une communauté juive* (Paris 1938) p. 80, 81; Godeschot, *op. cit.*, p. 6; Ginsburger, M., "Un emprunt de la nation juive d'Alsace," p. 88-86; Archives of the Central Consistory, *Procès verbaux*, p. 39, 40, 51.

under the bridge since those days. At Bordeaux and in the other cities inhabited by the Portuguese Jews this had never been the case for the simple reason that it was only beginning with 1723 that they could publicly attend synagogue and openly maintain rabbis. At the head of the Bordeaux community were the families Gradis, Fernandez, Silva, Laneyra, Ferreyra and Pereire. The head of the Pereire family was Joseph Nunés Pereire, who called himself Viscount de la Manande and Baron d'Ambés. At Avignon and in the Comtat, the rabbi had never played a great role in communal life.

Due to the scarcity of men versed in rabbinical literature among the native Jews, the rabbinical function was performed most of the time by a foreigner without ties of family or friends in the place, who did not speak the dialect of his flock and who was unfamiliar with the usages and customs of the local population. Rabbi Solomon Azubi, who was born in Sofia, was rabbi at Carpentras from 1617 to 1635. One of his successors was Rabbi Abraham Shalom, of Amsterdam, who remained with the community from 1650 to 1660. The community of Avignon had rabbis from Prague: Jacob Ispir, from 1741 to 1775, and following him till 1790, Elie Vitte Ispif. The community of Cavaillin invited a Polish rabbi, Moses Jacob Polaque. The community of Isle engaged, in 1628, the Rabbi Leon Sègre from Piedmont, and after him, in 1677, the Polish Rabbi Abraham Liptsis, of Mehier, and, after him, a German rabbi, Jesse Luria, of Bendic. The duties of the rabbi were clearly defined in the customary agreement of the community which read as follows: "To teach Jewish children to read and write, and to instruct them in the Mosaic law for the period of . . . years, to preach and to perform all the functions which befit a rabbi." He was generally paid 800 francs a year and was exempt from all taxes and other general or specific financial obligations. Performing the functions of instructor in Hebrew and of preacher, the rabbis seldom showed such qualities of soul and mind as to make them leaders or give them an outstanding role in the community. Solomon Azubi was the only one who, due to his vast intellectual equipment, occupied an important place not only in Jewish life but also in the general life of the community.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Chobaut, *op. cit.*, p. 9, 14-15; Dubnow, *op. cit.*, vol. iv, p. 290; Malvezin, *op. cit.*, p. 189; Bibliothèque of the Musée Calvet, Etude Charane N° 655 F° 388.

The community of Metz occupied a place of first magnitude in the history of the Jews of France. It was one of the most ancient and most important communities in France. Its origins go back to the beginning of the Christian era. Since time immemorial Metz was a center of Talmudic studies. In the 10th century it was already regarded as the center of Judaism in central Europe. Its spiritual chief at that time was the famous Rabbi Gershom, surnamed "the light of the exile." None of his successors ever attained the same degree of fame, although there were among them outstanding personalities such as Rabbi Falk of Cracow, the former rabbi of Berlin, Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschütz. The community of Metz, too, used to bring in its rabbis from the outside. The candidate for the position of rabbi was not supposed to have parents or important connections of any kind in the community. Eibeschütz was the last of the rabbis who played an important part in the life of the community, but this was due to his vast Talmudic knowledge and his character. His successors were never able to impose themselves upon the leaders of the community. Abbé Grégoire, writing in 1789, referred as follows to the rabbis in the North-East of France: "At Metz they (the Jews) get along without them for several years." Indeed, the post of chief rabbi having become vacant following the death of Lion Asser in 1785, remained without a titular. "This fairly long vacancy," says Abraham Cahen, "must be ascribed to the desire of a considerable number in the community to break with the tradition that the rabbi was not to be a native of Metz nor to have any family relations in the city. . . . The influence of the Biblical studies of Mendelssohn and his school had something to do with these hesitations of the community. As it could not, however, make up its mind either to preserve the tradition or to abrogate it, the vacancy remained unoccupied and a rabbinical commission was appointed provisionally, composed of the former assessors of the chief rabbi."<sup>29</sup>

When Louis XIV conquered Alsace and definitely annexed Strasbourg in 1681, he confirmed most of the ancient privileges of the feudal lords concerning the juridical status of the Jewish population in their lands, especially the privilege to admit Jews into their territories. They were

<sup>29</sup> Posener, S., "Histoire de la communauté juive de Metz," in *Terre Retrouvée*, April 15, 1939; Netter, *op. cit.*; Grégoire, Abbé, *Motion en faveur des Juifs (Paris 1789)* p. 32; Cahen, A., "Le rabinat de Metz de 1567 à 1871," in *Revue des Etudes Juives*.

not granted the right of nominating rabbis until considerably later. It was the letters patent of April 23, 1738, which restored that right to the Bishop of Strasbourg, the Prince of Hesse-Darmstadt and the nobility of lower Alsace. In all the other towns, lands and feudal possessions in the province, the rabbinical functions were performed by a person appointed by the king. The first such appointment occurred in 1681, at Ribeauville. In 1721, his district was curtailed in Upper-Alsace because a second rabbi was appointed at Haguenau, for Lower-Alsace.

