I

TENTH- AND ELEVENTH-CENTURY

BACKGROUND

During the tenth and eleventh centuries northern France slowly rose from its torpor. Population increased, the economy developed, and cities grew. This progress contributed to—and benefited from—the establishment of more effective political units. The dukes and counts of northern France carved out for themselves ever larger territories and began to control their domains with increasing authority. The most powerful of these magnates, William of Normandy, was able, during the 1060's, to muster sufficient force to conquer for himself a kingdom across the English Channel. Unobtrusively the king of France, overshadowed often by his mighty vassals, was subduing the Île-de-France and bending it to his will, slowly laying the groundwork for the sudden expansion of royal power that materialized at the end of the twelfth century.¹

The revival of trade and of urban centers must have vitally affected the Jews of northern France; however, evidence from this period is sparse. Documentary records, generally meager for this early age, shed no light whatsoever on the role and position of the Jews. The only non-Jewish materials available are the random observations of churchmen, in some instances enlightening, in others misleading. Jewish sources likewise are slim, consisting of a few brief chronicles, a substantial number of rabbinic responsa, and commentaries on the classics of Biblical and Talmudic literature. While the paucity of evidence precludes a detailed reconstruction of Jewish history during this period, enough remains to sketch in outline the condition of northern French Jewry prior to the First Crusade.

A precise geography of pre-Crusade northern French Jewry is impossible. There are, however, a number of locales for which Jewish settlement is attested: Auxerre, Blois, Châlons-sur-Marne, Le Mans, Orléans, Paris, Reims, Rouen, Sens, Troyes. These are major urban centers, all


Evidence for these Jewish settlements can be found inter alia in the following: for Auxerre, see Agus, Urban Civilization, vol. 1, p. 174; for Blois, Berliner, Ozar Tov, p. 49, and Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, p. 11; for Châlons-sur-Marne, Agus, Urban Civilization, vol. 1, p. 174 (Châlons-sur-Marne seems more plausible than Chalon-sur-Saône); for Le Mans, Berliner, Ozar Tov, p. 49, and Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, p. 11 (for the identification with Le Mans, see Chazan, "The Persecution of 992"); for Orléans, Raoul Glaber, Les cinq livres de ses histoires
the seats of dioceses. Random evidence indicates Jewish presence in smaller towns as well. Thus, in the incident of 992, the villain, a convert from Judaism to Christianity, moved from Blois to Le Mans, visiting (and duping) a number of Jewish communities in western France along the way. Likewise the so-called Rashi ordinance, which dealt with taxation procedures in the Jewry of Troyes, reflects Jewish settlement in smaller towns. The ordinance was enacted by a major Jewish community surrounded by smaller satellites: “We the inhabitants of Troyes, along with the communities in its environs...” By 1096 the Jews had begun to spread beyond the confines of the major cities of northern France.

Widespread insecurity had destroyed the centralized authority of the Carolingians and had brought to power the feudal barony of northern France. Endangered French society had reconstructed itself through a network of immediate personal ties; the unity embodied in Carolingian rule gave way to a host of localized principalities. The Jews, as perhaps the most exposed element in this society, had the deepest need for the protection that only these magnates could offer. They were thus cast into permanent dependence upon a plethora of seigneurs, ranging from king to petty noble.

It is difficult to trace the implications of this dependence in the pre-Crusade period. The political status of northern French Jewry was never specified in comprehensive charters, as was the case in Germany. It is only with the passage of time and the proliferation of records that a detailed picture of Jewish political circumstances emerges. In general it is obvious that even in this early period the political authorities were responsible for basic Jewish security. This included both protection of Jewish life and property and judicial jurisdiction over the Jews. In 992, when a serious charge was leveled at the Jews of Le Mans, the count not only constituted the court before which the Jews were to be tried; he in fact stipulated the procedure to be utilized. It is also possible that even at this early stage governmental support for the Jews included aid in Jewish business affairs. Detailed information on this comes only in the twelfth century, however.


6 Berliner, Ozar Tov, p. 49; Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, p. 11.

7 Louis Finkelstein, Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages (New York, 1924), p. 149.

8 A great deal has been written concerning the breakdown of Carolingian government and the development of new societal bonds. Perhaps the most useful treatment for our purposes is Marc Bloch, Feudal Society, trans. L. A. Manyon (Chicago, 1961).

Willingness to extend to the Jews protection and aid was contingent, of course, on significant advantage to be derived from these Jews. Governmental authorities anticipated two major benefits from Jewish presence: general stimulation of trade and urban life and, more tangible, the immediate profit to be realized from taxation. Tax records from the early period no longer exist, and information in the Jewish sources is fragmentary. There can be little doubt, however, that the flow of income from this taxation was the major factor in the protective stance taken by the barony of northern France.\(^{10}\)

The dangers inherent in this alliance with the ruling class were manifested early. While the authorities were relatively successful in protecting the Jews from others, there was no power that could effectively interpose itself between the Jews and their protectors. Only two incidents of any proportion mar the calm of Jewish life in northern France prior to 1096; in both cases it was rulers with unrestricted power over the Jews who were responsible for the persecutions.

