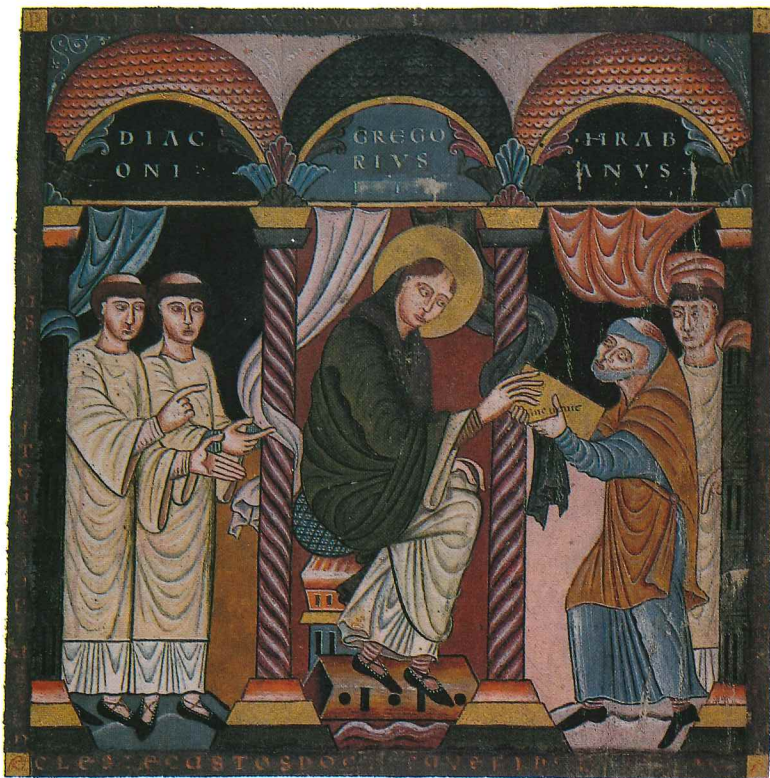


The Beginnings of European Jewry



1. Presentation of the Book to Pope Gregory. Rabanus Maurus, *De Laude Crucis*, 10th century.

The history of the beginnings of a Jewish presence in Europe cannot be thought of as a linear and continuous development. The evidence is fragmentary, random, and often inconsistent. The earliest recorded presence of Jews in medieval Europe is that of colonies of oriental or "Syrian" merchants in towns north of the Loire or in southern Gaul during the fifth and sixth centuries. In the historians' debate concerning the demarcation of periods, the existence of these colonies attests to the persistence of trade in the period of transition from the urban and Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages. It also indicates the contraction of commerce which was then limited solely to the import of luxury goods and carried out almost exclusively by non-indigenous groups which inherited the role of the Greek-speaking diaspora.

Gregory the Great

590–604

576: Avit, Bishop of Clermont-Ferrand, forces the 500 Jews in his town to choose between conversion or expulsion.
581: King Chilperic I and Gregory Bishop of Tours conduct a disputation with the Jew Priscus, agent of the king. A year later Chilperic orders the forced conversion of the Jews in his kingdom.
590–604: The pontificate of Gregory the Great who adopts a "moderate" policy towards the Jews. He condemns forced conversions but approves of conversions attained by material inducements; he first formulates the principle which was reiterated from the twelfth century onwards in all papal bulls favorable to the Jews that "as one should not accord the Jews in their synagogues any liberty beyond what is fixed by law, thus they should not suffer, within what they were accorded, any infringement of their rights."
613–694: Anti-Jewish legislation in Visigoth Spain. 613: The Jews are made to prepare for the choice between conversion or exile.

Anti-Jewish legislation in Visigoth Spain

613–694

633: The Fourth Council of Toledo (presided over by Isidore of Seville) condemns forced baptisms but confirms the validity of previously achieved conversions of children; converted children are to be taken from their families to protect them from returning to the false religion of their parents. 638: The Sixth Council of Toledo institutes a public confession for converted Jews who need to prove their loyalty to the Catholic faith. 653: The Eighth Council of Toledo demands that converted Jews sign a written promise not to marry within the forbidden degrees of family relations and that they themselves inflict the death penalty on any person who disobeys the observances of the Catholic faith. 681: The Eleventh Council is called upon to destroy "the Jewish pest"; prohibition on the celebration of all Jewish festivals; introduction of a system of surveillance on converted Jews. 694: Jews are accused of treason and reduced to "slavery."
629: Expulsion of the Jews by Dagobert I.

Muslim conquest of Spain

711



2. Jewish tombstones in medieval Spain. Palencia, Old-Castile.

711: Muslim conquest of Spain. According to Lucas de Tuy (13th century), the Jews delivered Toledo into the hands of the invaders. The accusation of "treason" during the Muslim invasion will be raised often against the Jews and *conversos* in the 15th century.
797: The Jew Isaac is included in a delegation sent by Charlemagne to Harun al-Rashid; he is the only one to return from the voyage.
c. 820–828: Letters of Agobard. The letter concerning "the superstitions of the Jews" reveals that the Jews of Lyons were familiar with the mystical writings of the ancient Orient.
c. 825: Louis I the Pious accords a bill of rights to "Rabbi Donatus" and his nephew, to Jews in Lyons, and to Abraham of Saragossa.
838: The Bodo-Eleazar affair: Bodo, a deacon at the court of Louis the Pious, befriended Jewish merchants who frequented the palace; in 838 he fled to

After an interruption of over 150 years, we encounter another group of Jewish merchants, new arrivals from the great centers of Jewish civilization in Palestine and Babylon. They were attracted to Europe not only by the profit to be made in distant lands but also by the policy of protection offered by the Carolingian kings who wished to encourage and control the suppliers of expensive textiles, spices, and other luxury articles consumed by the rich nobility.

In the ninth century some of these merchants were involved in long-distance trade encompassing the whole of Eurasia. From the Frankish kingdom they exported swords, slaves, and furs to the Muslim world; then, following the Silk Road to India and China and returning via Khazaria and the Slavic lands, they brought back spices and perfumes to Europe. A Muslim document refers to these great dealers as *radhaniya* (from the river Rhone or a region near Baghdad).

From several sources we learn of the existence of a community of prosperous Jewish merchants, protected by imperial agents, who enjoyed the social prestige which the Christian society was willing to accord to the descendants of the people of the Bible. When Agobard, the Archbishop of Lyons, conducted an intensive campaign against the Jews, his efforts to restrict their activities all failed.

