# The Jews of Malta.

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"Neither rats nor Jews can exist at Malta," once remarked the late Lord Fisher, with characteristic impetuosity. "The Maltese are too much for either." It would betoken an excessive sensitiveness to take the gallant Admiral's remarks too seriously: yet it is to be hoped, in the interests of scientific truth, that his zoology was more accurate than his history. The current works of reference would indeed bear out his views, since none of them devotes an entry to the subject. Yet, far from it being the case that Jews cannot live at Malta, their history on the island goes back to an immemorial antiquity, to be rivalled in very few places on the surface of the globe: and it has continued, without serious break, right down to our own day. Not that the record is in any way monotonous or commonplace. Almost every facet of Jewish history is reflected in it—possibly the Israelitish, certainly the Roman, the Arab, the Italian, the Spanish, the Catholic, and finally the British: with a romantic interlude when the community was composed exclusively of slaves—a phenomenon assuredly unique. The tragic element is not wanting. The expulsion from the Spanish dominions did not overlook this remote dependency: and in recent times the Blood Libel raised its head even in such an out-of-the-way spot. In earlier times, as we shall see, the island community could claim some personal connection with England. Later it was linked up with one of the most important productions of the Elizabethan drama: and finally it attained freedom and tranquillity under the British flag. Thus it is surely not out of place to present here, under the auspices of the Jewish Historical Society of England, a first complete sketch of the variegated story and vicissitudes of this, perhaps the oldest, community of the Empire.

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## I.

When, many centuries before the opening of the Christian era, the enterprising traders of Phœnicia made the first historical settlement on the island of Malta and its neighbours, it is far from improbable that some adventurous Hebrew of the neighbouring seafaring tribes of Zebulun or of Asher was associated in their enterprise. In the Late Stone Age the group had enjoyed a magnificent culture, amply testified by the splendid monuments of the Neolithic period in which it is so rich. It had long, however, been desolate when it was first occupied by these shrewd pioneers from the Palestinian seaboard. From that day, Malta was given a certain Semitic imprint which was never subsequently lost, in spite of repeated conquests and changes of rule. It is to this period, in all probability, that it owes the curious dialect which persists locally to the present day, as well as certain ethnographical characteristics still dominant.[1] The very name of the island ("Melita" to the ancients) has been conjectured to derive from the Hebrew root *malat* (מלט), to escape: not unsuitable for a port which proved a very real refuge in the violent storms of the Mediterranean. In this earliest period, it can hardly be imagined that of the nearest neighbours of the Phœnicians in their own country, the Hebrews, none came thither, whether as a trader or a permanent settler. This may have remained the case even when the island passed under the control of the vigorous daughter-colony of Carthage. The great Hannibal himself—"the grace of Baal"—is said to have been Maltese by birth. While, however, he was engaged in his stupendous invasion of Italy, his native place was captured by the consul Titus Sempronius Longus (B.C.E. 218): and though Hannibal avenged it by overwhelming the latter at the battle of the Trebia, it passed out of direct Semitic control for a period of eleven hundred years.[2]

Henceforth there was no racial affinity to attract Jews to the island, and it was not of their own free will that it received the first Hebrew visitors of whom we have record. In the year 62, while Paul of Tarsus and his companions were on their way to Italy as prisoners,

[1] H. Dudley Buxton, "The Ethnology of Malta and Gozzo," in *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, v. 51 (1921).

[2] For the antiquities of Malta see the *Cambridge Ancient History*, ii. 575–81, 582, 597, 599; iii. 643 *seq.*

they were shipwrecked upon the coast, and forced to spend three months there before being taken off.[3] Paul could as yet perhaps still be reckoned a Jew: the others, on their way from Cæsarea to Rome to be tried, apparently, for political offences, would almost certainly have included some of his less malleable compatriots. It does not appear, however, that any Jewish settlement was as yet to be found upon the island, for Paul speaks of the inhabitants as "barbarians," and does not mention any proselytising efforts undertaken there among his "brethren," as he must otherwise assuredly have done. However, the same accident and the same geographical position which brought these persons to the island must have been operative also with others as intercourse between Palestine and the Near East on the one hand, with Rome and the cities of Italy on the other, became more frequent: and some at least are likely to have remained. The frequent wars and rebellions in which the Jews were implicated flooded the whole of Europe in increasing numbers with Jewish slaves, of whom some must certainly have been sent to Malta. Their liberation was rarely long delayed, by reason both of the tenderness of their coreligionists and of their own unsuitability for a servile state—temperamentally as well as through the rigid observance of their religious practices. Many of these remained as free settlers in the places to which they had been brought as captives. Jewish traders, too, must have found in this entrepôt of Mediterranean commerce a useful centre for their activities. Causes such as these were responsible for the coming of Jews to the neighbouring mainland of Sicily, where they were to be found from the first century before the Christian era downwards: and it is not likely that the formation of a permanent settlement at the intermediate stage in Malta was long delayed. All this, however, is pure hypothesis, and there is no definite indication of the date or the manner in which this was effected. That a considerable community was to be found in Malta even in Roman times is, however, certain. This is proved beyond the possibility of doubt by a series of catacombs which have been discovered in the

[3] Acts of the Apostles, xxviii. 1–11. It was long believed, owing to a misreading of Josephus, *Antiquities*, xvii. 16, that a considerable Jewish community existed in Malta even in republican times. The passage in question refers, however, to Melos.

island. Five at least of these have been regarded as Jewish in origin by reason of their characteristic arrangement, thought to be according to the Palestinian tradition, and entirely different from that adopted by the Christians. In certain of them, too, there have been discovered splendid representations of the Menorah, or seven-branched candelabrum—the most characteristic of all the funerary symbols employed by the Jews in the first centuries of the Christian era. No inscriptions have, unfortunately, been preserved; but a number of fragments bearing Hellenic characters found in these catacombs indicate that the language in use for religious purposes at least among the Jews of Malta, as elsewhere in the Roman Empire, was Greek.[4]

At the period of the decay of the Roman Empire in the West, Malta followed the fortunes of the neighbouring mainland of Sicily, falling at first under the sway of Byzantium. At this period one may presume the same manifestations of intolerance as elsewhere in the Eastern Empire, particularly in the reign of Heraclius,[5] though nothing at all is on record. But, in 870, the group was captured by the Arabs —a premonition of the occupation of the mainland a few years later. The latter remained in control for a comparatively short space of time, being driven out after a lapse of two hundred and twenty years by the Norman rulers of Sicily. Of the fortunes of the Jews in this period we know absolutely nothing. Nevertheless, upon the analogy of other lands which were subject to the same rule, their condition must have been comparatively happy. Until the end of the mediæval period the community of Malta retained the impression which it received at

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[4] E. Becker, *Malta Soterranea: Studien zur altchristlischen und jüdischen Sepulkralkunst* (Strassburg, 1913), and plate xxv (3). The mosaic representation of Samson and Delilah (?), *ibid.*, plates xxv (2), xxvi, is by no means so convincing as the author suggests. His conjecture (p. 91 *seqq.*; *cf.* p. 94) that the Jewish catacombs at Malta date back to republican times is effectively refuted by the fact that the Apostle Paul found no Jews on the island. The interesting inscription reproduced by S. Krauss in *Synagogale Altertümer*, p. 312, as being from Malta was actually found at Gaza. See *Revue des Études Juives*, xix. 101.

[5] For the persecutions in the Byzantine Empire, see S. Krauss, *Studien zur Byzantinisch-Jüdischen Geschichte*, p. 36 *seqq.*, and M. Salzman, *The Chronicle of Ahimaaz*, introduction. It would seem improbable that Malta can have been an exception to the general rule of Byzantine intolerance.

this stage. Its communities were known, as in Sicily and Spain, by the Arab title of *Aljama*, or Assembly : [6] the synagogue was called the *Meschita*, or Mosque : while Arab names such as *Saadun* remained common to the last.

On the capture of Malta by the Normans in 1090 it became once more a dependency of Sicily, as it remained for over four centuries. During this period the history of the Jews on the island and its smaller neighbour of Gozzo (which always shared its fate) can be clearly traced, thanks to the remarkable wealth of the archivistic material available.[7] In 1240, according to the official report of the Abbot Gilbert to the Emperor Frederick II, there were in Malta twenty-five Jewish families as against forty-seven Christian, and eight in Gozzo as against two hundred.[8] This, representing a total Jewish population of perhaps some two hundred and fifty between the two, does not, however, necessarily represent their proportion to the total number of the inhabitants, as Mohammedanism remained in a majority until 1249. It is, however, a surprisingly large number to be found in this out-of-the-way spot at so early a period.

Even the minute islet of Comino, between Malta and Gozzo, now little more than a barren rock, is known to have harboured at least one Jew. Abraham Abulafia of Saragossa (born 1240) was a Spanish mystic and founder of the practical Cabbala, who cherished wild dreams of breaking down the barriers between Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism, and attempted to convert the Pope, Nicholas III, to his ideas. He was saved from burning on that occasion (the pyre

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[6] From the root *jama* = gather. The word became providentially Latinised as *aliama*.

[7] The documents in the central archives relating to the Jews have been published by the brothers Lagumina in their stupendous *Codice Diplomatico dei Giudei di Sicilia*—an inexhaustible mine of information for mediæval history (Palermo, 1884 ff. published in fascicules, the last of which has not yet appeared). This work, which forms the basis of a good deal of the first part of the present Paper, will be referred to as Lagumina, with the number of the document in question.

[8] Winkelman, *Acta Imperi Inedita*, "Diocesi," i. 17. There is a yet earlier mention of the community of Malta (מאלטה) in some recensions of Ibn Ezra's famous elegy on the sufferings of the Jews at the time of the Almohadan persecutions in 1140. (*Revue des Études Juives*, xx. 25.) The correct reading is, however, מאלגה (Malaga).

was already prepared) by the sudden death of the Pontiff, and he is next heard of in Sicily, where he played the prophet and declared himself Messiah. Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret of Barcelona, the greatest Jewish authority of his age, realised the danger of his ingenious theories, and exposed them in a letter directed to the Rabbis of Palermo, who had appealed to him for counsel. As a result, the dreamer had to take up the pilgrim's staff anew. Italy, Sicily, and Spain were all closed to him. Accordingly he took refuge in Malta. He does not seem to have met with a favourable reception even here : for it was on the desolate rock of Comino, between Malta and Gozzo, that he took up his abode " against his will, for many days." [9] His *Sefer haOt*, or Book of the Sign, which he composed here about the year 1288, is filled with hardly veiled invective against " the inhabitants of the Island "—possibly Sicily, but far more probably the less distant Malta. A few years later he composed his last and (it is said) most intelligible work, *Imre Shefer* (1291)—where, is not quite clear. From this point he disappears from view.[10] This is the solitary indication extant of the presence of any Jewish inhabitant upon the third island of the group, and is one of the few links which bring Malta into connection with general Jewish literary and intellectual history. Abraham Abulafia is indeed the first Jew who visited Malta known to us by name after the Apostle Paul—strange bedfellows indeed !

The composition of the Maltese community seems to have been mixed. Some families, perhaps, survived from Roman times. The Arabic names of others seem to denote that they came over with the Saracens. On the other hand, certain of the appellations—Messina, Marsala, and others—obviously denote provenance from the mainland of Sicily. The Cagliari family came perhaps from Sardinia, the Gerbi from the neighbouring coast of Northern Africa, and the Safaradi certainly (like Abraham Abulafia himself) from Spain. Most noteworthy of all was the Inglisi family, of whom we know Samuel (head

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[9] Introduction to the *Sefer haOt* :

ויבריחוהו מעיר לעיר וממקום למקום עד בואו במדינת מיסינה באי קומתינה ושם ישב בלתי חפצו ימים רבים

[10] H. Landauer, in *Orient*, vi. (1845), 383–4 ; Jellinek, *Auswahl kabbalisticher Mystik*, p. 18.

of the community in 1484), David, and Xaniniu (Chananiah).[11] It is curious that it is precisely at this spot, later to be under the English flag, that we find such persistent traces of English Jews—perhaps far-flung refugees from the expulsion of 1290, perhaps shipwrecked pilgrims to the Holy Land. Italy, so prolific in "national" surnames, provides an example of this one nowhere else.

On the other hand, the dispersion from Malta began early. As far back as the middle of the fourteenth century a certain Bulfaracchio of Malta, one of the Proti, or presidents, of the community of Messina, was engaged in considerable financial transactions with the Crown : [12] and in 1447 a David Malti was authorised to collect a donative from the Jews of Noto.[13] In Syracuse there seems to have been a veritable colony of Jews from Malta and Gozzo, who were forced to contribute to the taxation of their native communities on the occasion of a special levy in 1451.[14]

The history of the Maltese group was always determined by its position, midway between the Christian and the Mohammedan world, and constantly open to attack from the one side or from the other. It was always peculiarly vulnerable : and the Jews, by reason of their creed, were even more perilously situated than the generality of the inhabitants. One of the earliest mentions found of the Jews of Gozzo—already an organised community of some numerical importance—is in this connection. In 1390 a raid was made upon the island by the ruler of Tunis. Among the captives whom he took back with him were six unfortunate Jews [15] too poor to ransom themselves, who remained in slavery. The pious duty of Redeeming the Captives was always a cherished privilege amongst Jews, and three years later the wealthy community of the Sicilian seaport of Trapani authorised a collection to be made upon their behalf. For some reason or other the sum brought together was never disbursed (perhaps the person who had taken the burden upon himself never returned to

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[11] A. Mifsud, "Tracce dell' antica vitalità giudaica maltese" in *Journal of the Malta Historical and Scientific Society*, iv. 9 ; Lagumina, §§ 690, 957.

[12] Lagumina, §§ 55–6. [13] *Ibid.*, § 379. [14] *Ibid.*, § 389.

[15] Their names are worth recording, as an interesting specimen of Maltese Jewish nomenclature : Sadun, Sabbeus (Sabbetai), Machulaff, Jacob, Caffura, and David.

Tunis), and the unhappy islanders lingered on in slavery for a further decade. The news of their condition trickled through to Sicily, and ultimately (by the medium, apparently, of a certain Moses Sason) the interest of Martin I was aroused on their behalf. This sovereign was one of the most philo-Semitic who ever sat upon the Sicilian throne, and he unhesitatingly utilised on behalf of the sufferers the royal authority, which was peculiarly strong over the internal affairs of the Jewish communities of the kingdom. He ordered that the sums which had been collected should be paid out immediately, and that there should be devoted to the same purpose in addition any unpaid bequests which had been made during the past thirty years to the synagogues or Jewish charities in the whole kingdom of Sicily—including, of course, Malta and Gozzo itself. Of this, 300 doubloons would be needed for the redemption of the six men of Gozzo, the rest should be employed for the ransom of any other Jews enslaved in those parts.[16]

This was easier to order than to execute. The Jewries of the realm were impoverished by recent disturbances, the synagogues themselves having been stripped of their ornaments. Moreover, the leading communities of Palermo and Trapani alleged that it would be contrary to Jewish law to divert such legacies to purposes other than those for which they had been originally intended. The puzzled King had no alternative but to submit the question to expert opinion, and Master Joseph Abenasia, the royal physician, was commissioned, with two Rabbis of Palermo, one of Trapani, and one of Syracuse, to enquire into the theological aspects of the case.[17] Meanwhile action was suspended. The result cannot be ascertained, but from the silence of the documents it would appear that this perhaps unique case of royal deference to Jewish law went against the King.

Let us pause to examine as far as possible the state of the island communities at this period. They must necessarily have been small in numbers. In 1240, as we have seen, there were twenty-five Jewish families in Malta, and eight in Gozzo.[18] Of the exact figures at the close of the Middle Ages there is no exact record. However, in 1492, on the occasion of an extraordinary levy of 100,000 florins made upon the communities of the kingdom, the Jews of Malta paid 255

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[16] Lagumina, §§ 181–2. [17] *Ibid.*, § 193. [18] *Supra*, p. 191.

ounces and 15 tari, together with 13 ounces 15 tari towards a donative of 5,000 florins: the community of Gozzo contributing 182 ounces 28 tari and 9 ounces 17 tari respectively.[19] The total number of Jews in the whole kingdom at this period has been reckoned somewhat exaggeratedly at 100,000. But, at Palermo, the careful Obadiah of Bertinoro on his way to Palestine in 1488 found 850 Jewish households,[20] which would correspond nearly enough to the Christian estimate of 5,000 souls four years later.[21] Here, on the same occasion, payments were made of 2,494 ounces, 37 tari, 10 grains and 127 ounces, 28 tari, 10 grains respectively. On the basis of these figures, the Jewish population of Malta at this period may be reckoned at just over one-tenth of that of Palermo, or about 500 in all: while that of Gozzo would have totalled approximately 350; numbers so great as to amply bear out the Christian complaint that their departure would have depopulated the islands.[22] The total had thus grown by nearly five times since the middle of the thirteenth century, the rate of increase being greater in the smaller island. The communities were concentrated in the capital cities of the two islands—Gozzo in the smaller, and Notabile (later known, after the building of Valetta, as Cittavecchia) in the greater.[23]

The occupations of the Jews of Malta were varied; for in the kingdom of Sicily the economic degradation which came about in the northern kingdoms of Europe was unknown. Apparently agriculture was not excluded, for as late as 1435 we meet a certain Musci (Moses) Arnocrani, who was in possession of landed property.[24] The majority of the Jews of the island were, however, engaged in petty commerce.