The first crisis took place in 992 in the city of Le Mans. A convert from Judaism, one Sephok b. Esther, after earlier clashes with the Jews of Le Mans, deposited a waxen image in the synagogue ark and then unearthed it in the presence of the count of Maine, Hugh III, claiming that the Jews pierced the image regularly in hopes of destroying the count. In the face of adamant Jewish denials, Hugh of Maine ordered the Jews to be tried by combat with their accuser. The chronicle breaks off at this point, with the Jewish community seemingly on the brink of catastrophe. From the opening remarks of the communal letter which describes the incident, it is obvious that the community emerged unscathed. How this came about is unknown. Perfectly clear, however, is the danger stemming from the Jewish community’s total reliance on the will of the governing authorities.\(^{11}\)

The second major incident was far more serious, both in scope and in consequences. According to a variety of extant sources, the years between 1007 and 1012 saw a series of edicts across northern Europe, posing to the Jews the alternatives of conversion to Christianity and expulsion or, on occasion, death. Most of the Jews seem to have chosen expulsion. In some cases, however, there was loss of life, the first instances of that readiness for martyrdom which became a significant characteristic of Ashkenazic Jewry. Although the factors in this perse-

\(^{10}\) The Jewish sources were concerned primarily with the internal issues of Jewish community affairs, particularly the apportionment and collection of taxation. For later information on taxation of the Jews, see below.

\(^{11}\) Berliner, Ozar Tov, pp. 49-52; Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, pp. 11-15; Chazan, “The Persecution of 992.”
cution were of a religious nature, primarily a concern with the spread of heresy in northern Europe, the decision to convert or expel the Jews could only be made by those feudal lords who controlled Jewish fate—once more an important index of the potential dangers inhering in Jewish political status.\footnote{Chazan, “1007-1012: Initial Crisis.”} While the local lord exercised effective power over the Jews of his domain, there were other forces striving to make their influence felt. Chief among these was the Church. In some cases, churchmen were themselves feudal lords holding direct rights over Jews. Such overt control, however, was not so prominent in northern France as it was elsewhere.\footnote{Note, for example, the extensive political power exercised by the bishops of Germany over the Jewish communities of that area.} The normal channels of Church influence were twofold. The first was the Church’s strong moral pressure on the barony. Clerics close to the feudal dignitaries would utilize this intimacy to further their views on the Jews. Thus, for example, in the 992 incident an anonymous churchman strongly bolstered the anti-Jewish animus by his inflammatory speech to the count of Maine.\footnote{Berliner, \textit{Oz\'ar Tov}, p. 52; Habermann, \textit{Sefer Gezerot}, p. 15.} A more circuitous and less effective mode of influence was through the masses. This involved specifying the Jewish behavior which was unacceptable to the Church and threatening excommunication of those Christians having contact with recalcitrant Jews. According to Raoul Glaber, part of the early-eleventh-century program to eliminate Judaism entirely from sections of northern France was abetted by an episcopal decree outlawing all contact with Jews.\footnote{Glaber, \textit{Les cinq livres de ses histoires}, p. 72.} The major problem with such boycotts was the difficulty of enforcement.

From the point of view of the Jews, ecclesiastical influence could be either beneficial or baneful. In the instance cited, the cleric of Le Mans much inflamed anti-Jewish passions. On the other hand, it was the awareness of potential Church protection that led a Jew of Rouen, Jacob b. Yekutiel, to deny the right of Richard II of Normandy forcibly to convert the Jews: “You lack the necessary jurisdiction over the Jews to force them from their faith or to harm them. This can only be done by the pope at Rome.”\footnote{Berliner, \textit{Oz\'ar Tov}, p. 47; Habermann, \textit{Sefer Gezerot}, p. 20.} The claim of Jacob was not a negation of the feudal rights of Richard over the Jews of Normandy; it was an assertion that the program undertaken ostensibly in the name of the Christian faith was in fact a perversion of Christian principles and had
to be brought before the highest ecclesiastical officials for sanction or annulment. According to the Hebrew account, Jacob proceeded to Rome, pleaded his case, and secured a papal decree halting the program of forced conversion.17

At this juncture the king exercised no special regalian rights over the Jews. He did, of course, possess normal baronial jurisdiction over the Jews of his own domain. Beyond this, he could on occasion exercise his prerogative as suzerain. It was on this basis that Robert the Pious intervened in the affairs of the county of Sens, deposing Count Raynaud on charges of Judaizing.18 In the incident of 1007–1012, the king exhibited strong moral leadership in the campaign of forced conversion. While the Hebrew chronicle emphasizes the king’s central role in the affair, it also underscores the necessity of agreement by his vassals.

Then the king and queen took counsel with his officers and his vassals throughout the limits of his kingdom. They charged: “There is one people dispersed throughout the various principalties which does not obey us. . . .” Then there was perfect agreement between the king and his officers, and they concurred on this plan.19

Thus the king could suggest action; its execution, however, depended on the consent and the support of the local authorities.

