

**The Mellah: Exploring Moroccan Jewish and
Muslim Narratives on Urban Space**

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
A Brief History of Moroccan Jewish Settlement	7
Source Review	11
Chapter 1: Jewish Perspectives	25
1.1 Original Myth	25
1.2 Stories Retold	33
1.3 Foundation myths and narratives by theme	38
1.3.1 Muslim-Jewish Relations.....	38
1.3.2 Sultanic-Jewish Relations.....	43
1.3.3 Daily life: Protection	46
1.3.4 Daily Life: Vulnerability	51
1.4 Conclusions	52
Chapter 2: Muslim Perspectives	54
2.1 Foundation Stories	54
2.2 Mellah as a political tool and source of monetary gain	61
2.3 Activity in the Mellah	71
2.4 Conclusions	76
Understanding the stories	77

Introduction

When I studied in Rabat, Morocco for a semester, I spent many weekends and Jewish holidays at the synagogue and amongst the Jewish community. While the essential Jewish rituals were familiar to me as an American Jew, some of the Moroccan Jewish traditions and customs were foreign. One such example was the distribution of little packets of salt after the Purim holiday services. When I asked a woman whom I met at the synagogue about the meaning of the salt, she responded that the salt was to ward off the evil eye, saying that for centuries Moroccan Jews had this tradition of receiving the auspicious salt in synagogue on Purim. She explained that the tradition stems from the practice of Jews historically being the Sultan's exclusive salt traders. This was a piece of information I had heard before, but in a different context. I had heard of this Jewish profession when asking why the Jewish quarter in Moroccan cities is called *al-mellah*, an Arabic word that derives from the root for salt. As I have studied more on the topic, I discovered a few other explanations for this name, some of which connote the population's relationship with the space.

The primary, and most valid, explanation for the use of the word *mellah* as the Jewish quarter is that the first *mellah* created, the *mellah* of Fez, was established on salty marshlands, or a salt quarry, thus a place of salt.¹ Another reason given is that the name stems from a Jewish responsibility for salting, preserving and displaying the heads of executed criminals.² This legend reveals a negative association with the space and the population that lived there.

¹ Jane S. Gerber *Jewish Society in Fez: 1450-1700 Studies in Communal and Economic Life* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1980) , 19.

² Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: a History and Source Book* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979) 81.

In Emily Gottreich's book, *The Mellah of Marrakesh*, the author describes the space of the *mellah*, as part of the fabric of the city, as a liminal space for the Muslim inhabitants of the city. This was an area that Muslims were allowed to enter in the daytime but remained closed at night, a space in which Muslims came to pursue economic activities and pay reverence to the Muslim saints found in the area, an area that Muslims identified with as part of Marrakesh. Yet, it was also a space that was "betwixt and between"³ because, while it was part of Marrakesh, it was not a Muslim area. In that quarter, Muslims could escape from religious orthodoxy, where they could drink, gamble and engage in sexual misconduct.

The Muslim relationship to the *mellah*, a space that includes the sanctioned and unsanctioned, is paralleled by the Jewish relationship to the *mellah*, which likewise contains a duality. On the one hand, the *mellah* was a space in which Jews were secure and protected. The *mellahs* were often located near the king's palace, placing the Jews under the protection of the king, and they were enclosed areas with gates that closed at nights and on the Sabbath. Additionally, the Jewish community in various *mellahs* believed that Jewish saints protected the *mellah* from hardships as they arose.⁴ Lastly, as a separate area, the *mellah* was a place where Jewish religious and communal life could thrive. Yet, the *mellah* was also a vulnerable space, a space that was often attacked by rebelling tribes, as a challenge to the king's authority for the king's power directly correlated with the security of the Jews.⁵

³ Emily Gottreich, *The Mellah of Marrakesh: Jewish and Muslim Space in Morocco's Red City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 79.

⁴ An example from Marrakesh is found in *ibid.* 34.

⁵ Shlomo A. Deshen *Mellah Society: Jewish Community Life in Sherifian Morocco*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), 22.

While each city is unique with its own culture and history, common themes in imagining the space of the *mellah*, both among Jewish and Muslim populations, are found. In order to further understand these relationships, one must go back to the beginning, to the creation stories of the *mellahs*. In this thesis, I seek to understand the cities' inhabitants' relationship to the *mellah* by collecting, translating and analyzing the *mellah* foundation myths and recorded events that occurred within. As Gottreich explains in "On the Origins of the *Mellah* of Marrakesh," understanding the circumstances of the creation of the *mellah* is an important step in understanding the structural hierarchy of interreligious and intercommunal relations in different Moroccan towns.⁶ Furthermore, the *mellah* itself is a "concrete expression" of the Moroccan Jewish-Muslim relationship.⁷ Looking at narratives written by Muslim and Jewish authors at different points in time reveals the changing relationships with the *mellah* and the other.

In order to understand the narratives presented, one must understand the historical context of the events and the authors who wrote about them. Therefore, in the introduction chapter is a brief history of Jews in Morocco, followed by a source review. The following chapter presents the Jewish sources about the *mellah*. Here we see the Jewish-sultanic relationship, Jewish-Muslim interactions and Jewish perceptions of the space of the *mellah*. The third chapter looks at Muslim sources about the *mellah*, these stories shed light on Muslim conceptualizations of the *mellah* and Jews through Muslim activity in and relating to the *mellahs*. The last chapter compares and contrasts some trends found in sources from both communities.

⁶ Emily Gottreich "On the Origins of the *Mellah* of Marrakesh," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (2003): 287-305.

⁷ Gottreich(2007), 7.

A Brief History of Moroccan Jewish Settlement

Jewish settlement in the Maghreb, Western North Africa, is thought to have begun over two thousand years ago. These Jews established themselves in the Maghreb long before the Arab conquest, and were essentially indigenous.⁸ These Jews lived primarily in the mountains, among the indigenous Amazigh tribes. There seems to have been cultural sharing between the Amazigh and Jews as evidenced by Jews speaking the Amazigh language and the myths of Berber-Jews and Jewish Berbers.⁹ These Jews who cohabited with the Amazigh and had long established communities in Morocco later became known as *toshavim*, or indigenous Jews.¹⁰

With the Arab conquests of the late seventh century, the Maghreb became an Islamic land and many Amazigh tribes converted to Islam, adapting Islam to their beliefs and practices.¹¹ Despite Islamic unification, ethnic and tribal tensions continued to exist, leading to many revolts, rebellions and dynastic changes.¹² It is probable that there were Jews who immigrated to the Maghreb through the Arab conquest, albeit in small numbers. Regardless of the number of Jewish immigrants, the legal status of the Jews in Morocco changed under Islamic rule.

According to Islamic law, Jews are a tolerated minority. Because Judaism is a monotheistic religion, Jews, along with Christians, are not required to convert to Islam under Islamic rule. This is consecrated in the Pact of ‘Umar, a pact which classifies Jews,

⁸ Deshen, 5.

⁹ For more on this look at Daniel Schroeter “The Shifting Boundaries of Moroccan Jewish Identities”, *Jewish Social Studies* vol.15, number 1(Indiana University Press: Fall 2008)” 145-164.

¹⁰ Gerber, 43.

¹¹ Richard J. H. Gottheil “Morocco as it is Today”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (American Oriental Society: Sept. 1934): 231-239, 232.

¹² Gerber, 7.

Christians and Zoroastrians as *ahl al-dhimma*, peoples of a protected minority. The pact guarantees governmental protection of this minority and, in exchange, requires an extra tax, *jizya*, on the minority communities as well as other, external indications of their second-class status.¹³ As time progressed, different Moroccan dynasties enforced the laws of the *dhimma* with varying degrees of stridency.

Although separate quarters within a city are not a requirement of the Pact of ‘Umar, nor of Islamic law, many Islamic cities throughout the Islamic world were divided into ethnic quarters as part of the organization of the city.¹⁴ These quarters, however, were for the most part created voluntarily, and people of different ethnicities were not limited to living in their ethnicity’s quarter.¹⁵ Even though it is not Islamic law, some Islamic scholars contend that Jews and Christians should be physically separated from Muslims to prevent negative influence. *Dhimmi* living among Muslims should return houses bought in Muslim quarters to the Muslims.¹⁶ Other scholars prefer cohabitation, in the hopes that the *dhimmi* will ultimately convert.¹⁷

In Fez, in 1438, for the first time in Morocco, Jews were segregated and obligated to live within a specific area demarcated for Jewish settlement alone. The Marinid king, Abu Muhammad Abd al-Haqq, placed the *mellah* next to his palace, and completely

¹³ Norman A Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 25 -26.

¹⁴ Susan Miller and Mauro Bertagnin (ed.) *The Architecture and Memory of the Minority Quarter in the Muslim Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 23.

