

# Lesson 1: Around the Middle Eastern Jewish World

## Appendix A - TRAVEL PACKETS

### **Note to Teacher:**

The following pages have instructional material featuring countries:

- 1. Morocco**
- 2. Yemen**
- 3. Syria**
- 4. Turkey**

These materials should be printed and posted around the room.

The images are referenced in the informational text of each packet.

You can shrink/enlarge the materials according to your needs.

# MOROCCO



<http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/morocco-political-map.htm>



Jewish Berber woman with tribal tattoo,  
c. 1930.

[Courtesy of Juifs Berberes.](#)



BABA SALI

[citation for graphic](#)

## Babylonian Captivity

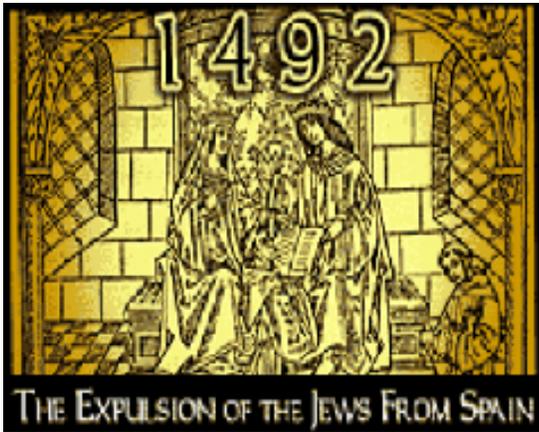


Around 586 BCE, the First Temple was destroyed and many Jews were exiled to Babylonia.



## The Jewish Quarter - the *Mellah*

[citation for graphic](#)



[citation for graphic](#)



During World War II, King Mohammed V kept the lives and property of the country's Jews under his protection and did not subject them to the Vichy Laws.

[citation for graphic](#)

# MOROCCO

**COUNTRY NAME:** Morocco

**HOW DID THE JEWS GET HERE?** Jews have been living in Morocco since the time of Antiquity. In the beginning of the 8th century Islamic leaders took over Morocco, and under these Islamic governments there were times of great economic and cultural prosperity for the Jews living there. After the expulsion from Spain, large groups of Sephardic Jews exiled from Spain settled in Morocco and many of them served in important diplomatic and economic roles in the kingdom. When the French took over in 1912, the Jews were some of the first to learn French and today this is one of the main languages spoken by Jews in Morocco.

**JEWISH TRADITIONS** - On Passover, the person leading the *seder* picks up the Seder plate and rotates it around each person's head while singing "*Ha Lachma Ania*" or "This is the Bread of Affliction."

**JEWISH FOODS** - *Sfing* is a yeast based, fried donut eaten on Hanukah and other happy occasions in the Jewish calendar.

**IMPORTANT PEOPLE** -Rabbi Israel Abuhatzaira (**Hebrew**: ישראל אבוחצירא), known as the Baba Sali (**Arabic**: بابا صلي, **Hebrew**: באבא סאלי, lit. "Praying Father") (1889–1984) was a leading **Moroccan Sephardic rabbi** and **kabbalist** who was renowned for his ability to work miracles through his prayers.<sup>[1]</sup> His burial place in **Netivot**, Israel has become a shrine for prayers and petitioners.

## MOROCCO

The roots of Morocco's Jewish communities date back to 587 BCE, when Jewish refugees, fleeing the Babylonian destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, crossed over to North Africa and settled in Morocco's Anti-Atlas region. There, they lived among the local Berber tribes, some of whom, it is believed, adopted Judaism and later fought against the Arab conquest. During the Roman Empire, the Jewish Diaspora of Israel spread throughout North Africa's Mediterranean coast. In 70 CE, following the Roman destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, additional Jewish refugees settled in Morocco.

At the end of the 7th century the Islamic Conquest reached Morocco, and, once again, Morocco experienced an influx of Jews. Under Islam, Jews were now forced to live as subordinate, second class "*dhimmi*". The situation for Jews and Christians in Morocco worsened in 1146, when the Almohades dynasty came to power and cancelled the *jizha* (tax demanded of *dhimmi*) but demanded that Jews convert to Islam or be killed. Those who converted were required to identify themselves by wearing a specific yellow head garment and lived as branded unbelievers who were subjected to severe anti-Jewish oppression and violence. By the 13th century, when the Berber Marinid dynasty gained power and eased religious restrictions, Jews were once again allowed to live openly and practice their religion in public.

As Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal in 1492, thousands more fled to the Moroccan Jewish "mellahs", or urban Jewish districts and quarters designated by the Sultan. Jewish refugees of the Spanish Inquisition were unwelcomed by local

Muslims and many were subjected to violence, famine, and a struggle for survival.

In the 17th century, the Alawids came to power and Jews continued to live as dhimmis, forced to pay exorbitantly high taxes and move into *mellahs* throughout the country. In 1670, a prominent Jewish councilor, Abu Bakr, was burned in public in order to arouse terror among Jews. During this same time, synagogues were destroyed, and Jews were expelled from the region. Continued poor treatment of the Jews occurred until 1863, when Sir Moses Montefiore was sent by the British to help release 10 Jewish men imprisoned in Morocco under suspicion of killing a Spaniard. Montefiore succeeded in liberating the prisoners and the Sultan published an edict granting equal rights to Jews.

By 1930, there were 225,000 Jews living in Morocco, constituting the largest population of Jews in North Africa. When Nazi anti-Semitic decrees prohibited Jews from

participating in public functions, Mohammed V refused to abide by such rules and instead invited all the rabbis of Morocco to throne celebrations. The declaration of the State of Israel in 1948, however, brought forth rioting and anti-Semitic sentiments within Morocco's Arabs, resulting in 44 Jewish deaths and the emigration of 18,000 Moroccan Jews to Israel. Morocco declared its independence in 1956 with several political positions being held by Jews. The same year, Jewish emigration from Morocco to Israel was suspended, but in 1963 the ban was lifted, and some 100,000 Moroccan Jews immigrated to Israel. The Six Day War in 1967 reignited Arab-Jewish tensions and by 1971, the Jewish population in Morocco had decreased to 35,000. Today, 3,500 Jews remain in Morocco and, although small, the Jewish community plays a significant role in politics and culture.

From <http://www.jimena.org/jimena-country-by-country/>

# YEMEN



<http://www.nationonline.org/oneworld/map/yemen-map.htm>



**Destruction of the First Temple**

[citation for graphic](#)



**Yemenite Jews forced to convert to Islam**

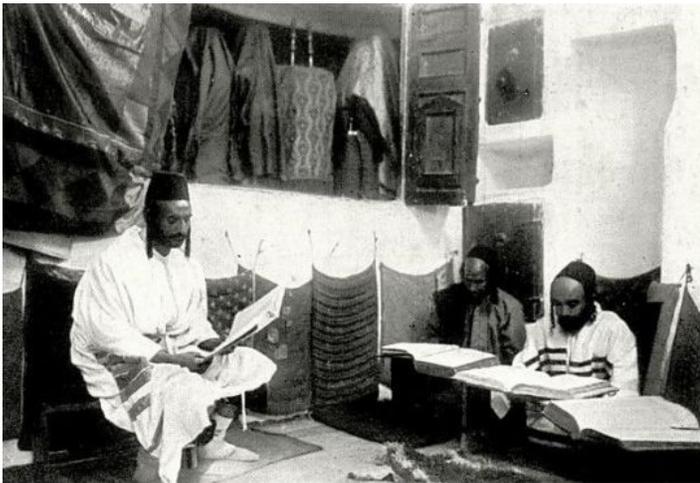
[citation for graphic](#)



**A Jewish family in Sana'a, 1901.** Hermann Burchardt  
[citation for graphic](#)



**Yemen in 1901.** Hermann Burchardt  
[citation for graphic](#)



**The synagogue of the Jewish community in Sana'a.**  
Hermann Burchardt  
[citation for graphic](#)



**Yemenite Jews en route to Israel from Aden, Yemen**  
[citation for graphic](#)



# YEMEN

**COUNTRY NAME:** Yemen

## HOW DID THE JEWS GET HERE?

According to Yemenite tradition, the Jewish community there originated from a group of wealthy Jews who left Jerusalem after the prophet Jeremiah predicted the destruction of the temple in 629 BCE. Historians believe that King Solomon's trading and naval networks brought Jews to Yemen from Judea around 900 BCE.