It was only after the Carolingian period, however, that the Jewry destined to be known as "Ashkenazi" was formed and began to evolve its unique patterns of internal organization and cultural life. Large families, often led by rabbinical scholars, migrated from southern Europe, particularly from Italy, to establish communities in the Paris basin and the regions of Champagne and the Rhine. Quite small at first, these communities began to grow rapidly during the eleventh century. From about 4000 persons around the turn of the millennium, the number of Jews in German lands had reached almost 20,000 by the time of the First Crusade (end of eleventh century).

These new communities also dealt in long-distance trade. The first-generation immigrants recognized hereditary monopoly rights in relations with clients – a custom borrowed from Arabic-speaking communities such as that of Kairouan, and still practiced among Ashkenazi Jews as late as the seventeenth century. The new communities imposed internal discipline to prevent feuds between rival family firms and, while jealously guarding their independence, accepted an inter-communal system of control and intervention to ensure peaceful relations and harmony within their diaspora.

For historians who wish to organize the sporadic and uneven history of European Jewry into a convenient formula of a succession of dominant centers, the late eleventh century, "the age of Rashi," opens a new chapter. Henceforth, Ashkenazi Jewry would maintain its predominance in the Jewish world.

500-1096



Bills of Rights of Louis the Pious

825

Muslim Spain, embraced Judaism, and adopted the name Eleazar; his works include missionary pamphlets extolling messianic expectations and describing the End of Days as the avenging of Israel's humiliation.

Beginning of 10th century: *The Book of Josippon*, a Hebrew version of Josephus Flavius, is composed in southern Italy by an unknown author.

917: The assumed date for the departure of the Kalonymus family from Lucca in Italy to Mainz in Germany. Hassidic sources from the 13th century influenced by the Carolingian legend attribute the migration to the initiative of a king called "Charles."

982: According to a Jewish story, a Jew called Kalonymus gives his horse to Emperor Otto II, thus saving the Emperor's life during a battle against the Muslims in Calabria, Italy.

c. 1000: In 992, according to a Hebrew source, the Jews of Limoges are accused of

The Bodo-Eleazar affair

838



3. Florentius, Aaron in the tabernacle. Bible from Leon, 960.

The First Crusade

1096

witchcraft. In 1010 together with some Saracens from Spain, they are accused of inciting the Fatimid Caliph Al-Hakim to destroy the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Expulsion of the Jews of Limoges.

1054: In Capua, Italy, a certain Ahimaaz composes "The Ahimaaz Scroll," a splendid chronicle of his family, known for its prominent position in Byzantine Italy.

1084: The Bishop of Speyer grants privileges to the Jews according to the model of the letters of protection of Louis the Pious.

1090-1095: Gilbert Crispin, Abbot of Westminster and disciple of Anselm of Canterbury, writes a *Discussion between a Jew and a Christian*, presented as a transcript of a friendly disputation between Crispin and a Jew from Mainz; the Jew enumerates various objections which permit the author to expand on the fundamentals of Christianity in a rational manner.



4. First page of the Scroll of Ahimaaz. Oria, southern Italy, 11th century.

1085-1215

Reconquista Spain 11th-13th centuries



The Almohads in Andalusia

Fuero of Teruel

Fourth Lateran Council

1147

1176

1215

1147: Alfonso VII of Castile appoints Judah ibn Ezra (nephew of poet Moses ibn Ezra) commander of Calatrava (Ciudad Real), an important fortress on the Muslim border.

1147-1148: Most of Andalusia falls under Almohad rule.

1151-1166: John, Archbishop of Toledo, to whom "Avendahut Israelita philosophus" dedicated a translation from Arabic to Latin of Avicenna's *De Anima*. "Avendahut" was probably the philosopher and historian Abraham ibn Daud.

1161: Joseph Kimhi and Judah ibn Tibbon, both emigrants from Muslim Spain who settled in southern France, one in Narbonne and the other in Lunel near Montpellier, simultaneously translate the *Duties of the Heart* of the Jewish philosopher Bahya ibn Paquda from Arabic to Hebrew.

1166: Judah ibn Tibbon translates Judah Halevi's *The Book of the Kuzari* from Arabic to Hebrew.

1176: The *fuero* (privilege charter) of Teruel - Jews are made the property of the royal

treasury.

1202: Meir ha-Levi Abulafia of Toledo asks the rabbis of Lunel to support his condemnation of Maimonides' theses which deny belief in the resurrection of the body. Sheshet Benveniste of Barcelona, physician, diplomat, and administrator at the Aragonese court, tries to dissuade the rabbis of Lunel from supporting Abulafia, arguing that the talmudic scholars of Castile opposed Maimonides' works only because his teachings undermine their judicial authority. This controversy will be rekindled a decade later, this time around the political issue of electing community leaders.

1204: Death of Maimonides in Egypt.

1215: Fourth Lateran Council, convened by Innocent III. Isaac Benveniste, Sheshet's nephew, heads a delegation of Jews from southern France who appeal to the Pope to prevent the adoption of anti-Jewish decisions. Nevertheless, the Council publishes a series of restrictive canons, particularly on Jewish money-lending.



4. The Jewish Quarter in Seville, viewed from the Cathedral.

Between the Cross and the Crescent

“They [Christians and Muslims] make war, and the ravages of combat bring about our ruin” (Judah Halevi). Indeed, in the second half of the eleventh century, after the demise of the Umayyad Dynasty and the fragmentation of Muslim Spain into small principalities, the Christian kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula launched the *Reconquista*. This was the great struggle to regain territories in Spain, a struggle which was viewed by European Christians as part of a larger crusade against Islam. The external threat forced the Arab and Berber principalities to forget their differences and to appeal to

of money from Muslim Spain, aggravated social unrest. This agitation was accompanied by anti-Jewish riots and massacres. Worse still, when the Almohads, another North African dynasty, replaced the Almoravides in Andalusia, they completely abolished the protection traditionally accorded by Muslim rulers to the Peoples of the Book, forcing everyone to profess Islam at least outwardly. The Jews then fled from Andalusia, some towards the Muslim Orient but the majority to the Christian kingdoms in Spain or to southern France.

The situation of the Jews who emigrated to the Christian part of the peninsula at first resembled the conditions they had enjoyed in Muslim Spain prior to the arrival of the Berber dynasties. The Christian monarchs of Castile and Aragon used the Jews in order to colonize regions reconquered from the Muslims. Also, in imitation of the Muslim princes, they developed the custom of employing Jews in the highest administrative and financial positions. Since Jews could not attain political power nor ally themselves with the nobility or the church, they became natural allies to the crown. The privilege charters (*fueros*) granted in the reconquered states were, however, suffused with ambiguities inevitable in a society where three ethnic-religious communities were forced to live together. While they did grant legal equality, the privilege charters also enforced submission to laws belonging in a non-mixed society.