¹⁶ Daniel J. Schroeter, *The Sultan’s Jew: Morocco and the Sephardi World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 91.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

outside of the *medina*, or old city, where the Muslims and Jews had both lived.¹⁸ He thus separated the Jews of Fez from the Muslims of Fez. The ostensible reason for this was the discovery of a saint buried in the *medina*, thus making the *medina* a holy space in which Jews could not live, thereby forcing the Jews to move out.¹⁹

Shortly after the creation of the *mellah*, Jews and Muslims arrived in large waves from Spain and Portugal, escaping the persecution of the Spanish Expulsion. These Jews, known in Hebrew as *megorashim*, or the exiles,²⁰ changed the make-up of the Moroccan Jewish by introducing new customs. Within the Jewish community, tension arose between the *toshavim* and the new Jewish immigrants, the *megorashim*. The *megorashim* had different practices and traditions from the *toshavim*, creating a competition over which group had religious hegemony. Ultimately the *megorashim* were successful and many prominent Moroccan Jewish families claimed historical ties to Andalusia.²¹

The second *mellah* was built in Marrakesh, approximately one century later, in the mid-sixteenth century (exact date unknown).²² The *mellah* of Marrakesh was decreed by the Saadi dynasty, which had moved the capital city of Morocco from Fez to Marrakesh. Contemporary historians believe that the formation of the *mellah* was enacted in order to establish the legitimacy of Saadi rule both by displaying the ability to protect the *dhimmi*, and by making the city of Marrakesh equal to Fez in religious orthodoxy. The reason for this is that Fez was the home to the '*ulama*', the educated class of Islamic legal scholars that opposed the new rule. The site of the *mellah* of Marrakesh was part of

¹⁸Susan G. Miller, Attilio Petruccioli and Mauro Bertagnin, "Inscribing Minority Space in the Islamic City: The Jewish Quarter of Fez (1438-1912)" *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 60, No. 3 (University of California Press, Sept. 2001): 310-327, 312.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 313.

²⁰ Gerber, 46.

²¹ Schroeter (2008) 149.

²² See Gottreich (2007) 12-21.

a larger process, undertaken by the first few Saadi rulers, to reshape Marrakesh by building landmarks and important sites, thus consecrating their rule. It is possible that the *mellah* was built as a unique project, or that it was a byproduct of the building of the Muwassin mosque, a major landmark in Marrakesh.²³ Regardless, the *mellah*'s institution was part of the transformation of Marrakesh to the capital and the installation of the new dynasty.

The concept of building the *mellah* to authorize a new capital city and legitimize a new dynasty is further supported by the creation of the *mellah* of Meknes. The Meknes *mellah* was the third official *mellah* in Morocco. Moulay Ismail, of the Alawite dynasty, founded this *mellah* just twenty years after the Alawite dynasty came to power in 1666, upon establishing Meknes as the new capital.²⁴ Although the Alawite dynasty continues to rule today, new *mellahs* were built around 150 years later.

Moulay Sulayman decreed the next few *mellahs* those of the cities: Tetouan, Rabat, Sale, and Mogador (Essaouira). These *mellahs*, excepting Tetouan, were not built in an area in which the Jews already lived, thus requiring the Jews to leave their homes and areas. Furthermore, many towns and smaller cities built *mellahs* through the end of the nineteenth century.²⁵ There are different explanations as to why building *mellahs* became Moulay Sulayman's policy. As Daniel Schroeter brings forth in *The Sultan's Jew*, it is possible that the king's motivation was "his concern for the rigorous application of the *shari'a* (Islamic law)."²⁶ Thus, he sought to fulfill the Pact of 'Umar by creating a protected space for the Jews, a population that was vulnerable to attack from rebelling

²³ Gottreich, (2007) 19.

²⁴ Joseph Toledano, *Vayehi Beet HaMellah: Toldot HaYehudim BiMaroko Mreishit Hityashvutam V'ad Yameinu*, (Jerusalem: Ramtol, 1984), 65.

²⁵ Schroeter (2002), 91.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

tribes, and, in leaning toward orthodoxy, he physically separated Jews and Muslims in the cities.²⁷ Despite the universality of the *mellahs*, each city has a unique narrative about its *mellah*'s creation, possibly reflecting distinctive regional concerns and different environmental factors for the *mellah*'s creation.

Jews, with some exceptions, were required to live in the *mellahs* until the French and Spanish Protectorates in the early twentieth century, when Jews began to move to the new, European neighborhoods.²⁸ Despite this movement, many Jews remained in the *mellahs* until the mass migrations from Morocco to Israel in the 1950s and 60s. Although the prescribed period of settlement in the *mellah* was relatively short in most cities, the *mellah* was central to Jewish life and memory. The creation of the *mellah* was not simply a moment in time, but rather a process through which the Jewish communities transformed in their history and culture,²⁹ and the foundation myths were the basis for the new Jewish community. As Susan G. Miller notes in *The Architecture and Memory of the Minority Quarter in the Muslim Mediterranean City*, “the imagining of a place becomes a complex process whereby sites achieve a symbolic value that reinforces collective identity.”³⁰

Source Review

In order to find the foundation myths and stories about the *mellahs*, I collected sources that span time, geography and language. From the Jewish perspective, I studied Hebrew sources written both by authors who had experienced the *mellah* firsthand and

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Clifford Geertz “Suq: the bazaar economy in Sefrou” *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society: Three Essays in Cultural Analysis* ed. Clifford Geertz, Hildred Geertz, and Lawrence Rosen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) : 123-244, 165.

²⁹ Gottreich, (2003) 294.

³⁰ Miller (2010) 30.

Jews of Moroccan descent, who had not lived in the *mellah* but wrote about it from stories they heard. Additionally, even some of the authors who lived in the *mellah* tell narratives that come from a distant past. Both this temporal distance and the geographic distance are reflected in the changing nature of the stories. From the Muslim perspective, I found Arabic sources that discuss the history of Morocco, and include information on the Jews and *mellahs*. In general, there is much more information on the subject written from the Jewish perspective. This is explained by the *mellah*'s centrality to the Jews and its marginality to the general Muslim population. However, I do attempt to present different Muslim perspectives. Below is a review of the sources with some explanation as to the distinct perspectives and goals of their authors, as well as the social and historical context in which they wrote.

The sources below come from a variety of genres: pre-modern histories, folktales, historical accounts and modern histories. All of these sources make use of folk narrative in their writings, thus illuminating to the reader a long history of traditions.

English sources

In addition to the Hebrew and Arabic language sources mentioned above, I used one English-language source as a primary source, for it is a record of narrated folktales.

Moroccan Jewish Folktales, is a product of a larger project to collect international Jewish folktales from Jewish immigrants to Israel, and Arab, Bedouin, and Druze folktales within Israel, spearheaded by Dov Noy. Originally from Poland, Noy immigrated to mandate Palestine as a young adult. Noy studied Talmud, Jewish History and Bible Studies at Hebrew University and earned his Ph.D. in Folklore Studies from Indiana University. He went on to direct the collection of folktales in Israel and

established the Haifa Ethnological Museum and Folklore Archives. The effort to collect folktales included, as of 1966, over three hundred storytellers and collectors, collaborating to preserve folkloric traditions.

The book records seventy-one stories, narrated by thirty-two people, all of whom were from Morocco. The stories were collected in their original languages, Judeo-Arabic or Judeo-Spanish, and written in Hebrew by thirteen different collectors between the years of 1955-1962, and are currently preserved in their manuscript form in the Israel Folktale Archives. The stories “tell about Biblical heroes, about Talmudic teachers, about great Medieval rabbis and sages, and about saints and miracle workers who lived only a few generations before the narrator.”³¹ Included in this are stories about the creation of the *mellah* and insights into portrayals of the Moroccan Jewish relationship with the king, and Muslim-Jewish relations.

As the preface notes, *Moroccan Jewish Folktales* was published in Israel at a time during which the role of Moroccan Jews as citizens of Israel was problematic. Mizrahi Jews, Jews from Islamic and Middle Eastern countries, immigrated to Israel and immediately faced maltreatment and oppression. The state, largely run by Ashkenazi Jews, Jews of Europe, sent and settled many Mizrahi Jews to development towns in the periphery of the state, adding economic barriers to their assimilation into Israeli society. Other barriers that the Mizrahi Jews faced included lack of education and racism from the hegemony of European Jewry. While Noy’s project was intended to preserve the cultural heritage of many different populations within Israel, and not specifically those of Moroccan Jewish heritage, we will later see attempts from the same time period to

³¹ Dov Noy *Moroccan Jewish Folktales* (New York: Herzl Press, 1966), 6.

preserve and strengthen Moroccan Jewish identity, perhaps as a reaction to the oppression of Mizrahi Jews.

