

The Economic-Political Role of the Jewish Community in Algiers

1780-1830

ALI TABLIT

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الدور الاقتصادي والسياسي للجالية اليهودية في الجزائر

كان الجزء الأكبر من تجارة الصادرات والواردات الجزائرية، قبل الاحتلال، في أيدي التجار اليهود الكبار للجزائر.

وكانت أهم الصادرات الجزائرية، تتمثل في القمح، والشعير، والصوف، كما كانت هناك مواد أخرى، مثل العاج، والذهب، والفضة، والشمع، والمرجان، وريش النعام، والخيول، والماشية، وجلود الحيوانات المدبوغة، ووبر الجمال، والخمر. وكان لهؤلاء اليهود وكلاء يمثلونهم في معظم موانئ المتوسط. غير أن تجارتهم كانت أكثر نشاطا مع ليفورن، ومرسيليا. وكانوا يستوردون من أوربا: سلع قطنية، والحرير، والخردوات، والبن، والقار، والتوابل وأنواع أخرى من السلع.

كان يسمح لليهود بشراء الأسرى المسيحيين الذين تم أسرهم من قراصنة الجزائر. ويستعمل اليهود، هؤلاء الأسرى في مضاربات تجارية أو يكرسونهم للحياة المنزلية.

بلغ عددهم في مدينة الجزائر، في هذه الفترة 5.000 يهودي لهم كامل الحرية في ممارسة ديانتهم، حسب قوانينهم، يرأسهم مقدم يعينه الداي ويدير شئونهم المدنية. وهم مواطنون جزائريون مثل المسلمين، وإنما يخضعون لضريبة معينة أكثر من غيرهم. يقيمون حيث يريدون، ويمارسون كل أنواع التجارة في كامل الجزائر، ولا يمكن استرقاقهم.

Abstract

Prior to the French conquest of Algeria in 1830, a considerable part of its import-export trade was concentrated in the hands of the great Jewish merchants of Algiers.

The principal articles of export were Algerian wheat, barley, and wool, but there were other items too: ivory, gold, silver, wax, coral, ostrich feathers, horses, cattle, hides, camel's hair, wine, and brandy. The Jews had agents and business correspondents in all the major ports of the Mediterranean, but their trade was particularly intensive with Livorno and Marseilles. From Europe were imported cotton goods, and silk, ironware, drugs, spices, coffee, paper, and a variety of other goods.

Jews were permitted freely to purchase Christian slaves who had been captured on these piratical ventures. These captives were brought either for speculation or use as domestics.

The Jews, of whom there are about five thousand in Algiers city, have the free exercise of their religion secured, they are governed by their own laws in civil cases, administered by a chief of their own community, who is appointed by the Dey, as Algerian subjects they may circulate freely, establish themselves where they please, and exercise any lawful calling throughout Algeria, and they cannot be reduced to slavery.

Key-words: Algiers, Jews, Jewish, commerce, trade, policy, Ottoman, Turks. Bacri. Busnach..

North African Jewry traces its origins to two sources: one uncontested documented migration was the flight of Spanish and Portuguese Jews to North Africa in the 14th and 15th centuries. However, there were large communities of Jews throughout North Africa when the Iberian refugees arrived. The origin of this earlier Jewish population is in question. One commonly advanced theory is that these Jews were descended from converts among the autochthonous Berber population.

Let us now narrow our focus to Algeria and turn to the year 1516. In that year Algiers became the center of Ottoman power in the Maghreb. According to the historian Jamil Abu-Nasr, the modern situation of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia was importantly shaped by the varying impact of the Ottoman Empire. The situation of the Algerian Jews was adversely affected by Turkish rule. There was a group of Jews in Algeria who enjoyed a privileged position. These were the Jews from Livorno, Italy, who settled in the coastal cities of Algeria from the end of the 17th century and throughout the 18th century. They acquired a crucial role in the economic and political life of the regency of Algeria. Westernized, often citizens of European countries, and hence under the protection of European consuls, they did not have the same restrictions as the indigenous Jews.

Two such families, Bacri and Busnach, were the most important of the Algiers Jewish mercantile families at the end of the 18th century. These two families were the catalysts in a series of events which led to the French occupation of Algeria. Through a very complicated set of political-commercial quasi-swindles which involved playing the French off against the Dey of Algiers, the Bacri and Busnach families were responsible for the situation in which the French consul (who was in league with their swindles) was swatted with the fly-whisk of the Dey. This so-called insult to the honor of France, the Dey tried to explain in numerous letters to the French government, was merely a sign of his exasperation with the dishonest and ineffectual French consul. Yet the "insult" was used as a pretext for the conquest.