Yet another potential influence on the destiny of the Jews was the municipality and its burghers. In an early stage of development at this point, its lack of authority over the Jews was already manifest. For the Jews, this powerlessness was a boon. If to the princes the Jews promised economic advantage, to the burghers they offered primarily competition. It was all to the Jews’ advantage to be removed from the jurisdiction of the growing communes. Yet this removal added political animosity to the religious and economic antipathies already harbored by the townsmen towards the Jews.

During this early period, the populace at large does not appear as a major instigating force in anti-Jewish activity. This was, to be sure, an epoch of substantial violence, and the Jews felt this lawlessness on occasion. The chronicle of 992 mentions in passing economic competition between the renegade Sehok and a member of the Jewish community. This rivalry led eventually to assassination of the Jew by hired

18 Glaber, Les cinq livres de ses histoires, pp. 69–71; Bernhard Blumenkranz has raised doubts about the dating and the authenticity of this incident in Les auteurs chrétiens latins du moyen âge sur les juifs et le judaïsme (Paris, 1963), p. 258, n. 7.
19 Berliner, Oẓar Tov, p. 46; Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, p. 19.
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killers from Blois. The responsa literature reflects the same instability. There is, for example, an interesting responsum dealing with Jewish merchants captured and held for ransom. More striking, however, is the frequency with which governmental oppressions such as those of 992 and 1007–1012 were accompanied by outbursts of popular antipathy. This is attested by the Hebrew chronicle for 992 and by a number of the sources for 1007–1012. The breakdown of official protection allowed the overt expression of that popular hatred normally suppressed by the authorities.

The Jews of northern France were by the eleventh century already supporting themselves primarily by commerce, and, as the century progressed, this led them increasingly into moneymaking. The reliance on commerce and usury is reflected in a most interesting responsum from the early eleventh century. The community had “levied on every man and woman, while under the ban, a fixed amount per pound of value of his or her money, merchandise, and other saleable possessions”; trade and banking were obviously primary. Despite the ordinance’s orientation towards taxation of merchandise and money, the community attempted to levy taxes on a local Jewess’s vineyard, demanding a portion of the value of both the land and its produce. The terms in which the issue was debated are revealing:

They [the community] claimed that vineyards were in the same category as the capital of a loan, while the harvested crop was equivalent to the interest. One derived no benefit from the vineyard itself, nor from the capital of the loan, during the first half year or year of its investment. Since they paid taxes from both the capital and the interest of their money investments, from their merchandise as well as from its profit, they held that L should do likewise. L, on her part, pointed out that a vineyard could not be compared to the capital of a loan, nor even to merchandise. Thus they argued back and forth.

20 Berliner, Ozar Tov, p. 50; Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, p. 12.
22 For 992, see Berliner, Ozar Tov, p. 52; Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, p. 15. For 1007–1012, see especially Berliner, Ozar Tov, p. 47; Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, pp. 19–20; and Raoul Glaber, Les cinq livres de ses histoires, p. 72.
24 Ibid., p. 439. The translation is somewhat free. Agus notes the primacy of commerce in his comments on this responsum; compare his The Heroic Age of Franco-German Jewry, pp. 101–2.
What is plainly assumed by both sides in the dispute is the centrality of wares and capital in communal taxation. The reply of R. Joseph Bon Fils agreed with the position that only merchandise, money, and the profits from both are taxable.

The economic reliance on commerce and moneylending emerges also from the famous ordinance of Rashi, dating from the end of the eleventh century.

We, the inhabitants of Troyes, along with the communities in its environs, have ordained—under threat of excommunication—upon every man and woman living here that they be forbidden to remove themselves from the yoke of communal responsibility.... Each one shall give per pound that which is enjoined by the members of the community, as has been practiced since the very day of its founding. We have likewise received from our predecessors the practice of paying on all possessions, except household items, houses, vineyards, and fields.25

A community which exempts “household items, houses, vineyards, and fields” from taxation is obviously heavily involved in mercantile pursuits.

Jewish commerce was probably largely local. As noted, evidence for settlement shows the Jews primarily in major urban centers. A number of responsa, however, indicate Jews traveling through northern France, trading at the fairs of this period. Insecurity made such travel hazardous on occasion; Jewish traders were seized and their goods confiscated.26 Sometimes the inherent dangers of commerce were magnified by involvement in shady dealings. An early–eleventh-century responsum deals with the legal complications arising from the disappearance and presumed death of an unscrupulous Jewish merchant. The questionable practices, which probably led to his violent demise, are described as follows:

A was accustomed to travel to many places and to many towns situated within a day or two of his residence. He would sell to and buy from the overlords of these towns, his regular clientele. Whenever they were short of cash, he would sell to them on credit, against pledges of gold or silver, or exchange his merchandise for cattle (or horses) which they had robbed from their enemies. These cattle he would accept at a low price, bring them home and sell them for a much higher price. His activities aroused the anger and hatred of the

plundered villagers, and of their feudal lords, who would say: "This Jew, by the very fact that he is always ready to buy looted goods, entices our enemies to attack and plunder us." Moreover, occasionally the overlords quarrelled with him on account of the pledges which A would eventually sell and because of the high interest he charged.  

The normal hazards of eleventh-century trade were here much enhanced.