The powerful Jewish families, who fulfilled functions for the Christian kings which were similar to those held by their fathers in Andalusian courts, naturally wielded considerable importance in the Jewish communities. For several generations the leadership of the community became a hereditary privilege of these dynasties of courtiers. Only in the early thirteenth century, and in connection with the Maimonidean controversy, did the first signs of a democratic reaction become apparent. The first power struggle took place in Barcelona in 1213 when the anti-Maimonidean party tried to dislodge the influential house of Sheshet, but failed. One generation later, in 1241, it succeeded. Henceforth the community was to be administered by a new type of urban Jewish patriciate.



1. Coat-of-arms of the united kingdom of Castile and Leon. Spain, Soria (?), 1300.

the Moroccan Almoravides for help. When the latter attained dominance over Andalusia, they formed a united empire “from the Ebro to Senegal.” The Jewish communities found themselves caught between two powerful societies engaged in a deadly struggle.

In Granada as in Seville, the Almoravides expelled the Jews from all positions of influence. Poet Moses ibn Ezra, as he was wandering from place to place in Christian Spain, lamented the crudity of a society which lacked the refinement of the Andalusian courts. Between 1108 and 1111 Castile suffered a series of rural and urban uprisings similar to contemporary revolts of communes and peasants in other parts of Europe. A general economic depression, caused mainly by the drying up of the flow

Reconquest of Toledo by Alfonso VI of Castile

1085

1081: Pope Gregory VII urges the King of Castile not to place any Jews in positions of influence.

1085: Alfonso VI of Castile captures Toledo: the first important stage in the reconquest of Spain from the Muslims.

1090: Granada is conquered by the Almoravides; the Jewish community is destroyed; the Ibn Ezra family is among the refugees.

1099: Death of Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, the famous Spanish hero known as El Cid; miracles and conversions of Jews take place around his corpse. The poem *El Cid*, composed c. 1140, includes the story of two Jewish preachers from Burgos whose treacherous operations are foiled by the Christian knight.

1106: Conversion of Moses ha-Sefardi (Petrus Alfonsi), sponsored by the King of Aragon, Alfonso I the Battler. In his polemical

The Almoravides in Spain

1086



2. Hispano-Moresque Passover Haggadah. Castile, c. 1300.

Capture of Saragossa by Alfonso I of Aragon

1116

works, Petrus Alfonsi attacks post-biblical rabbinical Judaism and denounces the anthropomorphic representations of divinity in Jewish homilies.

1108: Murder of Solomon ibn Ferrizuel, patron of Judah Halevi, and nephew of Joseph ha-Nasi Ferrizuel called “Cidellus” (“little Cid”) who was counselor and physician to Alfonso VI.

1109: Jews are massacred in Toledo and in the Burgos region.

1111: Anti-Jewish violence erupts in the wake of the peasants’ uprising in the Sahagun region.

1118: Capture of Saragossa by Alfonso I the Battler, King of Aragon. In November, King Alfonso VII of Castile, wishing to appease the townsmen of Toledo, introduces a law which excludes Jews and recent converts from public office in the city.



3. The synagogue in Toledo of Samuel ha-Levi Abulafia, minister to Pedro I of Castile, built c. 1357; later the El Tránsito church, now a Jewish museum.

The Jews of Italy

The self-governing medieval towns (communes) of central and northern Italy began to attract Jewish financiers from Rome and from lands beyond the Alps at the end of the thirteenth century. This migration constituted the original nucleus of most Italian Jewish communities surviving to this day. Jewish merchants and money-lenders had made themselves indispensable to the ecclesiastical authorities in Rome. Then, during the Avignon exile of the Papacy, many of them made their way to the north and settled wherever they found security for their investments, a convenient fiscal policy, and a need for the liquid capital they brought with them. A closely knit network of small Jewish communities was thus formed in the center of the peninsula, while other Jewish families migrated further north.

In the second half of the fourteenth century, Roman Jews reached the Po Valley. At the same time numerous Jews crossed the Alps into northern

Italy. Jewish life in the Renaissance, when their community reached the zenith of its demographic curve: approximately 50,000 persons. Widely dispersed throughout the peninsula and distinguished by great geographical and social mobility, it was essentially a prosperous community and well integrated into local society which was, on the whole, surprisingly well-disposed towards the Jews.

As all moments of prosperity during the history of the diaspora, the Renaissance was also a time of brilliant cultural achievement: Jews participated actively in the general intellectual revival (the musician Salomone de' Rossi being perhaps the most illustrious example), but also vastly enriched their own particular culture. The spirit of the Renaissance deeply affected all fields of Jewish studies. It gave birth to Jewish historiography (Azariah de' Rossi); to Jewish biblical exegesis (Obadiah ben Jacob Sforzo, who taught Hebrew to the German humanist Johannes Reuchlin); as well as to Jewish drama (Leone de' Sommi Portaleone).

Nevertheless, relatively tolerant though it may have been, Italian Renaissance society was still devoutly Christian, and thus by definition hostile to Jews. The Franciscan propaganda against usury, particularly ferocious during the fifteenth century, led to the founding of charitable loan banks (*monti di pietà*) throughout Italy. These were explicitly designed to chase the Jews out of the financial market where they had been especially numerous as a result of church prohibitions on Christians to engage in certain financial activities. Anti-Jewish sentiments were inflamed in 1475 by a ritual-murder libel in Trent which led to the destruction of the local Jewish congregation. Furthermore, when the Spanish monarchs decided to expel the Jews from Spain, their policy was also extended to their Italian possessions. Jews were ordered out of Sicily and Sardinia in 1492, and from the Kingdom of Naples in 1510; in 1515 the edict of expulsion was extended to the New Christians and their descendants. Renaissance toleration was being replaced by an age of segregation and expulsions.

The atmosphere surrounding the Jews became even more oppressive during the second half of the sixteenth century. The Catholic Church during the Counter-Reformation, in its efforts to protect Catholics from the possibility of religious contamination, invested great efforts in the process of pushing the Jews to the margins of Italian society. Their community, until then an integral and important part of the social, economic, and cultural life of Italy, was now turned into a persecuted pariah caste by the legislation and propaganda of popes and princes. The establishment of the Roman Inquisition, the burning of the Talmud in 1553, the creation of the ghetto in Rome by Pope Paul IV in 1555, the expulsion of the Jews from the Papal States in 1569 – all these were signposts in a process which would continue for over two centuries, until the French entered Italy in 1796.