## JEWISH TRADITIONS –

Yemenite Jews have a special pronunciation of Hebrew words, different than Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews.

**JEWISH FOODS-***Kubane* is a yeast-based bread eaten on shabbat and happy occasions.

**IMPORTANT PEOPLE** - Ofra Haza, Yemenite Israeli singer actress and Grammy nominated recording artist was born in Tel Aviv in 1957 and was famous for bridging the divide between Arab and Jewish culture through her music.



Ofra Haza

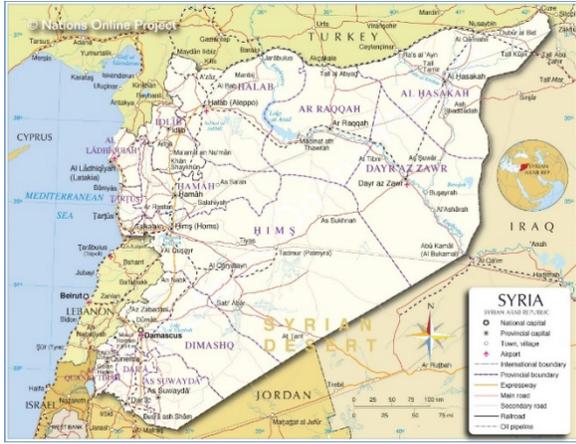
## YEMEN

There are many legends detailing the story of how the Jews came to settle in Yemen. Some believe that the Jews arrived in Yemen after receiving an order from King Solomon to search for gold and silver for the construction of the Temple, in 900 BCE. However, according to Yemenite tradition, it is believed that the Jews migrated to Yemen when they heard of the impending destruction of the First Temple in 629 BCE. Despite disagreement about when the Jews arrived in Yemen, there is no question about their long and illustrious history.

By the 900's, Islam rose to power and allowed Jews freedom of religion in exchange for a poll tax. In 1679 a large portion of the Jewish community was expelled from the region, only to be asked to return a year later when the economy in Yemen was suffering and the Jews had craftsmen and artisan skills which were needed. By 1700 there was resurgence in Jewish life in Yemen.

1882 marked the first wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine when conditions for the Jews started to worsen. An ancient Islamic law enforced in 1922, required all Jewish orphans under the age of 12 to be forcibly converted to Islam. Then in 1947 when the UN partition of Palestine was announced, a violent anti-Jewish pogrom spread through Aden, killing an estimated 82 Jews and destroying many Jewish shops, four synagogues, and over 200 homes. From 1949-50 nearly the entire Jewish Yemenite community was airlifted to Israel via Operation Magic Carpet. Civil war in 1962 prohibited any remaining Jews from leaving Yemen, although a few managed to escape anyway. By 2005 there were less than 200 Jews living in Yemen.