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[19] Lagumina, § 1015. 5 florins = 1 ounce; 6 tari = 1 florin.

[20] Letter of Obadiah of Bertinoro in *Miscellany of Hebrew Literature*, i. (7).

[21] La Lumia, *Gli Ebrei Siciliani* (extracted from *La Nuova Antologia*, March 1867), p. 20.

[22] *Infra*, p. 207.

[23] The system followed in this computation would suggest that the total Jewish population of the kingdom was about 40,000, as against the 100,000 of the popular estimate and the 20,000–30,000 of the over-careful Loeb (*Revue des Études Juives*, xlv. 172).

[24] Mifsud, *op. cit.*, p. 7. At the period of their expulsion a good deal of the property of the Jews of Malta seems to have consisted in real estate and livestock. See *infra*, p. 208 *seqq.*

Up to a certain point, they went round from place to place in the island selling their merchandise, especially at Rabato (the suburb of Notabile) and the villages, but at a later period they were forced to confine their activities to their shops in the cities.[25] Others were engaged in commerce on a larger scale with the mainland. Thus we encounter Solomon Mayr of Malta, who was implicated, with Gaudio (Isaac ?) Cashamena, of Syracuse, in some unfortunate commercial transactions in 1486,[26] and Xaninu (Hananiah ?) Inglesi, who was in partnership with Perxaim Peres, of the same place.[27] With Palermo the traffic of the Maltese Jews was so considerable that the dues on it received special entry in the accounts of that port.[28]

The profession of medicine was of course well represented here, as elsewhere in the mediæval Jewish world. As early as 1398 a certain Leone Maltese, of Polizzi, was authorised to practise medicine throughout the realm, after examination at Randazzo by a number of physicians (including a Spanish coreligionist, Joseph Abenazia, the medical attendant to the King).[29] He himself made a considerable reputation, so that three years later he was appointed similarly to the royal household.[30] Simon Maltese, likewise of Polizzi, who was licensed at Palermo in 1413, was very likely his son.[31] Benedetto of Malta was licensed after examination in 1445 at the same place.[32] In 1484 Lia Sabbat of Malta claimed at Catania the same exemption from taxation which was enjoyed by other physicians.[33] In Malta itself Jews seem to have monopolised the profession of medicine, so that it was inconceivable to the Government that any Christian could act in the capacity of physician. One family was especially prominent. Braccone Safaradi was a notable practitioner in the island in 1446.[34] A little later Abraham Safaradi, of Gozzo, was the salaried physician of the city of Malta : [35] his absence from the island in 1474 in order to put forward his claim to some treasure-trove occasioned such general inconvenience that the Viceroy was petitioned to force him to return to his duties without delay.[36] Contemporary with him was another

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[25] Lagumina, § 489.
[26] Mifsud, p. 9.
[27] *Ibid.*
[28] Lagumina, § 970.
[29] *Ibid.*, § 51.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] *Ibid.*, § 372.
[35] *Ibid.*, § 701.
[36] Mifsud, p. 10.

physician, Abraham Saba, likewise prominent in communal life.[37] Allied to the profession of medicine in those days was that of barber, or chirurgeon. Xema (Zemah) Girbu practised this art on the island at the same period, greatly to the profit and satisfaction of the gentry and citizens, who procured his exemption from the onerous dignity of president of the community when he was elected to it in 1486, so that their interests should not be jeopardised.[38]

The most curious occupation found amongst the Maltese Jews, however, was without doubt that of a certain Bulcali, who was in 1468 exempted from all special taxation in consideration of the valuable assistance he gave to the royal falconer.[39]

The organisation of the Jews of Malta was similar to that of the Jews of Sicily as a whole—one of the most rigidly controlled, the most highly centralised, and the most fully recorded of the Jewish communities of the Middle Ages.[40] Indeed, it was formally enunciated that " whereas the island of Malta is reckoned a member of the kingdom of Sicily, and Gozzo likewise, the Jewry of Malta and Gozzo is understood to be a member of the Jewry of Sicily." [41] As may be seen from this and many other sources, the Jews of the two islands were throughout reckoned as one single community. Juridically, as elsewhere in Sicily and in Europe, they were " *servi camerae regis* "—serfs to the Crown. Accordingly the royal control over them, even in internal matters, was (as we shall see) peculiarly strong. It was exercised

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[37] Lagumina, § 867. [38] *Ibid.*, § 730. [39] *Ibid.*, § 518.

[40] See, besides the monumental work of the brothers Lagumina, frequently cited hitherto, the following studies: Giovanni di Giovanni, *L'Ebraismo della Sicilia* (Palermo, 1748)—for Malta, especially pp. 57, 400–404; La Lumia, *Gli Ebrei Siciliani*, in the *Nuova Antologia*, March 1867 (the pagination here used is from the offprint): reprinted in his *Studi di storia Siciliana*, vol. ii, and *Storie Siciliane*, vol. ii, and published by Ida Zuccher in a German translation in the *Popul. wissensch. Monatsbl.* for 1882, as well as in the *Jahrb. für jüd. Geschichte und Wissenschaft* for 1883; and Q. Senigaglia, *La condizione giuridica degli Ebrei in Sicilia* in *Rivista italiana per le scienze giuridiche*, vol. xli. (1906): the pagination here used is similarly that of the offprint. See also R. Strauss, *Die Jüden im Königreich Sizilien unter Normannen und Staufen* (Heidelberg, 1910); Lionti, *Documenti relativi agli Ebrei di Sicilia* in *Archivio Storico Siciliano*, N.S. 1883–5; and Zunz, *Die Jüden im Sizilien* in *Zur Geschichte* (for Malta, especially pp. 508–9, 528).

[41] Lagumina, § 494.

locally by the Captains of the two islands, as the supreme local authorities, in their capacity of Captains of the Jews.[42] These were answerable only to the Crown. The King of Sicily (the throne of which was during a large part of this time combined with that of Aragon) was frequently an absentee. Hence the ultimate control over the Jews was generally exercised in his name by the Viceroy. It was to him that those of the Maltese islands generally had to appeal in case of any complaints against the Captains.

In 1434 a fresh constitutional experiment was made. A special office was created, its incumbent being invested with full civil and criminal jurisdiction over the Jews of the two islands. One Andrea Speciali was designated to the newly created post. His period of office was, however, disturbed. The citizens of Malta, resenting this infringement of their prerogatives, made a vigorous protest to the Viceroy. The latter promptly gave way, and as a compromise invested the jurisdiction over the Jews of the two islands in the Treasurer of the kingdom, in whose name it was to be exercised by the Captain of Malta. The islanders were not, however, satisfied even by this compromise, and petitioned that "the Captaincy of the Jews should return to the Captaincy of the City, as has always been the custom." The protest was this time in vain. It was only in 1466, in response to a further appeal, that the experiment was definitely abandoned, and the Captain reinvested in all of his old rights.[43]

The community still went, in Malta and Sicily, as in Spain, by the Arabic title of *Aljama*, or by its Latin equivalent of *Judaica* (Italianised as *Giudaica*).[44] At its head stood the Proti (πρώτοι), obviously a survival of Byzantine influence: an onerous dignity, from which exemption was occasionally granted by royal authority. This body was generally composed of twelve persons, designated annually by four representatives elected by the whole community, the change taking place, as was customary throughout the Jewish world, just after the Passover. In 1397 Martin I ordered that all three elements of the population—rich, middle-class, and poor—should be represented upon the body in equal numbers. This was by no means, however, a

[42] Mifsud, p. ii.

[43] *Ibid.*, with Appendix, § 1.

[44] In the Sicilian dialect, *Iudeca*.

democratic arrangement, as the numbers of the three classes obviously varied in inverse proportion to their wealth. Attempts were not lacking to bring about a more direct royal control, but the only permanent result was a fresh arrangement by which the outgoing Proti nominated their successors. Three of the twelve exercised authority in rotation during the four quarters of the year.[45] In Malta the acting Proti were assisted by a council of *Maggiorenti* (in Hebrew, *Memunim*).[46] This body was elected by a free vote of the community, outside interference by the secular authorities being expressly condemned by the central government.[47] Upon these officials devolved the general control of the community. This was close and absolute, no questioning of their authority being allowed. In Malta, as elsewhere in the kingdom, it was expressly forbidden by the Crown for individuals to assemble together without their consent, such conduct being considered "the beginning of iniquities and of division."[48] Their main function was the control of the communal taxation, for the collection of which they stood responsible. This they were able to enforce by their control of the extreme sanction of excommunication. They had the right, too, of appealing to the Crown for the redress of grievances in the name of their community: the actual phraseology of their petition being sometimes embodied (like an English Parliamentary Bill) in the royal assent.[49] There also existed a larger council, called the *moxel* (?) (composed probably of the major contributors to communal taxation) into which no person might be admitted without the leave of the Maggiorenti. These rights were formally confirmed by the Viceroy as late as 1485.[50]

One interesting case of excommunication which is preserved gives an interesting glimpse into Maltese Jewish life. A certain Joseph Messina, of Gozzo, had infringed a recent communal ordinance which forbade debts in Jewish hands to be transferred to persons not belonging to the community—presumably in order to prevent fellow Jews from falling into the power of Gentiles. He was accordingly excommunicated "*more hebraeorum*" and condemned by the two Proti, Samuel Inglisi and Semali (Semah ?) Levi, to pay a fine to the

[45] Giovanni di Giovanni, pp. 115–20; Lagumina, §§ 157–8; Senigaglia, pp. 25–6.
[46] Lagumina, § 868. [47] *Ibid.*, § 698. [48] *Ibid.*, § 151.
[49] *Ibid.*, § 698, *seq.* [50] *Ibid.*, § 868.

Captain. This official was persuaded by the culprit of his innocence, and accordingly attempted to obtain compensation from the community for the fine which he had expected to receive. From this action a viceregal edict ordered him to desist.[51]

The principal duty of the communal officials, which made them of such paramount importance to the secular authorities, was the exaction of the taxes payable by the *Aljama* as a whole. These were apportioned by three representative members, who were empowered to enforce their decisions by the excommunication of any recalcitrant.[52] Of the regular dues the most characteristic in the Sicilian kingdom was that which went by the name of *Ghezia* (Arabic *Gizium*)—a further relic of Moslem rule. This was a poll-tax, differing in amount for rich and poor.[53] Besides this there was a special tribute upon animals slaughtered according to the Jewish method and on wine ritually prepared.[54] Other characteristic burdens were the obligation to provide banners for the royal galleys and to carry out the cleaning of the royal castles.[55] In different localities there were a few special imposts. Thus at Malta the Jews had to furnish oil for the lamp which was kept alight in the loggia where the guard assembled—perhaps in lieu of personal service. Of this we know because the Captain of the Guard once appropriated the oil for his own use.[56] Similarly, they had to take their share in working on the fortifications, and though on one occasion they obtained exemption from this onerous duty, it was afterwards reimposed in view of the imminent danger of attack.[57] Such martial requisitions were common. The Jews of Gozzo had to maintain a man-at-arms at their own expense at time of war or of special danger.[58] In 1403, the community of Malta had to advance Martin I thirty ounces to equip a war galley, repayment of the sum being guaranteed on the export-dues from the harbours of Girgenti and Licata, with which places the island was in close commercial intercourse.[60] Yet another illustration of extraordinary taxation was the contribution of twenty ounces which the same community had to pay Alfonso I in 1440 towards the expenses of his

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[51] Lagumina, § 690. [52] *Ibid.*, § 957.
[53] Giovanni, pp. 50–52; Senigaglia, pp. 3, 13. [54] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[55] Giovanni, pp. 55–6. [56] Mifsud, p. 15. [57] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 8. [60] Lagumina, § 185.

Neapolitan campaign.[61] For the royal service, but for not other purposes (as the local authorities were warned in 1485), their beasts of burden could be requisitioned.[62] It was incumbent upon them also to give gifts to the Bishop and certain of the local officials at Christmas and Easter. This gradually grew into an abuse, past functionaries continuing to assert their rights after their term of office had elapsed, and minor clerics putting forward their claim as well, so that ultimately all of the notables of the island, clerical and lay, came to look upon it as their due. In 1485, however, the President of the Kingdom acceded to the petition of the Jews and restricted the number of gifts obligatory upon them to four, besides that to the Bishop himself.[63]

Though the Jews of Malta had their burdens, they were not without their privileges. We have seen that the local authorities were prohibited from abusing the financial burdens incumbent on the *Aljama*, or interfering in the communal elections. Similarly, when any Jew was imprisoned for civil debt, this had to take effect in the ordinary manner in the public prison. The private house of any official, where he might abuse his power, could not be used for the purpose, nor was it permissible to fetter the prisoner or put him in the stocks. More remarkable was the provision that the culprit had to be released for Sabbaths and holy days, beginning with noon on the previous day (in connection with this privilege it must be remembered that we are dealing with an island, escape from which was difficult). Again, it was apparently obligatory at Malta, continually in peril of surprise attack, for all persons who left their houses after nightfall to carry a light. The Jews, however, were empowered to dispense with this formality on the Sabbath, when it was against their practice to handle fire.[64] From time to time they would be given a general absolution for any alleged wrongdoings which they might have committed up to that date.[65] Though in cases of dispute the Jew was compelled to take an oath upon the Scroll of the Law, the local officials

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[61] Lagumina, § 368. [62] *Ibid.*, § 698.

[63] Giovanni, p. 57; Lagumina, § 698. The question did not however end here. The local officials refused to relinquish their claim, which they proceeded in the following year to enforce by throwing the leaders of the Jewish community into gaol. Further proceedings were suspended by the Viceroy, who summoned both sides to send representatives to him to present their case (*ibid.*, § 721). The ultimate outcome is obscure. [64] *Ibid.*, § 698. [65] *Ibid.*, §§ 165, 698.

were prohibited from attempting to give additional force to the ceremony by compelling it to be performed in the Synagogue, inside the Ark where the sacred text was kept.[66]

The religious life of the Jew was centred as elsewhere about the Synagogue—generally called either by the Arab term of *Meschita* or now and again by its Hebrew equivalent of *Chynisia*.[67] That of Malta was situated at Notabile, in the "*burgo di lo castello*." Here it was submitted from time to time to a certain amount of molestation from the rabble of the city, who on occasion broke the gates, smashed the lamps, and disturbed the services.[68] A cemetery was situated near the city at a spot still called in the vernacular Kibir-el-Lhud (Burial-place of the Jews), where down to the seventeenth century numerous graves with Hebrew inscriptions were to be seen.[69] Only one, however, has been preserved to the present day.[70]

At the head of the religious life of the community was of course the Rabbi. This was indeed no specific vocation, and seems to have been frequently combined, as was common in mediæval Jewish life, with the practice of medicine. As elsewhere in the kingdom of Sicily, the Rabbinate was kept rigidly under the control of the Crown, with other communal offices.[71] In 1395 there had been created the office

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[66] *Ibid.*, § 6, where *hecal* should be read for *lecal*. For the full text of the Jewish oath as customary in Sicily, see Lagumina, § 74.

[67] = כניסיה: the term, curiously enough, used in modern Hebrew for a church!

[68] Lagumina, § 868.

[69] Abela, *Malta Illustrata*, pp. 268–9.

