

Statement by Referee of Master's Thesis

The M.H.L. dissertation entitled:

"The Sixteenth Century Attempt to Reestablish Palestine
as the Center of World Jewry."

written by Richard G. Hirsch
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Report on Thesis of Richard G. Hirsch
entitled
"The Sixteenth Century Attempt to Reestablish
Palestine as the Center of World Jewry"

In this thesis Mr. Hirsch discusses some of the factors which were responsible for the development of Palestine into a center of world Jewry in the sixteenth century. He emphasizes the fact that expansion of the Ottoman Empire opened vast opportunities for Jewish settlement in Palestine, and thus made possible the growth of active, creative Jewish communities.

In considering the problem of the remarkable growth of Safed -- a hitherto unimportant city -- Mr. Hirsch points out that Safed offered wider opportunities than such venerable cities as Jerusalem. The consequences of such growth was a strong rivalry between Jerusalem and Safed which manifested itself most sharply in the struggle between Levi ibn Habib and Jacob be-Rab over the semicha issue.

The decline of the Ottoman Empire, according to Mr. Hirsch, was paralleled by a corresponding decline in the importance of the Palestinian communities.

Although Mr. Hirsch scarcely touched on the important responsa literature of the period, he does put to good use contemporary accounts, especially of Jewish and non-Jewish travelers. In addition, he has successfully posed the problem and has pointed to possible, though tentative, solutions.

It is with pleasure, therefore, that I recommend that Mr. Hirsch's thesis be accepted by the faculty.

Ellis Rivkin
Referee

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY ATTEMPT TO REESTABLISH PALESTINE
AS THE CENTER OF WORLD JEWRY

Richard G. Hirsch

After the Turkish conquest in 1516 Palestine became an integral part of the Turkish Empire. As such it was subject to all the forces affecting the expanding Turkish Empire as a whole. With the conquest, the Jewish community in Palestine, which heretofore had been insignificant in size and consequence, received new impetus. Many Spanish Jews who had settled in Turkey after the expulsion from Spain immigrated to Palestine. They were impelled by many motives, chief among them: the potentialities for economic security and advancement offered in Palestine and the opportunity for satisfaction of spiritual and cultural needs. The relatively young city of Safed soon gained dominance over Jerusalem in all phases of communal life. The remarkable cultural development of Safed as compared with the stagnancy of Jerusalem can be attributed to the solid economic foundations of Safed. Because Safed became a commercial and industrial center, it was able to support--with the aid of funds from the Diaspora--many academic institutions and renowned scholars. The continuous struggles between the scholars and the merchants over the payment of taxes are evidence of inherent weaknesses within the economy. During this time the relations between the Jews and their neighbors continued much as they had in the past. The respect with which the Jews were generally treated was

often dependent on the submissiveness of their attitude. With the decline of Turkey at the end of the 16th century the economic basis of the Jewish community in Palestine also began to decay, thus ending the attempt to reestablish Palestine as the center of world Jewry. The appendix contains an analysis of the nature and validity of the various primary sources of the period.

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY ATTEMPT
TO REESTABLISH PALESTINE
AS THE
CENTER OF WORLD JEWRY
by
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INTRODUCTION

Sir Walter Raleigh once said, "We may gather out of history a policy no less wise than eternal by the comparison and application of other men's forepast miseries with our own like errors and ill deservings." The aim of history is to study the past in order to gain a more profound understanding of present day problems. The interest and enthusiasm generated by the physical resurrection of the Jewish state in our own day cause us to focus our gaze on the past, on previous attempts by our brethren to establish Palestine as the center of world Jewry. Many of the problems perplexing Israel today and solutions to problems being offered have their counterparts in previous historical experience. It is the purpose of this paper to study a rich period of the Jewish history in Palestine which in many respects parallels the present-day Zionist movement, in order thereby to aid us in the discussion of contemporaneous affairs.

Within the consciousness of the Jew pulsed many forces urging him to return to the land of his origin. In many individuals one motive was primary. In others a fusion occurred. There were always a few romantics such as Judah Halevi and Nachmanides who, caring little for conditions, desired nothing else but a return to life on the soil of Palestine. Others wanted a return for religious reasons, seeking to visit famous holy places, ^{to}pray and ^{to}study on holy soil.

Numerous mass movements were organized by false Messiahs such as Solomon Molcho and David Reubeni who proclaimed the long-awaited advent of Apocalyptic times. But, it is the contention of this study that the prerequisite for immigration was a propitious Palestinian milieu, one which would provide the potential for economic stability and prosperity. Such a period is the object of our study.

As we gaze in retrospect on the history of the Jews in Palestine we note an unusual period of growth during the 16th century. We behold large numbers of immigrants settling in Palestine, particularly in the city of Safed, which now becomes for the first time a thriving industrial and intellectual center. We see the development of cultural movements such as Lurianic mysticism, which in later years influenced so much of Jewish history. We witness an attempt to reestablish the authority of the ordination and of the Sanhedrin and even an endeavor to found a political state at Tiberias. All these phenomena are manifestations of what might be called, "The 16th Century Attempt to Reestablish Palestine as the Center of World Jewry."

To study all aspects of the various movements which were at work in 16th century Palestine would be a task beyond the purview of a master's thesis. Each one of the above-mentioned phenomena would provide sufficient material for a thesis in itself. We have

therefore decided to concentrate our efforts on the aspects which have least been studied theretofore-- the economic, political and social developments of 16th century Palestine.

CHAPTER I

RISE OF THE TURKISH EMPIRE

A. GENERAL CONDITIONS

In order to comprehend the events of 16th century Palestine in their proper perspective it is essential that we portray the general conditions prevailing in the geographical area of which Palestine was an integral part.

In the latter part of the 15th century a new force became dominant on the European scene. Originating in Central Asia and infiltrating into Asia Minor, the Ottoman Turks had established their own sizeable kingdom. In 1453, under Mohammed II the Conqueror (1451-81) they achieved their great ambition of the conquest of Constantinople and in the succeeding years the conquest of what had been the Byzantine Empire. From 1481 on a serious rivalry developed between the Egyptian (Mameluk) kingdom and the Ottomans, ultimately culminating in an inevitable military struggle between the two at Aleppo, January 24, 1516. The Ottoman Turks won an overwhelming victory, went on to conquer Egypt in 1517, and henceforth all of the Eastern Mediterranean world was in their possession.

NOTES ON THE NATURE OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The legal and political system of the Ottoman state was based entirely on religious foundations. This was in contrast to the European states where more often than not the secular law was modified in accordance with religious principles, "but in Turkey the problem of the legislators has been to relax or adjust the interpretation of the canons of Islam, so as to permit it to take its place among European states and to establish a *modus vivendi* with neighboring unbelievers."¹

Whenever a new country was conquered the Turks would divide the country into fiefs and, as is the practice of many conquering armies, would assign them to members of the army as reward for valorous service and for promise of military aid in the future. In essence therefore, the system was a feudal one, with the exception that the fief of the father was not inherited by the son. Each person had to win his domain by his own valor and merit.² Understandably, this provided added inducements and increased occasions for internal conflicts and wars.

Taxation system--Three-fifths of the revenue of the Turkish Empire was procured by means of a capitation or head tax ("kharaj") which was levied on all unbelieving subjects with the exception of priests, old men, and children under ten years old. The tax was not especially oppressive and the non-believers generally paid it

willingly. Under Solyman the Magnificent (1520-1566) the Christian population, which was known as "Raja", also had to pay to the owners of the fiefs a tax of one-tenth of the produce, send one-tenth of its young men to the army, and pay a long series of taxes such as bride tax, hoof tax, meadow tax, etc. Nevertheless, Sultan Solyman was called the "Lawgiver." The Turkish courts dealt justly, "for even if the law gave fewer rights to Christians and Jews than to Mohammedans, it still afforded the opportunity for each man to secure in full those which belonged to him by law."³

Commerce, mainly in the hands of Christians and Jews, flourished during this period. The duties on imports and exports were comparatively reasonable. Accordingly the era witnessed the growth of large commercial and industrial cities. Constantinople became the most influential city in the Empire, the center of the entire eastern world.

Nevertheless, despite the apparent prosperity and strength of the Empire, its foundation was built on loose sand. The Empire was not a homogeneous unit, but embraced large masses of alien nationalities, each with its own culture, language, and history. These heterogeneous groups had been brought under one empire by conquest and were therefore held together by the only cohesive element known to the Turks--force. The Ottoman

Empire was a military state. Its mission was to spread Islam by fire and sword, thereby subduing all non-believers. Particularly after the earliest stage of the Empire the subjugated peoples were made to bear excessive taxes and the rule became more and more oppressive. The Turks cared little for ameliorating the lot of the subject peoples. No attempts were made to improve the educational level. A rather frequent practice evolved whereby government and ecclesiastical posts were sold to the highest bidder. As is true of most empires the Turkish Empire was founded on the necessity for a continuous expansion. Without the extension of the borders and the income to be derived from newly conquered peoples the point of diminishing returns was soon reached, and the Empire, especially after the death of Murad III in 1579, began to decline.

Of particular significance in the decline of the Turkish Empire was the discovery by the Portuguese navigator Vasco de Gama of a way around the Cape of Good Hope (1497). This opened up a new era in the history of the world. Commerce from Europe traversed the sea routes directly to and from India, with the result that the travel routes and centers of Asia Minor began to lose their importance. Portuguese and other European fleets were now enabled to attack Moslem ships in the Red Sea and in Indian waters. Thus, by the end of the

16th century most of the traffic in spices and other tropical products of India and Arabia were diverted from Syria, Egypt, and Turkey, and one of the main sources of national income was destroyed.⁴

B. THE JEW IN THE TURKISH EMPIRE

For the Jew the real significance of the Turkish Empire is to be found in the hospitable welcome given by the Turkish sultans to the Spanish Exiles. At a time when Spanish Jewry was tottering on the depths of despair, the Turks offered the light of new hope, opening up the gates of the Empire to the refugees of the Spanish Inquisition. The statement of Sultan Bajazet upon hearing of Ferdinand's action has become a byword: "Do you call him a wise king, he who impoverishes his lands and enriches my kingdom?"⁵ Bajazet sent word to all his dominions that the Jews should be treated with respect and that anyone who mistreated a Jew or who threatened expulsion would be liable to punishment of death.⁶ Samuel de Usque expresses the attitude of the Jews of Turkey in his famous Tanchumot Israel:

"Great Turkey, ...there the gates of freedom and equal opportunity for the unhindered practice of Jewish worship are ever open to Israel; they are never closed against thee. There thou canst renew thy inward life, change thy condition, strip off thy habits, cast away erroneous teachings, recover thy ancient truths, and abandon the practices which, by the violence of the nations among which thou wast a pilgrim, thou wast forced to imitate. In this land thou receivest boundless grace from the Lord, since therein he granteth thee unlimited freedom to begin thy repentance."⁷

The Jews of Turkey sent huge sums of money to Spain to aid in the transportation of the Spanish Jews and often they were compelled to pay ransoms in order to free their brethern.