1. A decorated coffer, marriage gift to the fiancée. Northern Italy, 15th century.

Italy after being chased out of German lands by the wave of pogroms provoked by the Black Plague of 1348–1349. For them too Italy was the obvious destination since the communes offered relative security and economic opportunities. A third wave, smaller in number, arrived in northern Italy after the expulsion of the Jews from France by Charles VI (1394). These Jewish merchants settled mostly in Piedmont and Savoy.

Jewish merchants and loan bankers were active in Italian lands throughout the communal period; but the most favorable period for

Jewish communities in the Po Valley

c. 1275

1255: Pope Alexander IV nominates a group of Roman Jewish bankers as *mercatores Romanam Curiam sequentes* – official merchants of the papal curia.

1275–1400: Jews from Rome settle in central and northern Italy.

1275–1475: The rise of Jewish banking.

1350–1420: Establishment of Ashkenazi Jewish communities in northern Italy.

1388–after 1460: Moses ben Isaac da Rieti, rabbi of the Rome community, physician of Pope Pius II and poet, author of *Mikdash Me'at* – a Hebrew poem inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

1390–1430: Communities of French Jews are founded in Piedmont.

1419, 1429: Two bulls of Pope Martin V attempt to put a stop to the anti-Jewish activities of the Franciscans.

1438: Founding of the Pisa bank in Florence, the largest Jewish bank in Renaissance Italy.

c. 1450–before 1515: Obadiah ben Abraham Bertinoro, author of a commentary

on the Mishnah, published in Venice in 1548–49; it will become the standard commentary on the Mishnah as is Rashi's on the Talmud.

1463: The first *monte di pietà* is established in Perugia.

1468–1549: Elyahu Levita, called Bahur, philologist and lexicographer, compiler of dictionaries of Hebrew words in the Talmud, of Aramaic, and the first Hebrew-Yiddish dictionary.

1475: A ritual-murder libel in Trent.

1486: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio de dignitate hominis*; associated with the humanistic circle of this Florentine Hebraist and Christian Kabbalist, are the Jewish philosophers Elijah Delmedigo and Johanan Alemanno.

1493: Following the expulsion from Spain, Jews are forced to leave Sicily and Sardinia which are under Aragonese rule.

1516: The first ghetto is created in Venice.

1524: Pope Clement VII receives David Reuben – a mysterious figure from the east

The Bank of Pisa in Florence

1438



3. "La Schola Spagnola," the Spanish synagogue in Venice, completed in 1555, reconstructed in 1654 by the architect Baldassare Longhena, remains unchanged to this day.

The first monte di pietà

1463

claiming to be a prince of a Jewish kingdom of the lost tribes, seeking Christian aid against the Muslims in the Holy Land.

1535: Judah Abrabanel (Leone Ebreo) writes *Dialoghi d'amore*, a classic of Italian philosophic literature.

1541: Expulsion of the wealthy Jews of Spanish southern Italy who had been allowed to remain under previous edicts.

1545–1563: The Council of Trent – the Catholic Church defines its dogmas and adopts a harsh line against non-Catholics.

1553: Pope Julius III orders the burning of the Talmud in Rome and throughout Italy.

1554: All Hebrew books are submitted to censorship.

1555–1796: The Age of the Ghetto.

1555: Pope Paul IV orders the segregation of the Jews of Rome.

1556: The burning of *conversos* in Ancona.

1569: Pius V expels the Jews from all papal states, except Rome and Ancona.

1571: Expulsion of the Jews from Tuscany, except the ghettos in Florence and Siena.

13th-18th Centuries



2. Oath of a Jewish physician. Venetian manuscript, c.1750.



The Ghetto of Venice

Burning of the Talmud in Rome

Expulsion of the Jews from papal states

1516

1553

1569

- 1583-1663:** Simone Luzzato, rabbi of the Venetian community, philosopher and mathematician, is the first to advance economic arguments in favor of toleration towards the Jews.
- 1589-1628:** Solomon de' Rossi composes his major musical works: *Ha-Shirim asher li Shelomo* ("Solomon's Songs") - the first musical composition destined for liturgy in the synagogue.
- 1593:** Portuguese *cōnversos* establish a community in Livorno (Leghorn), to become the most important of Italian Jewish communities.
- 1597:** Philip II of Spain orders the expulsion of the Jews from the Duchy of Milan.
- 1682:** Innocent XI orders the closing of the Jewish banks in Rome and throughout the papal states.
- 1684:** During the siege of Buda in Hungary, the Jews are accused of aiding the Turkish defenders of the city; pogroms in Italy; the Padua Ghetto is attacked and pillaged.
- 1777:** The Republic of Venice imposes heavier restrictions on the Jews living in the ghetto.
- 1782:** In Italian territories under Austrian rule the Jews are granted religious freedom and other privileges.
- 1796:** Bonaparte's Italian army puts an end to the Age of the Ghetto and proclaims the emancipation of Italian Jewry.



4. Jewish Funeral, by the Venetian painter Pietro Longhi (1702-1785).

The Jews of India



1. Preparing the mazzah (unleavened bread) according to Bene Israel custom. Two pages of a Passover Haggadah with Marathi translation. Poona, 1874.

Before the colonial period there were two distinct and separate Jewish communities in India: Bene Israel (“Sons of Israel”) in the Konkan region in the present-day state of Maharashtra; and in Kerala, the Jews of Cochin. Bene Israel, the largest group of Indian Jews, regard themselves as descendants of refugees from the Galilee who fled the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BC; but they are not mentioned in any external sources prior to their first contact with the Jews of Cochin in the eighteenth century.

Closely resembling their Maratha neighbors in appearance, customs, and language, Bene Israel engaged in agriculture and oil production. They practiced circumcision and observed the Sabbath and Jewish dietary laws. Within the rigid Indian caste system, it was natural for these “Sabbath-observing oilmen” (*Shanwar Telis*) to maintain their distinctiveness and to remain separate.

During the British Raj, many Bene Israel moved from their villages to Bombay and excelled as officials and soldiers. Following the encounter with other Jewish communities – first with the Cochin Jews, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century with Arabic-speaking Jews from Baghdad – Bene Israel extended their Jewish education and built a few synagogues. They translated prayer books and the Passover *Haggadah* into the Marathi language, and for a time published several Jewish periodicals. The more prosperous and educated families sent their sons to English schools. Attracted by the opportunities offered in the civil service, many of them moved to other cities such as Ahmadabad, Baroda,

Poona, Ajmer, Delhi, and Calcutta, where they lived alongside other Jewish communities but did not inter-marry with them.