[70] The inscription is referred to in Caruana's *Report on the Phoenician and Roman Antiquities in Malta*, p. 139, and is at present (thanks, as I understand, to my enquiries) preserved in the Roman Villa Museum at Notabile. Through the courtesy of Mr. Hannibale P. Scicluna, of the Malta Public Library, a photograph of the inscription is in my possession: it is apparently that on the tombstone of one Solomon, son of Yeshua (a not uncommon variant of Joshua) the Levite. As can be best deciphered, it reads as follows:

זה ק[בר]
שלמה ב[ן]
ישועה הלוי
הה[?] תנצבה

[71] *Cf.* Senigaglia, pp. 25–6. The Rabbi of Palermo was nominated by the Crown as early as 1283 (Lagumina, § 33). More surprising still is the royal appointment in 1399 of a *Shohet*, or ritual slaughterer, at Sciacca (*ibid.*, § 160; *cf.* also §§ 26 and 713).

of Dienchelele, or Chief Rabbi,[72] over the Jews of the whole kingdom, much to the disgust of the individual communities, whose independence was thereby considerably curtailed. The first incumbent was Joseph Abenasia, the King's physician. He was succeeded in office by Moses Bonavoglia, of Messina, who, owing to his absence in Naples, was formally invested on March 9, 1439, in the Synagogue of Palermo in the presence of two "procurators," one a Jew and the other a Christian. On his death in 1446 Joshua Banartini was appointed to succeed him.[73] The exercise of the Rabbinical authority throughout the kingdom was beyond the powers of one man, and it had become customary for the Dienchelele to appoint substitutes to represent him in the more important communities. Thus, in 1446, on Banartini's appointment, the physician Braccone Safaradi of Gozzo was authorised to act as his deputy in Malta and Gozzo, having the power to interpret Jewish law and to enjoy all the rights and privileges appertaining to the office.[74] This deputy-chief-rabbinate was, however, of short duration. In the following year, at the petition of the Jewries of the realm, the office of Dienchelele was abolished,[75] and the office of deputy in Malta automatically lapsed. Nevertheless, it seems as though the spiritual leadership, combined with the practice of medicine, remained in the same family. In 1485 Abraham Safaradi (called Rabbi Abraham in contemporary documents),[76] married and domiciled in Gozzo, was ordered by the Viceroy to be given preference over any other Jew in the two islands as far as medical service and the interpretation of Jewish law were concerned.[77] With this office was occasionally combined the more lucrative one of Notary, or *sopher*, of the community, which required a considerable knowledge of Hebrew

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[72] Hebrew, דיין כלילי (not, as Zunz imagined, בית דין כלילי—General Court). The Dienchelele was first appointed in 1395 (Lagumina, § 123, and Mifsud, p. 12): not, as stated in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, xi. 326, in 1405. For the institution, see Giovanni, pp. 109–15: Senigaglia, pp. 23–4: and Lionti, *Le Magistrature presso gli ebrei di Sicilia* in *Archivio Storico Siciliano*, 1884, pp. 328–71.

[73] Lagumina, § 371. The office did not therefore come to an end in 1425 (as stated in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, loc. cit.).

[74] Lagumina, § 372.

[75] *Ibid.*, § 378. The office had, however, been temporarily abolished in 1421: *Ibid.*, § 301.

[76] Mifsud, p. 10.

[77] Lagumina, § 701.

and of the Jewish law. In 1485 Raphael Cheti was created Notary of the Jews of Gozzo and Malta, with all the honours and perquisites of the post, "to make contracts, testaments, and writings" on behalf of the local Jews, after first taking a solemn oath on the Law of Moses. This, however, was not to preclude them from drawing up their documents on occasion at the hands of the ordinary Notaries Public.[78] It was after this, apparently, that it was desired to effect the combination of this office with the Rabbinate, for in 1492 Abraham Saba and Abraham Safaradi, both physicians, were authorised to fill the post in succession.[79] The functions of the Rabbi need not be enlarged upon here, but it is worthy of note that (as we have seen) the power of excommunication remained exclusively in the hands of the lay heads of the community. There is, in this connection, a curious Maltese illustration of the close control exercised in the kingdom of Sicily over the most intimate religious affairs by the Crown. A certain Reuben of Marsala, resident in Malta, was permitted by the Infant John in 1446 to marry again, although he already had a wife living in Jerusalem:[80] for, though the monogamous *Takkanah* of Gershom of Mayence was not yet universally observed in Sicily and in Italy as a whole, the assent of the secular authorities was considered necessary before taking a second wife. So far indeed had polygamy become repugnant to current practice that in 1421 the Jews of the kingdom obtained a viceregal decree to the effect that no Jew should in future have more than one wife at a time, though certificates of exemption continue to be found even after this date.[81]

The general treatment of the Maltese Jews was without doubt similar to that of their coreligionists in the rest of the kingdom—tolerant, if contemptuous. In only one respect is it likely to have differed for the worse. The wearing of the Jewish Badge prescribed by the Lateran Council of 1215 had been enforced in Sicily earlier than in any other country of Europe, being made obligatory by the Emperor Frederick II in 1221—no doubt in order to vindicate his suspected orthodoxy. At a later period a *Custos* (subsequently,

[78] Lagumina, § 700. [79] *Ibid.*, § 867. [80] *Ibid.*, § 264.

[81] See, for late instances of polygamy amongst Italian Jews licensed by the civil authorities, Bruzzone in the *Revue des Études Juives*, xix. 131–2, 146 (Ferrara 1590, Rome 1623, and Cuneo), and especially lxxxvii. 83–8; and Lagumina, § 774.

*Revisor*) *Rotellae* was appointed in order to supervise the correct observance of this wheel-shaped badge of infamy. In this office, two Bishops of Malta served in succession, both Franciscans: Fra Francesco Papalla, of Messina, the King's almoner, appointed in 1370, and Fra Giovanni di Pino, a Catalan, appointed in 1393.[82] These are the only two incumbents of the office known to us, and it is to be imagined that in their own diocese at least the regulation was rigidly enforced. For the rest, the relations between Jew and Gentile seem to have been friendly enough. We have seen how avidly the general population availed themselves of the services of a Jewish chirurgeon, and how Rabbi Abraham Safaradi was the official physician on the island. In 1431 a Maltese Jew named Xilorum was actually sent to the Viceroy as envoy on an official mission from the island.[83]

From the beginning of the fifteenth century, however, a less friendly spirit began to show itself. The first manifestation in Malta came apparently from the ecclesiastical authorities, who submitted the two island communities to some sort of persecution. An appeal was made to Martin I, accompanied without a doubt by some substantial donation. In consequence, at the beginning of July, 1400, he conceded them a general pardon for all crimes and misdemeanours, and forbade further interference with them on the part of the Bishop and Inquisitor, or even the fiscal authorities.[84] A little later on the fanatical John of Capistrano came to Sicily and brought about by his frenzied preaching a general reaction throughout the kingdom. Malta did not remain unaffected. There was indeed no actual outbreak of violence. Nevertheless, shortly after the accession of King John, the inhabitants of the island sent representatives to Court to solicit certain repressive measures against their Jewish neighbours. By a decree of May 8, 1458, they were put into effect. Hitherto it had been customary for the Jewish merchants to peddle their wares without restriction in the countryside and in the suburb of Rabato. This practice was alleged to result in dishonesty and scandal. The right was accordingly taken away, and the Jews were ordered to

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[82] Ulysse Robert, *Les Signes d'Infamie au moyen age*, pp. 83–4; Lagumina, § 121.

[83] Mifsud, p. 14.

[84] Lagumina, § 165.

restrict their selling in future to their shops in the town. At the same time a sort of Ghetto was formed. All Jews having houses adjoining churches, or even opposite them or in their immediate neighbourhood, were ordered to vacate them and sell them to Christians. Henceforth all the Jews were to inhabit a single quarter, known as the Giurucca, not contaminating true believers further with their pernicious propinquity.[85]

This last provision had perforce to be obeyed. The first, however, struck a severe blow at the prosperity of the Jews of the island, and they were by no means disposed to submit to it without protest. In this they were supported by one of the local magnates, Pietro di Birliuni. Their representations were therefore not without effect. A viceregal order of July 15, 1458, modified the earlier edict, restoring the right of the Jews to trade throughout the island, on condition that they refrained from conveying their merchandise from village to village in carts, though they were empowered to make use of pack-mules.[86] This restriction, however, still continued to be felt irksome, and the complaint was embodied some years later by the Jews of Sicily in a petition for the redress of their grievances. Accordingly, by an edict of January 8, 1467, all restrictions on trading were cancelled, the privileges of King Alfonso being renewed.[87] Even then the local authorities would not permit the transportation of their merchandise in bulk by the ordinary means of conveyance in carts, and the substitution of beasts of burden only roused fresh protests. Moreover, the local authorities at Rabato would not permit them to hire shops, claiming that they might only sell their merchandise in the market-place or else in some spot set aside for their use. Ultimately the Jewish community was compelled to have recourse once again to the Viceroy, who formally permitted the renting of shops in Rabato in which trade might be carried on without restriction.[88]

The rising tide of ill-feeling showed itself also in more violent manifestations. In Gozzo especially, the Captains vexed the Jews in every manner which lay in their power, overburdening them with unjust impositions and throwing them, not into the ordinary prison,

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[85] Lagumina, § 654.
[86] Mifsud, p. 16.
[87] Lagumina, § 494.
[88] *Ibid.*, § 622.

but into dungeons, if they demurred. Once again the community was forced to appeal to the central authority for help, and a special representative was sent by the Viceroy from Malta to the smaller island to enquire into the matter and to stop irregularities (1465).[89] In 1486, following a petty persecution, special provision had to be made during Holy Week to safeguard the Maltese Jews from attack.[90]

All of these petty vexations led inexorably to the inevitable *dénouement*. Since the beginning of the fifteenth century the Crown of Sicily had been definitely combined with that of Aragon. In 1479 the double throne was ascended by Ferdinand II, later known to infamous memory as Ferdinand the Catholic. The problem of the crypto-Jew, which formed the pretext for the banishment from Spain, was virtually unknown in Sicily and its dependencies. Nevertheless, the fatal edict which ended the settlement of the Jews in the Spanish dominions was operative in the island kingdom as well. On May 31, 1492, the order was secretly communicated to the local authorities.[91] Three weeks later, on June 18, the perpetual expulsion of the unhappy race from the kingdom, after a residence of fully fifteen hundred years, was formally and solemnly proclaimed. They were given three months to make the necessary arrangements, but by September 18 all were to have departed. The conditions were even more cruel than those of the expulsion from Spain itself, for during this brief period they were required not only to collect what was due to them and to settle their affairs, but also to idemnify the Crown for the loss of the special tributes which had hitherto been received from them ![92]

It was in vain that the Royal Council pointed out that, apart from other disastrous consequences, the islands of Malta and Gozzo (with Pantellaria) would be dangerously depopulated by the expulsion of their Jewish inhabitants.[93] The instructions received from Spain were carried out to the letter. Immediately the edict was proclaimed, any evasion of their burdens through flight was anticipated by sequestering and inventorising all of the property possessed by the Jews. Even the *Meschita* (synagogue) was occupied, though they might continue to use it for prayer. Only on the satisfaction of all

[89] Lagumina, § 489. [90] *Ibid.*, § 721. [91] *Ibid.*, § 874.
[92] Lea, *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies*, pp. 3–4.
[93] La Lumia, *Gli Ebrei Siciliani*, pp. 25–6.

the claims against them was their property to be returned, and the sacred building restored to their possession. Care should be taken, however, that they did not take with them money, gold, silver, precious stones, or livestock, whereby the realm would necessarily remain depleted. All other forms of property (it seems a sardonic provision) might be exported without let or hindrance. These provisions (which, severe though they were, served in some measure as a safeguard against worse abuse) were communicated at the request of the local *Aljama* to the authorities at Malta on July 13, 1492.[94]

It would seem however that here, for reasons both of size and insularity, there were special difficulties to be faced. So much of the island commerce had been in the hands of the Jews, and so limited was the market, that it was impossible for them to dispose locally of all the property which they could not take away. These special problems were embodied, with other matters, in a petition which was presented to the Viceroy on behalf of the two island communities. On August 18 he gave his reply. It was none too favourable, for there was apparently some hope of mulcting them still further. They had by then paid all of their debts, but he would not give an immediate order for their inventorised goods to be returned. They might indeed set about selling their *Meschite* and other communal property, both portable and otherwise, but the proceeds were to be deposited with the local officials until further instructions. Even those alienations and sales which had already taken place were not unconditionally confirmed, but were to be decided upon according to their merits by one of the judges of the royal court. In consideration of the special local conditions, they were empowered to bring to the mainland for sale such property (mules, livestock, jewels, and cash) as might not be taken out of the realm; but only upon condition that a sufficient surety was deposited in the civic treasury. Pledges had to be given similarly even for the " tori," or Scrolls of the Law, and other Hebrew books. A few of the other petitions were granted in a less niggardly fashion. No Jew possessing real or personal estate should be coerced in his person for the payment of his debts. If any person were found

[94] Lagumina, § 924. At the end of August, a local merchant was deputed to see whether these regulations had been evaded through bribery or corruption: *Ibid.*, § 971.

guilty of the not unnatural irregularity of concealing special stones with the object of taking them away with him, he should not incur any physical penalty, and would be permitted on the payment of proper surety to take them to the mainland for disposal. In the event of any further impositions, in which case they might not have sufficient ready money for payment, they might be permitted to make over in part satisfaction any debts which were owing to them. If this did not prove sufficient, their real estate would be accepted—all, however, at the estimate of the local authorities. Any such further levy was to be apportioned, not by the usual board of three (Hefez Levi, Samuel Cagliaris, and David Inglisi) but by a new body composed of two of the richer sections of the community, two of the middle-class, and two of the poor, a democratic step hard to understand. In future, only Alvaro di Nava, Treasurer of Malta, was to be permitted to intervene in their affairs. A possible source of abuse was checked by prohibiting the local officials from exacting any charge for the inventory which they had taken of property belonging to the Jews, who were empowered to nominate "procurators" to act for them and to collect whatever dues they left behind. Graciously enough their transport and victuals when they finally left were guaranteed them—naturally, at their own expense.[95]

The presentiment with regard to fresh exactions was verified by events. The annual dues of the Jewries of the kingdom were capitalised, on a basis of 4 per cent. interest, at a sum of 100,000 ducats, of which about two-thirds was to be paid immediately and the rest within one year. Towards this the quota of the community of Malta was 154 ounces 10 tari and 102 ounces 5 tari, and that of Gozzo 108 ounces 22 tari and 73 ounces 5 tari respectively. For a further donative of 5,000 ducats, the final date for their leaving the realm was postponed by two months, until December 18. Towards this Malta contributed 12 ounces 15 tari, and Gozzo 8 ounces 18 tari.[96] On the payment of these sums, or the receipt of ample security, the property of the Jews might be restored and sold freely by them in preparation

[95] Lagumina, § 957.

[96] *Ibid.*, § 1015. The amount for the donative of 50,000 ducats given by Lea, *ubi supra*, is inaccurate.

for their departure. The goods of those who had already fled were to be seized and alienated without further formality.[97]

The lot of the Jews of Malta must have been the same as that of the rest of their coreligionists elsewhere in the kingdom. Each person was permitted to take a suit of common clothing, a mattress, a pair of worn sheets, three tari (or half a florin) in money, and a few provisions for the journey. All the rest of their property had to be conveyed (at what loss may be imagined) by letters of exchange. Ultimately the rich were empowered to take with them twice as much as their poorer brethren, excepting for the articles of clothing. To prevent evasion of these stringent regulations, the exiles were all searched before leaving. The perquisition extended not merely to the miserable property left to them (especially the mattresses) but to the cavities of their bodies, in which it was thought that they might have secreted precious stones.[98]

Owing to inevitable delay in the collection of the crushingly heavy levies which had been imposed upon them, the final limit for the departure of the Jews was postponed once more for one month, until January 12, 1493.[99] After this date none might be found in the kingdom, on whatever pretext. Those of Malta and Gozzo were enjoined to embark (ostensibly for their security, but perhaps from less altruistic motives) on the boats of Giovanni di Givara.[100] Perhaps, as was the case in Palermo, the inhabitants stood upon the housetops to wave farewell to their old neighbours, who had lived in their midst for so many long centuries, but no chronicler among them thought it worth his while to record the fact. Only, in the next year, Jacopo Sabbara, the public notary of Malta, dryly registered the event in his notarial acts.[101]

Whither the refugees made their way cannot be ascertained. They must have thrown in their lot in the main with the rest of their Sicilian brethren, who maintained a separate existence throughout the Levant, with their own synagogues and their own ritual, for some generations to come.[102] Some must have made their way to the

[97] Lagumina, § 1028.
[98] Lea, p. 4; La Lumia, p. 30.
[99] Giovanni, p. 210.
[100] Lagumina, § 966.
[101] Abela, *Malta Illustrata*, pp. 268–9.
[102] The *Scuola Siciliana* continued to function at Rome until a comparatively recent date. Jewish travellers to Damascus in the sixteenth century speak of the

neighbouring coast of Africa, a few to the mainland of Italy ; but most, in all probability, turned to the hospitable shores of Turkey. Traces of the exiles are scanty. Jews bearing the surname of Malti are met with for some decades to come at Arta in Albania, Sofia, Lepanto, Negroponte, and the Morea.[103] In Venice a family going by the name of Malta was common in the seventeenth century and after, though it is by no means certain that it derived from these primitive inhabitants.[104] But in the city of Sofia, to which a really considerable body of the refugees must have made their way, there long existed a minor conventicle in which they worshipped God according to their ancient ancestral rite, which went by the name of the Maltese Synagogue.[105]

In Malta the impression which was left was hardly greater. Part of the property of the exiles was acquired by the civic body for the sum of sixty ounces, of which thirty-five were used for the repair of the royal castle on the neighbouring coast. The property belonging to the church of St. Salvadore was enriched in the year following the expulsion by the gift of an adjoining plot left vacant through the expulsion.[106] For a long time the Jewish cemetery remained visible on a hill near the city, containing many graves hewn in the rock,[107] but all traces have now disappeared.