The same responsum reveals the very fluid transition which many Jews made from commerce to lending. When his customers lacked the necessary cash at hand to make their purchases, the Jewish merchant would extend credit. In fact, there is an indication of the mechanism utilized for safeguarding this investment. The debtors gained the necessary credit by depositing pledges, which were held as security for repayment of the obligation. In case of eventual nonpayment, these pledged objects could be sold. No litigation or third party was needed, and the creditor was amply protected from the moment that the loan was extended. Safeguarding loans through retention of a pledge is, of course, the simplest expedient available, and it was probably the most common method used during this period.

There are, nonetheless, fragmentary signs of more sophisticated arrangements. A responsum of Rashi deals with a dispute between a widow and her brother-in-law concerning gifts allegedly given to the widow and her deceased husband by his parents. Chief among these gifts was "the tithe collectible from a certain village, which tithe had been pledged with L and J [the parents] for a loan of seven rotl. L and J thus empowered R and A to collect the produce of that tithe and the principal of the loan in the event the original owner of the tithe should come to repay the loan and redeem his pledge." While this arrangement is also designated a pledge (mashkon), it is quite different from the pledges indicated earlier. The former were physical objects which were deposited at the time of the loan. When the debt was repaid, the pawn was returned; if the borrower defaulted, it would be kept or sold. In the case of the tithe, however, it was not a physical object that changed hands; it was a right. The difference in practical terms was twofold. First, there was constant revenue; the lender collected regular

27 Ibid., p. 99.
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income, which was probably seen as the interest on the loan. More important, this was an arrangement that involved more than simply a creditor and a debtor; the implicit aid of a governmental agency was necessary. The creditor did not physically control the pledge; hence, should contention arise, he had to have the certainty of powerful support. Lending of the kind revealed in the responsum of Rashi is far more complex and generally more lucrative; it had as its result the further tightening of the crucial bond between Jew and baron. As Jews turned increasingly towards this kind of business operation, they began to depend on their overlords not only for physical protection but for buttressing their financial investments as well. Prior to the First Crusade this more complex method of lending may have remained rather uncommon. It was, however, destined to play an increasingly important role in Jewish economic life.

The aspect of pre-Crusade Jewish life that has attracted the most scholarly attention has been its communal organization. The Jewish communities of northern France were small, with a high level of internal cohesion and a broad range of activities. Yitzhak Baer has delineated three major functions in this community: the preservation of satisfactory relations with the ruling powers, the securing of internal discipline and order, and the establishment of necessary internal economic limitations and controls.

The alliance fashioned between the Jews and the barony was fueled by the tangible advantages realized by the feudal magnates. The most immediate expression of this was taxation. Collection of taxes was certainly one of the major functions assumed by the communal agencies. The responsum specifying those holdings open to taxation indicates that the purpose of the levy was "to collect the king's tax."

The methods for apportioning taxation were well-established and reflect the cohesiveness of the community. One method was that indicated in the above-noted responsum. This involved levying "on every man and woman, while under the ban, a fixed amount per pound of value of his or her money, merchandise, and other saleable possessions." This system depended for its effectiveness upon honest evalu-


ATION, BY EACH MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY, OF HIS POSSESSIONS. THE LIKELIHOOD OF SUCH HONESTY WAS ENHANCED BY THE RELIGIOUS SANCTIONS MENTIONED AND BY THE CLO森NESS OF A SMALL COMMUNITY, WHERE THE TEMPTATION TO UNDEREVALUE WOULD BE TEMPERED BY THE DIFFICULTY OF CONCEALING THE TRUTH. OCCASIONALLY, HOWEVER, THIS ARRANGEMENT BROKE DOWN. R. JOSEPH BON FILS WAS ASKED TO RESOLVE A COMPLICATED ISSUE THAT BEGAN WITH THE FOLLOWING CIRCUMSTANCE:


THE ROLE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AS A LIAISON BETWEEN THE JEWS AND THE RULING AUTHORITIES WAS NOT EXHAUSTED BY THE COLLECTION OF TAXES. ON OCCASION THE ORGANIZED COMMUNITY HAD TO MAKE REPRESENTATION BEFORE THE AUTHORITIES ON MATTERS AFFECTING THE SECURITY OF THE JEWS. Thus, in 992, when faced with the danger of trial by combat, the Jewish community made vehement protestations before the count of Maine. They appealed to precedent, on the one hand, and offered substantial material inducements, on the other.35 while in this instance there was large-scale community response, in periods of crisis a prominent individual could take the initiative, thrusting himself to the fore as the community’s spokesman. it was in this manner that Jacob b. yekutiel ventured to step forth before the duke of Normandy and ultimately before the pope himself.36

IN A COMMUNITY DESPERATELY ANXIOUS TO PRESERVE ITS INSULATION FROM THE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY WITHIN WHOSE BOUNDARIES IT LIVED AND TO ACHIEVE A MEASURE OF DISTANCE FROM EVEN THE MORE FAVORABLY-DISPOSED FEUDAL AUTHORITIES, THERE WAS AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR MAINTAINING INNER DISCIPLINE. WHILE THE SMALL SIZE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTED TO COHESIVENESS, CLOSE LIVING COULD ON OCCASION PRODUCE SHARP CONFLICTS BETWEEN MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY. IN THE FACE OF SUCH CONFLICT, THE COMMUNITY MARSHALEd ITS FORCES AND ORDAINED LIMITATIONS ON INTRACOMMUNAL STRIFE. THE COMMUNITY’S GOAL IN SUCH CASES WAS THE PRESERVATION OF PEACE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY, WITHOUT THE INTERVENTION OF OUTSIDE POWERS.