*Use original
title*

It is difficult to imagine the development and expansion of the Turkish Empire of the 15th and 16th centuries without the Jews living in its borders. The Jews filled the function of the middle class. One would expect the Greeks and Aramaeans to have wielded more influence than they did, for they were in a position comparable to the Jews. Since much of the commerce was in their hands, logically they too could have served as the middle class. But because the Turks were at war with Christian countries, they tended to distrust all Christians. On the other hand, Turkey had given refuge to the Jews at a critical time in their history so that the Jews, particularly since there was no other place to go, could be considered patriotic, trustworthy servants of the Sultan.

The refugees brought with them knowledge and techniques which proved to be invaluable. They had a comprehensive understanding of European commerce and languages. They were expert in many crafts. A conception of the importance of the Jew in Turkey may be gained by the following quotation from Nikolas de Nikolai, written in 1554:

"The number of Jews in Turkey and in the Grecian islands is very great, and in the capital Constantinople their numbers increase daily. They are the masters of the land in commerce and industry, they engage in banking and all branches of work and craftsmanship, and they supervise the interexchange of goods between east and west on both land and sea.

They are the heads of the big stores and the heads of the treasury houses in the capital.....and in addition to the fact that they are merchants they are also exceptional craftsmen, especially the refugees from Spain and Portugal. To the misfortune and evil of the Christians the Jews teach the Turks the techniques necessary for the strategies of war: how to make weapons and cannon and ammunition. The Jews established printing houses in Greek, Latin, Italian, but it is forbidden for them to publish books in Hebrew and Turkish. They are also the interpreters for all Europeans who come to the capital."⁸

Another version of the letter states, "They publish books in Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, and even Hebrew, which is their national language, but in Turkish and Arabic they are not permitted to publish."⁹ This latter version would seem to be the more correct of the two, for to forbid the Jews to publish in their own language would contradict the liberal policy of the Turks toward the Jews. In either case, it is quite obvious that the Jews were not allowed to publish in the Turkish language. Their freedom was not complete. It appears that the Turks did not want the Jews to have too many direct contacts with the masses, especially in a field such as printing where the Jews could gain control of public expression and opinion.

The Jewish population of Turkey expanded rapidly. 36 congregations were established in Salonica alone, where in the course of time there lived more Jews than gentiles. (Until World War II and the conquest of the Greeks by the Nazis the Jewish population of

Salonica represented a large proportion of the total populace). In Constantinople there were 44 synagogues with a total population of 30,000 Jews. In whatever community the Spanish Jews settled they soon assumed the leadership. In most places the Spanish language became the vernacular; both Jew and gentile respected them for their superior culture, their advanced skill, and their innate ability.¹⁰

Many Jews held unique positions in the courts of the sultans. Even as early as 1452 Mohammed II (1451-1481) had granted special rights to his confidant and physician Joseph Hamon, exempting him and all his descendants from all taxation.¹¹ That Jewish doctors especially were held in high esteem may be seen from the following excerpt:

"In Turkey and especially in Constantinople there are many Turkish doctors who live from this their occupation, but the number of Jewish doctors is larger and they have brilliant men and teachers of medicine. The reason their number is greater than the others is due to their knowledge of written and spoken languages: Greek, Aramaic, Chaldean, Turkish, and Hebrew, since in these languages..(except the Turkish language) most of the authorities have written on medicine, natural philosophy, and astrology, the knowledge of which fields is essential for medicine.

Beside the numerous doctors who are called in Turkish "Hikim," the Great Turk (the Sultan) retains his private doctors, some Turks, some Jews who receive a large salary and subsistence."

As an interesting sidelight: "The dress of the Turkish doctors is not distinguishable from the rest of the common people, but the dress of the Jewish doctors is distinguishable from them, because in place of the green Cretan turban worn by the Jews they wear a high hat of scarlet-red color."¹²

Rabbi Moses Kapsali, the chief rabbi of the Jews, was greatly respected by Mohammed, even though he did not know the Turkish language. The story is told (hardly to be considered reliable) that the Sultan disguised himself and went to the trial of a rich Jew vs. a poor Jew, at which Kapsali decided in favor of the poor Jew. The Sultan was so impressed by Kapsali's sense of justice that he showered him with bountiful gifts, and henceforth all cases pertaining to Jews were referred to him for judgment.¹³ Regardless of the validity of the story itself, the facts remain that Kapsali was the representative of the Jewish community in the State Council (Divan).¹⁴

Although Moses Kapsali was held in great favor at the Sultan's court, there evidently must have been opposition among the Jews themselves to the concentration of power in the hands of one individual. The history of the struggles of the Gaonim and Exilarchs in Babylonia and of the strong leaders of Jewish communities in all periods of history would tend to support the assumption that the leadership of Kapsali and Elias Mizrahi, who followed him, did not go uncontested.

In "Likutim Shonim" the account of the struggle is given in some detail. The opposition was led by Rabbi Joseph Colon and a Shaliach whose name was Rabbi Moshe Esrim V'arba (so-called because he knew only 24 books of the Bible and nothing else). Kapsali was wary of offending the Turkish Sultan by sending money to Palestine, at that time in the possession of Egypt, the Turkish enemies. We are told that in retaliation Rabbi Moshe Esrim V'arba joined in the attempted ouster of Kapsali.¹⁵

In later years Sultan Solyman instituted the office of "Kahiya," a Jewish advocate or political representative appointed by the Sultan. The duty of the "Kahiya" was to represent the Jews at court and to defend them against any acts of oppression or injustice.¹⁶

The Jews along with every other people in the Empire were forced to pay a poll tax, "kharaj" (cf. p. 5). In addition there was a tax known as "Rav Achjesi," or "money for the rabbi." For the payment of this second tax the community as a whole was responsible. The sultan, interested only in the total sums entering his coffers, permitted the Jewish community to decide the means of collection. Through the payment of this tax the Jewish community was allowed to have a chief rabbi. It is not known whether the sultan placed the tax upon the Jews or whether the Jewish community itself instigated the request for a chief rabbi and therefore assumed the additional tax burden.¹⁷

Despite the general picture of prosperity, progress, and religious freedom one receives from this brief survey of the life of the Jew in Turkey, one must not be deluded into thinking that all problems of anti-Semitism were eradicated. The distinctions in dress, the regulations against printing in the Turkish language, the necessity for the establishment of the Kahiya to act in the capacity of a government-recognized defense agency--all show that the seedlings of anti-Semitism, or at least anti-non-believer, were already implanted in Turkish soil. In later years Sultan Murad III once ordered the execution of all Jews because they dressed too gaudily. The Jews were saved only by the intervention of some influential brethren. Thus, "the fate of the Jew depended on the caprice of a despotic ruler."¹⁸ The Jews were the object of much abuse at the hands of their Christian neighbors, and often the respect given by the Sultan to individual Jews of high standing did not affect the status of the mass of Jews. In addition the Jewish community itself was divided. Many internal struggles, such as the incident involving Kapsali and his opponents, give evidence of the disunity which was characteristic of the Jewish community. Many congregations existed side by side, each of them maintaining its own sovereignty and its own culture patterns, dependent on place of origin.

It is a general historical phenomenon that the fate of the Jew is inextricably associated with the fate of the general society in which lives. Thus, the decline of the Turkish Empire signalled the decline in position and prosperity of the Jews in the Turkish Empire, so that by the end of the 16th century Turkish Jewry had reached its zenith.

CHAPTER II

THE JEW IN PALESTINE BEFORE THE TURKISH CONQUEST
as reflected primarily in
JERUSALEM

Palestine of the 15th century was not a prosperous land. When viewed from the general perspective it presents a dismal picture of filth, ignorance, and poverty. The lot of the Jewish communities, participating in almost every aspect of the economic life, was no better than that of the other inhabitants, and as we shall see, in many instances the Jews were in a much lower economic and social state.

Although individual Jews were scattered throughout Palestine, the only communities of any consequence were Jerusalem and Safed. Because Safed is significant for the purposes of this study primarily in the period after the conquest of Palestine by Turkey, a later chapter will be devoted to it. The scope of this chapter, therefore, will be limited to a study of Jerusalem. Most of our information concerning the Jewish communities of the time comes to us from travelers' accounts which, as stated in the appendix, are not to be considered completely reliable. However, there are enough varied accounts to be able to evaluate the approximate tenor of the times.

One of the earliest accounts is the letter of Rabbi Eliyahu de Pirara, an Italian Physician, who in 1438 wrote a letter home stating that for the first time the Jews were beginning to develop themselves in the various crafts; carpentry, smithery, ^{and} silk-work and were even opening up stores. He added, with all the fervent ardor of a modern professional, "there is no need to say that in the field of medicine they are all complete asses."¹⁹

The first clear conception of the Jerusalem community we receive from the letter of Rabbi Meshullam of Valtera, or perhaps Valtelina, written in 1481.²⁰ R. Meshullam says, "There are in it (Jerusalem) 10,000 Arab families and 250 Jewish families." (As we shall see throughout the course of the study, the population figures, the sights seen, and the evaluations of economic and social status are often at complete variance with one another. For example, this same author claims that at Gaza he saw the house of Delilah where Samson dwelt still standing and that at a distance of about one-eighth of a mile one can still see the courtyard of the palace Samson destroyed.²¹ For a more detailed discussion cf. Appendix.) "The buildings of Jerusalem are very beautiful....the land is flowing with milk and honey, even though it is in the mountains and is destroyed and desolate. Everything is cheap...there is an abundance of all fruits, honey, dates, etc.....The Arabs and even

the Jews of this place are "Hazirim" (gluttons) in their eating, for all of them eat from one dish with their fingers (and if this is not enough to shock modern etiquette) without a tablecloth."²² In an earlier passage R. Meshullam describes the Jews of Hebron, where the Cave of Machpella is located. He states that many times the Jewish women would cover their faces with veils as did the Arab women in order to sneak in to the forbidden places undetected.²³

The above two statements would seem to imply that at least as far as dress and food ~~was~~^{were} concerned there was very little difference between the Jew and his neighbor. Anyone who is familiar with Israel in modern times will be able to attest that in places such as Tiberias and Pekiin, where Jews have lived side by side with the Arabs for long periods of history, ^{The} Jew has assimilated the outward appearance of the Arab, his customs and habits, and even the Arabic language as his vernacular.