Glasson defined the powers of the Alsatian rabbis as follows: "The rabbis were judges in the spiritual domain and in all disputes arising among individuals; in all cases they applied the Mosaic Law. The Jews were not obliged, however, to accept the jurisdiction of the rabbi in matters of civil law; this was obligatory only in spiritual matters. In other cases the Jews could give preference to ordinary courts of justice. These, however, like the rabbis, had to apply the Mosaic law. The sentences of the rabbis were not enforced by them. They had to be restated in the formula of verdicts rendered by regular judges. Nevertheless, the latter could not by any means, direct or indirect, interfere with the jurisdiction of the rabbis."

The functions of the rabbi included also the drafting of contracts, the affixing of seals, the division of property, the appointment of trustees, and other such matters; all this done in accordance with the Mosaic Law and in behalf of Jews exclusively; as for contracts between Jews and Christians, they were valid only if executed before a notary or scrivener.

All decisions of the rabbis were subject to appeal in the royal council in Alsace, if the judgment had been rendered by a rabbi appointed by the king, or to the seigneurial court if it had been given by a seigneurial rabbi.<sup>30</sup>

The tendency of the French government to place the Jews of Alsace under the leadership of a rabbi nominated by the crown resulted in failure. This was due, according to Dubnow, to the opposition of the Jewish population. Another reason was the absence, among the rabbis appointed by the king, of personalities of outstanding moral authority. The most significant among them was Samuel Levy, appointed in 1702, by Louis XIV as rabbi of the Jews of Upper-Alsace. He resigned in

<sup>30</sup> Glasson, *Histoire du droit et des institutions de la France*, 8 vols. (Paris 1887-1903), vol. viii, p. 396-98.

1709 to become collector general of finances in Lorraine. Samuel Sanvil Weil was rabbi of Upper and Lower-Alsace, from 1711 to 1773. His administration, which will be considered later, clearly demonstrates that rabbinical authority was on the wane in this 18th century province.<sup>31</sup>

On the eve of the Revolution the rabbis no longer figured among the leaders of the Jewish life. They were not delegated to the Malesherbes commission in 1788. Neither does one find their names on the lists of deputies entrusted with the drafting of memorials of grievances to be sent to the Estates-General. The deputation which appeared before the National Assembly on October 14, 1789, was headed by an industrialist, Berr Isaac-Berr, of Nancy, and not by a rabbi.

Facts proving the preponderant part played in the Jewish community by laymen could be multiplied. Laymen managed the affairs of communal administration and made up all the important organs of community action. These organs were constituted by election based on property and had nothing democratic about them. The members of the communal administration were chosen by people who paid the communal tax. At Nice, before 1785, it was a tax on capital as declared by the tax-payer; after that date this tax was replaced by one on income derived from real estate and business of all kind. According to this regulation, every Jew, whatever his status, paid one-fourth of a franc for each hundred francs worth of merchandise bought or sold. All property, real and other, as well as wages, were taxed  $\frac{1}{2}$  percent on the product per year. Profit derived from stocks or commissions were subject to a tax of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  percent of the net profit. In addition to this, the heads of families paid a poll-tax of five livres per year for each member of the family, even if not married. The poor who had no shop, sold no new merchandise, and drew their means of subsistence from trading in old clothes, were exempt from taxes.<sup>32</sup>

At Avignon and in the Comtat the system of communal taxation was the same as existed in Nice before 1785. Each member of the community declared, on oath and on pain of excommunication, the value of his assets and paid three livres per hundred crowns if his fortune did not exceed 3,000 to 18,000 crowns. It was therefore a progressive tax of 1 per

<sup>31</sup> Dubnow, *op. cit.*, vol. vii, p. 399; Ginsburger, M., "Samuel Levy, rabbin et financier," in *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vols. lxxv, lxxvi, lxxviii, and "Samuel Sanvil Weil, rabbin de la haute et basse Alsace," *ibid.*, vols. xcvi and xcvi.

<sup>32</sup> Meiss, *op. cit.*, p. 36-38.

cent, 1½ per cent, and 2 per cent according to the amount of the capital. Such was the system of taxation but it did not serve as the basis for the electoral system. For the latter, the heads of families were divided into three classes, this also according to the amount of their fortune. At Avignon, according to the statutes of the community (*escamots* of 1779), the first class included all who had at least 30,000 livres, the second, those who owned between 15,000 and 30,000 livres, the third, those whose fortune was of 5,000 to 15,000 livres. Those who had less than 5,000 livres could neither vote nor be eligible for any office. From 1786 to 1788, the average number of eligibles, according to Chobaut, was 13 for the first category, 12 for the second, and 10 for the third. The community of Avignon then numbered 70 heads of families; in other words, half of the population did not play any political role at all.