From the 1920’s many Bene Israel became Zionists due to the activities of emissaries sent by the movement. After the establishment of the State of Israel, most of them emigrated there, while others went to England. From the 24,000 persons who constituted the community in 1947, only a few thousand still remain in India today. When they emerged from their isolation, Bene Israel found it difficult to be recognized as legitimately Jewish. The controversy concerning their status was only resolved in 1964 when the Israeli government issued a statement to the effect that Bene Israel are Jews in every respect.

The history of the Jews in Kerala is also obscure. This tiny community – about 2500 persons at the beginning of this century, of whom 1000 lived in Cochin itself and 500 in the nearby town of Arankolam – was divided into three distinct groups: “White Jews” (*Paradesi*, meaning foreigners), “Black Jews,” and “Freedmen”; the latter integrated into the “Blacks” at the beginning of the present century.

Legend and tradition trace the history of the Jews on the Malabar Coast to King Solomon’s times, but the earliest historical evidence of their existence dates from c. 1000. Two copper plates inscribed in Tamil record the privileges granted by the Hindu ruler of Malabar, Bhaskara Ravi Varman, to one Joseph Rabban (Issuppu Irappan) from the village of Angivanam. Accounts of various travellers – Marco Polo, Ibn Batuta, and the Jew Benjamin of Tudela – confirm the existence of small Jewish communities dotting the Indian coast from Quilon in southern Cochin to Calicut in the north.

The Portuguese conquest brought many Jews to India, but it also introduced the first religious persecutions. The Rajah of Cochin offered them asylum in his city, granted them freedom of worship, and even appointed them a community leader (*mudaliar*), who was to serve as their spokesman and arbitrator.

Dutch rule (1663–1795) was a time of freedom and prosperity for the community. The “White Jews” maintained commercial and cultural links with Jewish communities in Amsterdam and other places. The famous *Paradesi* synagogue of Cochin, built in 1568 and partly destroyed by the Portuguese, was rebuilt in 1760.

The community retained its independence under the British Raj, but after the establishment of Israel most Cochin Jews emigrated there, and the community in India virtually ceased to exist.

Finally, some mention must be made of small groups of Jewish merchants who settled in India at various times: traders from Persia who came to northern India during the Mogul period; and in the seventeenth century, European and Iraqi Jews, involved in the trade of the European East India companies, settled in India’s larger cities.

Earliest evidence for a Jewish presence near Cochin

10th century



4. Preparing the mazzah, Cochin, 1983.

11th century BC: The assumed period of the arrival of Aryans to the Ganges and Indus valleys; writing of the Rig Veda, the oldest sacred text of Indian culture.

10th century BC: Reign of Solomon in Israel; some slim evidence suggests commercial links between the Kingdom of Israel and southern India; legend and tradition trace the Jewish settlement on the coast of Malabar back to this period.

546–466 BC: Life of Buddha; the religion he founded spread throughout eastern Asia but disappeared from India itself during the 10th century AD.

962–1019: Reign of Bhaskara Ravi Varman; the Jew Joseph Rabban is granted the right to live in Cranganore on the Malabar Coast, 35 km north of Cochin.

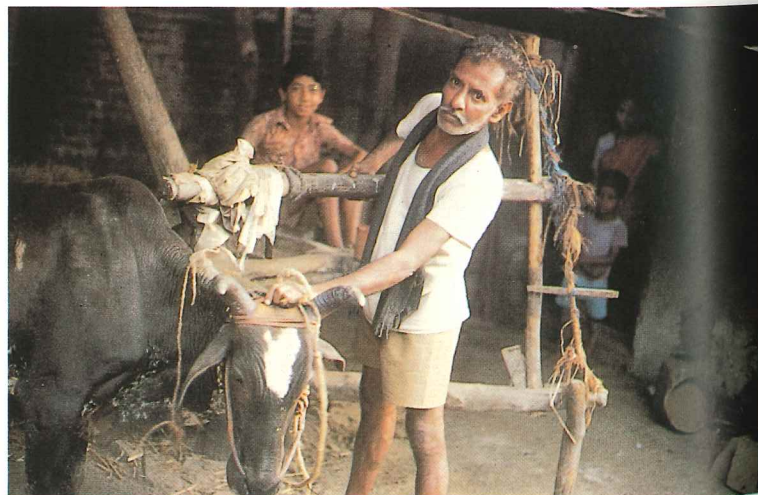
1167: Benjamin of Tudela arrives in India; evidence of a Jewish settlement on the Malabar Coast.

1288: Marco Polo visits India.

1333: The Arab traveler from Tangiers, Ibn Batuta, visits India.