But the most curious vestige of the ancient settlement of the Jews in Malta is, in certain proper names, connected with them by the suffix "*El-Lhud.*" Thus the emplacement of the cemetery just referred to is still known as the *Kibir-el-Lhud*, or Burying-Place of the Jews. Similar to this are other place names, such as *Ghain Lhudin* or *Gnien Lhudi*—a form which occurs more than once—meaning Fountain of the Jews ; the quarter *Tal-Lhud* in the village of Cospicua, scattered properties known as *ta Lihudi, ta Lhudi, tal Hudi*, etc., as

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Sicilian congregation there and its scholars. The Sicilian Ritual, now entirely extinct, is described by I. Davidson from a unique copy in the *Livre d'hommage à . . . Samuel Poznanski.*

[103] S. Asaf in *Zion*, ii. 68, note 2 ; Zunz, *ubi supra*, p. 531 ; *Responsa* of Joseph ibn Leb, I. (iii), 7.

[104] The name is common in the records of the Venetian community, though the family is now apparently extinct.

[105] See the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, xi. 428. This Maltese synagogue is said to have existed up to the middle of the nineteenth century.

[106] Mifsud, p. 17.

[107] *Malta Illustrata*, pp. 268–9.

well as some others of more dubious ascription. However, some of these names may have their root in mere folk-lore, or to the similarity in the Maltese language of *il-Lhud* (Libyan) with the word for Jew, or to the fact that Jew and Unbeliever ultimately came to have the same connotation.[108]

It is not impossible that one or two Jews remained in Malta even after the edict of expulsion. The opportunity afforded by this persecution to save souls in spite of themselves by bringing them into the bosom of the Church was too good to neglect. Every inducement was accordingly offered throughout the kingdom for the Jews to become converted to Christianity, in which case they would of course be permitted to remain without interference. Ferdinand, indeed, was not disposed to forgo the financial profit on which he counted and issued an order requiring all neophytes to purchase the privilege of baptism by the surrender of 45 per cent. of their property. The Jews of Malta were amongst the communities thus approached.[109] In a body numbering nearly a thousand souls all told (as seems probable) it would be strange if none succumbed. The sincerity of converts gained under such conditions was naturally doubted, and it was to proceed against the backsliders that the Inquisition was organised on the Spanish model in the kingdom of Sicily. That converts were to be found in Malta is suggested by the fact that the central tribunal maintained an organisation in the island under a special commissioner.[109] Hence, if any secret traces of Judaism remained, it is to be imagined that they were speedily stamped out: and this phase of the history of the Jews in Malta thus came to an end.

## II.

The rule of the House of Aragon did not continue in Malta for long. A curious concatenation of events was to bring the island before long into a sort of sentimental dependence upon the Holy Land. In 1522 Rhodes was captured by the Turks, after a memorable

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[108] Mifsud, pp. 3–4; Caruana, *op. cit.*, p. 139. The similarity of these phrases to the Hebrew is readily discernible.

[109] Lea, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–7.

siege, and the Knights Hospitaller of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, who had held it since 1309—a last outpost against the infidel—found themselves once more without a home. In 1530, therefore, the Emperor Charles V, King of Aragon, Sardinia, Sicily and their dependencies, made over to them the island of Malta, which they were to continue to hold as a bulwark of Christendom. Here they remained in possession until 1798, when they capitulated to the French, who were in turn dispossessed by the British two years later.[1]

The whole *raison d'être* of the Order, and the solitary condition of its tenure (apart from an annual tribute of a white falcon), lay in the supposition of a continual state of hostility between the Moslem world and the Christian, of which they were in a sense the knights-errant. Accordingly, they waged at all times a perpetual maritime warfare against the Turks and other infidel Powers, under conditions hardly distinguishable from piracy; completely parallel, indeed, to those of the Barbary corsairs who contemporaneously conducted similar operations from the neighbouring coast of Africa in the name of the Crescent. Shipping was preyed upon indiscriminately, the captured vessels being brought to the island with all that they contained, and the crews and passengers sold into captivity. Hence, down to the last day of the rule of the Knights, the island remained a last European refuge of the slave traffic, and its economy was to a large extent based upon forced labour: while the more unfortunate were sent to row in the galleys.[2]

It was not negroes of a low standard of civilisation and intelligence who were the victims, but any persons, of whatever standing, race, age, or sex who happened to have been sailing in the captured vessels. Merchants were therefore peculiarly liable to capture, and a considerable number of the mercantile class in the Levant were Jews. Moreover, the Jew was a nomad, and figured disproportionately on any passenger ship sailing between Eastern ports. Similarly, they formed a considerable element in the population of those Turkish

[1] It was expressly forbidden for any person of Jewish blood to be received into the Maltese Order (Mifsud, p. 22).

[2] For a general but superficial history of the Order see R. Cohen, *Knights of Malta, 1523–1798*, where a useful bibliography may be found. Interesting but somewhat fictional sidelights are to be read in E. Kraus, *Adventures of Count George Albert of Erbach*, translated by the Princess Beatrice (London, 1890). See now also E. W. Schermerhorn, *Malta of the Knights* (London, 1930).

coast-towns which sometimes the Knights, greatly daring, ventured to raid, carrying such of the inhabitants as they could seize back with them into captivity. Thus the victims brought to the island inevitably comprised, at all times, large numbers of Jews. The climax was reached on a certain occasion when the total numbered no less than two hundred and twenty persons, for whose ransom the enormous sum of 4,800 reals was demanded.[3]

A very graphic account of the condition of the slaves at Malta, and in particular of the Jews, is given by an English traveller who visited the spot in about 1663 :

" The slaves' prison is a fair square building, cloister'd round, where most of the slaves in Malta are oblig'd to lodge every night, and to be there about *Ave Mary* time. They have here several sorts of trades, as barbers, taylors, &c. There are about 2,000 that belong to the order, most of which were now abroad in the galleys ; and there are about 300 who are servants to private persons. This place (i.e. *Malta*) being an island, and difficult to escape out of, they wear only an iron ring or foot-lock. Those that are servants, lodge in their masters' houses, when the galleys are at home ; but now, lie a nights in this prison. *Jews*, *Moors*, and Turks are made slaves here, and are publickly sold in the market. A stout fellow may be bought (if he be an inferior person) for 120 or 160 scudi of *Malta*. The *Jews* are distinguish'd from the rest by a little piece of yellow cloth on their hats or caps, &c. We saw a rich *Jew* who was taken about a year before, who was sold in the market that morning we visited the prison for 400 scudi ; and supposing himself free, by reason of a passport he had from Venice, he struck the merchant that bought him ; whereupon he was presently sent hither, his beard and hair shaven off, a great chain clapp'd on his legs, and bastinado'd with 50 blows." [4]

From the moment of the change of rule, therefore, the name of Malta begins to occur with increasing frequency in Jewish literature, and always with an evil association. " In the year 5312 (1552)," writes Joseph haCohen, in his heartbreaking *Vale of Tears*, " the vessels of the monks of Rhodes, who are in Malta, cruising to find booty, encountered a boat coming from Salonica, whereon were about

[3] See letters regarding their release published by S. Bernstein in *haZofeh*, xiii. 355–7.

[4] Philip Skippon, *An account of a Journey made through part of the Low Countries, Germany, Italy, and France*, in Churchill, *Collection of Voyages and Travels*, vi. 621.

seventy Jews. They captured it, and returned to their island. The unhappy victims had to send to all quarters to collect money for the ransom of their souls exacted by the miserable monks. Only after payment were they suffered to continue their voyage." [5] In 1567 large numbers of Jews escaping to the Levant to avoid the persecutions initiated by Pius V fell victims on the way to the attacks of the Knights. "Many of the victims sunk like lead in the depths of the sea before the fury of the attack. Many others were imprisoned in the Maltese dungeons at this time of desolation," writes the chronicler.[6] It was not only over those who went down to the sea in ships that the shadow hung. Of the Marranos of Ancona who fell victims to the fanaticism and treachery of Paul IV, twenty-seven "penitents" who eluded the stake were sent in chains to the galleys of Malta, though on their overland journey before reaching the island they succeeded in making good their escape.[7] Sometimes not even an ample ransom could avail the captives, and on one occasion the intervention of the Pope was necessary to secure the release of a particular batch on equable terms.[8] As early as 1549 there were said to be as many as seventy Jewish slaves on the island at one time.[9] Though, according to an old Jewish adage, those who go to do a good deed receive no molestation, a party of pilgrims on their way to Palestine about 1620 were captured at sea and brought to the island, where they were

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[5] Joseph haCohen, *Emek haBakha*, p. 126 (there is a French translation of this moving work, under the title of *La Vallée des Pleurs*, by Julien Sée. Paris, 1881). In the *History of the Kings of France and the House of Ottoman, the Turk* (translated into English by Bialloblotzky, London, 1835), the total ransom of 10,000 ducats is mentioned.

[6] *Emek haBakha*, p. 150. A typical instance, from the other point of view, may be read in a seventeenth-century *Relazione* of an encounter on June 13, 1638 (Florence 1638). On the second page we are told how, on another ship, there were captured five Turks and one Jew. The memoirs of the Spanish adventurer Alonso de Contreras (1582–1633) provide a couple of further illustrations of the sort. Thus on one occasion he captured one of the principal tax-farmers in a raid on Salonica.

[7] Gedaliah ibn Jahia, שלשלת הקבלה, *ad fin.* *Revue des Études Juives*, lxxxix. 377, 380.

[8] Vogelstein-Rieger, *Geschichte der Jüden in Rom*, ii. 175–6.

[9] *Responsa* of Joseph ibn Leb, I. (iii) 7. A curious account of the hair-breadth escape from Maltese raiders of Rabbi Joseph Cohen of Corfu may be found in the preface of his commentary on the prayer תקנת שבת (Venice, 1604).

treated as slaves for a prolonged period before they could be ransomed.[10] These are only one or two of the more striking amongst the earlier examples of what went on almost without intermission from the acquisition of Malta by the Knights of St. John in 1530 down to their dispossession at the close of the eighteenth century. The Knights on their side professed to regard the Jews as more dangerous enemies even than the Turks, accusing them of espionage and worse: and they did not scruple to violate a neutral flag in order to make Jewish captives.[11] The great Turkish attempt on the island in 1565 (which, according to contemporary rumour, the Jews actually financed [12]) was certainly watched by them with eager eyes, and their disappointment on its failure must have been extreme. "The monks of Malta are still to-day a snare and trap for the Jews," records the chronicler sadly, at the end of his account of the siege.[13] There was some remission under Pope Sixtus V (1585–9), who expressly forbade the Knights to molest Jews going peacefully about their business,[14] but it was of short duration. "The monks of Malta are exceeding evil to the Jews . . ." mournfully declared a writer of the beginning of the seventeenth century. "They row in the Italian seas to prey and to spoil. Each time that they put out they seize upon all seafarers and sell them for slaves, both men and women, unless they pay ransom." [15] Thus the island continued to occupy in Jewish eyes a disproportionate importance, becoming a symbol for all that was cruel and hateful in the Christian world. Jewish scholars referred to it with an unwonted maledictory formula.[16] A Messianic prophecy current at the beginning of the seventeenth century detailed how the Redemption would

[10] The correspondence relating to their release has been published by S. Asaf in the Palestinian historical periodical, *Zion*, ii. 67–75. For a less tragic instance of Maltese depradations (from the protection, as it happens, of a neutral flag), see שו"ת מהרשד"ם III., § 343.

[11] See the Grand Master's vindication of his conduct in a letter to the Pope of August 31, 1578, in Stern, *Urkundliche Beiträge über die Stellung der Päpste zu den Jüden*, § cxxviii.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Joseph haCohen, *Emek haBakha*, p. 160.

[14] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, iv. 697.

[15] Continuation of the *Emek haBakha*, pp. 159–60.

[16] תש"א (= תמח שמה אמן: "May its name be wiped out. Amen.") *Cf.* שו"ת יעקב לבית לוי, § xxxvii. and Preface (see *infra*).

begin with the fall of the four kingdoms of unrighteousness, first among which would be Malta.[17]

"The Holy One, Blessed be He," says a well-known Rabbinic proverb, "always prepares a remedy before the affliction." So it was in the present case. Amongst Jews the very idea was abhorrent that a coreligionist should be enslaved to a Gentile and forced to disregard the practices of his religion, with his life and honour in momentary danger. Thus, from the earliest days, the Redemption of Captives had ranked high amongst the acts of charity which a pious Jew was called upon to execute, and it was considered proper that a sum of money left "for the performance of an especially good deed," without further direction, should be devoted to this, *Pidion Shevuim*, which could best deserve that title.[18] Throughout the Middle Ages this activity had continued, leaving ample traces in legalistic and historical literature (a case concerned with Gozzo we have seen above). It was through the medium of four Rabbis captured at sea by an Andalusian corsair and released by their coreligionists in four different ports that, according to an old legend, Talmudic learning first became diffused throughout the Diaspora in the tenth century. A hundred years later the redemption of captives captured on Christian vessels formed one of the main preoccupations of the Egyptian Jews. Abraham Senior, Treasurer of Castile and last *Rab de la Corte* in Spain, was instrumental in raising vast sums for the redemption of those of his coreligionists taken prisoner at the capture of Malaga. The communities of Italy, and particularly of Naples, similarly brought together a large amount by self-taxation to ransom the captives taken by Andrea Doria in Coron, Zante, and Patras in 1532.[19]

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[17] שבחי ר׳ חיים ויטאל, ed. Lemberg, 1862, p. 10, *apud* A. H. Silver, *Messianic Speculation in Israel*, p. 184.

[18] T.B., *Baba Bathra*, f. 8a. See also שערי צדק III. vi. 19.

[19] For a few illustrations of the Redemption of Captives in Jewish literature *cf.* J. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and Palestine under the Fatimids*, i. 87, *seq.*, 204–5, 232, 244, etc.; I. Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, cap. xix.; *Responsa Benjamin Zeeb* (Venice, 1539), §§ 19,229–231, part of which may actually refer to Malta; Loeb, *Joseph haCohen et le rachat des juifs captifs* in *Revue des Études Juives*, xvi. 46–9; Lagumina, § 513; *Pinkas Medinat Lita*, §§ 452, 485, 503, 542, 628, 989, etc.; Cassuto, *Aus dem ältesten Protokollbuch der Portugiesich-Jüdischen Gemeinde Hamburg*, in the *Jahrbuch der Jüdisch-Literaturischen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt-am-Main, viii. 282, x. 249; *Revue des Études Juives*, xxix. 135.

In these cases, as was natural in the old days, the organisation of relief was purely sporadic. Whenever the need arose, a collection would be made and assistance proferred. Every locality was likely to have a call made upon its charity at almost any moment, yet at the same time a long period of years might elapse without a single case arising. But, with the establishment in Malta of the Knights Hospitaller, the depradations upon Mediterranean shipping came to be reduced to a system, and the slave trade acquired one fixed centre. It became necessary therefore to set up a permanent organisation to cope with the new permanent situation. Now the great entrepôt of Mediterranean commerce was still Venice, whose trade with the Levant (carried on largely by Jews [20]) was of the highest importance. It happened, too, that there was at that city an important settlement of Jews hailing direct from the Iberian peninsula, whose genius for organisation was notorious. Thus it came about that there was set up here in the course of the seventeenth century the first of the regularly organised confraternities for the Redemption of Captives—חברת פדיון שבויים—which, in the course of the next hundred years, were to spread throughout the great Sephardic communities of the West.

The actual cause for its foundation was not, as it happened, the maritime problem. It would seem that the immediate occasion must be looked for in the terrible wave of massacres in Poland and the Ukraine by the Cossacks under Chmielnicki in 1648, which initiated the western trek of the Jewish masses which has continued to our own day. Thousands of Jews were sold into slavery at this period, yet no organisation to cope with such conditions was anywhere to be found. Even at Venice, the considerable activities of this nature always conducted to meet local requirements had hitherto been completely uncoordinated. A fund was therefore started there on behalf of the northern sufferers by the charitable brothers Aboab, members of a wealthy Portuguese family immediately hailing from Hamburg, which in the event became permanent.[21] This was apparently the origin

[20] *Cf.* R. Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Inquisitorato agli Ebrei, Busta 19, xi, " . . . . . Perchè la maggior parte delle mercantie che vengono dalla Rumania alta basa he condotta et è in mano de ebrei mercanti levantini viandanti . . . . . ." *Cf.* Roth, *History of the Jews in Venice*, passim.