34ibid., p. 466.
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The economic outlets available to the Jews were not extensive. For this reason the community had to exercise significant control in the area of economics also. The two major thrusts of communal limitation were the granting of exclusive commercial privileges and the restriction of the right to settle. The former usually involved business dealings with important secular lords or ecclesiastical institutions. From the slim evidence available, it seems that the arrangement was not everywhere operative and that, even where the prerogative of the community to give such privileges was recognized, the rights of exclusive trade were not widely granted.\(^\text{37}\) Restriction of settlement was directly related to the economic situation of the Jews. The small towns of northern France could absorb only so many Jewish traders and moneylenders. Overpopulation would simply force the available income of the community below the subsistence level. Again it must be noted, however, that the right of the community to declare a total or even a partial ban on new settlement was far from universally recognized.\(^\text{38}\)

To the three major functions of the Jewish community delineated by Baer at least a fourth must be added. The Jewish community of necessity had to supply certain essential religious and social services to its membership. The centrality of the synagogue in the Jewish community of this period is undisputed. It was far more than a center of worship, serving as an educational and general communal center as well. Details of Jewish schooling at the time are almost nonexistent. The literacy demanded by the business pursuits of the Jews and the already high level of cultural achievement indicate a successful educational system. Within the medieval municipality there were of course no "neutral" social welfare agencies; such facilities as did exist were Church institutions and, as such, closed to the Jews; thus the Jews had to provide for their own indigent, ill, and unfortunate. The needs of the local community were often augmented by the requirements of Jews whose business took them from town to town. In the case of the central figure in the Le Mans letter, as he proceeded through the Jewish communities of northwestern France, the Jews "supported him, as is their custom, in every town to which he came."\(^\text{39}\) Perhaps the most striking evidence of such concern is revealed in the following responsum:

Jews of Rheims, while on their way to the fair of Troyes, were attacked, plundered, and taken captive by "an adversary and an

\(^{37}\) See Agus, *The Heroic Age of Franco-German Jewry*, pp. 79–86.


enemy.” The charitable Jews of Troyes risked their own lives, (negotiated with the enemy,) and agreed to a redemption price of thirty pounds. The greater part of the ransom money was paid by the captives themselves; while in order to raise the remainder, the community of Troyes levied a tax of one solidus per pound on themselves, as well as on the neighboring communities of Sens and Auxerre, and on the Jews of Chalon-sur-Saone.\textsuperscript{40}

The locus of power in the Jewish community was the community membership itself. While the governing authorities benefited from the ability of the community to control its own affairs, particularly in the area of taxation, there was as yet no strong drive for more direct involvement in Jewish communal affairs or for more extensive exploitation of this useful and cohesive group. As noted, the community, for its part, was anxious to minimize outside interference.

The rhetoric of community enactments generally emphasized unanimous decisionmaking by the entire local Jewry: “The community of Troyes levied a tax. . . .”; “the townspeople levied on every man and woman. . . .”; “the community . . . heard about it and solemnly pronounced the ban. . . .”\textsuperscript{41} There was, in fact, even question as to the right of the majority to exercise its will over the minority.\textsuperscript{42}

At the same time, however, certain elements in the community did command special authority. Leadership was exercised by significant scholarly figures, such as Rashi, or by men of wealth and standing, such as Jacob b. Yekutiel. An interesting responsum indicates a more general tendency towards control by a segment of the community. In a conflict concerning the responsibility of individuals to accept the decisions of the majority, the following question was asked:

> We are a small community. The humble members among us have always abided by the leadership of our eminent members, dutifully obeyed their decrees, and never protested against their ordinances. Now, when we are about to enact a decree, must we ask each individual member whether or not he is in agreement with it?\textsuperscript{43}

Even at this early point a leadership class does seem to have emerged, although it certainly lacked the direct governmental support and the recognized religious authority that would later develop.

\textsuperscript{40} Agus, \textit{Urban Civilization}, vol. 1, p. 174. We have suggested earlier that Châlons-sur-Marne is more likely.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., vol. 1, p. 174, and vol. 2, pp. 438, 499.

\textsuperscript{42} Agus, “Democracy in the Communities of the Early Middle Ages.”