Hebrew Sources

The Hebrew sources that will be studied are listed here in chronological order: *Divrei Hayamim Shel Fsz*, by Meir Benyahu; an article from *Hatzfirah* (a periodical), *Ner Hamaarav*, by Jacob Moses Toledano; *Kehillat Sefrou* and *Fes V'hakhmeha*, by David Ovadia; and *Vayehi be'et HaMellah*, by Joseph Toledano.

Divrei haYamim Shel Fes, the Chronicles of Fez, is a compilation of manuscripts, mostly written by members of the famous Ibn Danaan family of Fez. Meir Benyahu, the compiler and editor, was born in mandate Palestine in 1926. He was of Baghdadi Jewish origin, and an important scholar of Oriental Jews and manuscript recovery.

As Benyahu writes in the introduction, the chronicles of the Ibn Danaan family began with the second Rabbi Saadia Ibn Danaan, who recorded the events of his time and encouraged his children to continue the tradition. Rabbi Saadia the Second began writing after the Spanish Expulsion, yet, a few records regarding events of year prior are found, as Rabbi Saadia the Second had asked his father, Rabbi Saadia the First, to relate important events before the Expulsion. These events that are included focus on the creation of the first *mellah*, and various other traumatic events for the Jews.

The family continued to record events as eyewitnesses, but did not do so in an orderly manner. Records were written on various other documents and loose pages. Additionally, the documents were written in multiple languages. In the 17th century, Rabbi Shmuel Ibn Danaan the Fourth began to compile and copy his family's records into a comprehensive book, in which he included the writings of another prominent member

of the Fasi Jewish community, Rabbi Shaul ben haRav David Sirriro. The book he compiled was known in Hebrew as *Divrei haYamim shel Fes*, and in Arabic as *al-Tarikh*, the history. His descendants, who make a concerted effort to record contemporary events in book format, carried on his work. The events recorded generally relate to governmental decrees, enemy attacks on the Jewish community and plagues, famine, and other natural disasters.

Although Rabbi Shmuel Ibn Danaan the Fourth gathered together all the found documents, he copied the records in the order that he received them, which did not correlate with the chronological order of events. In Meir Benyahu's edition, the events are reorganized in chronological order. Additionally, he added the probable authors to the anonymous documents, based on date and language. The records of the first three generations, Rabbi Saadia Ibn Danaan the Second, Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Danaan and Rabbi Saadia Ibn Danaan the Third were all written in Judeo-Arabic. Benyahu provides Professor Haim Zeev Hirschberg's Hebrew translation of these documents in square parenthesis, either included in the text itself or in footnotes.

Benyahu viewed his work as an integral piece in the academic study of Moroccan Jewry. In his introduction, he discusses the field's origins as non-academic, consisting mostly of books that compiled handwritten records and oral tradition in a historical fashion. However, he notes that the newer studies in the field are held to higher academic standards. His work, published in 1993, is part of the shift towards a more academic, objective study of Moroccan Jewry.³²

³² Meir Benyahu, *Divrei HaYamim shel Fez* (Jerusalem, Israel: Tel Aviv University Center for Diaspora Research, 1993) 7-24.

Hatzfirah was a Hebrew-language newspaper published in Warsaw. It began in 1862 as a weekly publication and, after some cancellations and reinstitutions, it became a daily newspaper in 1886. The newspaper contained a column called “Bein Aḥeinu haRiḥoqim”, “Amongst our Distant Brethren”, a column in which contributors from around the world published articles. Beginning in 1891, Ya’ish Halewi, a Moroccan Jew from the city of Essaouira, became one of these international contributors. He wrote to *Hatzfirah* to protest the Jewish elites’ “exploitation of the poor”, criticize the lack of social services provided in the face of great need³³ and condemn the superstitious beliefs held by Moroccan Jews.³⁴ By publishing his critiques in this newspaper, Halewi was able to make his voice heard both in Morocco and beyond.³⁵ Another contribution to the column about Morocco was published on August 12, 1892. The article was written by a European Jewish traveler who visited Morocco and sent a series of articles about his travels to the paper. His contributions shed light on how a European Jew experienced Jewish life and the *mellah* in Morocco.

Ner Hamaarav hu Toldot Yisrael B’Moroqo, *The Light of the West: the History of Israel in Morocco*, by Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Toledano, published in Jerusalem in 1911. This book is one of the works Benyahu mentions in his introduction as a pioneering work in the field of Moroccan Jewish studies. Although Rabbi Toledano was born and raised in Tiberias, his goals as stated in his introduction demonstrate his strong connection to Moroccan Jewry. However, the dedication of the book to the fiftieth anniversary of the Alliance Israélite Universelle Paris indicates an interesting view of Moroccan Jews. The

³³ Daniel Schroeter “Halewi: A Moroccan Reformer” *Struggles and Survival in the Modern Middle East* ed. Edmund Burke III (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993): 44-58. 47.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 51.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 47.

Alliance Israélite Universelle is an international organization, based in Paris, that works with various Diaspora communities through providing educational, cultural and political services. The primary goal of the organization was “the regeneration of Jews within their home countries.”³⁶ For Jews worldwide this meant their emancipation and integration into their host society. However, the AIU also maintained a negative view toward Islam and Islamic lands, and viewed the Jews who lived there as primitive but capable of rising above the “mire of superstition, ignorance and poverty that were believed to stem from the corrosive influence of the Islamic environment.”³⁷ The prevailing goal was to regenerate the Jews from those lands in the image of the European, “westernized” Jew.³⁸ Due to the difference in the AIU’s values and the various Islamic countries in which it worked, the AIU’s efforts alienated the Jews from their host societies.³⁹

Although the book is not considered to be of high academic caliber, it is one of the first books published about Moroccan Jewry, and sets the basis for the field. In his introduction, Rabbi Toledano laments the lack of information on the topic of Sephardi Jewish, and specifically, Moroccan Jewish history, mostly due to a lack of scholarship in the area. Despite the lack of information, his method for writing the history includes news items, manuscript collection, and the use of oral tradition and tales. He expresses his hope that the book will enlighten the worldwide Jewish community about Moroccan Jewry.

In Toledano’s opinion, the Moroccan Jewish community is unique because of its long history. He adds that despite, or perhaps because of, heavy oppression, it had a

³⁶ Jonathan P. Decter, “Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewry” *The Jew in the Modern World* ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 435-444. 437-438.

³⁷ Decter, 436.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

vibrant tradition and produced many great sages. Thus, Toledano seeks to illuminate Moroccan Jewish history and important families and sages, as it could greatly and positively impact religious Jewish life. Because of this goal, the book is written with a religious perspective.⁴⁰

Rabbi David Ovadia wrote both *Kehillat Sefrou Maroqo*, the Community of Sefrou, Morocco, and *Fes V'Hakhmeha*, Fez and its Sages. Born in Sefrou in the early 20th century, Rabbi Ovadia lived in Morocco until the early 1960s, when he, along with large numbers of Moroccan Jews, immigrated to Israel. Rabbi Ovadia worked in education both in Morocco and in Israel, and once in Israel, was inspired by the need to preserve the legacy of the Moroccan Jewish community.

Kehillat Sefrou Maroqo, published in 1975, is a four-volume work dedicated to the community of Sefrou, a city close to Fez that had long been home to a vibrant Jewish community. The first two volumes are a compilation of documents, handwritten manuscripts and letters that were written by rabbis of the sister cities of Fez, Meknes and Sefrou. Ovadia valued their word as religious men and eyewitnesses to the events they recorded. Their records mostly pertain to internal Jewish communal life. He did not edit any of the documents, although he provides Hebrew translations when needed. Additionally, there is no specific order to the documents; rather, he recorded them as he received them, and wrote extensive indexes for the reader to find his/her interests. The third volume is a history of Sefrou Jewry that Rabbi Ovadia wrote, based on the original sources in the first two volumes and other historical works. Finally, the fourth volume is a history of the sages of the area.

⁴⁰ Joseph Toledano, *Ner Hamaarav: Hu Toldot Yisrael B'Moroqo*, (Jerusalem, Ottoman Palestine: 1911) i-iv.

Fes V'Ḥakhmeha, published in 1979, is a two-volume work that is a compilation of different sources relating to Fez, such as the original *Divrei Hayamim Shel Fes* and other similar books. In addition, Rabbi Ovadia includes a history of the important sages and rabbis of Fez.

In the preface to both books it is evident that Rabbi Ovadia was driven by religious and social motivations. From a religious perspective, he, like Rabbi Toledano, focused on the importance of the Moroccan sages and the role their writings can serve in worldwide Jewry. In addition, he uses messianic terminology while explaining his mission, implying that he personally was motivated by a religious imperative.