[21] *Cf.* Kaufmann, *David Carcassoni et le rachat . . . des juifs faits prisonniers durant la persécution de Chmielnicky* in *Revue des Études Juives*, xxv. 202–216.

of the new confraternity. It prospered and increased exceedingly, so that by 1683 it could already be described as the wealthiest and most highly esteemed of the Jewish associations of the city.[22]

The organisation was under the auspices of two only out of the four congregations which figured in the city—the Levantine and the Portuguese. The remaining two, the German and the Italian, did not take any official share in the labours, though they contributed liberally to the funds.[23] The reason is plain. There was no question of lack of solidarity or of charitable feeling. But it was precisely the two Sephardic communities which comprised those who had commercial and social intercourse with the Levant, and who were in consequence most vitally interested in the matter.[24]

The manner in which the income was raised is interesting in the extreme. Voluntary donations were not of course refused, whether from Venice or other cities: for the fame of the Association and the report of its pious labours soon spread far and wide. The charitable Zaccharias Porto, of Florence, among his immense charitable bequests,

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The archives of the confraternity at Venice, as they existed in the last century (they have since been dispersed), went back to precisely this year, 1649: see Morpurgo, *Inchiesta sui Monumenti e Documenti del Veneto interessanti la storia . . . degli Ebrei*, p. 18. This late date for the foundation of the organisation does not, of course, signify that activities of the sort began so late. The case is on record, for example, of the ransom of one Joseph Israel by the Portuguese community of Venice in 1609 for 170 ducats (Soave, *Malta e gli schiavi ebrei* in *Corriere Israelitico*, xvii.).

[22] Morosini, *Via della Fede* (Rome, 1683), p. 242: ". . . Ma più stimata, e più ricca è חברת פדיון שבויים, Cheurà Pidiòn Scevuijm, *La Compagnia* del riscatto degli schiavi. A questa concorrono in Venetia quasi più di tutti i Levantini e gli Spagnuoli negotianti. . . ."

[23] Letter 489.

[24] The information given in the present Paper is principally based upon a manuscript letter-book of the confraternity between the years 1671 and 1710, in my collection. It comprises copies of some 523 letters written in Italian, Hebrew, Spanish, Portuguese, Ladino, to many parts of the world, from Constantinople and Egypt to London and Hamburg. A few, concerning the redemption of a prisoner captured in one of the wars in Northern Europe, were published by me in *haZofeh*, ix. 232–5, the rest of those written in Hebrew in *Zion*, vol. iii. Those written to England led up to a considerable correspondence of some independent importance, which I will probably deal with in the *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*. This volume will be cited in the present study by the number of the letter in question.

left it 1,500 piastres.[25] Other legacies, naturally, might be expected from natives of Venice.[26] Sometimes an individual donation might be accepted towards the ransom of the next slave that might be liberated,[27] or another local pious confraternity might subscribe some of its surplus.[28] On occasions of special urgency a special appeal would be made for help to other communities, as far afield as London and Amsterdam, which were generally glad to assist.[29] The community of Hamburg, with which Venice was in especially close relations, was peculiarly interested. It possessed a special aid society, under the name of the *Camara de Cautivos de Veneza*, with its own treasurer or *Gabbai*.[30] One of its principal members, Abraham Texeira, Swedish resident in the city, contributed to the confraternity in his lifetime the considerable sum of seventy douros annually, which was continued by his son after his death ;[31] and Moses Pinto, another wealthy Hamburg Jew, gave a yearly subvention of twenty douros.[32] Amsterdam and at a later period London possessed their own *Tesoureiros* or *Parnassim dos Cautivos*, who were always ready to co-operate.[33] But all this income was regarded as extraordinary. The ordinary came as a matter of business rather than of charity. In the first place, all members of the confraternity bound themselves to pay into its funds

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[25] See his posthumous work, אסף המזכיר, introduction ; Letter 94.

[26] Letters 141, 480. Letizia Nahmias, wife of Giulio Morosini, who resisted all temptation to follow her husband into apostasy, left the Fraternity ten ducats in 1668 (MS. will in my possession).

[27] Letter 506A. [28] Letters 258A, 489.

[29] *Cf.*, for example, Letters 325, 501–5, with article of Soave in *Corriere Israelitico*, xv. 80–1.

[30] Cassuto, *Aus dem ältesten Protokollbuch*, x. 254, xi. 89. For earlier interest in the freeing of slaves at Malta in co-operation with Venice see *ibid.*, v. 20 (1652), 38, 51 (1653); and viii. 278, *seqq.* See also Grünwald, *Portugiesengräbe auf deutscher Erde*, p. 24.

[31] Letters 49, 55, 39 and *passim.* [32] Cassuto, *ubi supra.*

[33] Parnassim dos Cautivos were regularly appointed at Amsterdam from 1639 till 1873, a complete list being found in the Montezinos Library in that city. In 1640 the office was filled by Eleazar de Solis, the renegade friar spoken of by Menasseh ben Israel in his *Vindiciae Judaeorum*. In London the institution of the Tesoureiro dos Cautivos continued, a venerable anachronism, until late in the last century, when, in 1882, the considerable funds which it possessed were merged in the general property of the congregation. In 1840 the sum of £500 had been advanced from this to meet the expenses of Sir Moses Montefiore's mission to Damascus. *Cf.* Goodman, *Moses Montefiore*, p. 66, n. 31.

a certain proportion of their annual profits. But, above all, a special voluntary tax of one-quarter per cent. was levied on the value of all goods despatched (presumably only by sea) to Jewish correspondents, and one-eighth per cent. on all goods taken away in person.[34] This is not so surprising as might appear at first sight. For those who paid this surcharge were precisely those Levantine merchants who were especially in danger from maritime depredations (particularly by the Knights of Malta), and who might therefore have most occasion for the services of the organisation. It was, as a matter of fact, a species of insurance. This explanation is proved correct by the fact that any interference with the fund seriously hampered trade with the Levant.[35]

The sums thus obtained were kept in two special chests, or *caixetas*, for the "Levantines" and "Ponentines" [36] respectively: for the fusion of the two elements was not complete. The funds varied from time to time. About 1742 the total sum was 3,500 ducats, of which nearly two-thirds was in the possession of the Portuguese. The combined funds were administered by five officials—Deputados dos Cautivos, or פרנסי חברת פדיון שבויים, as they were called, of whom three were Ponentine. These were empowered to dispose of sums up to fifty ducats without further reference. For the disbursement of larger amounts, however, the general approbation was required.[37] At the beginning, though the organisations were combined, the funds were kept separate, as has been seen. This method led, however, to constant disputes as to the limits of payment and the branch on which the ransom of particular individuals ought to fall. In 1742 recourse was had for arbitration to the Venetian magistracy of the Cattaveri, which possessed considerable authority, over the Jews especially. They decided that in future the two *caixetas* should be

[34] Soave in *Corriere Israelitico*, vii. 56. Morosini, *Via della Fede*, pp. 242–3. At the time of the Chmielnicki persecutions, the community of Leghorn had taxed itself as much as 25 per cent. of its income for the redemption of the prisoners.

[35] See *infra*.

[36] By "Ponentines" was meant the Sephardic Jews hailing direct from Spain and Portugal (at this period principally Marranos), as distinct from the "Levantines" who came *via* Turkey. The two sections maintained at Venice their own distinct synagogues and communal organisations. *Cf.* Roth, *op. cit.*

[37] Soave, *ubi supra*, vii. 56.

combined under the control of three Ponentines and two Levantines, and that any sum might be disposed of by four voices out of five.[38]

This parade of internal differences had the inevitable outcome of arousing Gentile cupidity. The consequences were not long in shewing themselves. A little later in the same year, the *Inquisitori sopra gli Ebrei*, seeking to bolster up the failing loan-banks which the Jews were forced to maintain as a condition of their toleration, confiscated the whole of the combined funds. A touching appeal was lodged in protest against this raid. The sums obtained, it was urged, were too small to benefit the banks substantially. Merchants in the Levant, deprived of their assurance, would refuse to continue their trade with Venice, to the Republic's manifest disadvantage. Reprisals might even follow in Turkey. These representations were not, apparently, entirely without effect. Henceforth, however, the organisation came closely under the control of the *Inquisitori*, whose permission became necessary before any disbursement was made or prisoner ransomed (Decree of January 25, 1742).[39] But, by this time, the supremacy of Venice had passed away. The importance of her community, now on the verge of bankruptcy, had dwindled with her trade. Other confraternities with similar objects had sprung up elsewhere, so that Venice lost its monopoly of this good deed and of the oblations of the charitable.[40] The community of Amsterdam, hitherto a regular subscriber, took upon its shoulders the work for the Atlantic and the northern seas. That of Leghorn, rapidly growing in wealth and importance, attained the supremacy in Mediterranean activity, providing more and more of the funds, though Venice for a long time retained control of the organisation. By now, moreover, travelling at sea was becoming more secure, and the need for the charity was correspondingly diminishing. The duration of the Venetian hegemony thus covers the most significant and interesting period of the history of this branch of charitable endeavour, so closely concerned with Malta and the Jewish prisoners brought thither in captivity.

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[38] *Ibid.* [39] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[40] See the noble vindication of their conduct written by the Parnassim dos Cautivos in classical Hebrew to the community of Constantinople in 1675, published by me in *Zion*, vol. iii., pp. 164 *seqq.*

The range of the activity of the Society was immense. It was by no means confined to the Mediterranean merchants for whom the organisation was intended in the first place. Prisoners captured in the constant wars on the mainland of Italy, or as far afield as Hungary and Poland: slaves rowing in the galleys in the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian Seas, from Marseilles and Elba to Corfu and Zante: victims of the Cossacks to the north and of the Tartars to the east: unfortunate brethren in faith groaning in servitude as far off as Persia on the one side and the Barbary coast on the other—all turned for succour to the *Parnassim dos Cautivos* in Venice, in the certainty of receiving sympathy, and, if it were humanly possible, deliverance.[41] But the principal centre of their activity was the island of Malta, the main seat of the traffic in slaves taken from the Moslem countries on the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. Other centres of operation, where galley-slaves in particular were redeemed, were the ports of Zante, Marseilles, Genoa, and Corfu. But at least three-quarters (perhaps even more) of their activities were concerned with this one spot. The story disclosed by the original documents, now in my possession, is not only a monument of Jewish charity at its finest, but also a pathetic record of the perseverance here of Jewish life under conditions which could not possibly have been more miserable or more adverse.[42]

The communications of the island with Venice were precarious; sometimes, indeed, a letter took two or even three months in transmission, though this was exceptional. It was necessary therefore to have some person on the spot to deal with fresh developments as they arose. Under the Knights, the exclusion of the Jews from the island was not absolute. Nevertheless, they were admitted only temporarily, and even so under such restrictions as to render it impossible

[41] For an illustration of activity in regard to Persian Jews, see Letter 272; for victims of the Tartars, Letter 63.

[42] Some idea of the extent and the fluctuations of the activities of the Parnassim dos Cautivos at Venice may be gauged from the number of letters written each year. In 1673 the highest limit was reached with 40 letters, falling to as few as four in 1678. By 1681 it had risen again to 34, to fall to 12 three years later, but again rising to 38 in 1686. Thence there was a general decline down to two in 1697, and to only one in 1709, though rising to 14 in 1703. The busiest years were 1671–6—the crucial period of the war with Turkey.

to rely upon their help. But the Venetian merchants necessarily had at Malta correspondents who were not averse from doing them a service, and a succession of these acted on behalf of the confraternity as its "consuls." They received, indeed, no salary. They must necessarily, however, have benefited in their business affairs as a result of their good offices, acquiring through them Venetian correspondents of absolute reliability, upon whose support they could count in their dealings with other members of the same faith and race throughout the world. They had, moreover, the right to charge a commission of five piastres for every slave liberated through their means.[43]

The first of these agents of whom there is any record is a certain Baccio Bandinelli (a namesake of the puny rival of Michelangelo and butt of Benvenuto Cellini) who acted perhaps from the time of the organisation of the Society in 1648 down to about 1670, when he was forced to give up by reason of his years.[44] He was succeeded by a French merchant named François Garsin, a Judge of the Tribunal of the *Consolato del Mare*. That the agency was considered a desirable one is shown by the fact that a certain Thomas Luis da Souza, who had assisted Bandinelli in his lifetime, proffered his services in addition. The offer was gratefully accepted, and he was associated with the Frenchman for a short period in 1673–4 until the other indicated that he would prefer to dispense with assistance.[45] This zeal on Garsin's part was not a selfish one. True, the Deputados were continually acting as his agents for the despatch of merchandise from Venice, and on one occasion in 1671 they exerted themselves to the utmost to procure the intervention of the Rabbinate of Alexandria with some recalcitrant Jewish debtors of his in that city.[46] Moreover, he received occasional gifts in token of their gratitude.[47] But material gain was

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[43] Letter 105. The owners were compelled to consent to the ransoming of their slaves and were similarly supposed to provide them with adequate food. (*Del Diritto Municipale di Malta*, Bk. VI. cap. xv, §§ xxii–xxiij.) For other regulations see *ibid.*, Bk. VII. cap. xiij, §§ viii–x. According to the first of these, each slave was supposed to bear an iron ring on his ankle.

[44] Letter 82. [45] Letters 82, 83, 95, 102.

[46] Letters 10 and 11 (Hebrew), published in *Zion*, vol. iii., pp. 166–8.

[47] *Cf.* Letter 317.

not his object. He even refused to accept the commission which it had hitherto been customary for the agent to charge for every slave released through his efforts. "All the greater will be your merit before God," wrote the grateful Deputados, "and by Him will you be rewarded all the more, these being of a nation diverse from your own."[48] It has been a real joy to have disinterred from the crabbed hieroglyphics of the original registers this monument of charity and lovingkindness towards the Jewish people in an age which was generally harsh and unsympathetic. We have a long memory for our persecutors; we should not be unmindful of our friends, amongst whom François Garsin and his associates surely deserve a high place. May their reward be perfect!

Garsin died in the autumn of 1706, after more than thirty-five years of devoted service. His son, Jean-Baptiste, in writing to tell the Deputados of his loss, offered to carry on his father's good work. This he did until his death thirteen years later. The next incumbent was a certain Filippo Antonio Crespi, who is found acting in the capacity for the following decade. For some years at this period a Jewish merchant from Leghorn named Samuel Farfara was resident at Malta and collaborated with the "Consul."[49]

When the Maltese galleys returned from some marauding expedition, the benevolent agent made it his business to visit the prison to which the captives were brought and to enquire whether there were any Jews amongst their number. More frequently than not, it happened that there were—usually merchants or travellers who had been sailing peacefully between Levantine ports on their own private affairs. Sometimes, indeed, when Jewish booty was in prospect, not even the flags of Christian Powers were respected. The case is on record, for example, of the seizure in 1672 by a Tuscan privateer of ten Jews—seven men and three women—from a Venetian vessel sailing from Alexandria, under the pretext that they were Ottoman subjects. The prisoners were brought to Malta and shamelessly offered for sale. On this particular occasion, a petition presented by the Deputados to the Doge brought about diplomatic representations

[48] Letter 105.

[49] Soave, *ubi supra*, xvii. 55, 102; Letter 506.

at the Court of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, which were sufficient to procure their release.[50]

This, however, was an exceptional case. More often there was no short cut out of the difficulty. Thus on July 23, 1725, there arrived at the island eighteen prisoners who had been captured while sailing from Salonica to Smyrna. All were poor excepting one—Jacob Fonseca, brother of Daniel Fonseca (Voltaire's friend, formerly a Marrano priest but now a practising Jew, and physician to the Grand Vizier at Constantinople). He naturally refused any subvention, and was subsequently released at the instance of the French Court, with which his brother had great influence: the rest were left to the good offices of their charitable coreligionists.[51] Similarly, in the autumn of 1673, ten poor Jews (some advanced in age, others mere children) who had been on their way to Palestine to subsist on the charity of their brethren were captured by the Treasurer of Malta whilst sailing from Rosetta and brought to the island, there to be the occasion of a species of benevolence of which they had not thought when they left their homes. Five of them died of the plague while in captivity. The rest were ultimately liberated for four hundred and eighty pieces of eight.[52] Another considerable influx came in 1685, when the city of Coron, on the Dalmatian coast, was sacked, and no less than twenty-one Jewish prisoners (mostly women and children, of no commercial value) were brought back to be sold into slavery, besides a score more who fell to the lot of the Venetians and were sent to row in their galleys.[53] From a raid on Nauplia in 1687 eight Jewish victims were brought.[54] But these are only a few of the most striking instances. Throughout this period, and especially in time of war (as, for example, the heroic

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[50] Letter 41, *seqq*. A similar case was that of Ephraim Ribera, a Venetian subject, captured and enslaved in 1683 (Letters 292, 298, 301). This shows that the defence put forward by the Grand Master in 1578 (Stern, *Urkundliche Beiträge*, § cxxxviii, see *supra*) was still upheld.

[51] Soave, *ubi supra*, xvii. 81. For the romantic career of Daniel Fonseca, the friend of Voltaire (see *Histoire de Charles XII.* book v.), see the *Memoirs of the Marquis d'Argens*, pp. 114–5. A Jacob Fonseca, also a physician, was first dragoman at the French embassy in Constantinople: Alberto de Soria, *Caratteri di varj uomini illustri* (Leghorn, 1773), pp. 166–73.

[52] Letters 160–64, 176, 187, 192.

[53] Letters 332, 372, etc.

[54] Letters 372, 376.

struggle between Venice and Turkey at the close of the seventeenth century), there was an almost constant influx of prisoners, mostly poor, to keep alive the Jewish connection with the island, and to give the Venetian community an opportunity of exercising its benevolence.