The Moslem population strenuously resisted the French occupation. The Jews aided the invading French army: they served as interpreters and guides; many were killed in combat action.

Toward the end of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, a number of Jews from Livorno, whose Jewish community was of comparatively recent oriental origin,

immigrated to Algeria and settled in the coastal cities .These were the Gorneyim, called so after their place of origin- Livorno or Leghorn. In the course of the century, the Livornese Jews acquired an ever-increasing importance in the economic and political life of the Regency of Algeria. Tolerably Occidentalized (1).They fell generally, by the regime of the capitulations, under the authority of the European consuls. They enjoyed complete freedom of movement, and were, therefore, known as “free Jews “(2). Intelligent and ambitious as they were, the high commerce of Algeria, and an important of its diplomatic dealings; soon fell into their hands.

At the end of the 18th century, the two most prominent families of Gorneyim at Algiers were the Bacris and Busnach.The latter family was established in Algiers in 1723 by Nephtali Busnach, and in 1724 by Abraham Busnach (3). It was Abraham’s son,Nephtali, who was destined to rise to the zenith of power attainable by a Jew in a Moslem state.

Nephtali Busnach owed his fortune, it is said, to services which he rendered to one Mustapha ben Ousnadji, who was Bey of Titeri from 1775 to 1795 (4).Fearing the anger of the Dey of Algiers, Mustapha had been forced to seek refuge in a holy place of asylum where none of his friends , dared see him. Only Busnach brought him encouragement, provisions, finally obtained his pardon, and then loaned him a large sum of money. Mustapha, who later became Bey of Constantine, showed his gratitude by making Busnach his chief man of affairs. As his confident and guide .Busnach soon became a powerful figure in the Algerian government.

The Bacri family appeared in Algiers around 1770, when Michel Cohen Bacri established himself here (5).In 1782, his sons, Joseph, Jacob, Solomon, and Mardochée formed a business association (6). A fifth brother, Abraham, remained outside the association, but they often engaged in common business ventures. Around 1797, Nephtali Busnach entered the society, when they became known as Bacri Brothers and Busnach. When Joseph Bacri’s son, David, married Busnach’s sister, the association between the two families was cemented by a close personal relationship (7).The power of the combination reached its height when Busnach became the Mokadem (head) of the Jewish community on February 3, 1800 (8).Abraham Bouchara, the former head of the community, had lost his post because of a personal scandal, and Busnach may have had a hand in his disgrace.

. The activity and intelligence of Bacri and Busnach led them into the service of the Deys. Precisely informed by their correspondents on European politics and commerce, learning through peddlers the news from the interior even before the Turkish officials, provided with an excellent secret service through merchants who were members of their clique, they could often give valuable information to the deys on the activities and exactions of their subordinates (9).Although looked upon with contempt , they became indispensable to the regime, and held great power over such weak deys as Hassan and his successor, Busnach , in particular, acquired dominance over the deys through his great ability, cleverness, and profound knowledge of business and politics. He was able to dispose of high officials, preferring to have his friends and his creatures in office. Busnach aided in the nomination of beys, was in constant touch with them and fixed the amounts of their tributes (10). His old friend, Mustapha, was made Minister of Finance so that Busnach could control the public treasury, and the climax was reached when he succeeded in having Mustapha elected Dey (11).

Bacri Brothers and Busnach was primarily a business enterprise, and the extent of its trade was truly remarkable. The American consul in Algiers, O’Brien, reported that about 170 vessels sailed annually to Europe with wheat, barley, wool, hides and oil worth over 2,500,000\$. <The whole trade of the 170 sail of cargoes is in the power of the Bacris and Busnachs of

Algiers, they have the contract or permit from the Dey...> (12).Bacri Brothers and Busnach acquired a commanding position in the import-export trade (13).O'Brien estimated the total resources of the two families at 5,500,000\$, a tremendous sum in that period (14).Their trading activities extended from New York to Salonica and beyond, with agents in every major city of the Mediterranean basin(15).