His work was intended to address a number of social issues as well. Firstly, he claims that he is saving the last remnants of the customs and traditions of Moroccan Jews through his work, a social problem evident to him by the mass emigration from Morocco. Additionally, he seeks to shed light on the Jewish community that is not well known in other Diaspora communities and Israel, perhaps as a result of the anti-Moroccan and Mizrahi sentiment in Israel at the time.⁴¹

Ovadia's motivation to save Moroccan Jewish religious and cultural customs may stem from his life experiences. As mentioned above, he participated in the mass emigration of Moroccan Jews from Morocco; thus, he saw with his own eyes the disintegration of the dynamic community in which he was highly active. This may have caused his need to "save the remnants" of the customs. Additionally, he was a religious leader. Having come from a rabbinical family, he served as a judge in religious courts, worked in Jewish education, and was a ferocious opponent of Jewish French educational

⁴¹ David Ovadia, *Kehillat Sefrou* (Jerusalem, Israel: Daf Chen, 1975) 1:xi-xii and David, Ovadia, *Fes V'Ḥakhmeha* (Jerusalem, Israel: Daf Chen, 1979) 1:xi-xvi .

intervention, hence opposing the Alliance and its efforts in Morocco. Yet in Israel he faced unforeseeable paradoxes. Firstly, Israel was a Jewish country, yet much of Israeli society is secular, a complete change from the religious environment to which he was accustomed. Additionally, as a man from a respected family and religious judge, Ovadia went from a highly respectable position in Moroccan Jewish society to being part of the underclass of Mizrahi Jews.⁴² Therefore, his work seeks to improve the status of Moroccan Jewry by highlighting its uniqueness and importance within the Jewish world.

Vayehi be'et haMellah, It was in the Time of the *Mellah*, by Joseph Toledano, was published in 1984 in Israel. Toledano himself was born and raised in Meknes, Morocco, and moved to Israel later in life. He authored many books in French about Moroccan Jewry and the *mellah*; *Vayehi be'et haMellah* is his only Hebrew book on the topic. The book tells the story of the Jews of Morocco by focusing on the *mellah* and life there. The method used is a combination of academic sources and interviews, giving the reader both fact and the Jewish narrative of events, the latter of which is usually indicated by the phrase “according to tradition...”

In his introduction, Toledano explains a few of his motivations for writing the book through story-telling. Toledano saw a travel guide for Morocco and immediately flipped to the section on Meknes. To his distress, there was not a single mention of the Jewish community in either the history provided or recommended landmarks. He thought to himself that, in the blink of an eye, the hundreds of years of Jewish history in Morocco was being erased. Therefore, he committed to writing a book about Jewish life in the

⁴² For more on mainstream Zionist rejection of Mizrahi Jews look at Jews in the Modern World, “Sepharadi and Middle Eastern Jewry”, also look at Yehouda Shenhav “Ethnicity and National Memory: The World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries (WOJAC) in the Context of the Palestinian National Struggle” in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 29, No. 1 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., May 2002): 27-56.

mellahs of Morocco. He wrote this book in Hebrew so that the Jewish nation, as he calls it, will know of Moroccan Jewish history.⁴³

However, he also wrote the book specifically for Moroccan Jews. Another story in his introduction explains the title of the book, a title that, according to Toledano, implies nostalgia for a bygone time. A friend of Toledano's criticized the title because, in the friend's opinion, the word *mellah* connotes oppression and raises feelings of shame and embarrassment at the overcrowding and filth of the *mellah*. Toledano, however, wished to memorialize what he calls the true *mellah* through recollecting the positive aspects of Jewish life, a type of commemoration that stems from love for a distant place. This may have also been a response to the narrative that had, by then, become mainstream in the 1980s in Israel. This narrative, promoted primarily by the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries, WOJAC, mirrored the European Jewish narrative by portraying Jewish life in Middle Eastern countries as a history of oppression finally ending in bitter expulsion from those countries.⁴⁴ The book's discussion of vibrant Jewish life seems to challenge that narrative.

Lastly, Toledano sought to strengthen the identity of Moroccan Jews. As Toledano recalls, Moroccan Jews during his lifetime felt tension between their different identities. Under the French protectorate, Jews were taught to have allegiance to France, yet, according to him, they did not truly identify with France. When Morocco became independent, the Jews were proud, but had lost their place in the larger society. Then, even in the land of Jews, in Israel, the Moroccans, "for reasons already known", still felt

⁴³ Toledano, David, "Introduction".

⁴⁴ Shenhav, 30.

an identity deficiency. Therefore, his discussion of the vibrant Jewish *mellah* life is an exercise in reaffirming his, and his peers', identity.

Arabic Sources

Tarikh al-Ḍu'ayyif (Tarikh al-Dawla al-Sa'idiya), Al-Ḍu'ayyif's History (the History of the Sadiya Dynasty), was authored by Muhammad al-Ḍu'ayyif al-Ribati. Born in 1752 in Rabat, Morocco, al-Ḍu'ayyif spent much of his life travelling the lands of Morocco.⁴⁵ Although he, in his book, claims that members of his family were well-known and respected scholars and religious leaders, this is not correct. He actually was born into a very poor family, forcing him to travel to find work.⁴⁶ He went to Fez to study, and there he met the king.⁴⁷ Due to his background, the reader will find "al-Ḍu'ayyif inclined towards the poor and critical of the rich and their monopoly and greed." However, his opinions are focused on and critical of the "scholars of science and religion who defend the truth and abandon what is vain", people whom he saw as his equals.⁴⁸ Due to his relative anonymity, the date and place of his death are unknown.

His history book records the events of the Alawi dynasty, beginning with the dynasty's inception in 1664 CE, which predates his birth, to 1818 CE. He records rebellions, travels and decrees of the king.⁴⁹ Most important for our purposes are his chronicles relating to the *mellahs* and Jews, who were often the scapegoat used both by the rebels and the king. Although al-Ḍu'ayyif's work does not strongly highlight the

⁴⁵ Ahmad al-'Umari, "Preface" to *Tarikh al-Ḍu'ayyif* au. Muhammad al-Ḍu'ayyif al-Ribati (Rabat: Dar al-Mathurat, 1986) i-xxi. viii.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

Muslim conceptualization of the *mellah*, it does give us some clues about the *mellah* as a Jewish space within a Muslim city.

It is important to note that al-Du'ayyif's writing is very unclear. Not only does he write in a mixture of Modern Standard Arabic and Moroccan dialect, but also, there are many spelling mistakes and grammatical inconsistencies. In order to best understand his work, I approached native Arabic speakers and an Arabic professor at Brandeis. Despite my best efforts, some of his work remains unclear. In such cases, I include multiple possible explanations.

Kitab al-Istiqsa fi Duwal al-Maghrib al-Aqsa, The Writings of the Examination of the Countries in the Far West, is a nine-volume work that tells the history of North Africa from the pre-Islamic conquest through the late-19th century. It was written by Ahmed ibn Khalid al-Nasiri, a member of the prominent family that founded the Nasiriyya zawiya and of the Moroccan elite.⁵⁰ Born in Salé, in 1834, al-Nasiri studied in Fez and returned to Salé where he began working for the government. He started off as a notary, then became the deputy to the *qadi*, or religious judge, of Salé. Al-Nasiri “entered the service of the Makhzan” in 1875⁵¹ and as part of the intellectual elite, had influence on the king, who often asked the elite for approval or advice. Given that he was born into and remained part of the Moroccan elite, he had a different perspective from al-Du'ayyif. In 1897, al-Nasiri finished the *al-Istiqsa* chronicles and he died shortly thereafter.

Tarikh Titwan, the History of Tetuan, is a 3-volume work written by Mohammed Daoud. Published in 1959, the work is a history of Tetouan and its region. Mohammed

⁵⁰ Pennell, C.R.. *Morocco since 1830: A History* (New York: New York University Press: 2000) xxvi

⁵¹ *ibid.* 93

Daoud was born in 1901 and died in 1984. He was a “prominent local historian”⁵² who was also heavily involved in Moroccan nationalist movements in the 1920s. He helped form a secret nationalist group in Tetouan. However, the main focus of the group was intellectual discussion, not subversive action.⁵³

⁵² *Ibid.*, 206.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Chapter 1: Jewish Perspectives

The Jewish accounts presented in this chapter relate foundations myths and stories from *mellahs* throughout Morocco. Understanding these tales will provide an understanding of the Jewish relationship to the space of the *mellah* and broader Moroccan society. Although each city and population is different, the themes of the royal-Jewish relationship, Jewish-Muslim relationship and internal communal relations are found in all. Within these frameworks, complex relationships are presented.