On October 2, 1790, under the influence of the political events in France, a new electoral law was introduced. The class system was abolished and the administration was entrusted to a council of seven members "who in addition to wealth, honesty, and extensive and sound knowledge, are possessed of real civic love and public spirit, without being subject as in the past, to distinctions of classes, since the equality just consecrated and established among men admits of nothing that holds ability in chains." The new system, however, was hardly more democratic. Even though the distinction of classes was abolished, the system of co-optation remained in force. The political pre-eminence of the wealthy persisted in fact and out of seven administrators, four belonged to the former first class and two to the second.<sup>33</sup>

The electoral system at Avignon and in the Comtat was by the casting of lots. A child drew the tickets on which were written the names of the eligible persons that met the requirements of each class. At Avignon they elected three treasurers (*bailons*), one from each class, assisted by nine counselors, three from each class.

At Carpentras, in 1785, the first category supplied six members of the council, including the first treasurer and his assistant; the two other categories supplied four members each. The community of Isle-sur-Sorgue was ruled by four treasurers and seven counselors in 1781; in 1787 and 1788, by four treasurers and twenty-five counselors. The little community of Cavaillon had only three treasurers, who performed

<sup>33</sup> Chobaut, *op. cit.*, p. 19, 50-52.



all the functions. The regime of these two little communities was more democratic than those of Carpentras and Avignon, in which the electoral system was based partly on casting lots and partly on co-optation, therefore favoring the wealthy members who paid the main part of the taxes. The drafting of the statutes that regulated the functions of the communal institutions was also done by the rich: indeed, out of the twelve drafters of the articles at Avignon, in 1772, seven belonged to the first category, four to the second, and one only to the third. "The poor," Chobaut rightly stresses, "took no part in the administration of the Jewish community."<sup>24</sup>

The council, composed of the first *bailon*, the treasurer, an auditor of accounts and counselors, managed the affairs of the community, its receipts and expenditures, its relations with the authorities and local police. There were some communal institutions that were not under the control of the council. Every year, therefore, in addition to and outside of the council, other officials were selected. There were *bailons* of the poor, *bailons* for the lights of the synagogue and for the *hevra kadisha* and the *hekdesch*, and deputies for maintaining silence in the synagogue. In Carpentras all these officials were chosen by casting lots.

In Alsace the communal administration was in the hands of the syndic, or superintendent, and the rabbi, both appointed by the central government or by the local lord. In many other localities the superintendent had several assistants, elected by the Jews. Their function consisted of advising the syndic, and especially to assist in the assessment of taxes. The rabbi directed the spiritual life of the community and was the judge in all matters concerning ritual and morals. He had the right to pronounce the ban (the *herem*) against the guilty and to impose fines. In some cases he performed the task of assessing the debts contracted by the community or appointed a commission for this purpose. At Metz and in Lorraine, the councils elected by the members of the communities managed all their affairs.

The first duty of the heads of the community was to represent it before the public authorities. The latter watched closely, particularly at Avignon and in the Comtat, the way the former attended to their business. The provost of the town and his assessors had the right to void the

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19-21.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21-22.

<sup>26</sup> Ginsburger, "Samuel Sanvil Weil," vol. xcvi, p. 180-84.

debates of the administrative council of the community; the decisions of the council had to be confirmed by the magistrates of the town in order to be enforced, and the same magistrates authorized the loans of the community. Nothing of a public, or solemn, or unusual character could take place without the authorization of the provost or the assessors. The provost, assisted by the assessors, the vice-provost, the notary and the registrar, made his appearance in the synagogue to witness the drawing up of the new roster of taxes.<sup>37</sup>

The day after their election, the new *bailons*, the treasurer and the counselors, before entering upon the performance of their functions, paid an official visit to the provost of Avignon "in order to assure him of their humble reverence, to entreat him to continue his protection of their community and to pay the customary duties, namely to the Seigneur and Most Illustrious Provost 27 livres and 3 sous, to his antechamber 13 livres and 4 sous, and to the registrar 17 livres and 16 sous, also a lump of refined sugar weighing four pounds." On the occasion of the Christmas holidays the Jewish leaders of Avignon brought money gifts to most of the town's functionaries. Furthermore they were required to pay to the "metropolitan chapter" 60 livres a year, they had to cover the cost of illumination for the holy days of St. John and St. Peter (which amounted to 68 livres and 8 sous) and to pay 12 livres for sweeping the palace of the rector. Likewise, whenever any one was elevated to the cardinalcy they had to pay for the cost of illumination; they were required to stand the expense of ringing the silver bell and expenses connected with the crowning of a pope.

At Carpentras, a more important center than Avignon, the expenses were greater and more numerous. The Jews there had to pay the bishop "for the right to set up a school, for public proclamations, for the right to maintain and to sell legally their wine at all times." In all they paid 139 livres and 20 sous, besides 30 livres and 20 sous to the bishop's family separately. For permission to open the oven to bake *matzoth* the Jews had to pay 3 livres; for the proceedings of election of *bailons*, 58 livres and 3 sous; to the town commandant they had to pay 60 livres; to the officer of the brigade of mounted police, 342 livres; to the city gate

<sup>37</sup> Bibliothèque of the Musée Calvet, *Rapport à M. le ministre de l'instruction public sur l'ancien état des Juifs en Provence, à Avignon et dans le Comté Venaissin* by Dr. Victor Hiacinthe Chambaud; *Communes et municipalités*, E-4-10.

keepers, 859 livres; to the gate keepers outside the Jewish quarter 234 livres; to the priest for the sermons he made in behalf of the Jews in the refectory of the *charité*, 120 livres, etc. etc.<sup>38</sup>