In 1488 an important personality came to Jerusalem to settle--Rabbi Obadiah Bertinora. Bertinora was an exceptional man who more than any other individual was responsible for raising the Jewish community to a level of self-respect. An anonymous Hacham from Venice, writing from Jerusalem in 1495, only seven years after Obad'ah himself had come to Jerusalem, presents the

following description of Bertinora: "The man is extremely great, the whole land kisses his mouth. Without him no man will lift his hand. Gentiles seek him out from the ends of the land and will not alter his words. And even in Egypt, Babylonia, and other lands, when he decrees a thing, they establish it. Even the Arabs honor and respect him...He is modest and humble...of him they say, 'this man is not born of woman.'"24

By the time that R. Obadiah Bertinora came to Jerusalem in 1488, the conditions in Jerusalem had evidently been growing progressively worse. In contrast to R. Meshullam, Bertinora writes in a letter to his father:

As for Jerusalem, most of it is destroyed and desolate, and it isn't necessary to say that it has no wall surrounding it. The population, according to what they say, numbers approximately 4000 families, and of the Jews there remain today 70 families, the poorest of the people, who have no subsistence. There is almost no one who does not lack food, and he who finds for himself food for a year is called a rich man in this place. At a time like this there are in its midst many widows, old and dejected, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, and others, seven women to each man. Now the land is peaceful and quiet, for the elders repented of the evil they had done."25

What was the evil of which Bertinora speaks?
In the continuation of the letter he explains:

"I witnessed an evil and widespread disease in this land: when a stranger becomes sick all his dear ones, neighbors, and acquaintances are afraid to approach him and to enter into his house lest the elders accuse them of stealing belongings from there....for the eyes of the elders are open, and they wait, as for rain, for the strangers who come to Palestine to die so that they might be their heirs, for they say that they are the treasurers of the Hekdesh, and the money of the strangers who have no heirs becomes Hekdesh. Most of the men and women living in Jerusalem are strangers from a distant land without known heirs in Palestine. Actually, according to the laws of the land their property belongs to the king, but they (the elders) divide (the possessions of the strangers) with the Arabs and with the officials of the land and do as they wish. The elders take everything and say that they pay the debts which they accumulated for the building of the synagogue. It is already several years and debts are still in force, for they still say that the debts for this thing are more than 1000 pieces of gold.....in the synagogue of Jerusalem today there are only a very few Sifre Torah in contrast to the more than 300 which were once there, and there is no need to add that there are no garments of gold or silver furnishings. The elders sold everything and did as they desired with the money."²⁶

The taxes in those times were extremely heavy. The ^Ehad tax alone was 400 ducats a year, which the community as a whole agreed to pay to the treasury of the government whether the number of residents remained constant or not.²⁷ In order that the taxes should come to the treasury at the appointed time, the heads of the community chose tax collectors who were to be responsible for the required funds. Failure meant punishment or jail or both for the tax collectors,

which of course would partially explain their cruelty. Abraham Luncz utilizes the above facts in an attempt to distinguish between the elders and the tax collectors, thereby seeking to cleanse history of the sins of the elders.²⁸ Such a distinction ^{can be maintained} ~~is hardly likely~~ if we are to assume that Bertinora's testimony is correct. From the letter cited above it is quite obvious that the elders perpetrate the wrongs. The elders, not the tax-collectors, are in charge of the Hekdesh. The elders alone could have had the authority to sell the Sifre-Torah. They alone were responsible for paying the debts of the synagogue. Even if we assume, as Luncz claims, that the function of elder and tax-collector was not combined in the same individual, the elders, as sole leaders of the community would still have had jurisdiction over the collectors.

In addition to the head tax there were other taxes. For example, in order to obtain a license to make wine there was a tax of 50 ducats a year. ^{when} ~~if~~ we consider that the head tax for the entire community for one year was 400 ducats, then we can imagine the excessive nature of this tax. The unreasonableness of this tax was due undoubtedly to the fact that the Arabs did not drink wine, "for it (wine) is an abomination to the Arabs."²⁹ In order to collect the money for the tax the purchaser was obliged to pay an additional graded tax: The rich paid 20 pieces of silver for every "Cantery" of wine,

people of medium means paid 16, and the poor, including those on charity, were forced to pay 12.³⁰

During the rule of the Mameluks the tax system was the same for both Jews and gentiles. However, the frequent change in government wreaked havoc with the economy. When a new "Naipu" (governor) took the reigns of government it was a general policy to demand an increase in government revenue.. At such times the taxes were often raised as high as twice the previous amount. Refusal to pay was met with jail, flogging, and other assorted punishments.³¹

Within a few years after the expulsion from Spain the Jerusalem community had more than doubled its sparse population. The Venetian traveler wrote that he found 200 Jewish families in Jerusalem in 1495.³² Evidently the influx of well-educated, refined Spanish Jews and the labors of Bertinora and his disciples had reaped their first fruits. The moral and economic level of the community was definitely raised, although perhaps not quite so much as our anonymous traveler states. He claims that "every day, evening, morning, and noon the entire community, rich and poor, gather together to pray with devotion.....and every day after the prayers..the men remain in the Bet Hamidrash to study Mishnah and Talmud, about 3 hours, and afterwards they go from strength to strength, visiting the sick and

giving gifts to the poor..."³³ The improvement in conditions was only relative; the economic situation in Jerusalem remained deplorable. If the entire community could find time to pray three times a day, study for three hours daily, and spend the rest of the day performing Mitzvot, very few of the men would have been able to hold jobs. "Most of the people support themselves by charity," records our traveler.³⁴ "Anyone who knows how to do work such as that of a welder or smith or weaver or sewer will earn his subsistence, but scarcely and with difficulty."³⁵ Thus, even a skilled laborer was hard-pressed to earn his livelihood. "Nevertheless, food is not so dear and this year bread and wine are cheap....a person can live on 10 ducats a year."³⁶

We have seen the lethargy of the Jewish community in Palestine under the hegemony of Egypt. The down-trodden masses, whose support was derived in large part from the contributions of charitable compatriots in the Diaspora, were without employment or means of obtaining their own subsistence. A later chapter is devoted to the relationship between the Jew and his neighbor, but suffice it to state here that although the Arabs were comparatively friendly toward the Jews, numerous cases of friction arose. The moral ^{character} ~~nature~~ of the community left much to be desired. Thus, the Jewish community was confronted by a complexity of seemingly

insurmountable obstacles. But the situation was not beyond hope. A New century and a new era lay ahead. The 16th century was to witness a renewal of the hopes and yearnings and a revivication of the Jewish community in Palestine.

CHAPTER III
THE TURKISH CONQUEST
and the
EMERGENCE OF A NEW JEWISH CENTER

As was shown in the last chapter, the Jewish community in Palestine began to show signs of reawakening at the close of the 15th century. After the expulsion from Spain the small number of Spanish refugees who immigratedⁱⁿ to Palestine increased the population and aided in the moral and economic uplifting of the Jewish community. However the improved conditions were only relative. The community as a whole was still debilitated, both in numbers and in strength. It was not until the defeat of Egypt at the hands of the Turks in 1516 and the subsequent occupation of Palestine by the Turkish government that the impetus was generated for large-scale immigration to Palestine.

Because of the lenient and encouraging attitude of the Turkish government,^{many} most of the Spanish exiles settled in Turkey, and as we have seen, soon took prominent roles in all aspects of Turkish life. There once again they succeeded in recreating for themselves a flourishing Jewish community which was destined to become the center of Jewish life for almost a century. From this select group of highly educated, enterprising Spanish Jews the new Palestinian immigration took its largest numbers.

In analyzing movements of masses of peoples it is always a difficult task to explain motivations. Especially is it difficult to limit a complex historical phenomenon to one specific cause. Most historians however, have agreed that the increased rate in Palestinian immigration of the 16th century can be traced mainly to religious fervor. To illustrate the approach of one of these historians: Solomon Schechter, in his well-known essay on "Safed in the 16th Century," specifically states, "The impulse under which they (the Jews).... acted when they preferred the 'land of glory' to the great commercial centers of Europe was a religious one."³⁷ It was undoubtedly true that large numbers of Spanish Jewry believed, as did the Jews in the period after the destruction of the Temple, that their grievous misfortune was "the work of their hands," that they had brought about their own downfall, and that God was punishing them for their iniquities. Abraham ben Solomon, a Spanish chronicler, writes, "Our iniquities had increased over our heads, and our trespasses had grown up into the heavens, seeing the evils and the sin and the terrible pride so rampant among the Jews in the kingdom of Spain."³⁸ But is it a logical corollary of this feeling of guilt to conclude, as did Schechter, that "it is to the need (for repentance) that we have to attribute the fact that large numbers of the exiles were impelled to emigrate to the Holy Land?"³⁹ If so,

then why did not the Spanish exiles who eventually settled in Palestine immigrate there directly from Spain instead of entering Turkey first? Why did a quarter of a century elapse before there was any large-scale immigration? The remainder of the chapter will seek to answer these questions?

Heretofore, Palestine had been under the sovereignty of the Mameluk Empire with its center in Egypt. The Jewish community of Egypt was a much larger community than that of Palestine. Ruled by its own Nagid, it was given autonomy over its own affairs, so that it may be said that the status of the Jews in Egypt was in many respects comparable to the status of the Jews in Turkey. Because Palestine was part of the Egyptian kingdom, the Nagid of Egypt held dominion over Palestinian Jewry, which of course also entailed the obligation of financial assistance. However, after the Turkish conquest of Egypt in 1517, the office of Nagid was abolished, undoubtedly because the Turks would not permit authority over any elements in the empire to reside in a newly conquered country. The Jews of Egypt, inhabitants of a former enemy state, were certainly not to be trusted as much as the Jews of Turkey.

It was, therefore, only natural for the Jews of Palestine to turn their gaze toward the Turkish Empire and its Jewish inhabitants. The Jews in Turkey, especially after the influx of the Spanish exiles, comprised a

much larger and more affluent group than any other in the world. With the Turkish conquest of additional European soil more and more Jews were brought under the hegemony of one power, so that by the middle of the 16th century the Jewish population of the entire eastern Mediterranean world resided in the Turkish Empire. The economic value of a unified empire under one ruler cannot be over-stressed. The elimination of foreign boundaries meant the removal of all commercial and trade barriers, tariffs, and customs. The very nature of the Empire stimulated trade and commerce and lent impetus to the expanding economy. Thus began a flourishing period of intercourse between all sections of the Empire. As was shown in Chapter I the Jewish merchants were both responsible for and recipients of the increased prosperity which resulted. From the aspect of the Palestinian Jewish community a vital, dynamic contact was established with the other Jewries living in the Empire. Now for the first time Palestinian Jewry could look for substantial aid ^{from} to Turkish Jewry, and conversely, Turkish Jewry could think in terms of positive, active support to Jews in Palestine, and as we shall see, even of Aliyah (cf. pg. 13, 14, where Jews of Turkey were unwilling to send money to Palestine while it was part of the Egyptian kingdom for fear of offending the Turkish Sultan).

The religious motive for immigration was undubtably strong, particularly among those who settled while Palestine was still in Egyptian hands. Many were the Jews, influenced by the conditions which produced David Reubeni and Solomon Molcho and similar personalities, who presented willing ears for Messianic preachings. Of these many went to Palestine in the hope of hastening the redemption by prayer and study in the land of Israel. In this group were those who, having seen the destruction of the center of Jewish culture, sought to renew the center in the transplanting of schools and scholars to Palestine. But in addition to and even among these elements were those whose motives were more practical, who saw in the undeveloped, poverty-stricken Palestine a new "land of opportunity."