Within these larger frameworks, the particulars of the associations with the space of the *mellah* are characterized by ambivalence. For example, the move to the *mellah* was traumatic, thus its inception was often negative; yet the space itself was a space of freedom of religious freedom. Similarly, the *mellah* was both vulnerable and protective; it was an area often targeted by rebelling tribes, yet the Jews there were also protected from the ire of their Muslim neighbors and even, on occasion, natural disaster.

First this chapter will look at the foundation myths of the Fez *mellah* that lay the basis for understanding the inter- and intra- communal interactions that are further elucidated by the foundation myths of other *mellahs*. Then, examining narratives about events and the space of the *mellah* will illustrate how these relationships were expressed in the Jewish perception of the space of the *mellah*.

1.1 Original myth

The creation of the *mellah* in Fez, the first one in Morocco, was an important event for the Jews there. The stories surrounding its creation have been reshaped and retold in almost every Hebrew source discussed; not only is this original myth oft-repeated, but also, the themes found here are expressed in the foundation myths of other *mellahat* and in Jewish narratives of events in the *mellahat*.

The original foundation myth is found in *Divrei Hayamim shel Fes*, in three records that explain three decrees imposed upon the Jewish population of Fez in the mid-15th century. :

“1438 – 5198

...

[The community of Fez was exiled² for our many and evil iniquities in the year 5198 (1438) and it was a sudden and bitter exile for Israel. We were exiled from the *al-medina*, called Fez *al-bali* (the old Fez) and some of the families went up and built the *al-mellah*.]

1465 – 5225

...

The decree that was in Fez, which we call the decree of “Harun”, is as follows. There were two brothers; one was a king, and one a rebel. One time, the people of the city revolted, and they sent for the other (i.e. the rebel) and crowned him and installed him. And the other swore that if he returns to his kingship, he would place only a Jew as a commander and officer.

For our many iniquities he returned to his kingship and fulfilled his oath and reinstated a Jewish officer over the city, his name was Harun. The Jews were haughty, they transgressed the teachings, overstepped the laws and did things that should not be done. Included in this, they took a married, non-Jewish woman and beat her cruelly, she screamed and supplicated to them, yet they did not listen to her voice, and continued to hit her until the non-Jews gathered. They killed the Jews with heavy and deadly blows, until they killed all the men, the only ones who remained were those who converted. Until a woman was included in those killed, and they found her two children, took them in vessels and presented them to the king. They had mercy on the women and ordered a proclamation in the city that they will no longer beat Jews.

After 20 days the king gathered all of the converts and said to them, I know and it is true that it was not by will that you converted from your religion, therefore, whoever wants to return to Judaism will return with his life. For all of those who had committed suicide, had cast himself off in the sanctification of the name of God, saying, I am a Jew. And those who feared for his life remained in his conversion, he and his children and his grandchildren. And he who began by saying I am a Jew is one of the sons of *al-l'jam*. And that was the decree of the year 5225 (1465), ...

Twenty-five years earlier there was another important decree in Fez, called the decree of “*al-khadah*” (the fountain). At this time, the Jews were haughty, they apostatized and went to “*al-jām ' al-kabir*” (the big mosque). They closed and sealed the source of water that flowed in the mosque, they filled the vessels of marble, from which the water flowed, with wine and got drunk there the whole night. When the light of day came, they left and forgot one Jew there in a drunken sleep. The Muslims arrived and found him there and killed all the male Jews found. Only he who converted was saved, and they killed children and women and brought the Jews from another place and held them captive.

And in the second decree, they decreed that the Jews could only wear coats of hair.”⁵⁴

The editor adds two relevant footnotes:

¹ This section is not found in our handwritten manuscripts, but is brought by Rabbi Avner Yisrael Hatzarfati in his book, “Yahas Fez”...

² This section was found in a Pentateuch written on parchment. From other handwritten manuscripts that Hatzarfati brings, explains that the expulsion was brought about by the story of the wine...

The three records from *Divrei Hayamim shel Fes* portray how a prominent contemporary Jew, Rabbi Saadia Ibn Danaan, perceived the interconnection between the Jews and the king, the Muslims and the Jews and internal Jewish communal life. These relationships are used by the Jewish sources to explain why and how the original *mellah* was created, giving us an understanding of the pertinence of their manifestation in physical space.

In the records above, the king is a central actor. His decrees, which in effect either punish or protect the Jews, affect the entire Jewish community. The first record portrays the king as the arbiter of punishment. There, the decree, ostensibly issued by the king and forcing the Jews to leave the *medina* and move to a new area, the *mellah*, is perceived as extreme and difficult. Although the record conveys this sense of punishment, this is not the only role that the king fulfilled in the decree. While the king did order the displacement of the Jews, he also moved them to an area near the palace, thus placing the Jews under his protection.⁵⁵ The king as protector, however, is not simply knowledge afforded by historical hindsight, but Ibn Danan at the time also recognized this role. The second record shows that the king protected the Jews by ending the affliction of the Jews at the hands of the mob. Furthermore, the king exhibited his leniency and benevolent

⁵⁴ Benyahu, 47-48.

⁵⁵ Toledano, Joseph, 18.

nature by allowing the Jews who converted to Islam to revert to Judaism. The Hadith, from which Islamic law is derived in addition to the Qur'ān, teach that the renunciation of Islam is punishable by death, banishment, or imprisonment.⁵⁶ Some schools do argue against harsh punishment⁵⁷. However, as seen by the example of Sol Hachuel,⁵⁸ the harsher punishments for apostasy were practiced in Morocco, even for Jewish converts to Islam who then apostatized. Thus, the king's actions show his benevolence towards the Jews in acting as protector. His leniency may also be explained by Sura 2:256 which states that there is no compulsion in religion.⁵⁹ Because the Jews were forced to convert, it is possible that the conversion was illegitimate due to compulsion. The third decree portrays the king as punisher yet again. Here, due to Jewish crimes, the king enforces a dress code, in order to both segregate and punish the Jews. The juxtaposition of these three stories demonstrates the multidimensional relationship that the Jews had with the king in his role as arbiter between the Jewish and Muslim inhabitants of the city, a role that was often expressed through punishment or protection of the Jews. This is a dynamic that lasted throughout various Moroccan dynasties.

Independent of this myth, the role of the king as protector and punisher of the *dhimmi* in Morocco is informed by the king's position as leader of the faithful and part of his authority stemmed from this.⁶⁰ In cities such as Fez, which is the home to the Moroccan '*ulama*' or Muslim jurists, the king was reminded of his religious duties which

⁵⁶ The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, s.v. "Apostasy".

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ For examples of Jewish and Muslim perspectives on Sol Hachuel's punishment for apostatizing after converting to Islam, look at "searching for Suleika" by Ruth Knaffo Sutton, "Searching for Suleika" in *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa* ed. Emily Benichou Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroeter (Bloomington, Indiana : Indiana University Press, 2011): 226-235.

⁵⁹ Qur'ān 2:256.

⁶⁰ Deshen, 15.

had “clear, negative implications vis-à-vis the Jewish position”⁶¹ because in such places the king had to be strict in his application of the law. As Daniel Schroeter notes in *The Sultan’s Jew*, the creation of the *mellah* fulfilled religious duties in two ways⁶². It proved the sultan’s religious orthodoxy, for some scholars argued for segregation between *dhimmi* and Muslims. Additionally, it fulfilled the king’s duty to protect the Jews, a duty stipulated by the Pact of ‘Umar.

Muslim-Jewish relationships were regulated by the Pact of ‘Umar as well. This pact, in which “the believers were required to subordinate the infidels and their religions”, was enacted in a spirit to “create a wide gap between the honor due to Islam and the faithful and the status of tolerated religions and their adherents.”⁶³ These stories illustrate that when this gap is violated, by Jewish encroachment on power or Islamic space, violence ensues.

The latter two records depict how the Pact of ‘Umar shaped Muslim-Jewish associations in mid 15th-century Fez. These stories show how violating the express prohibitions of the Pact as well as the social hierarchy intended by the Pact ruptures Muslim-Jewish connections. In the second record, governmental power is given to a Jew who is put in a high position in the government. Most contemporary historians believe that the riots discussed were instigated by this appointment;⁶⁴ yet, the 15th-century records explain the riots as being caused by Jews beating a Muslim woman, an event that occurred around the same time as the governmental appointment. Striking a Muslim is an

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶² Schroeter (2002), 91.

⁶³ Deshen, 18-19.

⁶⁴ Gerber, 20-21.

offense prohibited by the Pact of ‘Umar, a transgression that nullifies the protection afforded by the Pact⁶⁵. Thus, the Jews in this story violated the Pact of ‘Umar and, with this specific offense, forfeited their right to protection. The offense of the third record is even greater, as it is a direct violation of Islamic space, held sacred in Islamic society. The Jews encroached upon Islamic space by pouring wine, an impure and forbidden substance, into the ablution fountains, the source of purity for the Muslims. They further desecrated the space by getting drunk and spending the night there. Variations of this story are told in other sources as explanations of the creation of the Fez *mellah*, and other *mellahat*, such as that of Salé, as well.