Visit of Benjamin of Tudela in Malabar

1167



5. A family of Bene Israel, 1983.

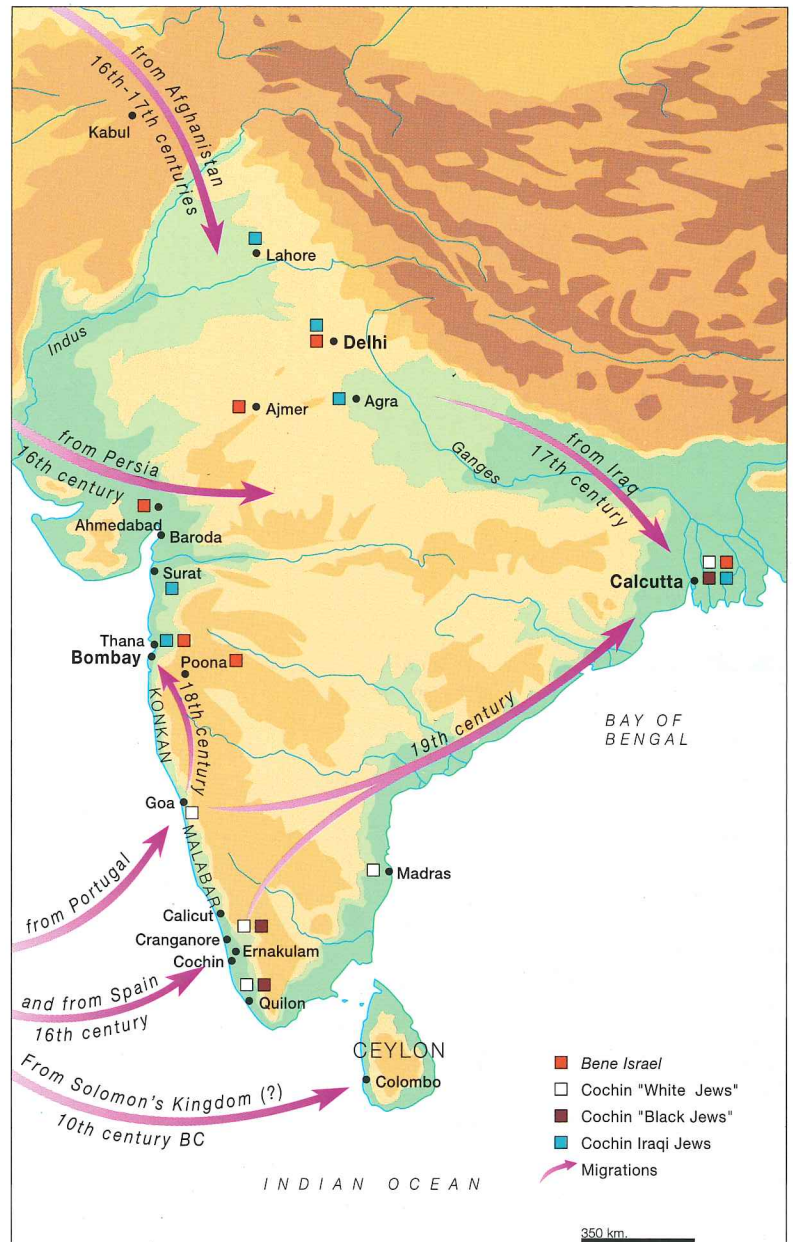
10th–20th Centuries



2. A family of Bene Israel in Bombay, 1890.



3. The Paradesi synagogue in Cochin, built in 1568.



The Paradesi synagogue in Cochin

1568
1510: The Portuguese conquer Panjim and establish Goa as the seat of the viceroy; many Jews and Marranos among the settlers.
1523: The Portuguese capture Cranganore; the Jews find refuge in Cochin.
1556–1605: Reign of Akbar the Great, third Mogul emperor: a period of religious toleration.
1560: The Inquisition established in Goa.
1568: The Paradesi synagogue in Cochin is built.
1663–1795: The Dutch rule Cochin; a period of prosperity for the Jews.
1674: The English East India Company transfers its center from Surat to Bombay, which becomes in subsequent centuries the largest Jewish center on the Indian sub-continent.
1686: The first delegation from the Jewish Portuguese community of Amsterdam arrives in India and establishes contacts with Indian Jewry.
c. 1750: Missionaries discover the Jewish

The first synagogue of Bene Israel in Bombay

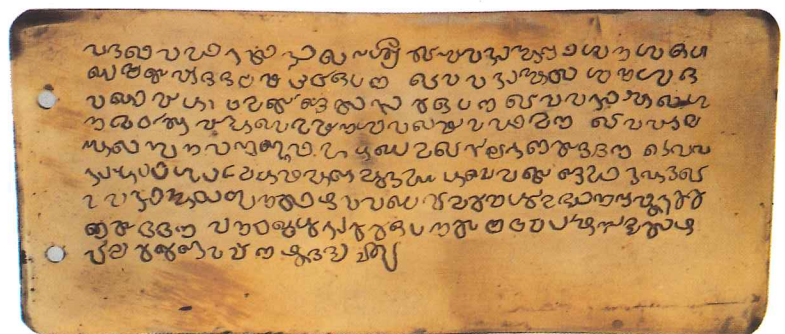
1796
 congregations of Bene Israel in Konkan, Maharashtra; first meeting between a Cochin Jew (David Rahabi) and a Jewish army officer, Samuel E. Divekar.
1772: Calcutta becomes the official capital of the British government in India; in the following century a flourishing Jewish community will develop there.
1796: The first synagogue of Bene Israel in Bombay: *Sha'ar ha-Rahamim* ("Gate of Mercy").
1799: The last battle of Tippu Sahib, Sultan of Mysore, against the British who consolidate their rule over southern India.
1810: The American Mission Society is founded in Bombay and opens a school in the Marathi language for Bene Israel.
1832: A Hebrew grammar book in Marathi is published.
1840: A Cochin Jew establishes the first Hebrew printing press in India.
1846: Translation of the *Haggadah* into Marathi.
1875: The Sassoon family establishes a

The first Jewish printing press in India

1840
 special school for Bene Israel in Bombay.
1884: "Maghen David," the largest synagogue in the Far East, is built in Calcutta.
1919: The first Zionist organization of Bene