All these dues were indeed but vestiges of customs from the Middle Ages. They were also in force in other places. At Nice there was the custom for the Jewish community to send the local authorities, for Christmas, some jam and some Levantine coffee. As late as 1822-1823, it sent *matzoth* to the first and second president of the city, the seven senators, the bishop and the attorney general on the occasion of Passover, and more substantial presents for the Christian Easter holiday. An old custom that prevailed at Nice (in 1784) required that the Jewish community pay for the box of the commandant in the theater. In Alsace, the Jews were also obliged to offer provisions to the authorities. In Ribeaupierre, for instance, they paid ten florins yearly for the right to protection; at Saint-Martin, a fat goose which could be replaced by an obole of one florin in silver. At Metz, the community was obliged to provide two lumps of melted grease for the manufacture of candles for lighting. This was changed, in 1770, to an annual payment of 200 francs and was paid up to 1796. The community also delivered candles to the convent of the Recollects, writing paper to the Capuchins and money for the purchase of books to the teaching monks. All functionaries newly appointed at Metz received a gift from the Jewish community the day they entered upon their duties, and, as a rule, all the authorities, from the highest to the lowest, from the governor to the journeyman, all received gifts on holidays. When a member of the royal family arrived in Metz, it was the Jewish community that covered the expenses for illumination of the city, for musicians and the like.<sup>39</sup>

Besides dues and expenses of such kind, the community sustained many others of a social and humanitarian character. Thus the community of Carpentras used to distribute about 3,750 livres each week to the poor families. It also distributed coal for a sum of over 300 livres per year, flour for Passover for a sum of 600 livres, and also cash to the amount of a thousand livres, given out especially during the first days

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, *Etat des charges annuelles et casuelles que la communauté des Juifs de la carrière d'Avignon supporte*, 7 Mars 1779; *Autres charges annuelles de la carrière des Juifs de Carpentras*.

<sup>39</sup> Meiss, *op. cit.*, p. 36; Ginsburgèr, "Samuel Sanvil Weil," vol. xcv, p. 64; Netter, *op. cit.*, p. 74, 78-79.

of Passover. Besides, the poor used to get over 80 loaves of bread each week. A special item of expenditure, amounting to 1,200 livres per year, was earmarked in behalf of "physicians, surgeons and apothecaries or for the needs of their patients." The community of Avignon spent nearly 300 livres every year for the "bashful poor," 48 livres for annual fees to the apothecary to pay for visits and medicaments that he may supply to the poor Jews of the community"; and 24 livres for "the fees of the surgeon of the community as remuneration for the visits he is obliged to pay to, and blood-lettings he is obliged to perform for the poor of the community in the course of the year."<sup>40</sup>

There were two more categories of poor who likewise attracted the attention of the administrators of the communities; the poor wayfarers and poor rabbis coming from the Holy Land. For hospitality in behalf of the former the community of Carpentras spent about 1,200 livres per year, and to help the latter, 600 livres yearly. The community of Avignon, though less important and not so rich, distributed 2,000 livres annually to poor Jewish vagrant beggars, "to help them continue on their way," and 500 livres annually "for the support of the poor of Jerusalem."

The vagrant beggars were a subject of constant care to the Jewish communities of France. This is a subject of social significance which unfortunately has not yet attracted the attention of Jewish historians. Jewish vagrancy was very current in Europe before the Great Revolution. Thousands of Jews in tatters, with sacks of provisions on their backs, roamed over the roads of the continent, directing their steps from the heart of Poland, Bohemia, and Lithuania to the rich centers of Western Europe. Isolated individuals, entire families with babies in their arms, numerous groups walked from one city to another, knocking at the doors of Jewish homes and synagogues. They were taken in because Jewish national tradition prescribed it, but people tried to get rid of them as soon as possible. The new arrivals, on their part, were eager to live at the expense of the community as long as possible and were ready for acts of violence when their demands were resisted. The leaders of the community, on the other hand, did all they could to get them out, especially when they arrived in great bands.

These *schnorrers* at times caused serious trouble. For example, the community of Isle, in the Comtat, was assaulted on September 18, 1773

<sup>40</sup> *Etat des charges annuelles* . . . 7 Mars 1779.

by a hundred Jews "speaking all the languages of Europe." They were each given 25 sous and twenty-two among them, sick or women in child-bed, were given shelter. On the next day they renewed their assault, joined by others that had been ejected by the communities of Avignon, Carpentras and Cavaillon, and they forced the gates of the city. It became necessary to call out a detachment of soldiers from Avignon to chase the gang. Two days later a new assault took place. They were locked up in a building outside the city and fed at the expense of the community at the cost of 12 sous per person. On October 4, they were expelled from the area. Four days later, a new gang of about a hundred men, having forced the gates of the city, scattered in the streets and, armed with canes and stones, assailed the Jews of Isle who had barricaded themselves in the ghetto. A detachment of grenadiers came in haste from Avignon, chased them and arrested fifty of them. These were kept for three days in jail at Avignon and then expelled from the province.