# SYRIA

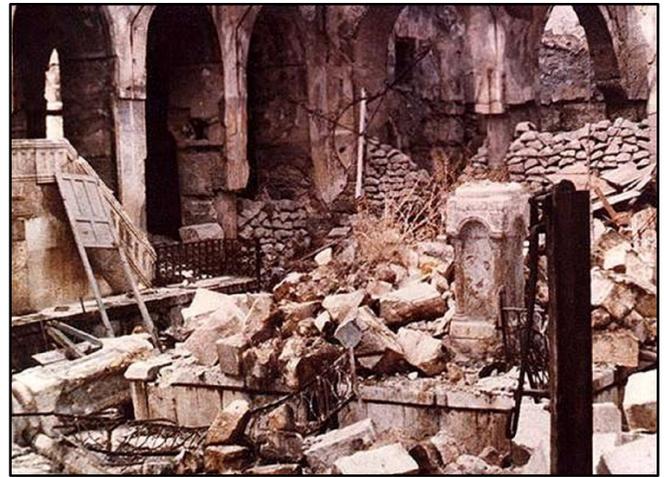


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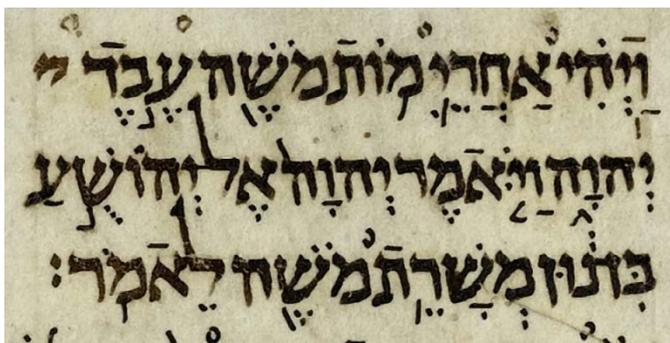


**Central Synagogue of Aleppo**

According to tradition, the foundation for the Great Synagogue in Aleppo was constructed by King David's General, Joab ben Zeruiah, (circa 950 BCE)



**Ruins of the Central Synagogue of Aleppo after the 1947 Aleppo pogrom**



**Closeup of Aleppo Codex, Joshua 1:1**

The famous Aleppo Codex is a medieval bound manuscript of the Hebrew Bible. Maimonides confirmed its accuracy. The Aleppo community guarded the Codex zealously for some 600 years

[citation for graphic](#)



**Bastel & Sambusak**

Savory filled pockets, a favorite Syrian appetizer

[citation for graphic](#)



**The Damascus Affair - A Jewish prisoner preparing his defense in court for the "Blood libel". Jews were accused of murdering Christians to use their blood to bake matzah.**

[citation for graphic](#)



**Jerry Seinfeld is a famous American Jewish comedian of Syrian Jewish descent.**

[citation for graphic](#)

# SYRIA

**COUNTRY NAME:** Syria

## **HOW DID THE JEWS GET HERE?**

The Jews of Syria originated from two groups: some have ancestors who were Sephardic Jews who escaped from Spain in 1492 and those Jews who inhabited the area from ancient times. The main center of Jewish Syria was Damascus and Aleppo until most of Syria's Jews moved to Israel.

## **JEWISH TRADITIONS -**

In some Syrian communities on Shabbat, twelve loaves of bread are made to represent the offerings brought to the Jewish Temple by the 12 Tribes.

**JEWISH FOODS-** *Bastel*, a meat-filled pastry.

**IMPORTANT PEOPLE -** Jerry Seinfeld, comedian is of Syrian descent. His mother Betty's parents, Selim and Salha Hosni, were born in Aleppo, Syria

**Population in 1943:** 30,000

**Current Population:** 50 or less

## **SYRIA**

Abraham is said to have stopped in Syria on his journey to the land of Canaan, sharing his goat's milk with the poor. Haleb or Aleppo, means "he milked" and it's said the city was named after Abraham's visit there. Jews are believed to have had a continuous presence in Syria since the days of King David (1000 BCE), when Judea's military commander Joab, took control of the ancient town of Aleppo. The indigenous Jewish community who lived in Syria since biblical days were known locally as *must'arabia*, or "would-be-Jews."

In 635 CE, when Damascus fell to the Muslim Umayyads in the Arab Conquest Jews began to experience a period of significant growth, as they had previously suffered under Christian domination during Roman and Byzantine rule. During the Abbasid Dynasty (eight to tenth centuries), Jewish life in Syria flourished with the Great Synagogue being built in Aleppo and Syrian Rabbis leading Jewish spiritual practice and scholarship of the time. During this period Maimonides wrote his famous work, *A Guide for the Perplexed* as a letter to his Aleppan colleague, Joseph Ben Judah. In 1375, a descendent of Maimonides brought the Aleppo Codex from Egypt to Aleppo, where it would be cared for and protected for 600 years.

With the Spanish Inquisition in 1492, Spanish Jews fled and immigrated to many Eastern Mediterranean countries, including Syria. While the local *must'arabia* Jews of Syria accepted and welcomed the Jewish refugees from Spain, initially the two communities existed separately. Overtime the communities joined until few distinctions remained. Under Ottoman rule Aleppo became a hub of trade and an important city for the Jews of Syria.