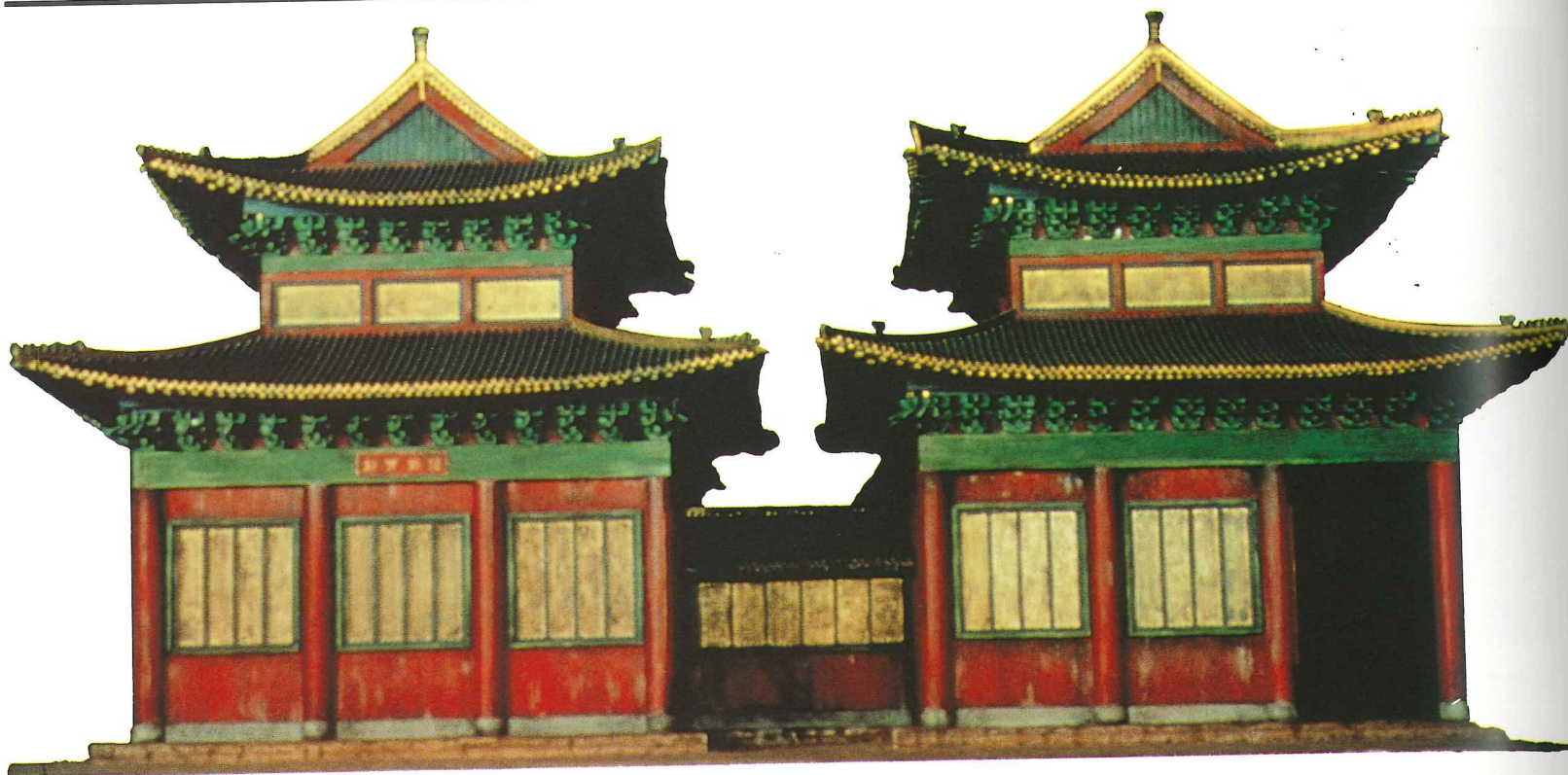
Jewish emigration from India

1948
 Israel founded in Bombay.
1937–1938: E. Moses, a Bene Israel Jew, is mayor of the City of Bombay.
1948: Widespread emigration of Indian Jews to Israel, England, and other countries.



6. An inscription in Tamil concerning the Jews of Malabar. End of 10th century.

The Jews of China



1. The synagogue in Kaifeng as it was in the 18th century. Reconstruction according to sketches drawn by Italian Jesuits.

Jewish merchants arrived in China together with other traders from the west when the famous Silk Road was open and safe, perhaps as early as the second century BC. The oldest extant testimony to their presence there, however, dates from the beginning of the eighth century AD (Tang Dynasty). It is a business letter, written in Persian using Hebrew script, discovered by Sir Aurel Stein at Khotan, a western outpost of the Chinese Empire. It is safe to assume that Jewish and Muslim merchants also lived in the port towns of southeastern China – Canton, and perhaps Ningpo and Chuanchow – but never permanently settled there. During the Mongol period (Yuan Dynasty), Jews and Muslims are mentioned together in decrees pertaining to taxation, prohibitions on ritual slaughtering, and levirate marriages (the custom of marrying the widow of one's deceased brother). Since no traces of these communities remain, it is impossible to estimate their size; all we know is that Marco Polo, who visited China toward the end of

the thirteenth century, recounts meeting many Jews in Khanbalik (Peking) and in Hangchow.

In fact, the only real Jewish community in China was the one in Kaifeng. Its origins date back to the 11th century AD, when approximately 1000 Jews, bringing cotton from either Persia or India, received permission to settle in this town in central China. In 1163 a synagogue was built in Kaifeng which was rebuilt several times over the years. Three steles, erected in the years 1489, 1512, and 1663, attribute different dates to the first arrival of Jews in China; the very early dates which the two latter steles suggest – the beginning of the first century or even earlier – should be regarded circumspectly. The inscriptions, in an attempt to reconcile Jewish and Confucian beliefs, recount in detail the genealogy of the Jews from Adam, who is none other than the Chinese Pan Ku.

Chinese sources make no mention at all of the Jews of Kaifeng, but in 1605 the well-known Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci, met in Peking a man

Recorded presence of Jews in China

Beginning of the Kaifeng community

Construction of the synagogue in Kaifeng

Early 8th century

End of 10th century

1163



2. A Chinese Jewish family, Kaifeng, 1910.

1000-256 BC: The Chou Dynasty – when China's first true civilization was formed; a time of enormous intellectual ferment, producing China's oldest surviving literature and giving rise to China's golden age of philosophy; according to a late source (1663), the first Jews arrive in China during this period.

479 BC: Death of Confucius.

206 BC-220 AD: The Han Dynasty: China forms links with Western Asia via the Silk Road; a late inscription (1512) dates the arrival of the first Jews in China to this period.

718: The date of the letter found by Sir Aurel Stein in Khotan in the Sinkiang Province on China's western frontier.

878-879: According to the testimony of the Muslim traveller Abu Zayyd, 120,000 people – Muslims, Christians, and Jews – are massacred during a rebellion in Canton.

960-1280: The Sung Dynasty: its capital remains Kaifeng until 1127 and is then transferred to Hangchow after the



"Juif de Caifum lisant la Bible à la chaire de Moïse, avec deux souffleurs."

conquest of northern China by the Tatar Jürchen Dynasty; it is probably during this period that Jews arrive in China and settle in Kaifeng.

1131-1200: Chu Hsi, the philosopher who reformulated Confucianism and made it the official ideology of the Empire, determining its spiritual character up to the beginning of the 20th century; Chinese Jews have always tried to minimize the differences between this doctrine and their own faith.

1163: Construction of the synagogue in Kaifeng.

1260-1294: Reign of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China, one of the most enlightened monarchs in human history; his court is visited by foreigners of all religions (Marco Polo among them), including some Jews.

1300: In a letter to his superiors in Rome, a Catholic missionary complains that he has

3. "A Jew of Caifum (Kaifeng) reading the Bible from Moses' pulpit, with two prompters." A drawing by Father Domenge, 1722.