Because of such incidents the councils of the communities naturally took all the measures in their power to prevent their recurrence. In 1775 the *bailons* of Carpentras, for instance, asked for and obtained authorization to pay each of the eight Christian gate keepers of the city an additional salary of eight livres per month to prevent foreign Jews from penetrating into the city. In 1779 the community spent for this purpose 1,093 livres, 859 livres for the gate keepers of the city and 234 livres for the gate keepers outside the Jewish quarter. The community of Avignon received from the authorities in 1755, 1764, 1767, and 1775, very strict orders enjoining them to keep out foreign Jews. No exception was made for the rabbis of the Holy Land. In 1775 the community decided, even if two rabbis came together, to give them only a hundred livres and to feed them at the expense of the *carrière* for eight days only.<sup>41</sup>

Vagrancy was a social evil peculiar not only to the Jewish population in old France, it infected the social body of the country as a whole. In 1765, out of eighteen million Frenchmen, three million were vagrants. The number of Jewish *schnorrers* in France, mostly of foreign origin, is unknown but the heads of the communities in all the provinces which had Jewish residents complained of them bitterly. In some cases the communal authorities denounced them to the police, who did not spare them. The foreign Jews, arrested as vagabonds, were mercilessly expelled

<sup>41</sup> Bibliothèque of the Musée Calvet, Mss. 2160 F<sup>o</sup> 121-123; Chobaut, *op. cit.*, p. 16-17.

across the border. The emancipation of the Jews and the wars of the Revolution served to attract even more foreign Jews toward France. The number mounted under the First Empire. Turned out by the economic crisis which raged on the continent, following the Napoleonic wars, they flocked toward France to beg money there. The Central Consistory, in its letters to the prefect of Paris, complained that "a number of individuals professing our religion, foreigners and without means of subsistence, daily arrive in throngs in the capital." The consistories of the départements sent similar letters to the local authorities. Those of the frontier départements, and of Alsace in particular, were even more affected than the communities of the South and West. The incessant arrival of *schnorrers* thus was an evil inherent in communal Jewish life. The origin and beginning of this aspect of Jewish life have not yet been established but it persisted up to the 19th century. It was practiced mostly by foreign Jews but also among these were Jews of Alsace, Metz and Lorraine. It was a social evil which the most enlightened representatives of French Jewry did not know how to combat, and found nothing better than to denounce it to the authorities. Berr Isaac-Berr, in his "Reflections on the Complete Regeneration of the Jews in France" was able to make only the proposal that a regulation be issued to forbid Jews to provide lodging to their vagrant coreligionists who wander from one city to another.<sup>42</sup>

### *Every Day Life*

The Jewish community, unlike French Jewry as a whole, was a united entity. Its composition was completely closed, and entrance into and getting out from it were surrounded by rigorous formalities. New members had to present all kinds of guarantees, they had to pay a high admission fee and assume their share of the communal expenditures. That means that they had to possess sufficient resources that could be easily checked up. On October 18, 1775, for example, the *carrière* of Avignon received in its midst Mayer Michel, of Prague, son-in-law of Isaie de Sasia, a Jew of Avignon. Mayer Michel paid on this occasion 300 livres as initiation fee and pledged on oath to contribute his part of

<sup>42</sup> Chobaut, *op. cit.*, p. 17, Posener, S., "Les Juifs sous le Premier Empire. Les Colporteurs," in *L'Univers Israélite* (Oct. 8, 1937) and "L'Immigration des Juifs allemands en France sous le Premier Empire," *ibid.* (March 23, 1934).

the communal taxes. All these requirements duly fulfilled, he could not be elected to any office of the *carrière* before the expiration of a period of ten years, such a period being deemed necessary to become familiar with his life and morals. He did not receive the title of member of the community unless his wife bore him children. If she died without having had any children, the husband would return *ipso facto* to his status of alien Jew. Likewise, every Jew who withdrew from the community had to reach an agreement with it concerning his dues and could not leave any arrears behind him. The statutes of Avignon of 1772 decreed that if a Jew did not pay his quota, his house could be sold on auction. An ordinance of the provost of the same city forbade Jews "to absent themselves and leave the present city for any business whatever before the particular Jews and the assessors had made their new tax list."<sup>43</sup>

Two cities, Paris and Bordeaux, had two distinct Jewish communities in the 18th century, one of Portuguese Jews, the other of Jews from Alsace and Lorraine. They inhabited different neighborhoods. In Paris most of the Portuguese Jews lived in the regions of Saint-Germain and Saint-André-des-Arts, while the Jews of the North-East were concentrated in the districts of Saint-Martin and Saint-Denis. The former had their temple at 3 rue du Cimétière St.-André-des-Arts; the latter had theirs on rue Brimische. Everywhere else Jews of different origin were united in a single communal organization. This forced cohabitation of dissimilar elements, whose traditions, ways of life and even religious rites were different, brought about resentment, hostility, collisions and fights which tore communal life apart. The "University" of Nice was a community of that kind. It was composed of three main elements, the natives of Nice, those of Comtat and the Portuguese Jews. To these were added immigrants from North Africa (the so-called Jews of Oran) as well as a few new arrivals from Holland. A colony of Jews of Oran was established in 1669, at Villefranche, near Nice. The Sardinian king Charles Emmanuel granted them all the privileges of the native Jews. They did not want to merge with the old community of Nice, hence rivalry sprang up, parties were formed, and more than once the senate of Nice had to pass judgment on the controversies between the different Jewish groups.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Musée Calvet, Mss. F<sup>o</sup> 4-10; Chobaut, *op. cit.*, p. 17-18.