If any Jews were found amongst the recent arrivals, the agent would give them a small sum of money to suffice for their immediate needs in the name of the Association at Venice.[55] Besides this, each received a regular allowance of one ducat weekly as long as the Deputados could afford it: but owing to the scarcity of funds this was ultimately restricted to the first month.[56] However, on each of the major solemnities of the Jewish year every Jewish slave continued to receive from the agent the equivalent of one piece of eight in cash, so as to make his holyday a little more tolerable.[57] In the case of illness they would be given a special allowance.[58] Provision was made for their accommodation in a special room, taken for that purpose, in the Bagnio, or prison, in which they were confined. Sometimes their numbers were so great that two rooms were necessary.[59]

Meanwhile word would have been sent to Venice at the earliest opportunity to inform the Deputados of the number and quality of the new arrivals and of the sums demanded for their release. When only an individual was in question, there might be enough in hand to ransom him straightway. On those occasions, however, when a whole ship-load came in, it was frequently necessary to have recourse to all sides to collect the amount required. Thus, on one emergency in 1705, contributions were successfully solicited from ten places all over Italy (though the community of Rome, racked with oppressive taxation, was compelled to refuse), as well as from London.[60] Amsterdam, Hamburg, and other places were not apparently asked

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[55] Letters 64, 164.

[56] Letter 64.

[57] Letters 67, 105, 149, 164, 307.

[58] Letter 187.

[59] Soave, *ubi supra*, xvii. 55.

[60] See Soave, *op. cit.*, in *Corriere Israelitico*, xvii. 81–2, and *La Communità Israelitica di Roma nel* 1705, *ibid.*, xv. 80–1. Letters 501, 505 were addressed to London on this occasion: the reply is to be found in the archives of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, London, *Mahamad*, vol. i. (ciii) f. 150. This led up to the permanent relations of a later period. For an earlier letter to London see Letter 325 of 1685.

on this occasion, though they were generally liberal with their oblations. Sometimes the city to which the victims belonged, even in the distant and poverty-stricken Levant, would be asked to subscribe to the ransom.[61] It occasionally happened, too, that one slave was set free to collect money for the release of his brethren in misfortune,[62] or that a wealthy merchant might be able to give satisfactory security for the sum demanded.[63] But more frequently the victims were indigent, and it was left to the Venetian society to look after their welfare and deliverance.

The mechanism of release was not so simple as might at first appear. Even though the proverbial wealth of the Jew was not justified by the actuality, it was nevertheless most notorious precisely where he was least known. The economic price of a slave tended therefore to disappear where a Jew was concerned. Everything was done to make capital out of the natural feelings of solidarity and charity which might be expected amongst members of the same race and the same religion. A Jewish prisoner was worth, in fact, whatever could be extorted from his brethren. Ransom thus degenerated into blackmail. Fifteen centuries earlier the Rabbis of the Talmudic period had realised that there were certain cases in which it was necessary to be inexorable and to turn for once a deaf ear to suffering, unless it were desired to put a premium on the enslavement of Jews. They ordained accordingly that, for the general welfare, no captive should be ransomed for more than his economic value.[64] This was a standard up to which it was hard to live for Jews "compassionate children of compassionate sires"; and it may be imagined that, at the best, the price of a Jew was higher than that of a Moslem, even though his industrial value were lower.

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[61] Letter 35.

[62] Letter 494. Another similar case was that of Isaac da Fano, in 1666, captured at sea with his son, who travelled about to collect the ransom demanded of him, with letters of recommendation from Algiers, Salee, and Italy. Amsterdam contributed 100 patacas, Hamburg 20 reichsthalers (see Cassuto, *Aus dem ältesten Protokollbuch* in *Jahrbuch*, ix. 8–9).

[63] Letter 308.

[64] T. B. Gittin, f. 45A: אין פודין את השבויין יתר על כדי דמיהן מפני תיקון העולם. The Deputados refer to this passage in vindication of their policy, Letter 476.

On occasion, moreover, Jewish chattels would be mercilessly exploited. The owner of one Judah Surnago, an old man of seventy-five, whose value in the open market would have been negligible, was unable to obtain the sum which he demanded in ransom. Accordingly he shut him up naked in a cellar for two months, giving him nothing to eat but black bread and water. The old man came out blind and unable to stand. His sufferings had, however, no effect upon his inhuman master, who threatened to load him with chains and to pluck out his beard and eyelashes if the sum he asked were not forthcoming. Ultimately the Deputados redeemed him for two hundred ducats, three-quarters of which were subscribed by the community of Leghorn.[65] For a certain Aaron Afia, of Rhodes, bought in 1703 by a speculating owner who already possessed two other Jewish slaves, no less than six hundred ducats were demanded. To stimulate the zeal of his coreligionists, he was kept in chains, and threatened with being sent to row in the galleys. The owners would not believe, wrote Garsin in despair, that his principals were poverty-stricken. The Deputados were similarly horrified. "We are not in a condition," they wrote, "to make such exorbitant expenditure. If they do not moderate their price, there will be utter disaster for the poor wretches, who will die in slavery: and the owners will lose their capital."[66]

For a certain Rabbi Isaac Moreno, of Belgrade, captured with his wife and three children in 1673, the Deputados were willing to pass their usual limits and to pay three hundred piastres, for which (so low were their funds) they would have to dip into their own pockets: but the owners asked 575. "If the said masters expect to obtain more for a useless old man and a sick woman, and three children (one of whom is blind), who have had nothing out of him (saving your reverence !) but lice, they are much mistaken," they wrote to their agent.[67] Not obtaining the sum they required, the owners retaliated by an attempt to obtain the conversion of one of the children: but, on principle, the Deputados would not increase their offer.[68] In another case on record, when a certain wealthy merchant from Smyrna, named Abraham Perez, was taken with five companions, one of the latter

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[65] Soave, *ubi supra*, xvii. 101.
[66] Letter 483.
[67] Letter 72.
[68] Letter 81.

(a certain Joseph Levi) was killed under the lash in order to stimulate a greater liberality on the part of the others.[69] The rest were ultimately sufficiently intimidated to secure their release, largely as a result of their own efforts.[70]

In 1702 a speculator had purchased three men and an old woman of sixty for 350, 304, 399, and 72 ducats respectively (it is worth while placing the precise amounts on record, as a contribution to a branch of economic history which has hitherto claimed scant attention). "It astounds us that they could be sold at such extravagant prices," wrote the Deputados. "They can rest assured that they will remain on their hands as long as they live: for our resources do not allow us to order their redemption even for as little as sixty. . . . It would be as well to publish abroad what we have told you in this matter, so that none will desire to purchase at such rates in future." [71] An unusually pitiful case, which stimulated the Deputados to especial solicitude, was that of a certain Polish Jew, Isaac Ashkenazi, who had left a wife and seven children in his native country, and in obtaining whose release there was great difficulty (1685).[72] There was at this period a certain Isidoro in particular who used to buy Jewish slaves on speculation in the hopes of being able to squeeze a high ransom out of their coreligionists—utter usury, as the Deputados characterised it.[73]

Encouraged by the publication of a governmental order that Jewish slaves should not be sent to the galleys, an attempt was even made (backed by a few judicious gifts) to obtain an official edict fixing a fair price for Jewish slaves.[74] Apparently nothing came of it, for the complaints still continued without intermission. "Though it displeases us to see the miseries which those unhappy wretches suffer," wrote the Deputados in 1703, "we do not see how to contribute to their release with more than we have offered in the past, by reason of the calamitous times which are on us and the restriction of business. The masters should moderate the rigorous pretensions which they have for their ransom: for if they do not they will assuredly lose all, by reason of the inevitable death of the slaves as a result of their miseries." [75]

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[69] Letters 288–9. [70] Letter 308. [71] Letter 482.
[72] Letters 311–12. [73] Letter 132 (?) [74] Letter 132.
[75] Letter 494. ". . . spiacendoce sentire la Miserie che patiscono essi poveri miserabili, non vedendo modo de poterli sufragare per loro riscato con più

Such was liable to be the fate of any unfortunate Jew who fell into the hands of an unscrupulous master. Every effort was accordingly made to purchase prisoners direct from their captors before they had been put up at public auction, and an attempt was made at one time to obtain an order from the Inquisitor to secure this by law.[76] In the auctions the Consul was empowered (when there was money in hand) to pay up to sixty or seventy ducats without preliminary authorisation, or, at moments of special affluence, even more.[77] The deeds of sale bore the imprint of a lawless age: for example, that of Abraham de Mordecai Alvo, "white," of Smyrna, aged twenty-two, disposed of by his captors for a mere trifle "according to the usage of the corsairs" and bought by Garsin for the sum of 110 ducats. For every sale a notarial agreement and the licence of the Grand Master were necessary.[78] In 1677 six slaves belonging to the Treasurer were released together for 480 pieces of eight.[79] Sometimes, in spite of a governmental order to the contrary, the unhappy prisoners were sent to the galleys. Thus it occasionally happened that the Deputados had the opportunity of ransoming slaves from Malta in Venice itself. A case in point took place in 1704, when they appealed to the community of Leghorn for assistance in raising 2,000 reals for the release of three victims from pains "worse than those of death."[80]

Despite all efforts, a long period frequently elapsed, owing to lack of funds or the obduracy of the owners, before the slaves could be liberated. Thus a certain Isaac Esicrit, who was released for one hundred ducats in 1716, had been in captivity for five years,[81] and some cases even worse are on record. Moreover, fresh victims were continually being brought to the island to take the place of those who had been released. Accordingly there was frequently a veritable community of slaves at Malta, as distinct from an agglomeration of isolated individuals. In 1672, for example, there were no fewer than sixteen

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di quanto si è esebito in passato, riguardo li tempi calamitosi che corono, e il negotio così ristreto, doverebbero li loro padroni moderara la rigorosa preteza che hano per loro Riscato, poi quando non lo farano sicuram^te^ perderano il tuto con la morte che vi farano costì in quelle miserie. . . . " (to François Garsin, May 30, 1703).

[76] Letter 149.
[77] Letters 67, 132.
[78] Soave in *Corriere Israelitico*, xvii. 103.
[79] Letters 190 *seq.*
[80] Letters 495, 500.
[81] Soave, *ubi supra*, xvii. 102.

persons left unredeemed at one time, while the total number of captives brought in during that year was twenty-nine.[82] Perhaps the most remarkable feature in the whole pathetic story is the way in which these miserable captives found it possible to carry on their religious life under such atrocious circumstances.

The powers in being on the island were generally tolerant, as the ecclesiastical authorities generally were regarding the Jews. There was an old authorisation permitting the Jewish slaves to possess their cemetery and synagogue, thus recognising their rights for the practice of their religion.[83] Nevertheless, the actual owners frequently showed themselves less sympathetic, compelling their slaves to work on Sabbaths and holy days and deliberately forcing them into breaches of the Jewish tradition. The Deputados professed themselves unable to comprehend how they could do this, seeing that they had acquired corporeal dominion only over their acquisitions: and on March 3, 1673, they wrote to the community of Rome suggesting that some action should be taken there, at the centre of the Catholic faith and of ultimate authority over the Knights, to remedy this state of affairs.[84] It would seem that something was effected, though none too speedily: for in 1675 the Inquisitor of Malta himself issued an order prohibiting Jewish slaves from being compelled to work on their religious holidays.[85] Thus a certain minimum of observance was at length assured.

In consequence of this tolerant attitude on the one side and of the remarkable tenacity on the other, there came into existence what is assuredly the most remarkable Jewish community that has ever existed—one composed exclusively of slaves, with its numbers continually recruited by prisoners brought in from the high seas by sheer force, and depleted by the releases effected through the galleys, ransom, or death! The Deputados addressed them in Hebrew in full and stately form: "To all the congregation of the groaning and the captive which are in the city of Malta—may the Lord bring them out of anguish to enlargement. Amen, thus be His will!" [86]

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[82] Letters 35 *seqq.*

[83] Letter 63.

[84] Letters 62, 63.

[85] Letter 149.

[86] Letter 150, אל כל עדת הנאנחים והשבויים המקום יוציאם מצרה לרוחה אכי"ר. What follows is in Ladino (Spanish written in Hebrew characters). *Cf.* other communications addressed to the *Kaal de Malta*, Letters 70, 108.

A community, however small, required special provision, which could be supervised only by some person who had complete freedom of action and movement. There was no Jew, however, in the island who was endowed with this simple qualification. Who else was indicated as a substitute but the agent of the Venetian society ? It is a strange spectacle to see how this Catholic man of affairs looked after the religious welfare of these unfortunate creatures of a different faith; yet he worked with a conscientiousness and a fervour which would have been praiseworthy even in a Jew. On the occasion of the holy days it was he who distributed some small gratification amongst the slaves; sometimes without express instructions from his principals, who, he knew, would honour whatever he did.[87] It was the agent, too, who made provision for a modest place of worship. In the Bagnio itself, in which the slaves were cooped up, he hired a special room for the Jewish prisoners, which was fitted up as a synagogue.[88] It was used for this purpose at first only on festivals, but afterwards on the Sabbath as well. Originally the Jewish slaves all slept here also, but subsequently a couple of additional rooms were taken for their accommodation. The gaoler, or aguzzino, acted as caretaker, receiving regular payment for his services. In the autumn of 1673 the Deputados authorised Garsin to have the necessary repairs done to the doors of the synagogue, and, two years later, to the reading desk.[89] In the Bagnio, too, the slaves had their oven for baking unleavened bread for the Passover. This oven Garsin was ordered to provide in 1686, so that they were henceforth able to observe the feast according to the prescriptions of their religion.[90] In 1707, when the number of the slaves was small and regular religious worship momentarily ceased, one of the two rooms was given up.[91]

The central object in Jewish worship is the Scroll of the Law. There was a copy for the use of the slaves, originally sent without a

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[87] Letters 394 and *passim*.

[88] For a general description of the "Bagnio" see *Nouvelle Relation du Voyage et description exacte de l'isle de Malthe . . . par un gentilhomme françois* (Paris, 1679), pp. 129–130, where a few further details regarding the slaves may be found.

[89] Soave, *ubi supra*, xvii. 55; Letter 451.

[90] Letter 340. *Cf.* Letter 462 for the observance of the Passover in 1699.

[91] Letter 506.

doubt from Venice, though it was not unknown for one to find its way to the island with other booty. If the number of the slaves fell below the quorum of ten necessary for the full formalities of public worship, this was taken by the agent into his charge. When, however, their numbers were recruited and arrived again at the necessary minimum, he restored the Scroll to them and the synagogue was fully constituted. Thus, in 1696, when the last Jewish slave left at the moment on the island had died, the agent was given detailed instructions as to the care and preservation of the Scroll of the Law and other appurtenances,[92] and, when the younger Garsin entered upon his voluntary duties in 1707, he was recommended to take care of the Scroll and other Hebrew books until such time as they were needed.[93] But, whatever might have been hoped, the days of the congregation of slaves were not yet over, for there was a recrudescence of piracy. "Yesterday," wrote the Consul on May 6, 1713, "they came to take the Law; wishing from now onwards, being eleven in number, to say their Mass. I gave them also stuff to make the mantle: and they stand in need of a table, with the pulpit." [94] Besides these bare necessities, they went to the extravagance of having a perpetual lamp to burn in the synagogue, and bells with which to adorn the Scroll,[95] and they even had a curtain to go before the Ark.[96]

Another necessary adjunct of settled religious life was the cemetery, for the conditions under which the slaves existed in so hot a climate (Malta is legendarily notorious for its fever, as well as for its cats and its lace) made this requisite out of all proportion to their numbers. In 1674, without applying to headquarters for authorisation, Garsin paid for the burial of two poor Jews who had died in an English ship going to Constantinople.[97] This was, however, in unconsecrated ground: for a short time afterwards the slaves complained to the Deputados that they had no place in which to bury any of their number who should die. Accordingly on October 26, 1675, the agent was authorised to purchase a plot of ground for this purpose at a price not exceeding fifty piastres.[98] A couple of years later plague broke out on the island, and, since it was impossible to bury

[92] Letter 451.
[93] Letter 506.
[94] Soave, *ubi supra*, xvii. 81.
[95] Letters 37–8.
[96] Letter 506.
[97] Letter 102.
[98] Letter 149.

the dead in the ordinary cemetery, a special piece of ground had to be acquired as a plague pit, and kept for future occasions should they arise. Accordingly on March 17, 1677, Garsin concluded the purchase of a plot outside Vittoriosa for seventy-five ducats in the name of the Spanish community of Venice. Five slaves had already been buried in it in the previous week before the transaction was completed.[99] At the same time arrangements were made for surrounding the original cemetery with a wall. In spite of this, it was found that it was being treated as a private garden by some economically minded neighbour, and Filippo Antonio Crespi, the new Consul, urged the Deputados to find the title-deeds in order to vindicate their rights of possession.[100]