Spanish Jews were shrewd business men, international traders and bankers, the experts in world finance and commerce. They possessed the techniques, the contacts (with fellow Jews and others throughout the Turkish Empire), and what is perhaps even more important the necessary capital. They were quick to realize that Palestine offered the potentialities for profit. The traffic in the Mediterranean Sea had not yet been affected by the discovery of the Atlantic routes, and so Palestine, in the center of Asia Minor, was deemed worthy of attention. And in addition to the

trade which might be engendered because of its location, the increasing Palestinian populace offered opportunities for business development within Palestine itself.

People need foodstuffs and clothes and shelter. An expanding population necessitates an expanding economy, just as an expanding economy requires an expanding population. The Palestinian soil was lying fallow. The immigrants came to sow their seed.

In order to understand the emergence of the new Jewish center we must examine historically the evolution of the communities in Palestine. We have already presented a statement of the conditions previous to the Turkish conquest. We shall now turn to the period after Palestine became an integral part of the Turkish Empire. There were numerous Jewish communities scattered throughout the land, among the most important: Tiberias, Shechem, Hebron, and Damascus. However, because of the limitations of this study, we shall concentrate our attention on the two main centers, Jerusalem and Safed.

The economic expansion in Palestine transformed parts of the country from an insignificant, poverty-stricken area into what for a time was a prosperous and flourishing economic, religious, and cultural center. This development can best be demonstrated by a comparison between the two principal centers. An analysis of the phenomenal growth of Safed as contrasted with the

comparative stagnation of Jerusalem will prove that the prerequisite for a thriving communal life is a sound economy. How else can we explain the gravitation toward Safed, a scarcely known city located in the mountains of the Galil, in preference to the city of Jerusalem, the traditional spiritual center of all Jewry?

Jerusalem is well-placed

CHAPTER IV

THE RETARDATION OF JERUSALEM

Jerusalem, as was to be expected, did not remain completely static after the Turkish conquest. Many of the immigrants coming to settle chose to make their home in the city sanctified by tradition. In Chapter II it was shown that the population of Jerusalem had increased to 200 families in 1495. However, by 1522 an anonymous Italian traveler presents an account which signifies a complex, growing community. "The community in Jerusalem of all types numbers 1500 families, most of them Ashkenzim and Sephardim, ^(and also) Mistarvim or Moriscoes (native Jewish inhabitants) and westerners, those who come from Berberia." There then follows a seemingly contradictory statement, "---all together 300 families in addition to more than 500 widows who easily support themselves in Jerusalem, since they do not pay any taxes."⁴⁰ In another version of the same letter in "Otzar Massot" the number of the families is placed at "600."⁴¹ In the original letter in "Shivche Jerushalayim" only the number "15" is written without the "hundred," which evidently Graetz assumed was omitted.⁴² It is most probable that Graetz's emendation is correct, since any community should have many more families than widows. On the other hand, we have a letter sent in 1525 from Jerusalem in which the author

states that in Jerusalem there are only two synagogues and a total population of 2000 people; the Ashkenazic synagogue is much smaller and accordingly defrays only one-fourth of the expenses of the community while the larger Sephardic synagogue pays three-fourths of the expenses.⁴³

The entire picture is blurred because of the limited facts at our disposal and the contradictory data they supply. It is hardly likely that the population would have been depleted two-thirds in the short interval of three years between 1522 and 1525, although it is possible that many of the immigrants who first settled in Jerusalem discovered the advantages to be gained in Safed and emigrated there from Jerusalem. In any case, the economic conditions had evidently improved somewhat because whereas previously almost the entire community was supported by charity, in "Shivche Jerushalayim" we are told that "there are 200 people who receive charity, and they are supported by contributions which come from Egypt and Turkey and other places."⁴⁴ In addition the community as a whole inherited all the property of the widows, "and most of the needs of the community are paid by these inheritances."⁴⁵

One of the key figures in the revival of interest in Jerusalem was the former Nagid of Egypt, Rabbi Isaac Ha-Cohen Shulal, who after being deposed from his post, emigrated from Egypt and settled in Jerusalem.

A man of exceptional wealth, (one would expect this to be both a prerequisite and a result of his term of office) he utilized his money with great liberality, establishing yeshivot in Jerusalem and Safed and supporting the poor scholars. In addition he wrote letters to the entire Diaspora describing the plight of the Jews in Jerusalem and asking for financial assistance. One of his most capable assistants in the upbuilding of the Jerusalem community was a physician David ibn Shushan, head of the Sephardic Yeshiva. These men together with Bertinora, who did not die until 1520, were mainly responsible for the improved moral conditions in Jerusalem.⁴⁶

The anonymous traveler in "Shivche Jerushalayim" has copied for posterity the laws which most probably were put into effect around 1520. The necessity ^{for} ~~of~~ the regulation of some aspects of life which every person should have realized for himself without the promulgation of laws shows the inferior moral life which must have existed. A translation of the original copy of the traveler is here reproduced in full:

"The regulations and agreements of the holy congregation of Jerusalem written on a tablet in the Synagogue:

1. No man shall bring his fellow into their courts (of the Arabs) unless he has warned him three times that he did not obey the law.
2. No judge can force any man to lend money to the congregation for the needs of the community or for anything except his own desire and will.
3. No scholar shall pay any special assessments or taxes at all and this applies even if he is very wealthy; similarly widows do not bear any yoke (of taxes) at all.
4. No Jew shall buy illegitimate (counterfeit) money and if it comes into his hands he shall not spend it if he recognizes that it is counterfeit.
5. A man shall not sanctify something for use in the synagogue unless he decides that he shall not partake of its use any more than others.
6. No one shall go intoxicated to pray at the grave of Samuel nor shall any one drink wine while he is there (they were accustomed to celebrate there every year with dances and songs, similar to the type of celebration which occurs every year at Meron on Lag B'Omer).
7. No one shall slaughter for himself or others until he shows his knife to a Hacham.
8. No one shall quarrel in the synagogue, but shall go before the judge, according to whom shall be the (decision), and he who transgresses this will be fined two ducats for the treasury.⁴⁷

The moral and economic rehabilitation (if it can be called that) of the Jerusalem community was short-lived. In all records the number of those who live by charity is extraordinarily large. The community always was forced to appeal for financial ^{subsidies} ~~subsidization~~ to fellow Jews in other lands. The fact that the majority of new immigrants chose to settle in the Galil in preference to Jerusalem demonstrates that the conditions in Jerusalem were never conducive to large scale settlement. After the 1520's the situation grew progressively worse, so that Rabbi Levi ibn Habib, in his discussion of the Semicha, states, "As for the food of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, not only are there no delicacies but the food is bitter and unpleasant, and he who obtains enough to buy a head of a thin cow and intestines, or even a kid on Sabbaths and holidays, considers himself as if freed from the house of bondage and sitting on the throne of rulers."⁴⁸

During the course of time the community incurred numerous debts. Continually forced to borrow from the rulers of the city and from the Arab inhabitants at heavy rates of interest, whatever strength existed was slowly sapped. By 1586 the community had lost all semblance of dignity. In that year, the Mufti (the religious leader of the Arab community) claimed that the main synagogue, which according to tradition dated back

to the days of Nachmanides, had been vacated by the Jews and subsequently sanctified as an Arab place of worship. The financial status of the Jews was such that they were unable to protest the illegal invasion of the Arab~~s~~ lest the Arabs in indignation would demand payment of all back debts. It was not until the Arabs began to make wine stores in the synagogue that the Jews finally gathered the courage to protest. They showed the proper Arab authorities the papers of possession, paid them a large sum of money, and finally the Arabs agreed not to desecrate the synagogue further. In the meantime the Jews had moved to another place and did not take the effort to return and rededicate their original sanctuary.⁴⁹

The meagerness and the scarcity of life in Jerusalem is demonstrated by the almost continuous struggle between the scholars and the rest of the people. In times when the masses of people are self-sufficient and when the merchants are making profits, scholarship flourishes. There must be a sound economic base which affords to creators of culture the financial patronage and leisure time to produce. This is a general historical phenomenon, the validity of which is born out by periods such as the Gaonic age in Babylonia and the Golden Age in Spain, both of which were founded on a sound economic structure.

One of the laws copied from the synagogue in Jerusalem provided that "no scholar shall pay any special assessments or taxes at all, and this applies even if he is very wealthy." At that time, around 1520, the economic conditions must have been such to permit the scholars to receive support from the community. But when in the succeeding years the taxes were increased, the merchants and workers were no longer able to pay the tax for the entire community including the scholars. They therefore asked those scholars who were capable of paying their share to lighten the burden by contributing to the tax collections. A spirited struggle ensued and finally in 1548 all scholars and heads of Yeshivot convened for the purpose of strengthening laws of exemption for scholars. A statement was issued to the effect that anyone who tried to negate the standing regulations would be reproved by the rabbis. Temporarily this threat of punitive action must have silenced the non-scholars. But only five years later the struggle commenced anew, with the result that those scholars who had means were forced to bear their burden of the tax payment. During this entire period the taxation waxed more oppressive. The government officials had discovered that the Jews of Jerusalem received large sums of money from Jews in the Diaspora and eagerly seized upon this as a pretext for higher taxation. However, the scholars

refused to be pacified and after continual haranguing succeeded in 1566 in reinstituting and reaffirming the previous Takanah.⁵⁰

The situation eventually became so intolerable that many scholars left Jerusalem and went to Safed, which by this time was itself in the throes of a declining economy and where, though the shortage was as great if not greater than in Jerusalem, at least the government officials ruled justly. This left Jerusalem inhabited only by the poor masses and the poorer scholars, who in order to meet payment on taxes had no choice other than to mortgage their property and movable objects to the gentiles. They even resorted to borrowing money, using for surety the money that the Sh'lichim brought in from collections in the Diaspora. The lenders recognized that the Jews could receive aid only from them and so they in turn charged exorbitant rates of interest. The struggle between the scholars and the masses was never actually settled. Each time the masses would request the scholars to pay their share the rabbis would retort with a strengthening of the Takanah. The opposition to the scholars became so bitter that the masses told the government officials the names of those scholars who were able to afford taxation. The scholars in revenge placed all those in Herem who informed on them to the tax collectors.⁵¹

A terrible famine in the Galil caused an influx of Jews from Safed to settle in Jerusalem in 1584. However the increase was ephemeral. In 1594 the city was ravaged by a plague and in 1599 a famine ended the not too glorious epoch of 16th century Jerusalem.⁵²

CHAPTER V

THE RISE OF SAFED

Any account of Palestine of the 16th century must invariably center around the city of Safed in the Upper Galil. There the majority of immigrants made their way, there they settled permanently, and there they established a thriving economic and cultural center. The growth of Safed is all the more remarkable when one considers that it is relatively speaking one of the youngest cities in Palestine. No mention is made of it either in Biblical or Talmudic literature, and the first hint given as to its existence lies in a 13th century letter. A more perfect location for a city could not be imagined. Situated high in the mountains, it possesses one of the most healthy climates of any site in Palestine, and even today caters to a large tourist trade. The letter of the anonymous Venetian traveler of 1495 describes the excellent water and healthy climate and attributes to ~~the~~ them the ripe old age of many of the inhabitants, "and in their midst an old man 130 years old and still in his prime."⁵³ Rabbi Shlomo Meisnerel corroborates the state of health of the inhabitants of Safed, and in his letter encouraging immigration gives as added inducement that no one has boils, "but all of them are clean as gold."⁵⁴