<sup>44</sup> Kahn, Léon, *Les Juifs de Paris sous Louis XV* (Paris 1892) p. 50, 51, 56; Meiss, *op. cit.*, p. 8, 9, 11, 12.

Even in communities of homogeneous composition there was no lack of dissension and strife. Clashes of ambitions and of interests developed on occasions such as the elaboration of new statutes for the community, the drawing up of communal tax lists, the assessment of the annual and extra dues, the election of the rabbi, of members of the communal council and of members of the *hevra-kadisha*. The elections usually took place in the fall, during the Succoth holidays because peddlers, merchants and such like were home during this time, having returned for the celebration of the New Year. The holidays of rejoicing were thus often transformed into a period of acrimonious internal struggle.<sup>45</sup>

In Alsace, the election of a rabbi almost always provoked a clash of ambitions and of personal and collective interests of a more violent character than anywhere else in France. The career of Samuel Sanvil Weil, rabbi of Upper and Lower-Alsace, in this respect presents a good example. As pointed out above, Samuel Levy, rabbi of Upper-Alsace, had exchanged this post for that of treasurer to Duke Leopold of Lorraine, in 1709. He had owed his rabbinical nomination to his wealthy relative, Alexander Doterle, purveyor of horses to the armies of Louis XIV and syndic of the Jews of Rîbeaupierre. The latter, however, had a strong rival in the person of the former syndic of the same locality, Baruch Weil, who was compelled to yield the post of syndic after several lawsuits and other proceedings. When the rabbinic post became vacant following the departure of Samuel Levy, it was Baruch Weil, apparently one of the wealthiest Jews of Upper-Alsace, who had Samuel Sanvil Weil appointed to the post.

Weil's rabbinic activities thus started in a time of internal strife. They continued amidst the same circumstances while they lasted. Having been granted, in 1711, letters patent allowing him to perform the functions of rabbi and judge of the Jewry of Alsace, Samuel Sanvil Weil decided to settle at Ribeauville. The influential members of this community, however, saw no need or use in having a rabbi among them. Energetic steps were taken by both parties before the lord of Ribaupierre. The Jews generally were in no hurry to recognize Weil's authority. The Jews of Thann and other places ignored his orders, so that soon after his appointment Samuel Weil appealed to the intendant of Alsace to obtain the submission of his flock. To this the intendant agreed. The rebellious

<sup>45</sup> Dubnow, *op. cit.*, vol. vi, p. 418; Cahen, *op. cit.*, p. 105-106.



members of the communities were not the only ones he had to fight against; his colleagues the rabbis, who contested his right to the post of rabbi, perhaps caused him still greater troubles.<sup>46</sup>

In these brawls Samuel Weil was the winner most of the time not because he was the rabbi, but, above all, because he was the son of Baruch Weil, the money-lender of the lords of Ribeaupierre, and because he himself was a wealthy man to whom the chancellery had recourse when short of funds. The balance of its accounts with him, as established in 1735 by the treasurer of the chancellery, shows that in addition to an obligation of 26,000 livres they owed him 11,095 livres. As one sees, his relations with the seignior of Ribeaupierre were not only of an administrative and juridical nature but much more often of a commercial and economic order. Likewise, his position in the community became more important not merely because of his rabbinical functions, but to a greater extent, perhaps, on account of his commercial and financial operations.

Rabbi Samuel Sanvil Weil was a wealthy man, a "*gvir*," and the "*gvirim*" played an important role in the communal life. It was the rich people who administered the communal affairs, either personally, as members of the communal council, or through persons appointed by them. Thus, Rabbi Samuel Weil's cousin, without consulting anybody, constituted a commission for the assessment of taxes and it functioned for quite a long time. This was by no means an isolated case. His father, Meyer Weil, prevented, by his own authority, the Jews of Ribeaupierre and elsewhere from submitting to the ban pronounced against them by Rabbi Samuel Weil for violations of Jewish law. Meyer Weil himself pronounced bans of excommunication and dissolved them and thus interfered in the sphere of competence that belonged to the rabbi and not to the superintendent.<sup>47</sup>

Instances of illegal interference by the rich in the communal administration are numerous. The situation did not improve with time; it rather grew worse, especially in Alsace. Here, a very rich man, very active and with influential connections in Paris, occupied the foremost place in Jewish life. He was Cerf-Berr, purveyor of the royal armies, purveyor of wheat for the province, patron of Jewish science, syndic general of the

<sup>46</sup> Ginsburger, "Samuel Sanvil Weil," vols. xcv and xcvi.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

Jews of Alsace and correspondent of Mendelssohn and his disciples. It was he who asked the philosopher of Dessau to draft a memoir to enlighten public opinion on the Jewish problem, a task which Mendelssohn entrusted to Christian Wilhelm Dohm. The famous work by Dohm, published in 1781 under the title of *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, was translated, thanks to Cerf-Berr, into French and introduced in France. Here it was seized by the police on the grounds that the preliminary authorization of the ministry was lacking. The important role played by Cerf-Berr in the Malesherbes commission is well known. He it was again who obtained from Necker the authorization for the Jews of Alsace, Lorraine and Metz to draft a memoir intended for the Estates-General.