The later re-appropriation of the third record as the foundation myth for the *mellah* of Fez may give the reader some insight into how the foundation myths were formed. The records given in *Divrei HaYamim shel Fes* are not chronologically ordered, creating a sense of ambiguity regarding the timeline. The third record occurred twenty-five years prior to the one dated in 1465, placing the story in the year 1440, just two years after the *mellah*'s creation. This peculiar construction of the records may indicate that the myth was already beginning to form in the Jewish narrative, less than thirty years after the event. The use of this story as the foundation myth in later sources reinforces this point.

In addition to Muslim –Jewish relations, the records of Ibn Danaan inform the reader of internal communal Jewish life. In all three records, the author uses religious language in discussing the events, expressions that indicate the divine purpose of the

⁶⁵“The Status of Non-Muslims under Muslim rule,” Internet Medieval Sourcebook, *Fordham University*, 1996, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/pact-umar.asp>.

events and the guilt of the Jews. Firstly, Ibn Danaan calls the events punishment for “our iniquities”, implying that the events were ordained by God as the Jews’ punishment for violations of religious law. However, he differentiates the actors from the accepted Jewish community by defining them as irreligious Jews, Jews who had transgressed the laws and apostatized, thereby creating division within the Jewish community. Furthermore, he describes the Jews as “haughty”, and it was their hubris that perhaps caused them to bridge the social gap, which led to violence.

Ibn Danaan was not alone in assuming communal Jewish responsibility for horrific events that as a consequence of their haughtiness. Kabbalists and even rationalist courtiers, such as Ibn Verga, expressed similar thoughts in response to the Spanish Expulsion⁶⁶. Solomon Ibn Verga is the author of *Shebet Yehudah* (The Rod of Judah), a history of the events that occurred to the Jews of Spain and the Jews of Portugal up until their exile. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, who examined the writings of Ibn Verga claims that Ibn Verga subscribed to what Yerushalmi calls the “myth of the royal alliance”⁶⁷. This belief, forged into a “central ideology”⁶⁸ of the courtier class Jews in Spain, assumes that the Jews were essential to the king, and thus, his primary interest was in their protection.⁶⁹ However, the masses were not interested in the protection of the Jews⁷⁰, creating tension between the king’s intentions and the people’s desire. Although the king was allied with the Jews, at times he was unable to mitigate the mob’s anger, which was

⁶⁶ Yerushalmi, 51 and 52.

⁶⁷ David N. Myers, “Of Marranos and Memory: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and the Writings of Jewish History” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory* ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efran, and David N. Myers. Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998. , and Yerushalmi, 38.

⁶⁸ Yerushalmi, 38.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

provoked by the Jews, and succumbed to their demands against the Jews⁷¹. Thus, Ibn Verga “castigate[s] the hubris of [his] coreligionists” and their resulting sins as the reasons for the misfortunes that befall his people⁷². This myth allows Ibn Verga to continue to praise the king even as he decrees edicts that are harmful to the Jews, such as the Spanish Expulsion. The similarities between Ibn Danaan and Ibn Verga are found both in their willingness to blame the Jews for the misfortunes that befall them and in their portrayal of the king.

Ibn Verga portrays the king as mediator between the masses and the Jews and Ibn Danaan’s monarch plays a similar role, especially in the second record. Furthermore, although Ibn Verga depicts many kings throughout Europe as benevolent, in particularly bad cases, he even provides an explanation to mitigate the king’s evil actions.⁷³ While Ibn Verga takes this to the extreme, calling the king who expelled the Jews from Spain a *hasid*, or righteous person, Ibn Danaan does the same thing to a lesser degree⁷⁴. Instead of proclaiming the benevolent nature of the king, he implies it when saying that the king allowed the Jews to revert to Judaism. However, the same concept of a vertical relationship with the king is described. This is of note, as the positive relationship with the king, and his role entirely, changes with the later incarnations of the Fez foundation myth, yet reappears in foundation myths of other *mellahs*.

In later incarnations of the story, we will see that the authors do not accept Jewish responsibility and are unwilling to portray a divide in the Jewish community, perhaps a

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 52.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

consequence of the authors' different historical contexts. However, the themes of the king's relationship with the Jews and Muslim-Jewish relationships are still evident.

1.2 Stories retold

The stories told in *Divrei haYamim* were reincarnated in different times and locations. An example of this is the foundation story of the Fez *mellah* as recorded in 1911 by David Toledano in *Ner Hamaarav hu Toldot Yisrael b'Moroqo*.

There came the days during which the Jews of the great city of Fez were punished multifold and many evil misfortunes were brought upon them. In the year 1438 one specific event occurred; the Muslims found, in their house of prayer, wine in the ablution fountains, and they suspected that the Jews' hands were in this. Thus, the anger of the mob fell upon their heads. They, the Jews of Fez, who lived for eternity within the walls of the old city, were expelled then by the hot temper of revenge. Many of them were murdered by the hands of the mob of the zealous nation, many others were forced to convert and, as for the remaining families, their homes were moved to outside the *medina*. They built for them the "*mellah*", that is, an area for the Jews, designated just for Jews from then on and until today. The authors of the memoirs of this event say that this expulsion was "a sudden and bitter exile" for the Jews of Fez from the enemies that were amongst them, the Muslims who hated and were hostile toward them. However it is still unknown if the government was supportive of the mob in expelling the Jews of Fez from the *medina*, or if it (government) just stood to the side because it was unable to protect against the vengeful spirit of religious zealotness that consumed them (the mob) because of the wine in the house of prayer?⁷⁵

The use of this story to explain the creation of the *mellah* of Fez is not only found here, but in other sources as well, such as *Fez V'Hakhmeha*.⁷⁶ However, as is clear, the stories are not identical. The three primary differences in the two stories are the depictions of role of the king, Jewish-Muslim relations, and internal Jewish communal life.

Toledano's record departs completely from the portrayal of the Jewish relationship with the king provided in *Divrei haYamim*. In the earlier records, the king is

⁷⁵ Toledano, Yakov, 44.

⁷⁶ Ovadia (1979), 1:146.

heavily involved with the Jewish community, actively playing the role of arbitrator between the Muslim and Jewish inhabitants of his city and punishing or protecting the Jews. Here, however, the king does not arbitrate; he is either a participant with the Muslim mob, or entirely passive. In *Divrei haYamim* the role of the king is central, whereas here, it is an afterthought.

In this record, the relationship between the Muslim and Jewish inhabitants of Fez is altered as well. In *Divrei haYamim*, the relationship between the Jewish and Muslim inhabitants of Fez is reciprocal; the Jews violate Islamic space and the Muslim inhabitants react. It is a cycle of violence in which both the Jews and Muslims are active participants. However, in Toledano's rendering, the relationship is asymmetrical. First, he describes the Muslims as enemies of the Jews, "who hated and were hostile toward them", portraying a one-sided relationship in which the Muslims are active in their hatred with no mention of the Jewish sentiment toward the Muslims. In this interaction, Toledano paints the Muslims as "zealous", overtaken by rage and barbarous. Additionally, the Jews are passive in this relationship. By claiming that the Muslims "suspected the Jews" of pouring wine into the fountains, he removes blame from the Jews and casts a shadow of doubt on whether or not the story actually occurred as such. His omission of the detail of the Jew who fell asleep and was found in the mosque further absolves the Jews of responsibility.

By not indicting the Jews in his story, Toledano also presents a different perspective on internal Jewish communal life. In *Divrei haYamim*, the narrator highlights the division within the community. In his story, the Jews who commit the atrocious acts are Jews who were "haughty" and had no regard for Jewish law, and, in the latter story,

had apostatized. Thus, these Jews were placed in the “bad Jew” category, differentiating them perhaps, from the “good” Jew, the believer who respected the laws, Jews such as the author. The story in *Ner Hamaarav*, on the other hand, precludes the Jews from responsibility and portrays the Jewish community as a united front, not divided by internal strife.

The difference in the accounts could be attributed to the time and place in which the authors wrote. Ibn Danaan wrote while living in Morocco, under the rule of the king. He lived at a time in which the myth of the royal alliance was central to the ideology of many and therefore, the role of the king remained important to him. Additionally, by blaming the Jews, it is possible to read a warning into the story. Similar to Ibn Verga, who foreshadows the massacre of Lisbon and writes of a story in Spain as a warning⁷⁷, perhaps Ibn Danaan is recording these events to alert Jews to the possible dangers of the future. Toledano, on the other hand, lived in Palestine, separated both geographically and temporally from the events that he describes. He has no need to justify continued Jewish settlement in Morocco, or the Jewish relationship with the king. Nor does he need to advise the Jews of potential future events. Furthermore, the purpose of his work is to make the Moroccan Jewish community known to worldwide Jewry; thus, it is not in his best interest to implicate Moroccan Jews as haughty or blameworthy. His portrayal of the Muslims also fits into his worldview. As noted in the introduction, Toledano supported the AIU that viewed Moroccans and Easterners as primitive. Toledano’s description of the Muslims reflects this.