With the community itself as the fundamental authority, it is in no way surprising to find power highly localized. The question of the right of one Jewish settlement to legislate for others was raised a number of times. In general a distinction was drawn between daily administrative affairs—where each community was autonomous—and principles of Jewish religious behavior—where coercion could be exerted. One of a number of expressions of this distinction is phrased in the following way:

As to your question whether the inhabitants of one town are competent to enact decrees binding on the inhabitants of another town, and to coerce the latter inhabitants while they are in their own town, the following ruling seems proper to us: If the decree that they are enacting deals with the needs of their place, such as taxation, weights, measures, and wages—in all such matters the inhabitants of one town are not competent to legislate for the inhabitants of another town. Thus we quoted above the Talmudic ruling: “The townspeople are permitted,” which means that only the people of the town are competent to legislate in such matters but not outsiders. If, however, the inhabitants of a town transgressed a law of the Torah, committed a wrong, or decided a point of law or of ritual, not in accordance with the accepted usage—the inhabitants of another town might coerce them, and even pronounce the herem against them, in order to force them to mend their ways. In that case, the inhabitants of the former town may not say to the latter: “we are independent of you, we exercise authority among ourselves, as you do among yourselves.” For all Israel is then enjoined to force them (to mend their ways); as we find in the case of the “rebellious sage,” or “the condemned city,” that the Sanhedrin coerces them and judges them.  

Extensive authority was exercised by outstanding scholarly figures, whose enactments were generally considered binding over a wide number of settlements. Thus, Rashi affirms that the important edict of R. Gershom of Mayence would certainly be applicable in all Jewish communities.

Should it become established through the testimony of reliable witnesses who are recognized authorities on this restrictive ordinance of the great teacher (R. Gershom), that he enacted this ordinance with greater rigor and strictness than all other anathemas and restrictive measures customarily enacted in the last generations; that in this enactment he used the awesome term shamta; and that he solemnly

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44Ibid., vol. 2, p. 452.
prohibited to mention the disgrace (of temporary apostasy) not only to the culprits themselves who eventually returned to Judaism, but even to their descendants; and should it further become established that when A and his family were forewarned, the name of the great teacher (as author of the awesome ban) was mentioned to them—we cannot deal lightly with a ban of Rabbenu Gershom, since in our generation there is no scholar of his great eminence, capable to release a person from such a ban.\textsuperscript{45}

The sanctions at the disposal of the community were of course conditioned by the bases of its power. One possibility lay in the direction of the secular authority, but it was an avenue only sparingly utilized because of the danger inhering in such an approach. Thus, an early-eleventh-century Jewish community faced with the overt recalcitrance of two of its members and the support of a neighboring community for the rebels was "about to ask the king to order his constables to collect his tax directly from A and B. Upon further deliberation, however, they changed their minds and decided first to inquire whether their solemn decree was still valid, i.e., whether the cancellation thereof by the community of S was of any consequence."\textsuperscript{46} A turn to secular authorities was a step which most Jewish communities were reluctant to take.

Since the most tangible locus of power was the cohesive community itself, the ultimate weapon at the disposal of the Jews was the ban of excommunication. Given the importance of the Jewish community and its facilities to the individual Jew, the power of exclusion was a formidable one. The ostracized Jew was in a hazardous position politically, economically, socially, and religiously. At the same time, excommunication was not an infallible tool in the hands of the Jewish community. The realities of power within the community often limited the effectiveness of the ban. In one case, for example, "since the members of the community feared that B and his friends, living so near the synagogue, would remove the scrolls of the Law and other community articles, and that no one would be able to stop them from taking these articles, they transgressed the law on several occasions—all on B’s instructions."\textsuperscript{47}

Another limitation on the effectiveness of excommunication was the localization of Jewish authority already noted. Thus two Jews excommunicated in community T "went to S and related there the whole incident. The people of S took A and B into their homes, wined and dined them, transacted business with them, lifted from them the ban of

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., p. 501.
\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., p. 467.
\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., p. 447.
community T, and gave them a written release of such ban.\textsuperscript{48} While the action of community S was judged illegal, in fact the localization of power did weaken the impact of any such ban.

The Jewish community of northern France thus emerges, from earliest times, as a remarkably cohesive and comprehensive organization. The isolation of the Jews forced them to create for themselves all sorts of agencies—political, economic, social, educational, and religious. The small size of the individual Jewish settlements precluded the independence of each of these agencies. What emerged then was a total Jewish community responsible for filling every one of the vital needs of its constituents. Therein lies the secret of the wide range of powers and the effectiveness of the Jewish community organization even at its early stage of development.

Perhaps the most persuasive index of the level of maturity reached by northern French Jewry prior to the First Crusade is its intellectual creativity. It seems reasonable to conclude that a community capable of producing extensive scholarly achievement like that of R. Solomon b. Isaac of Troyes (Rashi) must have been well-established and effectively organized. Rashi, already noted as an outstanding communal authority—one of the few whose eminence was broadly recognized—wrote copiously. His works, which quickly became classics in Ashkenazic circles, included primarily extensive commentaries on the Bible and the Talmud.\textsuperscript{49} While he was always revered as the beginning—and not the culmination—of a brilliant series of northern French scholars, his creations indicate that, by the last years of the eleventh century, northern French Jewry had come of age.

At the end of the eleventh century many of the creative forces that had been germinating steadily throughout western Europe burst forth into the passion, vision, and violence of the First Crusade. The Crusade was an expression of the new militance of Christendom against its external foes; it revealed also new potential for internal upheaval and disruption. While the goal of the pope and of the great barons was a military expedition against Islam, the feelings unleashed by the call to the Crusade could hardly be contained within the particular channels

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., p. 466.

