**North Africa**

In the 1930s, North Africa was home to one of the largest Jewish centers in the Muslim world. During the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, France and Italy occupied the region, and ran the territories as colonies (see the attached map). In 1830, France conquered Algeria, in 1881 it took Tunisia, and in 1912 it occupied Morocco. Meanwhile, in 1911, Italy occupied Libya. These invasions had a decisive influence on the fate of North African Jewry during the Second World War.

When war broke out in Europe in September 1939, after the German invasion of Poland, France and Britain declared war on Germany. In May 1940, France was occupied by Germany, and divided into two parts (see map below). The Northern part was ruled by Germany, and the Southern part was handed over to the government headed by Philippe Pétain, and ruled from its capital in the town of Vichy. France’s North African colonies – Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia – were managed by the Vichy government. The Vichy regime supported Nazi Germany and its policies, and passed laws targeting Jews and foreigners, both in mainland France and in its North African colonies. These laws were implemented differently in different regions, due to legal and political differences, as well as the position of the local French administration regarding the Jews, and the intervention of the Muslim leadership.

Algeria was the first French colony to begin implementing the Vichy laws. Immediately after the publication of the laws in France, in October 1940, Algeria promulgated legislation concerning the status of the Jews which affected all the areas of their lives – legal, economic, educational, and organizational. Jews, to whom the Crémieux Decree of 1870 had granted French citizenship 70 years earlier, now lost their civil rights. In addition, the French colonial administration in Algeria was loyal to the Vichy Regime, and enforced its edicts in full.

Moroccan Jews were also hurt by the Vichy laws. Various decrees published from October 1940 onwards caused Jewish government workers, teachers, and lawyers to lose their jobs, impacting their financial situation. During the war years, Morocco was a point of transit for many, primarily Jewish, refugees who were fleeing Europe. Most settled in port cities such as Tangier or Casablanca. Some had permits allowing them to stay in Morocco temporarily, but thousands of those who did not were sent to detention camps. The local Jewish community helped them to resolve their legal status and find places to live and work.

In Tunisia, as well, laws began to be passed restricting Jewish life, and revoking many of the Jews’ legal, civic, and economic rights. In 1940, for example, Tunisia passed a law concerning the legal status of the Jews.

In November 1942, the Allies invaded Algeria and Morocco, in Operation Torch, and these territories were liberated from Vichy’s direct control. However, in practice, former members of the Vichy administration continued to run these countries, and only in March 1943 were the anti-Jewish laws repealed.

Beginning in November 1942, the Germans controlled Tunisia directly for half a year. The Tunisian Jews were the only Jews in North Africa who experienced direct Nazi occupation. The damage to their community was severe – Jewish leaders were arrested, and Jews were pressed into forced labor and sent to work camps. In addition, the Jews suffered from daily bombardments, from heavy fines, their property was confiscated, and in some places they were forced to wear the yellow badge.

The fate of the Libyan Jews during the war was also determined by colonial rule. Libyan Jews, most of whom had been Italian subjects, had lived under the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini since 1922. In 1938, Italy launched its racial laws, which were partially implemented also in Libya, impinging upon Jewish life there. When Italy entered the war, in June 1940, on the side of Nazi Germany, the situation of the Libyan Jews deteriorated; the war affected local fascist legislation and actions against the Jews. The Jews’ economic and judicial status was restricted, and they suffered from harassment by the local fascists. In addition, Libyan Jews suffered from bombardments, and were sent to perform forced labor in the Sidi Azaz and Bukbuk labor camps. Some 2,600 Jews from Cyrenaica in Libya were deported to the Jadu detention camp established nearby. A deficient diet, extreme overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions, and harsh climate resulted in epidemics. Simultaneously, some of the Libyan Jews were deported to Tunisia and Italy, and from there to the concentration camps at Innsbruck in Austria and Bergen-Belsen in Germany. According to scholarly estimates, more than 700 Jews were murdered in Libya during the war, about 2.5 percent of the Jews who lived there at the time.

As noted above, in November 1942, Algeria and Morocco were liberated from the Vichy regime. In January 1943, Libya was liberated by the British, and on the 7th of May, 1943, the Allies liberated Tunisia from the Germans.