⁷⁷ Yerushalmi, 65.

While Toledano's story in *Ner Hamaarav* is one example of the centuries-long transformation of the records in *Divrei haYamim*, another example is found in *Fez V'Hakhmeha*, published in 1979.

The year 1465, there was a difficult decree because they found a Gentile (male), murdered, and the Gentiles rose from Fez *al-bali* and killed the Jews as they liked and it was in the *mellah*, in other words, a holy community. They died as martyrs, for the sanctification of God. About 20 men fled from them and a few men and women, another misfortune should not occur, and those killed who are mentioned are buried in an area near the entrance of the *bab al-mellah* (gate of the *mellah*, ARBC) and this gate is closed for the *kohanim*.^{78 79}

This story also departs from the original in *Divrei HaYamim* in regards to the king, and from both the original and the Toledano version in ascribing Jewish culpability. Furthermore, it elucidates another aspect of Jewish communal religious life. In this story, the king is not even mentioned. He is absent from the text save for a small indication of authority, the use of the word decree. However, it is unclear what exactly the decree is. In contrast to *Divrei HaYamim*, where the king is a protector and allows Jews to revert to Judaism, the king in this narrative either has no role or a very hidden one.

In this telling of the story, Ovadia mitigates the atrocity of the violence and absolves the Jews of guilt. In *Divrei HaYamim*, the event is described in detail, with empathy for the woman who supplicated for her life to no avail. Here, the act of murder isn't described; the man is simply found dead, thus the reader's emotional response for the victim is blunted. The violence is further curbed by the change of the victim's gender. In many traditional societies women are seen as hapless, weak and needing protection. As such, the torture and murder of a woman is a greater violation than the murder of a man. In addition to diminishing the atrocity of the event, Ovadia acquits the Jews of any and

⁷⁸ *Kohanim* are the Jewish priestly class.

⁷⁹ Ovadia (1979), 1:146.

all responsibility for the murder. In this rendering, the Jews are not active; rather they are innocent victims of the rage of the Muslims. Going a step further than Toledano, Ovadia does not indicate that there is any “suspicion” of the Jews. Instead, his portrayal shows the Jews as scapegoats, This story excuses Jews of any responsibility, and even if one were to argue that the Jews did in fact murder the victim, the violence itself is more acceptable.

This story also brings forth a new aspect of the events that occurred, the aftermath of the violence in terms of religious practice. Ovadia brings to light the practical religious implications of the event, the burial of the bodies and the prohibition of the *kohanim*, Jewish priestly class, from entering the area. His mention of this issue is our first glimpse into the *mellah* as the Jewish space. Within the *mellah*, and Jewish quarters throughout Islamic lands, the Jews had the freedom to “withdraw into their own enclaves that offered a sanctuary and the means to sustain a rich spiritual and associational life.”⁸⁰ The space, albeit vulnerable to attack, was also a space in which Jewish religious life flourished.

This iteration of the event in Fez in 1465 also demonstrates how the author’s goals and context shape the story. Unlike Ibn Danaan, Ovadia does not blame the Jews nor mention the king. However, as will be seen, he did subscribe to the myth of the royal alliance when describing the sultan Moulay Sulayman as beloved. Nor does Ovadia portray the Muslims as violent and primitive, like Toledano. Rather, his narrative focuses on religious implications, reflecting his goal of saving the remnants of tradition of a transferred population. The different incarnations of the records from *Divrei haYamim*

⁸⁰ Miller (2010) 14.

shel Fes demonstrate how narratives transform over time and as an expression of personal beliefs.

1.3 Foundation stories and narratives by theme

This next section deals with the foundation myths of various other *mellahs* throughout Morocco, including those in Marrakesh, Meknes, Rabat, Tetouan, Sefrou, and Essaouira. Based on the themes found in the stories above, the foundation myths are split into two categories, Muslim-Jewish and sultanic-Jewish relations.

1.3.1 Muslim-Jewish relations

The foundation myths of the *mellahs* of Marrakesh, Tetouan, and Sefrou all relate to Muslim- Jewish relations. Similar to the records of *Divrei HaYamim*, in most of these stories, the Jews violate either an outright prohibition or the spirit of the Pact of ‘Umar. The *mellah* of Marrakesh has at least two different foundation myths, one of which falls under the category of Muslim-Jewish interactions. The story below was recorded in *Vayehi be’et haMellah*, published in 1984.

The given reason is the complaint of a Muslim woman against the Jewish beadle, who was awakening the Jews for prayer. According to her words, he fell upon her and hit her when she requested him not to bother the repose of the neighbors.

Even if this is simply a story, it highlights the true origin of the creation of a separate living neighborhood for the Jews as it had occurred in Fez around a century prior- to punish and to separate...⁸¹

In this story, the beadle, synagogue administrator, violates two express prohibitions of the Pact of ‘Umar. The first violation is one of noise. The Pact stipulates that the *dhimmi* will ensure that their calls to prayer are soft⁸². However, the call that awoke a sleeping resident shows that the call was too loud and thus violated the Pact. The

⁸¹ Toledano, Joseph, 31-32.

⁸² “The Status of Non-Muslims under Muslim rule”.

second violation committed by the beadle was his striking of the Muslim woman, an act prohibited by the Pact as well. As the author notes, the story conveys a sense that the *mellah* was created to segregate and punish the Jews. This story of violation and then punishment indicates the Jewish sense of responsibility for the mellah's creation.

The foundation myth of Tetouan's *mellah* describes a situation in which no laws are violated, but the spirit of the Pact of 'Umar is. In *The Sultan's Jew*, Daniel Schroeter recounts the Jewish foundation myth of the Tetouan *mellah*. "In Tetouan, a tradition recounts how Muslim residents complained that the existing Jewish quarter was adjacent to the big mosque which was being reconstructed. It was the Jews who heard the call to prayer of the muezzin, so as a consequence, the new *mellah* was built." In this story, which Schroeter found in both Muslim and Jewish sources,⁸³ the mere proximity of the Jews to an Islamic holy space is cause for their transfer to the *mellah*. There are a few possible explanations for this. The first is practicality; the mosque is for Muslim worship, therefore Muslims should live nearby. This is especially true if Jews surrounded the whole area, and the call to prayer could not be heard beyond their neighborhood. A second reason is more conceptual. The mosque is a holy space, an area to which honor is due. The Jews' physical proximity to the mosque physically transgresses the gap between the two communities that the Pact of 'Umar intends to create.

The last myth relating to Muslim-Jewish relations, and specifically Jewish violation of the Pact of 'Umar is that of Sefrou. The Sefrou story, brought in *Kehillat Sefrou* by Rabbi David Ovadia, provides interesting insights into the creation of the foundation myths. According to Ovadia, the *mellah* of Sefrou was established when the

⁸³ Found in Muhammad Da'ud. *Tarikh Titwan*, 6 vols. Tetuan: Maktabat al-Talib, 1959-66. p. 3:238-39 and in David Corcos, "Juifs au Maroc et leurs *mellahs*" in his *Studies in the History of the Jews of Morocco* Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1976. p. 92-93.

city itself was built sometime during the reign of Idris I.⁸⁴ Thus, there are no eyewitness accounts, personal memories or stories regarding its foundation. However, by relating three separate tales consecutively, Ovadia seems to infuse a Sefrou legend into a foundation myth.

Even though the king was beloved and accepted by the Jews, their lot did not improve in his days and they remained, as always, the cursed *dhimmi*. In the year 5572 (1812) a non-Jew was found drunk in the *mellah* of Sefrou and falsely accused two treasurers of the city of giving him the brandy in order to intoxicate him. His lies were accepted and the two beaules were put in jail. In the year 5567 (1807) Moulay Sulayman decreed that Jews who found their livelihood amongst the Berber encampments must return to the cities and could not continue to make a profit in those sites. It is possible that this decree was related to the wars and revolts that the king was conducting against the rebelling Berber tribes such as the Ait Oumali in the Middle Atlas and his desire to prevent the possible murder of Jews, who were often scapegoats in conflicts¹⁰¹. Similarly, Moulay Sulayman decreed that the Jews who were living “in the city, together with the non-Jews” must abandon their households there and build a “*mellah*”; that the Jews would live in alone. Therefore, he delineated areas in which they would establish the *mellah*, and he compensated them for the lands that they had amongst the gentiles.⁸⁵

The author adds a footnote, recorded below:

¹⁰¹ It is also possible that he wanted to prevent Jews from finding a living outside of the cities, amongst the peoples of the villages. According to this, his fanatic orthodox side was the cause. D. Corcos, *Les Juifs et leur Mellah*, p. XIV

The first of the three events described above is yet another story of Jewish violation of the Pact of ‘Umar. In this case, the Jews violated the prohibition of selling alcohol⁸⁶, or at least were accused of doing so. As expected, those who violated the law were subjected to its penalties. However, looking at the rest of the paragraph, the narratives may be construed a little differently.