The commercial success of the two families and their determining influence on the Turkish regime excited the mingled admiration and hatred of some European consuls. For example, the French consul, Jeanbon Saint-André, exclaimed: “ would one have believed that all the commerce of the Mediterranean would fall into the hands of two Jews of Algiers? Nothing, however, is more true...where is there an important place where you will not find agents of Bacri and Busnach? Cartagena, Marseille, Genoa, Livorno, Naples, Smyrna, Alexandria, Tunis and others have them... They promise the small states of Europe peace, and make it; if they are discontented, they declare war on them...Is it a matter of redemption of slaves? They are the mediators in it. A European merchant offends them? They chase him out...” (16).

Were the Jews really all-powerful? The evidence leads one to believe that they were not free agents; that to a great extent, they were acting merely as straw men and as a helpful screen for the Dey and the beys. The Turkish official, by investing their funds in the Jewish commercial enterprises, were able to obtain large profits without participating directly in the purchases and sales which the Jews affected through their scattered agents and with the European consuls. The relationship was reciprocal. The Dey and beys depended on the Jews, who supplied them with a sizable percentage of their income; while the Jews, on the other hand, were indebted to the Turks for financial advances and diplomatic protection. There is no reason to suppose that either the Dey or the Jews were in reality the masters; they were partners in a common commercial enterprise.(17).

In addition to their commercial activities in the export-import trade, Bacri and Busnach played an important role as large scale shipowners. They controlled a fleet of cargo vessels which plied the Mediterranean and Atlantic, flying the Algerian flag.(18). The Bacris purchased many vessels that Algerian and French corsairs captured from the allies during the Napoleonic wars.(19) In addition , the Bacris were active in the purchase of the cargoes which the captured ships had carried. Huge profits were accumulated from these sources, and all this was accomplished in the face of continuous threats by the English (20).The largest single group of Jews engaged in a variety of traditional handicrafts. These were tailors, tinsmiths, coppersmiths, jewelers, watchmakers, glaziers, goldsmiths, silversmiths, wordsmiths, lace makers, embroiderers, turners, shoemakers, and so forth. Seated for long hours in their small narrow booths, they became, through patience and application, artisans of the first rank. Some of these occupations, particularly those of tailor, lace maker, embroiderer, and precious metal worker were Jewish specialties, if not monopolies (21). After its re-establishment in 1792, the Jewish community in the coastal city of Oran became quite active commercially. Its import-export trade with Spain and Gibraltar was quite extensive (22). Jewish merchants are known to have loaned large sums of money to their hereditary enemy, Spain. It is interesting to note also that at this time a few Jews were living illegal in the Spanish port of Almeria .The bulk of the Jewish population of Oran were engaged as petty merchants, artisans, and peddlers (23). The Jewish community of Constantine was the only sizable community in the interior, and a few of its Jews did carry on a profitable export trade. But the majority of Constantine Jewry showed an occupational distribution similar to that of their coreligionists elsewhere in Algeria (24).

Under the Turks, the Jews of Algeria lived in their own quarters in the cities. The houses they occupied could be owned fully by them, and rich Jews often possessed luxurious homes. In 1789 the Jewish quarter of Algiers, the **Hara**, contained about 180 houses (25). The **Hara**, was far from clean, and its low houses built in Moorish style, lined narrow streets and alleys where the sun never penetrated. The homes of the rich were clean and elegant, but for the great majority life in the **Hara** was terribly overcrowded and unhealthy. Regret for the days of the Turkish regime seems to have been fairly common among certain groups of the older generation. For example, the traveler Benjamin II reported: *The young are well satisfied with the French government, but the older members with whom I spoke on this subject, fancy that since the French have taken possession of the country, religious feeling has been on the decline, and that commercial transactions are not so profitable as when the Arabs were in power* (26).

A German adventurer, Prince Puckler-Muskau, spoke with a Jewish broker on this subject: *"It is true," said he to me, "we were sometimes hanged and speared, and very often flogged for the merest trifles; that was better, however, than as things are now-we earned more and possessed ten times as much money ... The Turks never asks how much a thing costs, and never makes a bargain . When we wanted money for anything, we went to our patron and said, 'give us so many thousand francs- we will pay you so much per cent out of the profit.' Without difficulty and on the security of our simple word, we received the money ... The French don't understand this country. It is quite out of the question to expect to make any profit by them for every one wishes to grow rich as fast as he can, and they are even more niggardly than we, the despised Jews.*(27).