11th–20th Centuries

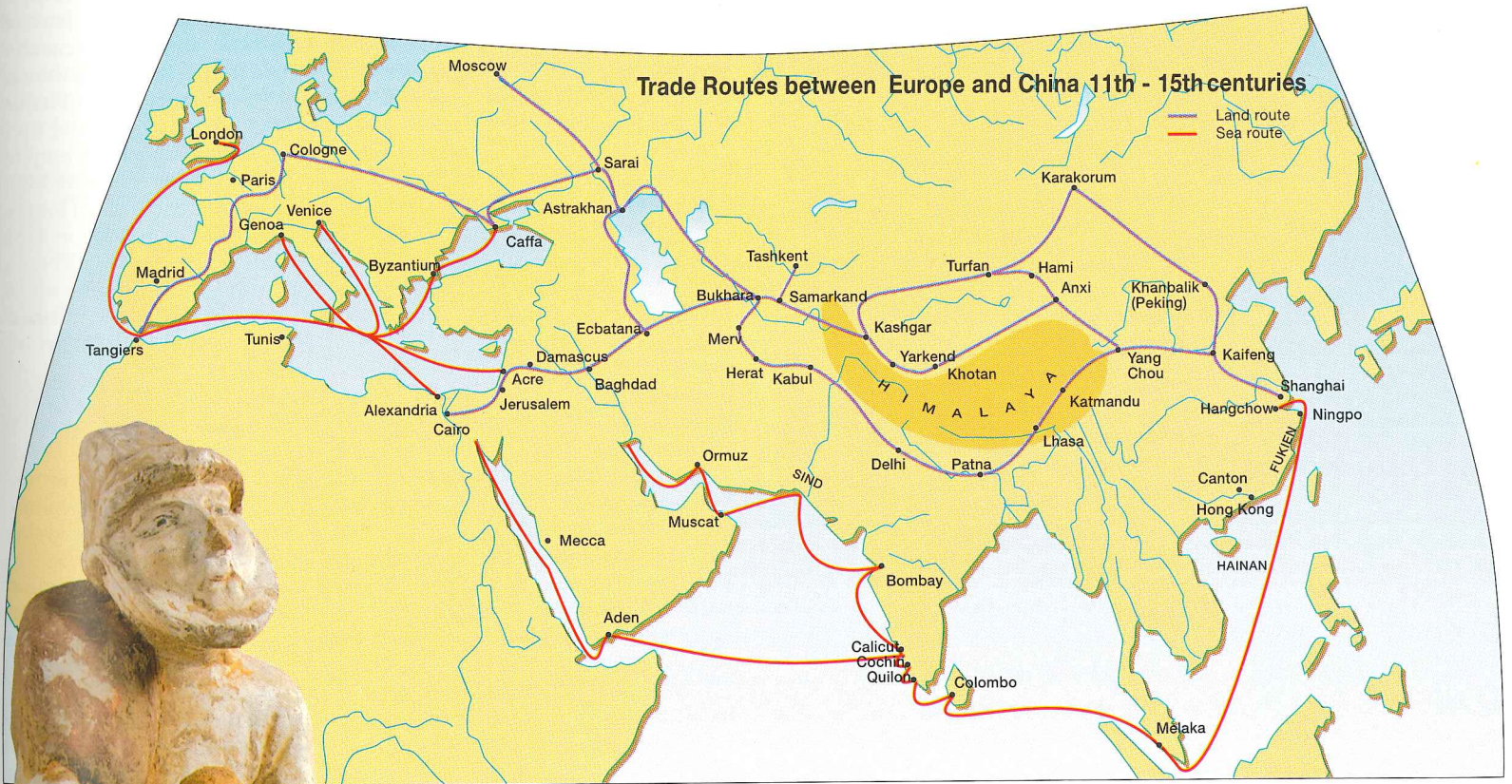
from Kaifeng called Ai Tien who told him about his community. According to Ricci, there was a Hebrew Pentateuch in the Kaifeng synagogue, and the Jews there practiced circumcision and refrained from eating pork. But apart from the steles, the only tangible evidence of the Kaifeng community are several prayer books discovered by Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century, as well as a community register from the middle of the nineteenth century written in Hebrew and Chinese.

Over the years the Jews of Kaifeng have been dispersed or assimilated into the local environment; they adopted Chinese surnames and customs, and some attained prominent positions in the mandarin and in the army. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the community had no rabbi and had virtually ceased to exist.

Today there are still a handful of Chinese who consider themselves

descendants of the Kaifeng Jews (rumor has it that China's former president, Liu Shao Chi, was one of them); but, to all intents and purposes, their Jewish identity has been lost.

Modern Jewish communities were formed in China during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Hong Kong the Jews were predominantly British subjects, many from India and Iraq. By 1937 about 10,000 European Jews were living in China. The Russian Jewish population in Harbin numbered some 5,000 people, most of them refugees from the Russian Revolution of 1917. The greatest influx of Jews to China was, however, prompted by World War II. Very few of them made the effort to study Chinese culture, and most left for other parts of the world soon after the war. Today there is a small Jewish community in Hong Kong – the only remnant of Jewish existence in the vast Chinese world.



Disputation of Peking

1342

not managed to convert even a single Jew in Fukien Province.
1340: Imperial decrees forbidding levirate marriages mention both Jews and Muslims.
1342: A theological disputation between Jews and the priest Mariniolli in Peking.
1489, 1512, 1663: Dates of the steles in Kaifeng describing the history of the Jews: the first dates the arrival of Jews to Kaifeng during the Sung Dynasty period; the second, engraved on the back of the stele of 1489, ascribes it to the Han Dynasty; the third claims the Jews arrived during the Chou Dynasty and describes their beliefs in Confucian terms.
1605: Ai Tien of Kaifeng tells the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci about his community.
1642: The synagogue of Kaifeng is destroyed during an anti-imperial revolt.
1663: The Kaifeng synagogue is reopened.

4. A Jewish peddler (?). A miniature terracotta sculpture from the Tang period (618–907 AD).

Three Jewish steles in Kaifeng

1489, 1512, 1663

c. 1800: Death of the last rabbi of Kaifeng.
1867: A Jew called Lieberman arrives in Kaifeng and discovers the community's descendants.
1898: The first Jews settle in Harbin.
1905: Following the Russo-Japanese War and pogroms in Russia, the Harbin community grows from 500 to 8000.
1938–1941: Approximately 20,000 Jewish refugees from Europe find shelter in Shanghai.
1948: Mao Tse-tung, leader of China's Communist Party, proclaims the People's Republic; the Nationalists retreat to Taiwan.
1955: A Chinese exile in Taiwan claims he is the last Chinese Jew.
1959: Liu Shao Chi is elected president of the People's Republic of China; rumor has it that his ancestors were Jews from the Kaifeng community.

5. Cover page of a special edition of the journal Jewish Life, dedicated to the first conference of the Jewish communities in the East. Harbin, 1939.

Death of the last rabbi of Kaifeng

c. 1800