\textsuperscript{49}On Rashi, see Maurice Liber, \textit{Rashi}, trans. A. Szold (Philadelphia, 1906); \textit{Rashi Anniversary Volume}, published by the American Academy for Jewish Research (New York, 1941); Judah Fishman, ed., \textit{Sefer Rashi} (Jerusalem, 1956); Irving Agus, “Rashi and His School,” in Roth, \textit{The Dark Ages}. 24
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delineated by its instigators. Thus the First Crusade brought more than
the conquest of Jerusalem; it left a path of death and destruction
within Christendom itself.\textsuperscript{50}

The dispossessed who took up the chant “Deus lo volt” savagely
vented pent-up furies upon many of their long-despised neighbors.
Given the pervasive religiosity of medieval civilization and the distinctly
religious hatreds that animated the Crusaders, it comes as no surprise
that the prime object of the internal violence associated with the First
Crusade was European Jewry.

France, particularly northern France, played a major role in the great
drama of 1095–1099. It was in the French city of Clermont that Urban
II issued his appeal; French barons were conspicuous in their leadership
of the crusading forces; it was in the French countryside that Peter the
Hermit began his preaching for a humble army of the pious to free the
holy places from Moslem hands. Yet France, despite its prominence,
was spared the upheavals that followed in the wake of Crusade preach­
ing.\textsuperscript{51} France’s eastern neighbors bore the brunt of the devastation that
crusading fervor unleashed.

The relative calm with which France weathered the Crusade is re­
lected in the fate of her Jews. The same Jewish and Christian sources
that are so copious in their description of Jewish sufferings in the
Rhineland area say almost nothing of Jewish fate in France. Although
arguments from silence are always suspect, it is difficult to believe that
this set of Jewish and Christian chroniclers and editors would have been
unaware of, or uninterested in recounting, extensive Jewish tragedy in
nearby France. The Rhineland Jews who compiled the Hebrew chroni­
cles knew the reactions of the French Jews to the organization of the
Crusade, and they detailed Jewish persecution over a broad area. It is
inconceivable that large-scale catastrophe in France could have gone
unknown or unreported.\textsuperscript{52} Moreover, the longest of the Hebrew Cru­
sade chronicles is embedded in a late-twelfth-century communal his-

\textsuperscript{50} For a general description of the First Crusade, see Steven Runciman, \textit{A History of the

\textsuperscript{51} On the movement of the Crusaders through western Europe and the outbreak of violence,

\textsuperscript{52} The Hebrew First-Crusade chronicles were published by Adolf Neubauer and Moritz
Stern, \textit{Hebraische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während der Kreuzzüge} (Berlin, 1892),
pp. 1–30, 36–46, 47–57, and were republished in Habermann, \textit{Sefer Gezerot}, pp. 24–59,
72–82, 93–104; note my study of these chronicles to appear shortly in the \textit{REJ}.
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tory of Spires Jewry, which includes a series of letters detailing the Blois catastrophe of 1171 and its aftermath. The Spires editor would not have omitted information on Crusade tragedy in France had it been available.\textsuperscript{53}

There is satisfactory evidence for but one specific persecution of Jews within the area of northern France, an attack which took place in the Norman city of Rouen. The fullest description of this assault is given by Guibert of Nogent as a backdrop to his account of a monk of the monastery of Fly.

At Rouen on a certain day, the people who had undertaken to go on that expedition [that is, the Crusade] under the badge of the Cross began to complain to one another, "After traversing great distances, we desire to attack the enemies of God in the East, although the Jews, of all races the worst foe of God, are before our eyes. That's doing our work backward." Saying this and seizing their weapons, they herded the Jews into a certain place of worship, rounding them up by either force or guile, and without distinction of sex or age put them to the sword. Those who accepted Christianity, however, escaped the impending slaughter.\textsuperscript{54}

The striking difference between the relative peace enjoyed by northern France and its Jews and the wholesale destruction, especially of Jewish life and property, further east can be accounted for in a number of ways. This difference is surely not a reflection of more benign French attitudes; as Norman Golb has argued, French Crusaders were deeply implicated in the wave of German atrocities associated with the First Crusade.\textsuperscript{55} In France, however, their antipathy was not translated into deed, partially because France was the very first area of organization. The problems of the undisciplined Crusader bands tended to multiply the further eastward they moved, the larger their numbers, and

\textsuperscript{53}On the composite Spires chronicle, see Robert Chazan, "A Twelfth-Century Communal History of Spires Jewry," \textit{REJ} 128 (1969): 253–57. The position taken here diverges widely from that presented by Norman Golb in his "New Light on the Persecution of French Jews at the Time of the First Crusade," \textit{PAAJR} 34 (1966): 1–64. While agreeing that Frenchmen were implicated in the attacks on German Jews, we find only the incident in Rouen attested for our area of northern France. Even with Golb's reconstruction of the persecution at Monieux (out of our domain), the evidence for Jewish suffering in France is extremely sparse. It seems to us that Golb has made far too much of Monieux and of the participation of Frenchmen in massacres elsewhere.