William, Shaler, judged them as the following: The Jews , of whom there are about five thousand in this city, have the free exercise of their religion secured; they are governed by their own laws in civil cases, administered by a chief of their own nation, who is appointed by the Bashaw; as Algerine subjects they may circulate freely, establish themselves where they please , and exercise any lawful calling throughout the kingdom; and they can not be reduced to slavery... they practice trade in all its branches, and are here the only brokers, and dealers in money and exchanges; there are many gold and silver smiths amongst them, and they are the only artificers employed in the mint.(28).

Joel, Barlow, believed strongly that the Jewish banker's influence with Hassan Bashaw was far too great, and he wrote to the Secretary of State, he is as much under their control... as any slave in Algiers is under the control of the Dey., and again: *The Turks are vilified to an insufferable degree and the Jews are cherished ... there are two distinct powers... the House of Baccri and the Dey. No peace can be made or maintained, no commerce can be carried on, no officer can be come into place, without the leave of that house. The Jewish power arose with present Dey, and it will sink with him. It is probable that not a single member of the houses of Baccri and Busnach will survive the Dey for one hour. They will be massacred* (29).

.After 1830, some of the richer families began to move out of the old quarter. Living in these insalubrious quarters, it was not surprising that the dreaded cholera attacked the Jews with particular deadliness (30). According to an eyewitness, in 1787 the plague killed 1,771 Jews (31). A cholera epidemic in Oran in 1834 killed of 125 people, of whom 44 were Jews (32). The epidemic of 1835, which felled 1600 French soldiers, struck the Jewish community of Algiers especially hard (33).

More odious was Busnach's role in piracy. As the most influential personage in a state whose very existence depended on income from that source, Busnach inevitably participated in

its supervision. It was said that no corsair could have Algiers unless Busnach, having received information from agents in the European ports, judged the time ripe (34). When ships taken by Algerian pirates were sold at other North African ports as Tunis, the proceeds of the sales would be transferred to Algiers through Busnach and his agents (35).

One of the most impressive aspects of the varied activities of Busnach and Bacri was their adroitness and influence in diplomacy. Busnach was in direct with all the European representatives in Algiers, and it was customary for them to approach the Dey through him. In the name of the Dey, he received the consuls of the minor powers when they presented their usual gifts. Acting as diplomatic intermediary, Busnach warded off an imminent war between England and Algiers in 1800. In the following year, he negotiated the peace between Algeria and the French republic. Busnach conducted the negotiations for a new treaty between Algeria and Portugal in 1803. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Spanish consul called him simply "the viceroy" (36). The American consul reported the diplomatic power of the Busnach – Bacri in 1801 in the following, not over-friendly, terms:

"The Busnachs and Bacris's influence in this Regency is Very great they are the directory they can give us war when they think proper. They made the French peace in spite of the Firman of the Grand Signior. They keep the Dey in hot water with the British .This is French influence... They rise the winds and calm the seas...our stipulations and annuities should have consular funds-not to be dependent on those leeches and extortionists the Jews..." (37).

The diplomatic and commercial aspects of the activities of Bacri and Busnach were closely linked in the minds of the consuls; and this was so in fact. The consuls of the different nations relied upon them as their bankers and brokers, and drew on their respective governments through them (38). Joel Barlow reported to Washington in 1796 that money was scarce in Algiers, because "the Jews are our brokers" had their funds tied up in France (39). The Bacri had a thriving business in loaning money to consuls who were interested in redeeming slaves. (40) In addition, they loaned sums to the consuls to be used for the purchase of presents for the Dey. The special French representative, Herculaïs, made extensive use of the Bacri and Busnach as bankers, accountants, and political auxiliaries in his dealings with the Dey. The French consul, Vallière, commented angrily in 1796:

"France alone used to enjoy the privilege of not being under Jewish influence...Herculaïs placed himself, since the day of his arrival,... under the fist of the Jews... the Jews simultaneously deceive the Day and the consuls: they are the head and the tail, they ask the questions and give the answers to affairs, and always end them to their own advantage." (41).

Mordecai M. Noah, the American consul at Tunis, warned his agent Keene, against the Bacris in 1813, as follows: "It is proper to caution you against the impositions practiced by those who loan money in Algiers, and who take advantage of the want of a regulated exchange." (42).

One of the most fascinating areas of the Bacris' diplomatic activity was their interest in the infant United States of America. As intermediaries between Algeria and the United States in a period of strained relations between the new nation and the North African Powers, the Bacris played a major role .Their influence was particularly helpful to the United States during negotiations for new treaties.