Even before the Spanish Inquisition and the Turkish conquest the Jewish community of Safed was of

respectable size. In 1481 Joseph Mantabia writes that "Safed is a fine community whose population, including the surrounding villages, is approximately 300 families."⁵⁵ Our Venetian traveler of 1495 substantiates the figure "approximately 300 families."⁵⁶ Evidently those Spanish refugees who did come to Palestine before the Turkish conquest gravitated toward Jerusalem, for there was no noticeable increase in the population of Safed until after the first quarter of the 16th century. Even the anonymous traveler of 1522 finds the same population as his predecessors.⁵⁷ But by the middle of the century a Franciscan monk found 8000 to 10,000 Jewish inhabitants.⁵⁸ In 1535 Rabbi Moses de Rossi writes from Safed, "I tell you that just as in Italy the community increases daily.. ...he who saw Safed ten years ago and sees it now (witnesses) something wonderful to behold, for the Jews continue to come at all times."⁵⁹ Jacob Canaani in his classic essay on Safed estimates that by the beginning of the 17th century there must have been approximately 6000 families or the equivalent of 30000 Jews living in Safed.⁶⁰

Why this sudden interest in Safed, why this rise of a small village to a large metropolis, the biggest city of Palestine? Of primary importance is the comparatively inferior economic and social status of Jerusalem. Many of those religiously inclined would

no doubt have preferred to settle in Jerusalem did not Safed offer greater material and cultural inducements. We shall enter into a more detailed discussion of the main reasons in the following pages, but for the present let us merely enumerate some of the reasons the immigrants preferred Safed to Jerusalem:

1) In Safed the taxes were much lower than in Jerusalem, and as long as the standard of living was high the scholars were not obliged to pay taxes. This of course helps account for the unusually large number of scholars who settled in Safed. Rabbi Shlomel writes that in 1609 there were over 300 great and pious rabbis in Safed, 18 Yeshivot, and 21 synagogues.⁶¹ Rabbi Moses de Rossi states, "Here there is no Galut as in our land and the Turks honor the worthy Jews. Here and in Alexandria, Egypt those who are appointed over the customs and taxes of the king are Jews.....and in the entire kingdom there are no special assessments...Only this year for the war of the "Tzufi" were the Jews required to lend some funds to the government officials.. (In return) sometimes the officials give them pledges and sometimes they give them a share of the taxes of the city, which the Jews collect.....In truth the scholars don't pay any tax except the poll tax."⁶² ~~(The practice of lending money to rulers to finance their wars was a practice with which not only the Jews of Palestine but the Jews of Europe became well acquainted. Throughout~~

~~their history the Jews had served as the "piggy banks"~~
~~of royalty~~). Later on we shall see that a struggle
between scholars and merchants occurred in Safed as
well as in Jerusalem.

2) Safed had been the capital of a district
during the occupation of the Mameluks, and the Turks,
who followed a similar policy, retained it as the
capital. The governor of the district made his head-
quarters there.⁶³ No doubt this enhanced the prestige
and importance of the city and resulted in expansion
of commercial ties. The government officials and army
personnel also contributed to the expanding population
and increased the consumer demand.

3) Safed had an excellent location for business
and commercial purposes. It was near Zidon, the main
port of Israel, through which passed most of the exports
and imports. It was also in the same area as Damascus,
the center of the Jewish merchants in Asia Minor.
Safed, located between these two commercial centers,
was thus enabled to establish important ties, the
prerequisite for successful business ventures.

4) Safed was surrounded by numerous Arab
villages with large and thriving populations. Many
Jews lived in these villages in the environs of Safed.
The neighboring population offered good potential for
business development and the Jews dwelling in the midst
of the Arabs could serve as good contacts.

5) Safed quickly became a cultural center.

World renowned scholars were drawn by its spell. Soon monies began to flow into Safed from Jewish communities throughout the Diaspora who were anxious to recreate a spiritual and cultural center in the Holy Land. The possibility of pursuing academic studies and being supported in comparative munificence lent added force to the magnet of Safed.

6) Safed was located in an area hallowed by tradition. In Meron, a few kilometers away, is an ancient synagogue and also the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the traditional leader of the Kabbalists. According to several Midrashim the Messiah was destined to come to the Upper Galil first. Since the people still yearned in pious anticipation for the redemption of the people and land of Israel through God's anointed, to live in the Galil was a rare privilege.⁶⁴

In comparison to Jerusalem and the other communities Safed was a veritable garden of Eden, stocked with all goods and foodstuffs. The Venetian traveler states, "The Jews have stores of spices, cheese, oil and all kinds of grains and fruits. And I heard...that five people are supported by each store... Foodstuffs are also inexpensive.." ⁶⁵ Rabbi Moses de Rossi tells us of a famine caused by a drought, a plague of locusts, and a viscious hailstorm which destroyed

all the fruit in the vicinity, but that despite this they ate "grapes in abundance" in Safed.⁶⁶ The anonymous traveler of 1522 writes of Safed, "The city is full of all good and praiseworthy foods, grain and corn, and the finest oils in great abundance...Everything in season is cheap for the consumer...Were it not for the abundance of ~~the~~ and produce which they transport to Damascus and other places, they would not be worth anything (because the home market would be flooded and the prices of foodstuffs would decrease).... There are all kinds of good fruits and those that aren't there are brought from Damascus...The land abounds in commerce and there are many Jewish merchants with all kinds of merchandise who bring goods from Damascus and sell them in Safed."⁶⁷

Writing from Safed, Rabbi Shlomo also testifies, "I found all the Holy Land full of the blessing of the Lord and great abundance and low cost of living which is impossible to appreciate or to imagine or to describe. And I, when I saw the great abundance which exists in the Holy Land and I saw that all the peoples partake of the goodness and the Jews are scattered and don't have the privilege of eating its fruit and satiating themselves in its goodness, then I cried and said, 'Would our brethren, the house of Israel, know only one-tenth of the plenty and abundance and great goodness which now exist in

Palestine, they would cry day and night over their exile and the spacious, fine, and desirable land they have lost, which even in its destruction produces fruits and oil and wine and silk corresponding to one-third of the world...Boats come from the end of the world, from Venice, from Spain, France, Portugal, and Constantinople laden with grain, olive oil, raisins, pressed figs, honey, silk, and soap...The goodness is like the sand upon the seashore.....pressed figs, chickens, and eggs are very inexpensive...and lamb is tender and good and fat...and fish....and rice....and many kinds of legume, lentils the like of which you have never seen, whose taste is like nuts, (all) cheap.....and also all kinds of turnips and good vegetables without end... whose good taste you never tasted, are to be found during the entire year in summer and winter, almost for nothing,,,in addition to the excellent fruits, cabbages, pomegranets, lemons, melons, and watermelons whose taste is like sugar....and cucumbers, squash, and gourds....He who attains from God the privilege of settling in Israel and has a little money so that he is able to support himself, happy is he and happy his lot... he is also able to rejoice in the Lord and satiate himself in the good and rich pasture, to eat of its fruit and to enjoy its goodness. And with a third of the expenses in your land he is able to support himself here in Israel and to live the life of a king."68

The above sources prove, despite the obvious exaggeration due to excess enthusiasm, that Safed of the 16th century was filled with an abundance the like of which did not exist anywhere else in Palestine at the time and had not been known for many centuries previously. It is obvious, as stated in the appendix, that the purpose of these letters is not so much informational as it is to attract the masses of Jews living in the Diaspora, to urge the "gathering in of the exiles." The same traveler of 1522 who describes the general prosperity and the excellent business opportunities so ardently simultaneously admonishes his compatriots at home not to come unless they have a good trade, because "no one will be able to hire himself out as a teacher or as a house-servant or as a (helper) in a store, nor to place himself in the (responsibility) of the community, for the poor are many. Therefore let no one leave Italy who has no vocation or funds, lest he repent and desire to return."⁶⁹ Thus we see that the prosperity did not extend to all classes. The poor, as in every society did not cease to exist. Only those with the necessary capital and skill could really benefit and participate in the improved economy.

These sources also demonstrate the nature of the trade which must have existed between Safed and the neighboring villages and cities. To Zidon, the

chief port of Israel, and to Beirut came ships laden with their imports from all the countries on the Mediterranean Sea. Safed, the largest commercial center in Palestine and connected commercially with Damascus and other business centers, was the depot to which all the goods were brought. From there they were distributed throughout the country. Likewise, most of the produce and manufactured goods destined for foreign consumption passed through Safed. Thus, Safed was not only a political capital but also a commercial center. We can well imagine the merchants and traders coming with their wares from Damascus and all parts of Palestine, meeting in the market places, discussing their deals in coffee houses, and lending a picturesque color to the active, vibrant life of the community.⁷⁰

The above letters concentrate mostly on the imports from European countries and from Damascus, but it is to be assumed that in a balanced economy such a tremendous import necessitated an equivalent export. The flourishing commerce of Safed was to a great extent based on one home industry, the industry which even until our own day has always counted ^{Jews} among its most active and influential entrepreneurs--the garment industry.

In the continuation of the statement cited previously, Rabbi Moses de Rossi writes, "The garment industry increases daily, and they say that more than 15,000 Carisee (71) were manufactured in Safed this year in addition to the higher (priced) garments and there are those who manufacture cloth as good as that in Venice and every person who does any work with wool will earn his subsistence easily."⁷² Canaani utilizes the quotation of Rossi to prove "that the garment industry of Safed was already so important that it was able to compete with the great, advanced city of Venice."⁷³ The facts do not seem to support such a rash statement, for Venice was the largest producer of cloth in the world. However, from this and other sources we do know that the quality of the work was of superior value and could be compared favorably with the excellent craftsmanship of Venice.

The garment industry of Safed developed to such an extent that the other Palestinian communities, particularly Jerusalem, which had itself once been the center of Jewish glory, grew envious of the eminence of Safed. Rabbi Levi ibn Habib, in his controversy with Berab over the reinstitution of the Semicha, sarcastically states, "The question of this Hacham (Berab) is no question at all, and his opinion that it is a question is no excuse, for who told Maimonides

that at a time close to the Messiah the Hachamin would be only in Safed and not scattered throughout all of Palestine? Did he prophesy that because of the garment industry in Safed men of valor would immigrate to Safed from the other places in Palestine? On the contrary, ~~we~~ would think that God would strengthen their hearts so that many would immigrate to Israel and scatter and settle in all its cities and places to strengthen the entire country."⁷⁴ The mood of the statement displays a touchiness which is rooted in more than the controversy over the Semicha and which seems to have its origin in a deep-seated jealousy of the prosperity of Safed in comparison to the ~~an~~ weakened position of Jerusalem.