Thus, ever on the watch for the defense of the Jewish interests, Cerf-Berr did not tolerate opposition or competition in the sphere of his activities. When a Jew by the name of Lehmann, from Blensheim, competed with him for a contract for deliveries for the army, Cerf-Berr obtained from his relative, the rabbi of the town, David Sintzheim, future chairman of the Great Sanhedrin, a ban of excommunication against the Lehmann family.<sup>48</sup>

With the leaders of the communities and rabbis behaving in such a way it is no wonder that the minor officials carried on even more. The synagogue and the council were often the scene of violent rows. The drafting of the list of tax-payers and the assessment of extraordinary dues, too, were the occasion for uproarious disputes when the persons taxed refused to deposit the prescribed sums. Not only in the Alsatian communities, but everywhere the tax-payers complained of being taxed above their means and often went to great lengths in their protestations. At Avignon, Carpentras and in the two towns of Comtat the position of the administrators, in 1764, had become so precarious, following the excesses of certain members of the communities, that they sent a delegation to the Vatican asking for measures to stop the assaults upon them. "These delegates," we read in an ordinance in behalf of the said four communities, "have performed their commission and upon their most humble entreaties and requests, the Supreme Congregation of the Holy-Office has given orders which will bring back tranquility, order and calm

<sup>48</sup> Ginsburger, M., "Familles Lehmann et Cerf-Berr," in *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. lix, p. 106-30.

in the said *carrières*." The ordinance was posted in all the *carrières*; despite this, however, certain notables of the communities of Avignon and of Isle refused to pay their quota and the *bailons* again complained to the Vatican. An ordinance of the provost, issued upon a complaint of the assessors of the *carrière*, Mordacay Ravel, Israel de Valabregue and Samuel of Carcassonne, decreed "that no Jew, whether man, woman or child, should insult or abuse by acts or words the said assessors, be it in the synagogue or outside, because of hatred for the taxes they must pay, on pain of prison and a fine of ten crowns incurred by each offender, *ipso facto*, applicable for each time." One sees that the administrators entrusted with the assessment of communal dues often were assaulted not only by adults of both sexes, but even by children, and not only in the streets of the ghetto, but also outside. The cases of aggression must have been frequent enough and painful enough for the victims, if the mayor of the city had to take such severe measures of reprisal.<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusions

The weakening of rabbinical authority and the growth at its expense of that of the *gvirim*, are the conspicuous facts in the evolution of Jewish communal life during the second half of the 18th century. They also represented the external forms of another important phenomenon which was taking place in the course of the same period, the general secularization of Jewish life. Neither must one forget another characteristic feature of the same evolution, which partly if not entirely explains the decline of ecclesiastical influence, i.e., the penetration of the tendencies of the Christian world into Jewish life and the beginning of the movement of assimilation which preceded that of emancipation.

The rabbinate had lost most of its former influence in the community and had itself undergone a process of evolution. We have seen in Alsace, the land of the strongest Jewish religious traditions, the chief-rabbi of Upper-Alsace, Samuel Levy, abandon his office to accept the post of treasurer general with the Duke of Lorraine. His successor, Samuel Sanvil Weil, devoted himself to commercial and financial affairs no less than to the spiritual direction of Jewish life. The most important community in the North-East, from the viewpoint of the role played by its

<sup>49</sup> Musée Calvet, Extrait des Registres de la Secrétairerie d'Etat de la Légation d'Avignon; Archives E10 communales et municipales.

rabbis in the past, that of Metz, allowed the post of rabbi to remain vacant during the last years of the century and entrusted his functions to a commission of lay persons. There were no rabbis among the vanguard who fought for political and civic rights. Heavy opposition to the propagation among Jews of the ideas of the age was formed by the rabbis, but it bowed before the irresistible pressure of the general liberating movement. "When in 1792," writes Abraham Cahen, "following different reverses of the French armies, all men had been invited to meet and co-operate in the defense of the place, one saw coming an old venerable man whose features and garb indicated that he belonged to the Jewish religion: he was the chief rabbi Oury Cahen who came to give his coreligionists a noble example of patriotism. Interrogated by the chiefs, he declared that the advent of a just and tolerant government was the thing the Jews had been waiting for for a long time."<sup>50</sup>

The purveyors of the armies of the kings, such as Cerf-Berr, manufacturers and big property men like Berr Isaac-Berr, bankers such as Louis Goudchaux and Lazar Michel Wolf, of Nancy, big tradesmen such as Salomon Moyse Levy and Isaac Mayer Marx, of the same city, mill-owners, such as Lipmann and Theodore Cerf-Berr in Lorraine, all these replaced the rabbis in the administration of the Jewish communities. The rabbis had become ministers of the cult exclusively.