The Swedish consul, Skjoldebrand, attributed the quick signing of the peace treaty of September 1795 to the energetic and shrewd intervention of Bacri.(43)Richard O'Brien," American captive in Algiers" had advised his government back in 1794 that "The Bockeries Jew Merchants is a good house for Algiers of influence with the Dey and Ministry and for their own

interest or to serve themselves if commissioned they will make the greatest exertions to bring about the peace for the U.S.” (44). Joel Barlow and Joseph Donaldson, U.S. agents in Algiers, who were engaged in further negotiations in connection with this treaty, reported in 1796 that:

“Baccry the Jew...has as much art in this management as any we ever knew ... has more influence with the Dey than all the Regency put together, and has been able to soothe his impatience on this subject for three months past...in order to save the treaty thus far...we found it necessary some time ago to make an offer to the Jew of 10,000 sequins(18,000 dollars)to be paid eventually if he succeeded and to be distributed by him at his discretion among such great officers of state as he thought necessary, and to keep as much for himself as he could keep consistent with success.” (45).

“Diplomacy,” as practiced in Algeria, was equivalent to extortion, and it is difficult to say whether the Bacris aided the Turkish extortionists or their victims. It is safe to conclude that, since self-interest was their primary motivation, they were not too fastidious about the sources of their income. In 1814, the American special agent, Keene, reported to Mordecai M. Noah concerning his secret negotiations with the Bacri:

“Jacob Bacri I particularly addressed myself to and found him every way polite and accommodating. He without hesitation told me that the Dey was not only ready, but indeed anxious, to conclude a treaty with the United States; and as auxiliary to his negotiations in that respect, he set the highest value upon the American citizens then in his power.” (46).

Bacri then informed him that a treaty could be arranged on the basis of the United States paying two million dollars for the right to pass the straits of Gibraltar, besides the payment of all arrears due from the previous treaty. When Keene objected, Bacri remarked that “the United States are considered by this cabinet to be rich.” The United States, however, decided to put an end to the system of paying tribute, and a “war” broke out between the two states. Noah was convinced that the break in relations was caused by the Bacris who were conniving with the Turkish rulers to extort money from the United States (47).

On the other hand, “Our friends the Jews here,” as O’Brien once styled the Bacris, (48) frequently performed valuable services for the American consulate at Algiers. On dozens of occasions, they advanced sizable sums for the expenses of the American consuls (49). Obviously, they did not act from altruistic motives, the interest rate usually having amounted to 10%. Loans were made to the Americans for the purchase of the customary consular gifts. An American consul, Tobias Lear, reported as follows in 1803:

“I found that the House of Bacri and Busnach were always provided with those articles which it was customary to give on such occasions, and... that our affairs would be placed on a much better footing to take the presents from them, and to use their influence with the Dey (which seems to be great...)”(50).

The Bacris were further useful in the complicated and delicate negotiations for the release of American sailors held captive at Algiers. As early as 1790, Secretary of State Jefferson, in discussing the prices which had been asked of other powers for the redemption of slaves, commented: “Captain O’Brien thinks our men will now cost \$2,920 each, though a Jew merchant believes he could get them for \$2,264 (51). The usual procedure was for the Bacris to arrange for the release and to provide the ransom money. On one occasion, they not only loaned Barlow money for the release, but also put one of their ships at his disposal for the transfer of the captives to Marseilles (52).

The Bacris also rendered important services to Spain, the arch-enemy of the Jewish people. In 1795, the King of Spain gave Bacri Brothers a payment of 40,000 reals as a reward for the faithfulness and zeal which they had shown in his service as brokers of the Spanish consulate at Algiers (53). For the same reasons, the Spanish ambassador at Paris supported the Bacris in 1799 in their relations with the Directory. The Bacris were so highly valued that they were able to obtain from the Spanish sovereigns a letter of recommendation for their brother Solomon (54).

During the last decade of the 18th century, Algeria proved a firm friend of the new French republic, recognizing it and rendering positive aid to the struggling democracy, both financially and materially. The days gave every facility to France for the purchase of provisions in the Regency. These purchases were made at first through French trading agencies, the *Compagnie d'Afrique*, and its successor, the *Agence Nationale*. However, soon the Directory had recourse to Bacri and Busnach. The latter, with their monopolistic hold on the Algerian grain export trade, were able to win the confidence of the agents of the Convention in France, and from 1793 to 1798 shipped very large amounts of grain to that country (55). These shipments provided supplies necessary to stave off a disastrous scarcity in the French Mediterranean departments. Naturally, such transactions provided serious competition for the French agencies in Africa. Nevertheless, the Directory, chronically short of funds, was forced to deal with the Bacris, who did not ask for immediate payment (56).