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the slimmer their provisions. The initial rallying of these crusading groups in France and their speedy movement towards the East played a major role in the safety of French Jewry. A second factor was the protection afforded by the less pretentious, but more effective, French political authorities. While the emperor was the most exalted political dignitary of Europe, the base upon which his power rested was a shaky one.\textsuperscript{56} Thus, in town after town, the Jews found themselves separated from large and bloodthirsty mobs by the flimsy military and political power of the local bishop. Even the Hebrew chroniclers recognize that many of these bishops were sincere in their desire to protect their Jews; their failure resulted from a lack of the required force.\textsuperscript{57} In France, on the other hand, where the Capetian monarchy advanced none of the grandiose claims of the German empire, firm political power had been slowly crystallizing in a series of well-organized principalities. Within these principalities the count and his growing retinue of administrative officials exercised effective authority. It was this political stability also that aided in harnessing the violence of the Crusaders and in sparing the Jews.

Although the Jews of northern France suffered little during the tumultuous first months of the Crusade, they were hardly oblivious to the dangers. In fact they were far more aware of the impending threat than any of their fellow Jews, for it was in their land that the Crusade was called, that the first active preaching took place, and that the first crusading groups began to form. The same Hebrew chronicle that said nothing of overt persecution in France recorded faithfully the fears of the French Jews.

At the time when the Jewish communities in France heard \[of the beginning of the Crusade\] they were seized with fear and trembling. They then resorted to the devices of their predecessors. They wrote letters and sent messengers to the Rhineland communities, that these communities fast and seek mercy on their behalf from the God who dwells on high, so that they might be spared.\textsuperscript{58}

The Hebrew chronicles also reported the more immediate steps taken by French Jewry to avert the threatened catastrophe. This information is contained in the brief description of the passage of Peter the Hermit through Trèves.

\textsuperscript{56}The absence of the emperor in Italy was prominently noted by the longest Hebrew chronicle—Neubauer and Stern, \textit{Hebräische Berichte}, p. 3; Habermann, \textit{Sefer Gezerot}, pp. 26–27.

\textsuperscript{57}Note, for example, the role of the bishops in Spires, Worms, Mayence, and Cologne.

\textsuperscript{58}Neubauer and Stern, \textit{Hebräische Berichte}, p. 47; Habermann, \textit{Sefer Gezerot}, p. 93.
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When he came to Trèves—he and the multitude of men with him—to go forth on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he brought with him from France a letter from the Jews, indicating that, in all places where he would pass through Jewish communities, they should afford him provisions. He then would speak favorably on behalf of the Jews. 59

Given the lack of destructive violence against the Jews in northern France, we can readily understand the lack of a political aftermath parallel to that which took place in Germany. Guido Kisch has carefully chronicled the evolution in Germany of safeguards designed to protect the vulnerable Jewish communities. 60 Jewish political status in France, however, underwent no significant development in the wake of the First Crusade. There had been, after all, no major calamity to arouse among the Jews themselves or among their baronial overlords a heightened sense of the urgent need for new protective devices.

Furthermore, French Jewry never viewed 1095-1096 as a watershed in its history, as did its German counterpart. 61 While the works of Rashi represent an early high point of French Jewish religious creativity, his successors did not see themselves as mere compilers of his legacy; they considered their efforts a continuation, not a collection. When, much later on, the sense of a chain of giant figures emerges, this series runs from Rashi through R. Samson of Sens, from the late eleventh through the early thirteenth centuries. The years of the First Crusade are in no sense construed as a major dividing line. Interestingly enough, when in 1171 French Jewry suffered what it considered its first major catastrophe, the calamity at Blois, it very movingly expressed the feelings of horror evoked by the utterly senseless death of over thirty Jews. If ever one might expect French Jewish recollection of the First Crusade, this would surely be the point. Yet significantly there is no recall whatsoever of 1096. When old memories are summoned up, they are recollections of a much earlier period. Thus, according to Ephraim of Bonn, R. Jacob Tam ordained that the twentieth of Sivan, the day of the catastrophe itself, "is fit to be set as a fast day for all our people. Indeed the gravity of this fast will exceed that of the fast of Gedaliah b. Aḥikam, for this is a veritable Day of Atonement." 62 The fateful year of the First Crusade in no way dominated the subsequent consciousness of northern French Jewry.

59 Neubauer and Stern, Hebräische Berichte, p. 25; Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, pp. 52-53.
61 On German views of 1096 as a decisive turning point in the history of Ashkenazic Jewry, see Joseph Hacker, “About the Persecutions during the First Crusade” (Hebrew), Zion 31 (1966): 225-31.
62 Neubauer and Stern, Hebräische Berichte, p. 68; Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, p. 126.
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Through the late tenth and on through the eleventh century, then, northern French Jewry continued to develop, benefiting from the general progress of western European civilization and making its own contribution to that progress. Already tightly allied with the powerful feudal barony, the Jews were involving themselves ever more heavily in the burgeoning urban commerce and had begun to develop viable institutions of self-government. By the end of the eleventh century, northern French Jewry was sufficiently mature to produce its first figure of renown, R. Solomon b. Isaac of Troyes. Relatively unscathed by the anti-Jewish outbreaks of the First Crusade, French Jewry proceeded into the twelfth century in a spirit of continued growth.