The garment industry of Safed encompassed more than the mere manufacture of the cloth. Every phase of the industry was developed. We note from other sources that the nearby villages grew mulberry trees from which the silk was produced, and in the account of the Duke of Noxos' attempt to establish Tiberias as a political center we are informed that the main industry was to be the production of silk.⁷⁵ Thus, the entire product from the raw material to the finished stage, including the ^edying, the cutting, and the sewing, was produced in the environs of Safed.⁷⁶

The refugees who came to Safed transferred not only their wealth but also their technology. The garment industry grew because the new immigrants had had previous experience prior to their arrival. The Jews who settled permanently in Turkey brought with them their skills and put them to good use in earning their livelihood in their new land, so that within a short time the Jews of Turkey had obtained, among other things, a near monopoly on the garment industry, which came to be known in Turkey as a "Jewish trade."⁷⁷ Similarly, the Jews coming to settle in Safed were able to transplant the entire garment industry, including the prerequisite finances, business contacts, and skills.

The Jews living in Constantinople and Damascus took an interest in Palestine for both religious and material reasons. Wealthy Jews would ship wool to Safed for the specific purpose of encouraging the industry.⁷⁸ (One might well compare the situation to the present day investments of wealthy American Jews in modern Israel for purposes both of earning profits and of aiding in the development of the Israeli economy.) Schechter quotes a source which tells of an incident about the year 1600 when a ship, laden with 100,000 "Keseph" worth of wool and 10,000 "Keseph" in cash for the poor, was wrecked during its voyage, subsequently causing much hardship in Safed.⁷⁹

The immigrants were adept at trades other than those associated with the garment industry. The extensive exchange of commerce between Safed, Damascus, and other cities was conducted mostly by immigrants from Spain who had managed to salvage their capital. The anonymous traveler of 1522 states, "He who doesn't have the capital to venture into business should be a skilled artisan....There are four good trades in Palestine: weavers, smiths, cobblers, and tanners.. also builders, for whoever is strong enough to be a day laborer in this type of work is paid well."⁸⁰ In addition there are records of all types of workers: barbers, helpers in stores, water-carriers, etc.⁸¹

A most important and rewarding occupation was that of money-lender and money-changer. No stable economy can exist without the function of a group which takes the risk of supplying the necessary capital for industry and commerce. The financier is the *sina qua non* of an expanding economy. Frequently these lenders would charge such exorbitant rates of interest, sometimes as much as 15% a year, that all the profits would be consumed by the interest. The responsa literature is replete with records of the struggles between various business men and money lenders. As a result of the high rates of interest many entrepreneurs were forced to go into bankruptcy.⁸² The difficulty of obtaining money readily and reasonably was partially responsible for the eventual decline of industry and commerce.

The struggle between scholars and merchants whose violent repercussions disrupted the Jerusalem community had its counterpart in Safed. There, as must also have been the case in Jerusalem, many of the scholars were unable and unwilling to depend on the irregular contributions from abroad. Such funds were uncertain. A ship might be wrecked or delayed, a Shaliach might die or decide not to return, or any number of possibilities might occur which would result in a lack of funds with which to support the scholars. The scholars, being unable to rely on the vagaries of fate, would often enter into business. There is one letter which even proves that Jacob Berab himself was an important merchant whose investments and dealings extended beyond the borders of Palestine.⁸³

*When I met
Berab
men previously*

The entrance of the scholars, tax exempt, into the field of business and commerce accounts for the great number of stores and investments and was one of the main causes of the expansion of the economy. The merchants of Safed, as did the merchants of Jerusalem, protested vehemently and vociferously to the fact that the scholars were in business, were earning profits, and nevertheless were not expected to contribute their share of the tax burden. Such men offered serious competition to those elements of the population not recognized as scholars.

In the Responsa of Rabbi Levi ibn Habib he attempts to answer the question of the legality of the exemption for scholars who are also business men. "Who is a scholar who is exempt from all taxation? He who is definitely diligent in his study and does not engage in business at all or perhaps engages in business in order to acquire his needs and afterwards returns to his study."⁸⁴ It is not difficult to perceive that such a definition permits varying interpretations. Who can define exactly what is the nature of "needs," or where an individual's income ceases to be "needs" and becomes luxuries? These are questions which must have been ^{as} unanswerable in the 16th century ~~as well as~~ as in our own day. The reason for the bitterness of the struggle lay undoubtedly in the fact that the scholar-merchants took advantage of the privileges given them and utilized their titles to free themselves from the payment of taxes while at the same time they were profit~~ing~~ing in their business ventures. The rabbis supported the scholars against the protestations of the merchants, artisans, and workers. Joseph Karo, R. Israel bar Meir Dekuriel, R. Moses ben R. Joseph of Trani, and their colleagues placed a harsh Herem on the leaders of the city lead by Judah Berlin. In order to demonstrate the fiercer~~ness~~ness of the struggle a translation of the original ban follows:

"By the authority of the heavenly Beth Din and by the authority of the earthly Beth Din, with the decree of the guardian angels and the statement of the holy ones....we ban and excommunicate and outlaw and curse and anathemize, etc....any Jew who collects any tax from any scholar whose scholarship is permanent and whose work is temporary, whether (he collects it) himself or through an agent be he Jew or non-Jew... and any one who transgresses this, cursed be he by day, cursed be he by night. This decree is valid from today until the time when the high priest of the Urim and Tumim is established.....We take it upon ourselves that none of us shall abrogate this decree either in part or in whole at any time. May everyone who enforces this decree be blessed by God."⁸⁵

Toward the end of the 16th century the prosperity of Safed was already on the wane. Rabbi Samson Bak, writing from Jerusalem, describes a terrible famine in Safed: "I have already informed you of God's good benefits unto me that he took me out of Safed and brought me to holy Jerusalem, where nothing is lacking even now in destruction and blessing is found in it....since I left Safed they are left through our many sins is so much distress that since the time it was established until now such a thing has not been heard of, nor has there been a famine and thirst like it...more than

1000 people died....Rabbi Johah wrote me that if the dearth continues another three months the land will be destroyed in hunger and the Galil ruined without a doubt, for there is no bread nor water, nor green leaf, the fields and gardens have already dried up, since no rain fell all last winter..."⁸⁶

Isaiah ben Abraham Horwitz moved to Jerusalem at the beginning of the 17th century to accept the position of AB Beth Din, "for Jerusalem, even though it is destroyed, is now the joy of all the land, peaceful and serene, good foods, the choicest wines, and (the cost of living) is cheaper than in Safed."⁸⁷ Rabbi Shlomo's letters, dating from 1606-1609, still describe Safed in glowing terms, but this is because the conditions must have temporarily improved again or because he exaggerated the situation or both. In any case a few years later the sound economic basis had been weakened considerably and its inhabitants had emigrated to other cities in Palestine or to other countries in the Diaspora.

From the comparison between Safed and Jerusalem we distinguish a ^{sharp} ~~sharp~~ contrast. While the progress of Jerusalem was retarded the city of Safed rose to heights of grandeur unattained by any Jewish community in Palestine since the days of the Temple. It is in this light perhaps that we may gain a new insight ~~into~~

into history by reexamining the struggle over the reinstitution of the Semicha. Historians have interpreted the conflict to be merely of a personal nature, based on the jealousy and enmity of the two participants, Rabbi Levi ibn Habib and Rabbi Jacob Berab.⁸⁸ However, when we analyze the economic status of the two communities and their relations with one another, we gain an entirely different perspective. We can imagine the feeling of helplessness and consternation which must have arisen in the heart of Ibn Habib when he saw the prosperous city of Safed attracting to its bosom the greatest scholars in Jewry, many of them former residents of Jerusalem. We can visualize the dismay which he must have felt when he was confronted with the picture of the upstart city dominating the Holy City in all aspects of religious and secular life. Undoubtedly personal motives must also have been significant, but of primary consideration for our purposes is the effect that the reinstitution of the Semicha and the Sanhedrin in Safed would have had on the Jerusalem community. It would have meant that what existed in fact would have received the "de juris" sanction of religious legal authority. Safed, not Jerusalem, would have become the official center of world Jewry, and with the title would have gone the prestige, the wealth, and the influence due its station. Habib's bitterness

is expressed in the source already quoted in this chapter on Page 51 and 52. It is not a personal issue alone. It is the material welfare and the honor of Jerusalem which is at stake.

Though Safed declined materially at the end of the 16th century, the spiritual and cultural influence it wielded spread throughout the Diaspora and may still be felt in certain aspects of Jewish tradition. Our study has established the economic and social foundations of the community. But we have determined merely the nature of the framework; of lasting significance for the history of the Jew is the magnificent cultural and spiritual structure which was erected upon this framework. The framework, however, was the *sina qua non* of Safed's spiritual glory. Without a strong, stable economy Safed would have been incapable of developing its many academic institutions and of providing their scholars with the necessities that would permit them to continue their studies. Without this economic foundation Safed would have been at best another 16th century Jerusalem. With it, it was able to create a living, dynamic culture.

Safed of the 16th century was the spiritual center of world Jewry. Its numerous Yeshivot, its unusual collection of scholars, saints, and mystics, and the general religious fervor of its inhabitants created an environment supersaturated with the spirit

of Judaism. During this short period in the long history of the Jews Safed produced noble and exemplary personalities whose inspired lives and works shall always remain among the most cherished traditions of the Jewish people. Caro, Luria, Vital, Alkabez, Berab, Cordovero, Alsheich--represent only a few of the many who brought honor to 16th century Safed.

CHAPTER VI

THE JEW AND HIS NEIGHBOR

Any consideration of the Jewish communities in 16th century Palestine would not be complete or objective if it neglected the relationship between the Jews and their neighbors. It must be stressed that the Jews were only a small minority--in the words of Christian traveler of the 15th century, "set as naught"--living in a vast sea of Arab neighbors. As such the Jews were influenced by their way of life, their habits and customs, and were dependent on them for their economic stability.⁸⁹ The Jews were so few in number that even had they desired they would not have been able to isolate themselves from the Arab community. They were in daily contact with the Arabs in much the same way and for much the same purpose that the Jews and Arabs of small villages in Israel today find their association to be mutually beneficial.

The accounts we have of Arab-Jewish relationships as usual vary in content. The gamut of letters extends from a picture of complete harmony and mutual respect to one of complete disdain and contempt. In large part the impression a traveler or immigrant receives is preconditioned by the status of the Jew in the society in which he formerly lived. It is also dependent on the particular community he visits and

the specific incidents which happen to him, so that it is conceivable that two different people might receive two contrary perspectives of the identical situation. (This is discussed in greater detail in the Appendix)

On the credit side of the ledger we have statements such as that of Eliyahu de Pirara that "the Jews work side by side with the Arabs and aren't jealous of one another and do not fight with one another."⁹⁰ Bertinora informs us that "on the part of the Arabs there is no Jewish Galut at all in this place (Jerusalem) and I went through the length and breadth of the land and no one scoffed or insulted... They (the Arabs) are extremely kind to any stranger and particularly to one who doesn't know the language... When they see many Jews living together they are not envious of them at all."⁹¹ Rabbi Israel Ashkenazi tells us that many poor Jews from Jerusalem "travel around the villages and small towns and the charitable Arabs give them bread and money and fruit for all their needs for nothing....(so that) many people from Jerusalem go out to the villages and don't return to their homes except for the festivals and Chanukah and Purim."⁹² Almost every traveler states that the places hallowed by Jewish tradition are respected by the Arabs. The modern day Arab custom of honoring Jewish holy places would tend to corroborate this

evidence that the Arabs had nothing but respect for the historic places and in many cases considered them as their own, which explains the reason for not allowing Jews to enter.