Even in the depths of their misery the slaves found occasion to indulge in the Jewish luxury of charity. A touching appeal was made on one occasion by two of them, both fathers of families, on behalf of one of their companions—Solomon ben Isaac Azich, of Leghorn, a youth of seventeen, who had been captured while on his way back from Smyrna. He was in the service of the Grand Master, being forced to carry intolerably heavy burdens and to work beyond the limits of his strength. The two older men urged that some special effort should be made on his behalf, without apparently thinking it necessary to mention their own plight.[101] Despite their miserable condition as far as the things of this world were concerned, the slaves somehow found the opportunity to translate their charitable feelings into action, not always well-directed. The case is on record of one unmitigated scoundrel, Isaiah Orefice, probably a common galley-slave, who was in the island in 1716, pretending to be a captive like the rest, and without doubt obtaining relief from the agent on that score. The tale he told was so piteous that the compassion of the other slaves was aroused. They assisted him accordingly to get away, not only by their entreaties to the agent but also by providing him with gifts from their own slender store of money. He rewarded their benevolence by taking with him the quilt and cloak belonging to one of them, Abraham Ajet, and stealing, in addition, the prayer-books from the synagogue.[102] Even more touching was the pawning by the slaves,

[99] Letter 192; Soave, *ubi supra*, xvii. 55.
[100] *Ibid.*
[101] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[102] *Ibid.*

in 1672, of the lamps and a few petty articles of silver which their synagogue boasted in order to assist in the ransoming of Moses Messini and Mordecai Maio, two of their brethren in distress.[103] The Deputados rated them roundly for this action, which might provide a deplorable precedent for the future, and ordered the Christian agent to redeem the articles from pawn. Nevertheless, there seemed to be an undercurrent of admiration in their rebuke.[104]

As was to be imagined from the circumstances of their capture, the slaves comprised all sorts and conditions of men. Though Malta disappears from the annals of Hebrew literature from the time of Abraham Abulafia, more than one Rabbi was, in later generations, brought to the island against his will. The most eminent of whom we have record, as well as one of the earliest, was Jacob leBeth Levi (Jacob, son of Israel, the Levite), a native of the Morea and translator of the Koran into Hebrew (from the Latin). Later he was Rabbi at Zante, where he died in 1634, leaving behind him a considerable body of *Responsa* as a monument of Talmudic prowess.[105] At an earlier stage in his career he was carried off, with the whole of his household and all his property, to the "den of lions and house of imprisonment" at Malta, his deliverance from which he regarded as a special manifestation of Providence.[106] But he can only have been one of many, for the Knights were no respecters of persons, and still less of Jewish scholarship. More than one of the victims redeemed by the Venetian society is referred to as Rabbi or Haham—for example, that Joseph Cohen Ashkenazi of Constantinople, who was redeemed at the close of the seventeenth century for 150 ducats.[107] Another was a certain Haham Samuel aben Mayor, who was purchased in Malta by a speculating Armenian and taken away by him to hawk through the communities on the mainland of Italy. It was possible to ransom him only a considerable time later, through the medium of the con-

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[103] Letters 37, 38. [104] *Ibid.*

[105] See *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vii. 33.

[106] *Cf.* his *Responsa*, Introduction: כי ברגע קטן ובשעה חדא הכני פצעני ומביעתו יבעתני שלן הייתי בביתי.....הביאני בבור לבאים ובתי כלאים אל עיר מלטה תש״א לולי ה׳ שהיה לנו.....אשר עזרנו ומעבדות לחרות הוציאנו.....

[107] Letters 255, 267. For another captured Rabbi, Isaac Moreno, of Belgrade, see *supra*.

gregation of Ferrara.[108] The "Emissaries of Mercy" on their way to collect alms for the four Holy Cities of Palestine from their brethren in the Diaspora were especially liable to interception at sea, their charitable mission being no protection in the eyes of the Knights. Thus we have the instance of an Emissary from Safed who was captured irregularly with nine other persons in a Venetian vessel in 1672.[109] In the fateful year 1666 a party of Rabbis from Jerusalem was captured while on their way to convey the glad tidings of the Messianic pretensions of Sabbatai Zevi, and their fate must have seemed to opponents of the pseudo-Messiah a punishment for their credulity.[110]

An interesting and very tragic figure appears amongst the slaves at Malta in the last decades of the seventeenth century. His name was Moses Azulai—no doubt a member of the famous Moroccan family of scholars and mystics, members of which had emigrated to Palestine (some inkling of his origin is given by the fact that a large part of the correspondence to him was written in Ladino). How he was brought to Malta it has not been possible to trace, though it was certainly anterior to the year 1671.[111] It seems that he must have had the good fortune to fall into the hands of a mild master, and there is some slight indication that he was engaged in trade on his own behalf.[112] Nothing seems to have been thought about his liberation. His preoccupations were not for himself, but for others, and for a prolonged period he acted as coadjutor to the worthy Garsin. He would report independently what fresh captives had been brought to the island,[113] what steps were being taken to release them, and who had been ransomed.[114] The Deputados, on their side, had perfect confidence in his disinterestedness, advising their agent to rely on him implicitly for the regulation of internal affairs. He seems to have been a man of some learning, corresponding occasionally in Hebrew and being unable to support

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[108] Letters 481, *seqq.*, 491.

[109] Letters 46 *seqq.* These Palestinian emissaries were not of course in danger only from one side. The case is on record of the adventurous Emmanuel Hay Ricchi, who was sold into slavery in Tripoli while on his way to Europe.

[110] Jacob Sasportas, קיצור ציצת נובל צבי, ed. Odessa, p. 4A.

[111] Letters 15, 16. But already at this period (1671) he seems to have been in the island for some time.

[112] Letters 15, 136.

[113] Letters 141, 156, 165.

[114] Letters 156, 226, 255.

his captivity without the solace of Jewish literature—assuredly a very characteristic touch! He is indeed first mentioned in connection with the despatch to the island of a copy of the *Midrash Tanhuma*;[115] he was probably the ringleader of the slaves who requisitioned a perpetual calendar (ספר עבורים),[116] and some time afterwards we find him requesting and obtaining another calendrical work, תקון ישכר.[117] A work of practical utility in another direction in that superstitious age which was sent to him was the פתרון חלומות, or Interpretation of Dreams, as well as the liturgical subsidiary, מעמדות, with the commentary which it so richly deserves.[118] At the same time he asked for fresh phylacteries.[119] His Rabbinical knowledge was at times turned to practical uses. Thus in 1673 he was asked to draw up a formal Bill of Divorce on behalf of David Maurogonato, one of his companions in distress, unless there were someone else on the island who could do it better.[120] In 1685 he was called upon to perform the same service for a disreputable fellow-captive named Joseph Zarfati, *alias* Maruli, of Smyrna, from whom a woman to whom he had been formally betrothed twelve years earlier demanded release.[121] From all of this, it would appear that he acted in a way as religious leader of the community during the period that he was on the island, and indeed it was owing to his insistency that the oven for unleavened

[115] Letter 15.

[116] Letters 118, 129. One of the first requisites of the slaves when the pathetic congregation was reconstituted in 1713 was a calendar. Soave, *ubi supra*, xvii. 81.

[117] Letters 299, 300.

[118] Letter 367.

[119] *Ibid.*

[120] Letter 70.

[121] Letters 312, 321. It was not to be wondered at if Bills of Divorce written under such conditions contained certain technical flaws: and the *Responsa* literature of the period contains several references to faulty documents of this nature which emanated from the island—almost certainly from prisoners. Thus in the *Responsa* of R. Hasdai Perahia, of Salonica, § cvii., the question is raised concerning a *Get* transmitted by David ben Samuel in 1668 (Asaf, *loc. cit.*, p. 70). In another case, of 1653, a compassionate prisoner released from Malta apparently acted as go-between "since there was no Rabbi on the island": but local Jewish scholarship was apparently inadequate even to copy accurately what he transmitted (Samuel b. Hayim Vital of Cairo, *Responsa*, שו״ת באר מים חיים, § xxii. Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 463). I owe my knowledge of this passage to Dr. Boaz Cohen, of New York. Mr. Herbert Loewe had the kindness to examine the MS. for me. A further casuistic discussion of the sort connected with Malta, with a highly romantic background, is contained in a MS. collection of *Responsa* of R. David Oppenheim, in the possession of Dr. Charles Duschinsky.

bread was provided.[122] When any of the slaves proved refractory (as, considering their misery, quite apart from their race, was no matter for surprise), it was he who was enjoined to restore discipline.[123]

The momentary change for the better that came about in the condition of the Jewish slaves in Malta at the beginning of the last decade of the eighteenth century does not seem to have been altogether grateful to Azulai. The maritime war in the Levant was not being carried on with much vigour. Victims were fewer. The slaves remaining on the island were released one by one. The calls on the Deputados at Venice became more rare, the total of the outgoing letters being reduced from a maximum of forty in 1673 to as few as two twenty years later. By the end of 1691 Azulai had only one companion left—a certain Moses Joseph, of Safed. He now began, as it would seem, to feel the solitude. After over twenty years of captivity, during which he had been in constant epistolary intercourse with those who had it in their power to change his condition, only now did he begin to importunate for his own release.[124] He was advanced in years, and had for a long time past given his services unstintingly, without any hope of recompense. Such a demand could certainly not be refused. The Deputados of Leghorn added forty reals to the fifty contributed by Venice; but, under such unusual circumstances, Garsin was instructed to go up to as much as one hundred and twenty. At the same time, so that the sole survivor should not be left in utter solitude, he was to enter into negotiations for his release as well.[125] In the latter case success was rapid, and the Palestinian prisoner sailed for freedom in a French ship going to Tripoli after 180 ducats had been expended on his behalf.[126] But with the unhappy Azulai, thus left in unqualified isolation, there was still some difficulty, for the anxiety of the Deputados increased the expectations of his owner. An additional contribution was elicited without much difficulty from Leghorn,[127] and Garsin was authorised to go up to as much as 150 reals, instead of the 120 previously fixed—a heavy price for so old a man. Success seemed at last assured. Instructions were actually given for the care of the communal property.

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[122] Letter 340. [123] Letter 281. [124] Letters 428 *seqq.*
[125] Letters 430–1. [126] Letters 435–9. [127] Letters 433–4.

Garsin was to retain the keys of the synagogue and the custodianship of the oven and burial ground; the Scroll of the Law and the books, with other ritual objects, were to be placed by Azulai in a sealed chest and entrusted into the agent's keeping until opportunity should offer for despatching it to Venice. For the expenses of his voyage Azulai was to receive a gift of five reals.[128] At last it seemed that his long sufferings were at an end (July 1694). But just as the Deputados at Venice were expecting to hear of his final release, they received instead the information of his death (under what circumstances is not recorded), after at least twenty-five years of captivity (April 1696).[129] The story is as tragic a one as even the chequered history of the slaves in Malta can tell.

Out of the horrors of slavery there was one easy method of escape. By the simple expedient of submitting to baptism, any Jewish slave would automatically have secured release. It is to the credit of the steadfastness of these miserable wretches that very few of them seized upon this easy way out of their sufferings. An exception was one Jacob Cardiel, of Tunis: but he was of a different stamp from the generality. When the ship on which he was sailing was captured, he fought, with the Moslem crew, to defend it. Fearing that as a consequence of this he would suffer special ill-treatment if his religion were discovered, he passed as a Mohammedan for the first fourteen months of his captivity. At the close of this period, realising perhaps that he had a better chance of release through the charity of his own people, he declared himself a Jew. The Deputados, informed of this, instructed their agent to withhold the usual gratifications from him until further enquiries had been made. Ultimately, although their suspicions were not altogether allayed, they ordered that he should be treated like the rest, and began to enquire about the possibilities of ransom. Seeing, however, that matters did not move with the expedition which he had hoped, Cardiel lost all patience and decided to take the shortest road out of his present troubles. After three years' captivity he became baptised—more, wrote the Christian agent, from desperation than from zeal.[130] Once a person had become converted, the Deputados

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[128] Letters 439–40. [129] Letter 451.
[130] Letters 509, 510; Soave, *loc. cit.*, p. 102.

naturally lost all interest in his fate. " As for the young woman from Coron whom you were to ransom," they wrote to their agent in 1688, " since she has passed to another religion, you are to remove her utterly from your mind." [131]

It was intensely characteristic of the Jew that human captives did not monopolise his attention. At the raid on Coron, during the Turco-Venetian war, the synagogue must have been sacked: for, besides the twenty-one Jews captured—mostly women and children—large numbers of books, with scrolls of the law and their trappings, were carried away to Malta amongst the spoil. The Deputados were careful to instruct their representative on the island to attempt to redeem these, as well as the victims of flesh and blood.[132] In 1699 Garsin gave a woman ten ducats for five Hebrew books, of the nature of which he had no idea, confident of the approval of his principals.[133] Rabbi Jacob leBeth Levi, a century before, was able to bring away with him from the island an ancient Scroll of the Law, to which he referred with the utmost respect: no doubt a redeemed captive like himself.[134]

How long this strange community of slaves continued its intermittent existence it is impossible to tell. With the growth of international peace and humanitarian ideas, the traffic must necessarily have decreased. Nevertheless, conditions were not fundamentally changed. In the Maltese codes as late as the close of the eighteenth century, detailed regulations for the conduct and position of slaves are laid down.[135] Slavery ceased at Malta only at the dawn of the nineteenth century, the slaves being set free on the overthrow of the Knights, and their release being subsequently confirmed officially on May 15, 1800.[136] The Jew, frequently a nomad or a merchant, must have re-

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[131] Letter 389 to François Garsin, March 26, 1688. " . . . La giovena procedente di Coron che riscatar dovevi havendo fatto passaggio ad altra religione deponarette ogni memoria in ciò . . . "

[132] *Ibid.*, 334. [133] *Ibid.*, 462.

[134] שו״ת ר׳ יעקב לבית לוי, § xxxvii.: מצאנו ראינו בספר תורה ישן נושן שהעלינו עמנו ממלטה תש״א.

[135] *Del Diritto Municipale di Malta*, 1784, Book V., cap. xv., and Book VII., cap. i.

[136] *Collezione di Bandi pubblicati dal Governo di Malta*, 1840, pp. 54–5. As late as the period of the French Revolution there were as many as 1,600 Moroccan

mained peculiarly subject to the depredations of the Knights as long as they lasted. The case is on record of the release by the *Deputados de Pidion Shevuim* at Venice of Daniel de Benjamin Silva and his wife Judith in 1752 for the sum of 200 ducats—probably in Malta.[137] But this can hardly have been an isolated case. For the traffic at this place, as far as the Jewish victims were concerned, was unabated. As late indeed as 1768 the community of London forwarded to Leghorn the sum of £80 to assist in ransoming a batch of no fewer than fourteen prisoners, then in captivity at Malta.[138] Hence it must be imagined that Jewish slaves figured in the island long after the hegemony of the Deputados of Venice had passed, and down perhaps to the period of the French Revolutionary Wars. By that time this unique phase of the history of the Jews in Malta had, however, yielded place to its successor.

## III

During all these centuries, from the Expulsion of 1492 to the extinction of the rule of the Knights of St. John in 1798, the Jews were not represented in Malta by the slaves alone. The Order was a semi-religious body, and it may be taken as a general rule that the Roman Church always tolerated the Jews, even though it did not invariably favour them. The Most Catholic sovereigns might expel the unhappy race from their dominions: yet the Holy See, though it could applaud their action, would not imitate it. Its satellites were naturally prone to follow in this respect. Hence it is not to be wondered at if the presentation of the island of Malta to the Knights ushered in a period of comparative toleration. Not indeed that a settled community was immediately established. It has always proved more easy to expel the Jews than to attract them back, and the little, impoverished island can have offered few inducements to them. Nevertheless a number of

slaves in Malta at one time, of whom 700 were redeemed by their compatriots for 200,000 piastres (D. E. H. L.*** *Bemerkungen über Sizilien und Malta*, Riga and Leipzig, 1793, pp. 141–3). The *Riscatto di Schiavi* formed an important item in the receipts of the Maltese exchequer down to the capture by the French, producing an average annual income of upwards of £1,500: *cf.* William Eton, *Authentic Materials for a History of the Principality of Malta*, pp. 51–4.

[137] Soave, *ubi supra*.

[138] Picciotto, *Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History*, p. 166.

merchants had occasion to visit Malta from time to time; and as early as 1593 regulations for their conduct were made.[1] The majority would have been Turkish subjects from the Levant: all would have been suspected—not altogether without reason—of a certain sympathy for the enemy of Christendom. The case is on record of three Jews—Samuel Mugnon (Munhão) and Moses Abdalif, of Jerusalem, with Samuel Cafsut of Monastir—who were arrested on the high seas in 1558, apparently on their way home to the Levant after a visit to Malta. They were brought back to the island and charged with conspiring with a certain Giovanni di Lorenzo di Lungo to the detriment of the Order and bearing treasonable correspondence on his behalf to Constantinople. A special tribunal was created to try the four—with what result may be imagined.[2] Under such circumstances it is not to be wondered at if a close surveillance was maintained upon the Jews if any visited the island on business.