During these years, the House of Bacri expanded its operations in France. Its warehouses in Marseille grew to great size. Jacob Bacri established himself in that port in 1795. The latter moved on to Paris, where he joined one of his employee; his official title was "agent in charge of the affairs of the Dey of Algiers," (57) indicating that he was the servant of the Dey. Jacob Bacri, likewise, acted under the special protection of the Regency. The Dey Hassan sent a letter of recommendation to the Convention in 1795, urging the French government to regard with favor Bacri, his "merchant in charge of the dey's commission" (58). The Bacris, in all their dealings with France, were acting not only for themselves, but also for the Dey, who was financially interested in their enterprises.

Lacking funds to pay for these considerable grain shipments, the French agent, Herculaïs, secured with the aid of Bacri an interest-free loan of Fr. 1,000,000 from the Dey (59). The Dey's benevolence is understandable when one realizes that he was acting as an interested party in France's commercial transactions with the Bacris. The Dey had good reason to treat with caution a nation with whom his agent, the House of Bacri and Busnach, had extensive dealings.

Competition between French and Jewish merchants in Algiers had been evident even before the French revolution (60). However, it was only after the revolution that the situation became serious enough to disturb the French. Complaints against the Jews and against the Bacris, in particular became frequent in French circles. The grain export monopoly held by the House of Bacri enraged the French consuls and traders (59). Some Marseille shipowners accused the Bacris of instigating the Dey to seize their ships on the high seas, and then buying them at auction (61). Bacri influence was blamed for the failure of important French trading houses in Algeria in 1798 (62). The Marseille Chamber of Commerce reported in 1810 that "as long as the Jews are the masters, there is no Frenchman who can venture to set up an establishment there." (63). It is undoubtedly true that the House of Bacri and Busnach had become the incontestable masters of the Algerian export trade.

Jeanbon Saint-André, the French consul in Algiers, whose primary aim was to saw discord between the Regency and England, (64) claimed that the Jews were using their influence

in the latter's favor (65) True, since 1793 the English were trying to persuade the Jews to cease shipments to France, but Bacri and Busnach, cognizant of the latter's military victories, did not succumb (66). Nevertheless, Saint-André denounced the intrigues of the Jews and the English to his government.

Such rationalizations were used by the financially embarrassed Directory to postpone payment on its debts to the Bacris. Delacroix, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, succinctly expressed the Directory's motives: "In thus retaining the sums due to these Jews, we will prevent them from separating themselves entirely from our interests ... (67) The French government was thus attempting to use the payment of legitimate debts as political blackmail in order to retain the friendship of the Jews and, with it, their influence on the Dey.

The latter, aware of these maneuvers, again and again called upon the French government to pay the debts to Bacris(68)The Dey made it clear that he was pressing this demand because only if the Bacris were paid would he be able to receive a return on the investment he had made in their enterprise. He stated: "In attacking them or their goods, you attack us or our treasury (69).

The French government, therefore, decided to pay, but its plans were interrupted by the outbreak of its war with Turkey and the subsequent involvement of Algiers (70) Although payment was made, the Directory requested and received provisions from the Bacri for the armies of Italy, Egypt and the Rhine (71) Deliveries were made despite the threats of the English, who requested the expulsion of the Bacris (72).

One of the first matters to be considered by France after the war, accordingly, was the question of the Bacri debts. Talleyrand, called upon for advice, reported very favorably: "The state of our present relations with the Regency necessitates the showing of the best good will possible to the Jews. This affair must be considered not as something private, but as an affair of state." (73) Bacri was allowed to present a bill of nearly Fr.8,000,000, on which an installment of Fr.3,725,000 was paid by the consuls (74) The Bacris took care to reimburse the Dey Mustapha, whose intervention they thought would still be useful in obtaining a definitive settlement. This foresight was rewarded when, after protests from Mustapha, the French paid another installment of Fr. 1,200,000. (75).