The 1800's signaled a change for Syria's Jews. In 1840 during the Damascus affair, Jews were accused of conducting ritual murder, and again in 1860 outlandish claims were made about Jews being criminals. As a result, beginning in 1850, Jews left Syria for Egypt and later for England. In 1908 a large community of Syrian Jews immigrated to New York, where the largest Syrian Jewish community lives today.

By 1943, 30,000 Jews resided in Syria, most of whom were located in Aleppo. In 1946, the French Colonial Mandate of Syria ended, and a wave of Arab Nationalism spread throughout Syria. Following the 1947 U.N. partition of Palestine, mobs of rioters took to the streets burning and looting Jewish community sites, Jewish homes and

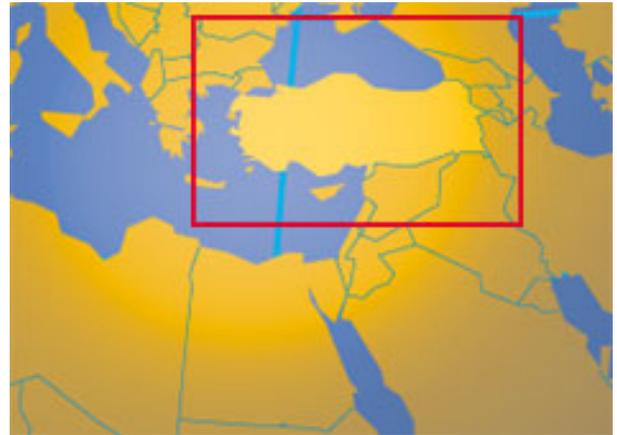
businesses, and sacred artifacts and manuscripts including the Aleppo Codex. The political and economic situation became even more challenging when Jews were removed from all government positions and Jewish bank accounts were frozen. Until 1992, when the Syrian Jewish community was finally granted exit visas, Jews suffered severe human rights abuses. In May 2012, it was reported that only 22 Jews still lived in Syria, all of them elderly and living in Damascus, in a building adjoining the city's only functioning synagogue.

From <http://www.jimena.org/jimena-country-by-country/>

# TURKEY



<http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/turkey.htm>



**Noah's Ark is said to have landed on Mountains of Ararat after the Great Flood in that now is modern Turkey**  
(Genesis 8:4)  
[citation for graphic](#)

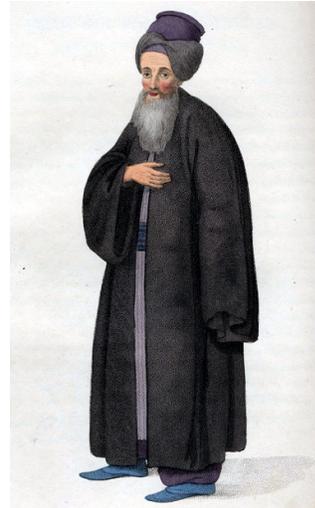


**The Mountains of Ararat**  
[citation for graphic](#)



Sultan Bayezid II saved the Jews of Spain from the Spanish Inquisition in 1492 by granting the Jews to settle in the Ottoman Empire.

[citation for graphic](#)



Painting of a Jewish man from the Ottoman Empire, 1779.

[citation for graphic](#)



Silver Torah case from Constantinople in 1860

[Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme](#)



[citation for graphic](#)

The Jews of Izmir (Smyrna) observed the custom of the bride offering sweets to her guest on an ornamented silver tray.

This tray was known in Ladino as a "Tavola di Dolci, or "Kucharera."

# TURKEY

**COUNTRY NAME:** Turkey

## HOW DID THE JEWS GET HERE?

The history of the Jews in Turkey (Turkish: Türkiye Yahudileri, Turkish Jews; Hebrew: יהודים טורקים Yehudim Turkim, Ladino: Djudios Turkos) covers the 2,400 years that Jews have lived in what is now Turkey. There have been Jewish communities in Asia Minor since at least the 5th century BCE and many Spanish and Portuguese Jews expelled from Spain were welcomed into the Ottoman Empire (including regions part of modern Turkey) in the late 15th century, 20 centuries later, forming the bulk of the Ottoman Jews.