To enter the island they had to obtain permission of the Grand Master.[3] Licence to enter was obtainable at the cost of one ducat on the first occasion, and four *tari* for each confirmation. This was not the only formality. They were not allowed outside the gates of Valletta, Vittoriosa, and Senglea: they were not permitted to put out to sea in a boat without the owner, to come near any fortified place, or to enter certain of the more important barracks. They had to take up their quarters in the public prison, in which they had to deposit their merchandise, and whither they were obliged to return every night to sleep. They were permitted to trade only in the market-place of Valletta. Before leaving the island they had to register at the Customs House. Besides this, they came under the ecclesiastical control, exercised by the Bishop Inquisitor as representing the Pope (an honour which was shared with booksellers and quacks[4]). The sums obtained from them for permission to enter the island went to the Captain of the Holy Office, in recompense for his arduous duties in maintaining surveillance over the Jews and seeing that they did not wander about the

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[1] Edict of Cardinal Vardala, Grand Master, *apud* Mifsud, p. 19.

[2] *Ibid.*, and Document II., p. 24.

[3] *Del Diritto Municipale di Malta* (1784) Book V., cap. ix., § xvi. "Nessun Infedele o Ebreo presuma sbarcare in questo Dominio senza Nostro Salvocondotto."

[4] See tariff of March 23, 1753, in *Archivum Melitense*, ii. 62.

territory without special permission. It was his duty, too, to see that they did not discard the Jewish badge which had to be worn at all times without exception. This now consisted of a piece of yellow cloth to be carried in the headdress by both men and women.[5] All the other disabilities in vogue in the Papal states were similarly enforced. Jews were forbidden to practise medicine, to work or to trade on Christian holidays, or to lend money at interest.[6] Conditions could not have been much more adverse.

In spite of all this, the right of the Jew to visit the island was recognised even at this epoch : and, so long as exclusion was not absolute, it was always possible to form the nucleus of a settled community. In Valletta itself (built late in the sixteenth century to commemorate the deliverance from the Turkish siege) one gateway was apparently named after the Jews who lived close by.[7] At the beginning of the eighteenth century Jews seem to have figured prominently in the economic life of the island : so much so that on February 25, 1726, it was ordered that a public loan-bank (monte di pietà) should be founded in order to dispense with their services.[8] At about the same period a certain Samuel Farfara, of Leghorn, was engaged in trade at Malta for some years together. Some of the slaves, set free on the island and lacking the opportunity or the desire to return to their homes, seem to have remained as free settlers in the spot to which they had been brought as captives, and the charitable confraternities on the mainland continued to take a benevolent interest in their lot. It was, apparently, on the basis of these freedmen that a proper Jewish community was reconstituted at Valletta. The *Deputados de Pidion Shevuim* of Leghorn purchased them a burial-ground in the suburb of Vittoriosa in 1784, as is still testified by an inscription to be read over the bricked-up doorway.[9] The city gate by which access is gained to

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[5] No mention of the Jews is, however, to be found in the correspondence and reports to Rome of the Inquisitor, Gualterotti, afterwards Archbishop of Mira, in British Museum MS. Add. 20587–9 (1739–1743). His interests seem to have been wholly confined to petty questions of precedence.

[6] Mifsud, pp. 19–20.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 18. This was known afterwards as the *Jews' Sally-Port.*

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[9] Professor H. P. Scicluna has obliged me with a copy of the inscription in question, which is to be found in the Strada Rinella, Calcara (Vittoriosa), and reads as follows :

this is known as the *Jews' Sally-Port*, while the roadway leading by the old governor's palace (where apparently they congregated) is still popularly called *It-triek ta Lhud* (Street of the Jews). [10]

It will have been noticed that no mention has been made thus far of the solitary link between the island of Malta and the Jewish people which figures in the popular imagination—Marlowe's play, *The Jew of Malta*. The plot is familiar—how one Barabas, a wealthy Jewish merchant, was mulcted of all his possessions in order to pay a tribute levied upon the island by the Turk, and in addition had his only daughter inveigled into Christianity. To avenge this, he poisons all the inmates of the nunnery into which she had been received, betrays the island to the Turkish army, and attempts to make an end of the latter also by means of an infernal machine, to which he himself ultimately falls victim. The play, which begins on quite a high plane, degenerates after the middle of the second act into the crudest melodrama : so much so as to make one suspect that the author, finding it inadvisable to continue his comparatively sympathetic treatment of the Jew, attempted to secure his effect by melodramatic exaggeration in the reverse direction. Of course the play has not the slightest historical foundation or verisimilitude. It has hitherto been usual to discount it principally on the grounds that no Jews were to be found in Malta at the period of which it treats. As we have seen, this is not in accordance with historic truth, although this fact does not save the play from being the merest exercise of the imagination. There is, however, one remarkable historical parallel, in which a Jew was closely connected with a Moslem attempt upon the island—though, indeed, it belongs to

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RECONDENDIS
GENTIS SUAE EXUVIIS
HEBRHŒORUM MANCIPIORUM
REDEMPTIO LIBURNIENSIS
CŒMETERIUM HOC AERE PROPRIO
COMPARAVIT ANNO MDCCLXXXIV

This inscription is of the greatest importance as proving the " servile " origin of the modern community. The present cemetery of the Maltese community is at the Marsa and dates from 1874. There is also a smaller burial-place attached to the English cemetery at " Ta Braxia," of which use was made at about the middle of last century. The assistance of Sir Moses Montefiore in procuring a new cemetery, the old one being nearly full, was obtained in 1827. (Lady Montefiore, *Private Journal of a visit to Egypt and Palestine*, p. 277.)

[10] Mifsud, p. 18.

a period some two centuries later than that of which Marlowe's play treats and diametrically reverses its action.

In the year 1749 there occurred at Malta the famous Turkish Plot. A certain Mustapha Pasha, of Rhodes, a Moslem prisoner of some consequence, endeavoured to gain possession of the island with the aid of the Turkish slaves, his compatriots and co-religionists. The plot was carefully organised and had every prospect of success. But five years before, at the time of the Grand Master Emmanuel Pinto, it happened that a number of Jews had sought refuge at Malta from the disorders in Northern Africa, and, to put an end to their miseries, had embraced Christianity.[11] One of these, as is to be imagined, was a certain neophyte by the name of Joseph (Antony) Cohen, who now kept a coffee-house in the neighbourhood of the prison at Valletta. Through his acquaintance with the tongue in which the conspiracy was hatched, knowledge of the plot came to his ears. He informed the Grand Master, and the island was saved. The hero of the occasion was rewarded with the gift of a house and an annuity of three hundred ducats by the Order, together with an additional two hundred from the municipality of the city : and his action was commemorated for future generations by a tablet affixed to the wall of his house.[12] Thus, after a lapse of nearly two hundred years, history made amends for fiction.

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[11] See *Medaglie Rappresentanti i più Gloriosi Avvenimenti del Magistero di . . . fra D. Emmanuele Pinto*, plate xiv. I owe my knowledge of this excessively rare work, of which no copy is accessible in the British Museum, to Dr. Boaz Cohen, of New York, who procured for me a photostat of the page in question. The accompanying medallion is purely conventional.

[12] To Professor Scicluna I am indebted for a photograph of the inscription in question, now preserved in the National Museum at Valletta. It runs :

D. O. M.
L'EM̃O E RM̃O SIG. GRAN MAESTRO
FR. EMANUELE PINTO
EL SUO SACRO CONSIGLIO
DONA
A GIUSEPPE ANTONIO COHEN NEOFITO
OLTRE VARJ PINGUI ASSEGNAMENTI
L'USO
DI QUESTA CASA SINO ALL'ULTIMO SUO
LEGITTIMO DISCENDENTE
PER AVER SCOVERTA LA CONGIURA DE SCHIAVI
L'ANNO 1749.

While the rule of the Knights continued, the existence of a settled Jewish community in Malta was an obvious anomaly. With the capture by the French, and the subsequent British occupation, conditions, however, changed. There is no greater tribute to English tolerance than the way in which Jewish communities have followed the flag throughout the world. This is especially so in the Mediterranean possessions. The case of Gibraltar—still, after all these years, almost the only important community in the Iberian Peninsula—will come readily to mind. Still more striking is the instance of Minorca, where, in the brief interlude of British rule in the eighteenth century, a prosperous Jewish community sprang up which vanished immediately after the reoccupation by the Spanish. Similarly in Malta, the Jews were assured of every possible liberty from the moment of the surrender to General Pigot in 1800. The importance of the island as a station for the Mediterranean fleet must have attracted a number of merchants (the case of one person who settled there about 1810 is on record).[13] The community received a formal constitution from General Maitland, who was Governor of Malta from 1813 to 1824.[14] At about this period it was already of sufficient importance to warrant a visit from a Palestinian Rabbi collecting funds for the Holy Land—one Joseph Mazliah (1821). The Jews whom he found there principally hailed from Tunis and the neighbourhood, which continued to recruit the community to a large degree.[15]

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For the Turkish Plot, see Accardi, *Mustafà Bassà di Rodi* (Naples, 1751); P. Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, i. 328–91 : *Relazione Storica della congiura de' schiavi Turchi di Malta* (Rome 1749).

[13] A. A. Correa, writing to the Board of Deputies of British Jews in 1840 (see *infra*), mentions that he has been resident on the island for thirty years.

[14] Lady Montefiore, *Private Journal of a Visit to Egypt and Palestine* (1844), p. 115.

[15] שו״ת ויאמר יצחק *apud* Asaf., *loc. cit.*, pp. 70, 71. The other Maltese Jews mentioned there were named Samuel ben Malca and Jacob Zarfati. In another volume of contemporary responsa, משכנות הרועים, mention is made of two Tunisian Jews resident at Malta (*ibid.*, p. 71).

Later on in the century there was an important case about the succession to a Jew of Susa named Fragi Pinhas, who went to Malta in 1864 and died shortly afterwards, leaving a fortune of about a million francs. A dispute arose as to whether the Jewish law of succession was to be applied, the decision being in the negative. Among other persons mentioned in connection with the case,

Another interesting visitor of the early nineteenth century was Benjamin Disraeli, who in 1830 scandalised or amused the officers of the garrison by his bizarre Andalusian jacket, white trousers, and rainbow girdle. He left for Palestine dressed as a Greek pirate—oblivious, no doubt, of the part which the pirates had played in the history of his people on the island so short a while before.[16]

It does not seem that the community attained any great numerical importance. Sir Moses Montefiore, on his way to Jerusalem in 1838, found there only six families: and though, with the aid of strangers, mostly from Morocco, they mustered thirty males in the synagogue in Strada Reale, Lady Montefiore graced the ladies' gallery alone.[17] It was no doubt partly as a consequence of this visit that Sir Moses' Damascus Mission in the following year was followed so anxiously upon the island.[18] In spite of its exiguous numbers, the little com-

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besides the deceased's seven sons and four daughters, is Joseph Moasi, one of the Rabbis of Susa then resident at Malta, who endeavoured to arbitrate. Several other Maltese Jews are also mentioned. (*Sommario di documenti—dottrinali—e pareri in causa Governo di Tunisi e Samama*, Florence, 1879, § 77, pp. 470–504.)

[16] Moneypenny, *Life of Lord Beaconsfield*, i. 59.

[17] Lady Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 184. The number of families had increased since 1827.

[18] See letter of A. A. Correa in archives of the Board of Deputies (MS. Minutes of Board of Deputies of British Jews, vol. iv. pp. 36–7):

"*To the President of the Board of Deputies of the British Jews, &c.*

"Worthy Sir,—Deem it not presumption in me when I declare in addressing you, that independent of my long residence here (30 years) I am a British Jew, and equally interested with yourselves in the Mission of Sir Moses Montefiore, and its victory over calumny bigotry and superstition.

"The Maltese Editors publish every report to our disadvantage, and nothing in our favor, and I have always answered their attacks as the local Journals can prove. Nay I have translated my articles myself and forwarded them in manuscript to my friends and Jewish Brethren in Corfu Barbary and the Levant. What I am anxious [about] is a translation into the Italian language of the meeting and speeches at the Mansion House and other favorable articles which have appeared favorable to us in the English Journals for the purpose of distributing them among our brethren in those parts, to console them and convince them of the friendship of the English Nation the cost of printing a hundred or so would not I conceive be very heavy, and if I am favored with the distribution in many cases I may obtain payment.

"I presume your Board will obtain the first information from Sir Moses

munity was apparently willing to go to some sacrifice to obtain spiritual guidance: for it was on his way to Malta in 1852 that Rabbi Solomon Hazan of Alexandria (author of the bibliographical dictionary, *haMaalot liShelomoh*) died in 1852, and his body was brought thither for burial.[19]

The importance of the island increased very considerably with the opening of the Suez Canal. It is to be imagined that it was this which brought about the very considerable increase in the Jewish population in the next couple of decades. In 1892 the Jewish population of the island was authoritatively estimated at 120—the majority, no doubt, immigrants from the Levant and the adjacent coast of Africa. Unhappily, there followed at their heels that spectre which has dogged the Jew throughout the Middle Ages and after—the infamous Blood Libel. It was shortly after the notorious affair of Corfu, which had inflamed religious passions and revived old superstitions in the Mediterranean. Though the British Government was tolerant, the attitude of the general population was far from favourable. At Malta the ground was well prepared, as half a century before at the time of the Damascus affair the local press had displayed an almost criminal credulity.[20] No specific accusation was indeed made on the present occasion, but there was a general arraignment which was perhaps worse. In November 1892 a pamphlet appeared in the Maltese language (the nearest akin to Hebrew of any spoken in Europe to-day!) entitled *The Blood of Catholics shed by Jews*. It was graced with the seal of the

Montefiore of his proceedings, and his ultimate success which I pray for. May I crave at the hands of your Secretary brief accounts thereof?

"I have the honor to be

"Worthy Sir

"Your humble Servant,

"(*Signed*) A. A. CORREA.

"Malta, 6*th August*, 1840."

[19] *haMaalot liShelomoh*, p. 113A.

[20] Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore, ii. 64. Further references to visits to Malta on the way to or from the Holy Land are scattered about this work *passim*. Another early nineteenth-century account of the Maltese community may be found in Margoliouth, *Mission to the Jews*, and in other conversionist literature of the period. A concise description may be found in *A Narrative of a Mission of Enquiry to the Jews from the Church of Scotland in 1839*, p. 36: 'In Malta there are very few Jews, and these few move from place to place; not many have wealth, and most of them are wretchedly poor.'

Archiepiscopal Court, and repeated in the worst possible form the old infamies. It alleged that the Jews made a regular practice of ritual murder in order to obtain Christian blood for use in making the unleavened bread for Passover and for other purposes, and urged the general population to keep a close guard over their children at the approach of that festival. The police spontaneously prohibited the public sale of the pamphlet. Nevertheless, it was thought by the local Jews that the consequences of a general accusation made under such authoritative auspices might be of the gravest. Attack, or even massacre, might ultimately result. They appealed accordingly to London, to the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Hermann Adler, who immediately approached Cardinal Vaughan, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster. Realising the gravity of the case, the latter made representations to the Archbishop of Malta, and succeeded in obtaining the withdrawal of the official sanction from the pamphlet. At the same time Mr. Arthur Cohen, K.C., President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, appealed to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Ripon, who at once telegraphed instructions to the governor of Malta to give every possible protection to the Jews on the island. In the following February, in view of the approach of Passover, when the question might become acute, a request was made for special precautions to be taken. In consequence of this warning the Board of Deputies afterwards appointed a special sub-committee to report upon the general question so as to anticipate and cope with any similar condition which might arise in the future. Thus the festival passed off without any further untoward occurrence.[21]

From this point, however, there seems to have been some falling off in the numbers of the community, due perhaps in the main to that economic phenomenon which has driven the Jews throughout the world more and more into the larger centres of population during the course of the last century. By 1904 their number had been halved, not totalling more than sixty persons—a figure which has since been more or less maintained.[22] During the war of 1914–1918, indeed, bygone history

[21] MS. Minutes of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, vol. xiii. 185–6, 194, 202–4, 210–1. See also C. H. L. Emanuel's anniversary volume, *A Century and a Half of Jewish History*, p. 133.

[22] See figures in *The Jewish Year Book*.

repeated itself: for the exiguous numbers of the congregation were immensely recruited by an influx of Jewish prisoners of war—mostly Sephardim from Turkey and Bulgaria—who already in 1916 totalled some 150. But with peace, figures came down to much their previous level. Owing to a munificent benefaction, however, it is possible to continue to maintain the synagogue with its minister, and to hold regular services for the half-dozen families still left on the island.[23] Their numbers are small, but nevertheless they are heirs to an ancient and romantic tradition, stretching back perhaps to the days when the Temple yet stood in Jerusalem. A history which has seen so much cannot be considered, despite momentary decay, as being at an end.

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[23] For a fanciful account of present-day conditions in Malta, see *A Minyan in an Island* in *The Menorah Journal* for November 1927. *Cf.* also Nahum Slousch, באיי הים, pp. 46–66.