Possessors of great fortunes, having access to all the chancelleries and offices of high dignitaries, received in high society, very often enjoying personal privileges, such as letters patent of naturalization specifying that the beneficiary might "have, hold and possess all kind of property, movable and real estate, that he might acquire, be given, legated or left him in any manner whatever,"<sup>51</sup> or licenses which exempted the Jews of Avignon and of Comtat from the obligation of wearing the yellow hat.<sup>52</sup> These men understood in their own way their duties towards the community. They spent themselves, spent their money and time for it, but in exchange they expected a servile obedience. Any opposition provoked their wrath. In addition, they very often mingled their personal affairs

<sup>50</sup> Cahen, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>51</sup> Hilferdinger, P., *Documents sur les Juifs à Paris au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris 1913) p. 35n. Jews naturalized in this way were those of Avignon, Moïse Dalpuget in May 1759, Israël de Valabregue in September 1770, Josue Gabriel de Pichaud in March 1772, Cerf-Berr, of Strasbourg, in March 1775, Moïse Castro Solar, of Bayonne, in April 1776 (*ibid.*, p. 34n.).

<sup>52</sup> Musée Calvet, Mss. 2160 f. 105, 1771, March 12. Brevet que dispense le Sr. Vidal l'aîné de porter le chapeau jaune.

with those of the community, as we have seen it happen in the case of the quarrel of Cerf-Berr with the Lehmann family.

The fact is, however, that opposition there was, that the *régime du bon plaisir* of the *gvirim* gave place to violent protestations, even to actual violence, which made very difficult the position of the syndics, the *bailons* and other communal administrators. The opposition was composed of various elements; of notable persons discontented by excessive taxes; modest merchants and craftsmen, but also a certain, very limited number of individuals who, though occupied with commerce or industry, formed the core of the *maskilim*, the intellectuals of the period. A Berr Isaac-Berr, of Nancy, would at times set aside the accounts of his commercial firm in order to write a "Letter to Abbé Grégoire" or to couch on paper his "Reflections on the Complete Regeneration of the Jews in France." Berr-Bing, of Nancy, a friend of Abbé Grégoire; Ensheim, also a correspondent of Abbé Grégoire on the Jewish problem, and a professor of mathematics; the brothers Terquem, one doctor of sciences, the other doctor of medicine; Abraham Furtado, banker of Bordeaux and author of political and philosophical works, future chairman of the Assembly of Notables; Jacob Beer, physician of Metz, nephew of Berr Isaac-Berr, author of pamphlets in the defense of the Jewish people, one of which, entitled "Letters to His Grace the Bishop of Nancy, Deputy to the National Assembly," caused a sensation; Louis Isaac-Berr, and Benisaacson, authors of the "Reply" to the speech of the representative of Strasbourg at the National Assembly against the Jews; Salkind-Hurwitz, immigrant from Poland, librarian at the Royal Library in Paris, are examples of such persons. On the whole, they are not numerous, but one meets a few in all the great communities; they did not disassociate themselves from their Jewish surrounding, they were concerned with the communal affairs, they preached harmony between the Mosaic law and the urgent dictates of the century, between Jewish traditions and universal civilization; they advocate peace between administrators and administrated within the community. Their younger brothers and their sons, in following their examples and their appeals, were to form the first generation of French Jews after the emancipation, among whom were to be many an illustrious man.

The followers of Moses Mendelssohn in France greeted with enthusiasm the convocation of the Estates General and the speeches of the great

orators of the National Assembly. Despite the persecution endured by the Jewish population in Alsace, despite the violent antisemitic campaign of the royalist and reactionary press, despite the postponement of the debate on the Jewish problem by the representatives of the people, despite the disastrous perturbation brought about by the events in the economic life of France and all the losses they suffered as tradesmen, industrialists and business men, they did not despair, they were certain that better days were coming. Least of all were they sorry for having staked all on a change of the political and social regime. Berr-Bing wrote, in a letter addressed to his Christian friend, Cheverant of Besancon: "Like you, my dear friend, I have lost two thirds of my fortune, and there is not much left on what to work and live, but I do not regret my loss since I am now a French citizen and true republican and even if only this will remain in my possession, I shall be rich enough. A true republican must live by his work and I shall never deviate from my principle: The republic, freedom or death."<sup>53</sup>

These forerunners of new times, however, formed but a small minority in the Jewish communities. The great majority, while aspiring toward a new order, more equitable, and equal for all, was taken up by the incessant cares of everyday life, by the urgent necessity of feeding their families, and earning their bread. They took no part in the communal administration, had neither the required leisure nor the franchise. They left this care to the rich, to the *gvirim*, although they too were much concerned in such matters as tax assessment and the like. When taxed beyond reason, they protested; they also protested when a big shot allowed himself to hurt their feeling of fairness and sense of dignity. But it would be a mistake to think that Jewish communal life in France at the end of the 18th century showed only quarrels and cabals. In reality, the quarrels created agitation among the members of the upper classes, but they had little interest for the common people who, indeed, did not think it was any of their business. One attended the synagogue, one said his prayers and one showed one's respect to the rabbi. Still, the old traditions were no longer followed with the ardor of their ancestors; even in the small communities they were replaced by new ideas and new ways. Within the framework of the great changes that France as a whole was undergoing, Jewish communal life too was on the road to a new destiny.

<sup>53</sup> Godeschot, *op. cit.*, p. 32.