Rabbi Shlomel adds his testimony, "...The gentiles who live in Palestine are all humble and submissive before the holiness of Israel, and even when we stand all day on the field with Tallith and Tephilin and pray and call aloud to our God before the graves of the righteous, not one of them will interfere or open his mouth to mock the prayer, God forbid..... On the contrary they revere the graves of the holy Tanaim and they respect the synagogues, they light candles on the graves of the righteous and supply oil to the synagogues." In the continuation of the letter Shlomel relates that in the neighboring villages there are the remains of early synagogues containing Torah scrolls. The Arabs treat these sacred places with the utmost respect. They even retain the keys and open up the synagogues for the Jews who ^{occasionally} ~~continually~~ go there to pray.⁹³ (From personal experience I can testify that in the village mentioned by Shlomel--Meron--and also in places like Gush Halav (Jfish in Arabic) there are ancient synagogues still standing. Meron, until recently inhabited by Meronites, contains the most intact ancient synagogue in all of Palestine.)

On the other side of the ledger we are told that the position of the Jew is dependent on a deferring attitude, on his "knowing his place" in the Arab world. Our Venetian traveler informs us that the Arabs don't hate the Jews nor do they abuse or revile them. The Jews even retain possession of the key to the city gate near the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem. However the Jews must be "humble and subservient and not give commands or orders to the Arabs."⁹⁴ Israel Ashkenazi, in a letter from Jerusalem in 1520 refers to a letter he had received in which the correspondent assured him that no matter how bad conditions in Palestine were it was still "better to be under Islam than under Christendom." Ashkenazi replies, "In these lands it is the opposite... There are two sides to the question. He who accepts upon himself the yoke of exile and of submissiveness, who doesn't raise his hand or foot against the Arabs.... and doesn't speak haughtily at all, even to the little ones, and is deaf and dumb, except (in cases where it is necessary) to appease and to bribe a little, then with him all is well. For when the Arab sees the humility and submissiveness he is appeased....if he demands ^{his money} (of the Jew) he settles for less....and don't think that this is something which is new, for I saw letters that Maimonides sent to Spain in which he wrote that there isn't a nation in the world which desires to

humiliate and humble the Israel nation as the Arabs do...When a man humbles himself then he is able to go everywhere, to do business and to open up a store in the market place like the Arabs, and no one speaks out or mutters against him. With his green turban⁽⁹⁵⁾ he goes every place he desires, even on the highways, and he is honored in the eyes of all, only that he pays a high tax, for from here to Damascus there is a tax for Jews of more than one Venetian ducat, and similarly from here to Egypt, and Christians who are not residents pay more than double..."⁹⁶

The latter statement would tend to show that the Christian was oppressed by government taxation more than the Jew. Nevertheless, though the Christian may have been despised he evidently felt himself superior to the Jew. Despite the fact that the Crusades had finally ceased and Christendom had been forced to retreat from Palestine by the powers of Islam, the might of Christendom certainly was much greater than that of Jewry. This was true even in Palestine, where as we have seen, large masses of Jews were among the poorest of the population. Many Christian travelers never even mention the despicable Jews in their accounts, unless it be a parenthetical aside. In the ten volume edition of the "Palestine Pilgrim Text Society" publication, a rather complete collection of pilgrim's accounts,

only once are the Jews referred to: "The holy city of Jerusalem is at this day the dwelling place of divers nations of the world, and as it were a collection of all manner of abominations." The pilgrim, Felix Fabri, then enters into a description of the Saracens, Greeks, Syrians, Jacobites, Abyssinians, Nestorians, Armenians, Gregorians, Maronites, Turcomans, Bedouins, Assassins, Mahometans, Mamelukes, Latin Christians, etc, and in one small paragraph at the end says, "Among all these the Jews are held to be accursed, insomuch that the misery and contempt which they undergo greatly dulls their understanding, for everywhere throughout the whole world they are despised and set as naught. They have various sects among themselves, such as those of Samaritans and Essenes, and there continually arise among them new heresies, whereof I could say much.."97

This excerpt reveals not only the contempt of the Christian for the Jew, but also demonstrates the character of travel accounts. The author exhibits a complete misconception of the conditions of the time because he based his knowledge of the Jew not on what he saw but on what he knew of the history of the time of Jesus when there had been a Jewish sect known as Essenes. (cf. Appendix for a more detailed analysis.)

To travel the highways from city to city during the period was an extremely hazardous undertaking. Many robbers frequented the roads or lay in wait to ambush unprotected travelers. As an interesting aside, Rabbi Moses de Rossi writes that among the bands which attacked unsuspecting wayfarers was even a band of Jewish tent-dwellers who divided the spoil with their Arab colleagues.⁹⁸ Because of the dangers the Jews were forced to hire guides. Frequently the Arab guides would stop in the middle of the journey and refuse to continue until they received a greater sum of money than originally agreed upon. Accordingly, the Jews developed the practice of signing a "clear contract" so that in case the Arabs would bring them to court they would be able to present valid testimony in their defense. Often even this was not sufficient. "Even if the Jews increase their prayers no one heeds them, for in all these places there is no law, particularly when it is a case of Jews against Arabs."⁹⁹

It is difficult to differentiate between the character of the relationships before and after the Turkish conquest. In both periods we find the same mixed reports. One would ^{not} expect an abrupt change in day to day relationships merely because of a change in ruling authorities. The Turkish conquest was of little direct consequence for the lives of the masses of the

people. It is possible that the changing circumstances, the growth of commercial importance, and the subsequent enrichment of segments of the Jewish community as a result of the Turkish conquest would have had an indirect effect on the rapport between the two communities, but of this we have no evidence.

CONCLUSION

The decline of Safed and Jerusalem and the other places of Jewish habitation at the end of the 16th century and the resulting end to the period of revival was due not so much to causes within Palestine itself as to the evolution of events within the Turkish Empire as a whole. Around this same time the Turkish Empire began to lose its hold on its conquered countries. The travel routes to Palestine were utilized less and less frequently. The Empire, founded on conquest, could retain its potency only by continual conquest; but when there were no more countries to conquer the momentum ceased. The governors of the various territories and districts, particularly since their positions were obtained not by descent but by military valor, engaged in continual wars with one another. In order to maintain their armies the people were taxed oppressively. The extortion and exploitation of the peoples within the Empire in turn decreased the economic opportunities. Without capital there could be no sound economic development. With the deterioration of the Turkish Empire as a whole, Palestine, an integral part of the Empire, was seriously affected. When the heart decays, the rest of the body cannot long survive. The decline of Turkey thus sounded the death knell of the 16th century attempt to reestablish Palestine as the center of world Jewry.

In this analysis of 16th century Palestine we have attempted to demonstrate the importance of the economic and social aspects of communal history for the evolution of cultural and spiritual contributions. It is only by perceiving and evaluating the background of a painting that one can appreciate the full significance of the entire picture. The comparison between Safed and Jerusalem and the examination of the motivations which move masses of people clearly demonstrate that the number of pure idealists in the world comprises only a small minority. The great majority of people are motivated by noble ideals only when a sound basis of material security is concurrently offered. Nor can cultural and spiritual values develop in a vacuum. Jerusalem, in dire financial straits, lay sterile; Safed, with a thriving economic life, gave birth to Lurianic Kabbalah, the Shulchan Aruch, and myriads of renowned saints and scholars. From these considerations we may conclude that the essential prerequisite of a vibrant and creative communal life is a sound and secure economy. With such an economy Palestine could look forward to becoming the center of world Jewry; without it, Palestine once again passed into oblivion.

APPENDIX

ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCES

The nature of the sources utilized for this study is such that it is doubtful if a really accurate reconstruction of the period can be undertaken. Unfortunately, no Josephus has left us a rich heritage of contemporary history from which we might draw the data necessary for a correct interpretation, and the general histories of the time make little if any mention of the Jews of Palestine. The absence of a contemporary historian who would have been able to look at the events of 16th century Palestine in their proper perspective causes us to seek elsewhere for primary source material. As a result, most of the sources at our disposal were not originally written for the purpose of leaving a record of the past for the peoples of the future. Thus in the writing of the history of the 16th century much must be left to conjecture.

*Josephus
also has to
be used
with care.*

The primary sources of the period are to be found in 1) responsa literature, 2) travelers' accounts, and 3) letters sent from Palestine to the Diaspora.

1) Responsa literature--The responsa consist, as the Hebrew name "Sh'elot U t'shuvot" implies, of questions and answers. People who were disturbed by a particular problem or who were engaged in some sort

of legal dispute or difference of opinion over interpretation of Jewish tradition would write to a well known rabbi for advice, interpretation, or decision, whichever was the case. We have no assurance that the questions asked are typical of the problems of the age. Many are undoubtedly isolated problems and do not reflect the tenor or temper of the times. Often the responsa are not concerned with practicality, but with such hypothetical matters as Sh'mita and Karbanot. Only rarely is mention made of the complete name or the location of the individual asking the Sh'elah, nor is the exact year of the correspondence given.

In preparation for this thesis, the author took a cursory glimpse into the vast realm of the Responsa literature. The account of the Semicha struggle in the responsa of R. Levi ibn Habib and some of the responsa of "HaMaBiT" (Moses ben Joseph of Trani) were perused in an effort to cull pertinent facts which could be applied as evidence in the study of the contemporary history. The efforts did not bear fruit. Those passages which might have had bearing on the study were few and far between. There was no chronological correlation or system whereby they could be placed in a historical order. Perhaps some day a historian will be able to read the entire responsa literature of the period and with the facts thus garnered piece together a true picture, but such a task was not within the purview of this study.

2) Travel accounts--Almost all the travelers who came to Palestine, both Jewish and gentile, came for religious reasons. The Christians made pilgrimages to the Holy Land, during the Holy Year and at other occasions, primarily to see the places sanctified by Christian tradition. They sought to visualize for themselves the scenes of the Bible and other holy writings. Accordingly, they tended to be prejudiced in their views by the concepts and impressions of the Holy Land which had been indoctrinated into them in the countries of their origin. They saw that which they had expected to see and they wrote that which they were expected to write. They took no particular interest in the folk patterns or civilization of the inhabitants of the country, except perhaps as they reflected on the past religious history. Thus, we have seen that in the entire collection of the Palestine Pilgrim Society's monumental publication, only one insignificant paragraph refers to the Jews, and that incorrectly, describing them as split up into the sects which existed during the time of Jesus.¹⁰⁰ We are therefore left with extremely sparse source material from non-Jewish sources, material which is essential if the proper perspective on the period is to be maintained.