In 1802, Algerian-Franco relations again took a turn for the worse. Continual attacks were being made upon French ships by Algerian Navy, and, as though to add insult to injury, the Dey insisted on gifts from the French consul. Napoleon, extremely vexed, warned the Dey that he would descend upon Algeria and destroy the Regency (76).However, there is evidence that the Bacris themselves consistently maintained friendly relations with France (77). Jacob Bacri, who had become a familiar figure in Paris, continued to work for the final settlement of the debt, and the Bacris could not afford to antagonize the French (78). In a letter to his brother Abraham, on December12, 1803, Jacob implored his relatives not to despair since he had secured the co-operation of Talleyrand. He reminded them that the debt, which still amounted to Fr, 7,000,000,would be sufficient to pay off "the men of Algiers and still leave a considerable profit for the Bacris (79).Apparently, the rest of the family had abandoned hope of obtaining payment on the French debt, but Jacob was still optimistic.

However, after Talleyrand had left the government, the French Foreign Office conveniently forgot the entire affair. The situation changed with the return of their protector to political power in 1815. On orders from Talleyrand, the French consul, Pierre Deval, promised the Bacris in 1816 the liquidation of their debts (80). They now claimed Fr.24,000,000 , but

agreement was finally reached on a more realistic figure of Fr.7,000,000 (81). Both parties signed a convention on October 28, 1819, providing that Fr.7,000,000 would be paid to the Bacris, less the amount that might be claimed by their creditors in France.

Jacob Bacri and Deval presented the agreement to the Dey Hussein, who fully approved of it (82). Finally, after considerable debate in the French Chamber, a law was passed on July 24 1820, approving the settlement (83).

Jacob Bacri, who failed to derive any immediate benefits from the settlement, was so crippled by debts that he was forced to ask the English consul for a loan in 1824. When he failed to repay it, the Dey placed him under arrest, and at the same time, believing that this would facilitate payment, forced him to abandon the title to the debts in his own favor (84).

The Dey, perhaps with some justice, also accused Deval of conniving with Bacri to defraud him (85). He therefore demanded the removal of Deval and the immediate payment of the debt. But instead of a favorable answer, a French frigate arrived off Algiers in October 1826, bearing a note requesting reparations for diverse acts of hostility and piracy (86). The Dey was forced to disavow the conduct of the Algerian Navy, but continued to request Deval's recall and the payment of his debt.

On February 28, 1827, Baron de Damas, Minister of Foreign Affairs, replied that France had fulfilled all its obligations according to the agreement of 1819, and that "the government of the King will not be able to deliver the sum ... until after all claims against it will no longer exist." He stated that the Algerian government, by its attitude in this affair, had ceased to be friendly. Military action was threatened unless the Algerian Navy were restrained, reparations paid, and friendly relations restored with the French consul (87). However, the letter containing this ultimatum was never sent. Instead, four ships of the French navy approached Algiers in April in support for Deval (88). This infuriated the Dey, who was further angered by reports that the French concessions were being armed.

On April 30, 1827, at the festival held at the end of the Moslem holy celebration in his palace, Hussein beckoned Deval to approach, and asked him if he had received an answer from his government to the letters concerning the Bacri debts; if not, why not (89). The discussion grew heated when Deval replied in a haughty, and the Dey, losing his temper, struck Deval with the handle of his fan. The French consul immediately notified Paris of this "insult" to his dignity.

This, the famous *coup d'éventail*, led the French ultimatum of June 15, 1827, which was presented with the support of a naval detachment. France demanded an apology for the insult, and punishment of the "pirates", the right to arm her establishment in Algeria, and a declaration that the French government had completely liquidated the Bacri-Busnach affair and that she would enjoy a most-favored treatment in Algerian commerce. Hussein naturally refused these terms. On the following day a blockade of the Algerian coast commenced by French warships. The road was open for the ultimate expedition to Algiers and its conquest in 1830.

Conclusion

Under the Turks, the Jews formed a notable part of the population of Algiers; but they suffered grievous burdens and mortifying insults. Hence they gave the French a hearty welcome; and their conditions have been so much improved, that they have turned the tables on their former rulers, whom they often treat with contumely and harshness. This circumstance, by increasing the hatred of the other native race, to them, has led the Israelites to dread greatly the departure of the French. They have a monopoly of the land-trade and brokerage. Their children frequent the

French schools, speak the French tongue, and assume the Frank dress, without losing the spirit of caste. They readily become lawyers' clerks and employees of government; they are already initiated into French legislation; and the natives have no other consulting advocates.

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