**JEWISH TRADITIONS** - The “*Kucharera*” or “*Tavola di Dolci*” (Ladino) is a silver vessel for presenting sweets to welcome guests. The custom of presenting sweets to a guest is one of the characteristics of hospitality common to the Sephardi Jews of Izmir, Turkey.

**JEWISH FOODS** Vegetables like okra, artichoke, spinach, cabbage, and all their derivatives with meat are cooked with a lot more lemon than you will see in the Turkish cuisine. The most characteristic dish in contemporary Turkish Sephardic cooking is called *gaya kon avramila*, fish in sour plum sauce.

**IMPORTANT PEOPLE-** Rabbi Yom Tov Elgazi was born in Izmir Turkey in 1727. In 1735 he moved to Jerusalem with his family and later became an official in the Jewish religious court there and was one of the leaders of the Sephardic Jewish community there.

**CURRENT POPULATION:** 15,000

## TURKEY

There has been a Jewish presence in Turkey since biblical times when it is believed that Noah’s ark landed on Mount Ararat. In 300 BCE, the Jewish community was located primarily in the city of Sardis. In 1204, Jews, Muslims, and Christians were told to resettle in Constantinople (today’s Istanbul), the new capital.

When the Ottoman Army conquered Bursa in 1324 they made the city their new capital. At the time, they found a Jewish community oppressed under Byzantine rule. Jews welcomed the Ottomans as saviors. Sultan Orhan gave them permission to build the *Etz ha-Hayyim* (Tree of Life) synagogue which remained in service for hundreds of years until recent times.

Following the Spanish Inquisition in 1492, the Sultan Bayezid II invited Jews from Spain and Portugal to resettle in the Ottoman Empire which perpetuated a mass immigration to the region. At the time, the Ottoman Empire consisted of territory covering most of North Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus, modern day Greece, as well as what we now call the Balkans and the Arabian Gulf.

Unlike Jews in other areas of Europe and the Middle East, the Jews in Turkey enjoyed a good amount of religious tolerance and prosperity. Although they were still required to pay special taxes and abide by restrictions dictating where to live and work, Jews had a significant amount of autonomy, engaged in business enterprises of their choice, and some reached high positions in the Ottoman court. Jews in the Ottoman Empire were respected, influential members of society who contributed to diplomacy, commerce and trade.

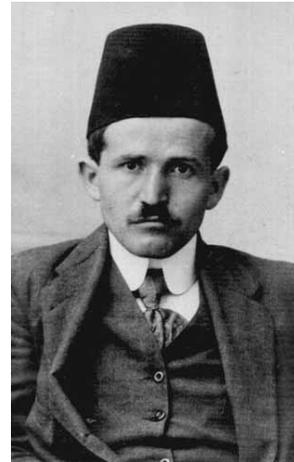
In 1912, the future first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion moved to Istanbul and studied law at Istanbul University with Yitzhak Ben Tzvi who would later become the second President of Israel.

Turkey became independent in 1923, causing a significant change in the treatment of Jews there. In 1934, a planned deportation of Jews from East Thrace and an anti-Jewish pogrom caused feelings of insecurity among the Turkish Jews. In addition, the **varlik vergisi**, or wealth tax, of 1942 was imposed upon wealthy citizens of Turkey. The tax disproportionately affected minorities and was seen as an attempt to decrease minority power. People who were unable to pay the tax were forced into labor camps. 30,000 Jews decided to emigrate from Turkey.

During WWII when the ship Struma filled with 769 Jews arrived in Istanbul, the passengers were refused entry into Turkey. On the journey back, the ship sank after being hit by an explosive. Throughout WWII, Turkey remained relatively neutral, but several Turkish diplomats were key in saving thousands of Jews from France and Eastern Europe.

Today there is still a community of about 15,000 Jews remaining in Turkey, despite occasional anti-Semitic sentiment.

<http://www.jimena.org/jimena-country-by-country/>



**David Ben-Gurion**, with the Turkish *Tarboush*, as a student in Law at the University of Istanbul in 1912.  
[citation for graphic](#)



**Neve Shalom** is the central and largest Sephardic synagogue in Istanbul, open to service especially on Shabbats, High Holidays, Bar Mitzvahs, funerals and weddings. It was built in the 1930s.