The Jewish travelers of the time, upon whom we have had to rely for a major part of our source material, are no more reliable than their Christian counterparts. They also came with preconceived notions as to what they would find, and they also were ^{perpetrators} ~~victims~~ of understatement and exaggeration. The situation must have been quite similar to that which exists today. Depending on the outlook, interests, and enthusiasm of the modern visitor to Israel, one can hear and read reports emphasizing the meager diet, the horrible conditions, the disunity, the "Hutzpa" of the Sabras, and on the other hand vivid, enthusiastic accounts of the tremendous growth, the spirit, the confidence, and the unity. Most likely all of the statements made are basically true. Yet the only way one can account for the wide variance is to say that few, if any, of the travelers are objective. Almost all are preconditioned by their previous environment and experience. Almost all see only what they want to see. All these factors contribute to the unreliability of modern day accounts. How therefore can we expect complete unanimity or validity in reports of travelers of almost 500 years ago?

The problem is made all the more difficult by the fact that in the desire to present fascinating accounts the authors would often employ legendary

material as factual and would even resort to copying directly from something written by another traveler.¹⁰¹ The travelers were ever conscious of the people for whom they were writing. They therefore tended to concentrate on those aspects of life in Palestine which were exceptional and extraordinary. In order to gain the interest of the readers it was felt that the unusual had to be emphasized. It is therefore rare that we find any lengthy discussion of the day to day life of inhabitants or of their modus vivendi. In vain did we search for some account of the communal structure. The organization and operation of the community must have been of paramount importance, and yet because it was not in the realm of the extraordinary or because it was not thought to be of interest to the readers, it was never described. We can only conjecture as to its nature on the basis of fragmentary evidence.

3) Letters sent from Palestine to the Diaspora-- There is a close relationship between this type of source and the preceding, particularly when referring to the material written by and for Jews. Most of the letters sent to the Diaspora by Jews were not only personal but were intended to give information on the land of Israel as well. It is accordingly difficult to differentiate between letters and travel accounts.

Most of the source material studied for this paper consisted of travel accounts in the form of letters to families, friends, or even to what appears to be whole communities.

An additional characteristic of this type of travel account-letter was the desire for propaganda. The accounts of whole communities devoting their time exclusively to study, prayer, and the performance of Mitzvot can hardly be accepted as trustworthy. This type of exaggeration was intended either to provide an example for the communities in the Diaspora after which to pattern themselves or else, what is perhaps more likely, to encourage immigration to Palestine. In like manner many of the accounts of the material abundance prevalent in Safed or Jerusalem, contradicted in the very same letters by statements of the unusually large numbers of people living on charity, must be attributed to propaganda purposes.

Another type of letter was that sent by Yeshivot or other like institutions which depended on outside income for support. Of all the sources one would expect these to be the least reliable, for their author's purpose in writing was to plead a cause. The more destitute the situation, the more sympathy could be evoked from contributors. The letters of the B'nai Yeshivah are replete with horrifying descriptions

of the despicable position of the Jew, his inability to attain for himself the basic necessities of life, and his complete dependence on the subsidization of Diaspora Jewry. Even during the height of Safed's glory letters were sent out depicting the crying needs of the Jews of Safed, for, as was mentioned in the main text, the income from world Jewry was a major factor in the economy.

When we realize the motivations and purposes of the authors of our sources we can perceive why population figures are often in complete disagreement, why the Arab neighbors are so beneficent in some accounts and so dastardly in others, why at an identical time in a city's history there exist unheard of prosperity and unspeakable poverty, etc. Only when the nature of the sources is continually borne in mind can we comprehend the exaggerations and contradictions which occur in the historiography of the period of history encompassed by this study.

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1. Cambridge Modern History, vol. I, p. 98
2. Ibid., p. 99
3. Ibid., vol. III, 129
4. Hitti, "The Arabs," p. 208
UJE, vol. X, p. 359
5. Rosanes I, p. 57; cf. also note 47.
6. Kapsali, "Likutim Shonim," p. 12
7. Graetz (Rabinowitz) vol. VII, p. 27
For English translation, cf. vol IV, p. 400 f.
8. Rabinowitz, "Motza-e Ha-Golah," p. 61, cf. note 1.
9. Rosanes, vol. I, p. 61, 62
10. Ibid. p. 60-64
11. Kapsali, op. cit., p. 6;
cf. also Rosanes I, p. 22
12. Rosanes I, p. 61, 62 (Nikolas de Nikolai, "Les
Orientales," Anbursa 1546, p. 168)
13. Kapsali, p. 8, 9
For other instances showing the friendly attitude
of the Turkish sultans, cf. Kapsali, p. 22-24; 39-48.
14. UJE, vol. X, p. 326
15. Kapsali, p. 13-16
16. Rabinowitz, op. cit., p. 75-87, for additional
information on the communal structure;
cf. also JE, vol. XII, p. 281
17. Rosanes I, p. 24; for additional information on the
taxation system cf. the Responsa of the Rashdam
(Salonica) *מ"ס פ"א דער יעד*
According to Graetz this tax was levied on the
congregation according to three different classifica-
tions of property: 200, 100, and 20 aspers;
cf. Graetz (Rabinowitz) vol. VII, p. 130, note 2.
18. JE, p. 282

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19. Rabinowitz, p. 50, 51; cf. also Graetz (Rabinowitz), vol. VIII, p. 278
For another letter of R. Eliyahu Meir Pirara cf. Eisenstein, "Otzar Masaot," p. 83, 84
20. For the discussion of the correct name, cf. Eisenstein, p. 86
21. Ibid., "Letter of R. Meshulam of Valtera," p. 96, 97.
22. Ibid., p. 101
23. Ibid., p. 98, 99
24. Ibid., "Letter of the anonymous Hacham from Venice," p. 128
25. For other quotations concerning the wickedness of the elders cf. Luncz, "Jerusalem," vol. VI, p. 58.
26. Eisenstein, "The letter of R. Obadiah Bertinora to his father," p. 117
27. The amount of 400 ducats a year must have been the tax for the entire community. The Hacham of Venice informs us that the head tax is $1\frac{1}{2}$ ducats a year for each person. He also tells us that in 1495 the population was approximately 200 families. If we multiply this by $1\frac{1}{2}$ ducats we arrive at a figure close to 400 ducats a year.
cf. Ibid., "Letter of the anonymous Hacham of Venice," p. 129
28. For his argument, cf. Luncz, "Jerusalem," vol. VI, p. 58-60
29. Eisenstein, p. 128
30. Loc. cit.
31. For instances illustrating this, cf. Kapsali, p. 39-43.
32. Eisenstein, p. 129
- 33.- 36. Loc. cit.

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37. Schechter, p. 202 f.
38. Ibid., p. 204
39. Loc. sit.,
40. "Shivche Yerushalayim," (the book contains no pagination; the page numbers which will be quoted are my own, starting from the beginning of the book) p. 32; according to my numbering p. 29-33 deal with Jerusalem.
cf. Graetz (Rabinowitz) vol VII, p. 23, note 1.
41. Etzenstein, p. 135
42. "Shivche Yerushalayim," p. 32; cf. also Graetz (Rabinowitz) vol. VII, p. 23
43. Luncz, "Jerusalem," vol. V, "A letter sent from the Holy City to Corpi in 1525," p. 81
44. "Shivche Yerushalayim," p. 32
45. Loc. sit.
46. Loc. sit., p. 29-32;
Luncz, "Jerusalem," vol III, p. 6-9
47. Graetz (Rabinowitz), vol. VII, p. 24, 25
Responsa of Levi ibn Habib, 3-5 p. 6-7
47. "Shivche Yerushalayim," p. 38
For different versions cf. Luncz, "Jerusalem," vol. III, p. 7; also Graetz (Rabinowitz) vol. VII, p. 25
48. Weinrib, (Zion, vol. III), p. 62, note 18
cf. Habib on the Semicha controversy (at the end of his Responsa)
49. Luncz, "Jerusalem," vol III, p. 22, 23
50. Ibid, p. 19, 20; in order to gain a concept of the fierceness of the struggle cf. note 37.
51. Ibid., p. 18-22
For a further discussion compare the situation in Safed (Chapter V of this study)

NOTES

52. Luncz, "Ha-Maamar," vol. III, "Letter of R. Samson Bak," p. 287; p. 282-288 contain other letters. cf. also the end of Chapter V in this study for other quotations
53. Eisenstein, p. 126
54. Kahanna, "Letter of R. Shlomei MeinstereI," p. 217
55. Luncz, ~~ibid.~~ p. p. 90
"Letter of Joseph Mantabia Ashkenazi from Jerusalem to Lombardia in 1481"
56. Eisenstein, p. 126
57. Ibid., p. 132
58. Canaani, p. 7, note 4
59. Luncz, ~~ibid.~~, "Letter of R. Moses de Rossi," p. 201
60. Canaani, p. 7
61. Kahanna, p. 209
62. Luncz, ~~ibid.~~, p. 207
63. Canaani, p. 8, note 3, 4, 5.
64. Ibid., p. 7, 8.
65. Eisenstein, p. 126
66. Luncz, ~~ibid.~~, p. 204
67. Eisenstein, p. 132
68. Kahanna, p. 216, 217; for the complete letter cf. p. 214 f.
69. Eisenstein, p. 132
70. For corroboration of the existence of cages (coffee houses) cf. Canaani, p. 15
71. A special kind of cloth; cf. Canaani, p. 25, note 3
72. Luncz, ~~ibid.~~, p. 204, 205
Canaani, p. 25

NOTES

73. Loc. sit.
74. Schechter, p. 230; for the original quotation cf. Responsa of Habib, Venice, 1565 (Rare Book Room of the Hebrew Union College Library) p. 292 d.
75. Roth, p. 117
76. Canaani, p. 27-30
77. Rosanes, vol. II, p. 40
78. Schechter, p. 230
79. Loc. sit., cf. R. Chaim Alsheich's Preface to the Pentateuchal Commentary of R. Moses Alsheich
80. Eisenstein, p. 132
81. Canaani, p. 35, 36
82. For a more detailed discussion, cf. Canaani, p. 30-33
83. Loc. sit.
84. Ibid., p. 15
85. Ibid., p. 16, note 6
86. Luncz, ibid., p. 287
87. Fromkin, "Letter of Isaiah ben Abraham Horwitz," p. 114-121; also cf. Schechter, p. 283
88. For information of the Semicha struggle cf. -- Habib; Klein, p. 180-183; Rabinowitz, p. 218-230; Graetz, p. 214-220; Revel, etc.
89. Cf. quotation of R. Meshullam previously cited on p. 18, 19.
90. Rabinowitz, p. 51
91. Eisenstein, p. 117
92. Luncz, ibid., "Letter of R. Israel Ashkenazi," p. 187

NOTES

93. Kahanna, p. 214-216
94. Eisenstein, p. 129
95. The Jews were required to wear a special headdress,
cf. Chapter I, p. 13; also note 12.
96. Luncz, *ibid.*, p. 190 f.
97. "Palestine Pilgrim's Text Society," vol. X , p. 384
98. Luncz, *ibid.*, p. 204 f.
99. Eisenstein, p. 127
100. cf. p. 66, 67
101. Weinrib, p. 200, note 30; also his analysis of the
historiography of the period
Cf. also Luncz, "Jerusalem," vol. IV, p. 137f.