Similar to the case of *Divrei HaYamim shel Fes*, the events are not chronologically ordered, but they create a link among the three events. Although Ovadia

⁸⁴ Ovadia (1975), 3:25

⁸⁵ *ibid.* 3:35

⁸⁶ “The Status of Non-Muslims under Muslim Rule”

provides plausible reasons for the two edicts- the protection of the Jews and the king's religious zeal- the construction here could indicate the first event as the catalyst for the two edicts. Thus, the Sefroui story of the drunken Muslim is the catalyst for the creation of the *mellahs* in other cities. This is further supported by the familiar themes found in the story. The story relates both the theme of Muslim-Jewish relations -and more specifically, Jewish violation of the Pact of 'Umar- and the theme of the king as arbiter who both protects and punishes the Jews.

Ovadia's use of the same themes found in other foundation myths and the non-chronological order of events may show Ovadia's intent to create a local, Sefrou foundation legend. Perhaps Ovadia chose to do this in order to link the Sefroui communal Jewish experience to the broader Moroccan Jewish experience and to better explain to the reader the broader phenomenon of the *mellah*. Ovadia expresses the broader Jewish experience in Morocco as well. He begins the passage by saying that the "king was beloved and accepted by the Jews" although he decreed the *mellah*. This statement shows that the myth of the royal alliance persisted in Moroccan Jewish ideology throughout the centuries. Even though Ovadia had left Morocco and emigrated to Israel, he, as a Moroccan Jew, still subscribed to this ideology. Similarly, Joseph Toledano, author of *Vayehi be'et haMellah* describes the sultan Sulayman, who decreed the later *mellahs*, as a *hasid*,⁸⁷ using the same terminology as Ibn Verga.

These foundation tales all relate events that transpired between the Jewish and Muslim communities that led to the creation of the *mellahs*. The relationship between the communities is structured by the Pact of 'Umar, a system that protects the Jews yet forces their subservience by regulating their place in the public domain. The *dhimmi* are

prohibited from a myriad of public acts that challenge or dishonor Muslims, thus also establishing a social gap between the two groups. While the stories relate violations of the Pact and its spirit, none directly reference the Pact itself. The lack of direct reference may underscore the Jewish understanding of Muslim-Jewish relations. In all of the stories there is a sense of the social hierarchy, which, when violated, causes violence and punishment. Therefore, the Jews experienced the social hierarchy created by the gap, but did not relate it to the actual law. This experience may be explained by the leniency with which the various prohibitions were enforced. For example, although selling alcohol was prohibited, it flowed freely in the *mellah* and was often sold to Muslims without consequence. Regardless of the perception of legality and legal implications consistent in all of these narratives, the *mellahs* “are seen as a form of collective punishment for specific transgressions.”⁸⁸

From the outsider’s perspective, these stories provide another interesting point. The Pact of ‘Umar states that violations will result in penalties and a forfeit of the protection guaranteed by the Pact, yet, these violations all resulted in the creation of the *mellah*, a space that was in part devised out of genuine concern for the safety of the Jews.⁸⁹ The sultan was interested in political legitimization and so he continued to protect the Jews as the “weakest and most exposed” sector in society,⁹⁰ even after violations of the Pact of ‘Umar. Because protecting the Jews was a clear display of the king’s authority, many of the later *mellahs* were established after a time of political

⁸⁸ Gottreich (2007), 21.

⁸⁹ Brown, 254. The creation of the later *mellahs* followed a “period of agitation during which rural populations entered the cities and pillaged the Jewish population.”

⁹⁰ Deshen, 19.

instability.⁹¹ Yet, the *mellahs* also served the purpose of isolating and ostracizing the Jews,⁹² thereby serving as a punishment as well. Thus, the creation of the *mellah* as a response to violations of the Pact of ‘Umar both served the purpose of punishment, felt keenly by the Jewish community and represented in their foundation myths, and of protection, which was also recognized by the Jews in their relationship with the space.

1.3.2 Sultanic-Jewish relationship

The following stories, of the cities of Marrakesh, Rabat, and Mogador (Essouira), connect the creation of the *mellah* to the relationship between the Jewish community and the sultan of Morocco. Here again, the king often plays the role of arbiter of Muslim-Jewish relations, resulting in the protection or punishment of the Jews. These tales also describe the king as a benevolent ruler, protecting his most vulnerable subjects, while at the same time causing the distress and trauma of the move to the *mellah*.

A story surrounding the creation of the *mellah* of Marrakesh is told in *Moroccan Jewish Folktales*. While this legend does not seek to explain why the *mellah* was created, it is a foundation story that describes the king’s role and his relationship with the Jewish community.

The story begins with the king’s decision to create a new quarter for the Jews, the *mellah*, next to the palace. In the process of the transfer, he recompensed the Jews with money or houses in the new quarter, thus ensuring that “the Jews did not lose thereby”. An elderly Jewish woman refused to move from her room in the *medina*, and the king, when confronted with this issue, gave her special permission to remain in her abode until

⁹¹ See the next chapter.

⁹² Deshen, 19

her death. Once she passed away the king sealed the room off, and placed a sign commemorating the elderly Jewish woman who had lived there.

The story describes a king who is both protective and benevolent. The story begins by stating that the *mellah* was built next to the palace, a space of protection rather than of punishment. Moreover, the king compensates the Jews for their property loss, thereby alleviating the stress of the move and further removing a sense of punishment. The benevolent king goes even further, and shows respect and kindness toward individual Jews in allowing the old woman to remain in her home. He even seals off her room and memorializes her after her death. This story paints a picture of a kind king, even as he is forcing the Jews to move, reflecting the belief in the myth of the royal alliance seen in Ibn Verga's writing about the Jews and kings of Europe.

While the above anecdote mirrors the myth of the royal alliance by describing a compassionate king, even while he decrees an edict that is traumatic for the Jews, the story below portrays another aspect of the myth. The Rabat *mellah*'s foundation legend depicts the king as arbitrating between the masses- the Muslim population- and the Jews, whom he desires to protect. There are two versions of this myth, the first of which is found in *Vayehi be'et haMellah*.

According to traditional stories, the reason for building the *mellah* was the libel that a Muslim woman told 'against a Jewish boy who did not acquiesce to her and, in order to protect the Jews they built for them a separate neighborhood.'⁹³

Daniel Schroeter provides the same story with a little more detail:

"The tradition in Rabat tells the story of a Muslim woman falling in love with a handsome young Jewish man but leveling false accusations against him after being spurned, thereby provoking disturbances against his coreligionists. Consequently, the sultan built a *mellah* to give the Jews of Rabat protection from the Muslims."⁹⁴

⁹³ Toledano, Joseph, 90.

⁹⁴ Schroeter (2002), 91. He references Corcos, "Juifs au Maroc", p.104 as the source of this story.

In both iterations, the king decreed the *mellah* as a measure designed to protect the Jews from the ire of the Muslims. Thus, the story reflects the aspect of the tradition of royal alliance, which assumes the vested interest of the king in protecting the Jews and that he mediates between the Jews and the masses that hate them. Although the intervention is a negative experience for the Jews, his story assumes that the king's prime intention is protection, thereby absolving the king of blame.

The stories above also provide another perspective on Jewish-Muslim relations. For the first time in these stories, the Jews do not violate the law or spirit of the Pact of 'Umar; rather, it is a Muslim who breaches the social divide. Regardless of who initiates this rupture of the social hierarchy, the consequence remains the same- segregation of the Jews.

The story that Schroeter relates in regards to Essaouira clearly depicts both the protective aspect of the king and the Jewish sense of the move as punishment.

“The foundation of the *mellah* of Essaouira, according to Jewish tradition, was the consequence of a request to the sultan from the ‘second class’ of Jews living among Muslims (i.e. not those in the *casbah*) that measures be taken to guarantee their safety because of the general insecurity of the period. The decision to establish the *mellah*, however, came as a bitter surprise.”⁹⁵

As Schroeter explains, the “second class” of Jews are those people who were not traders of the sultan. Both Jewish and Muslim traders were allowed to live in the *qasbah*, or royal grounds, and were afforded special protection by the sultan. This “second class” of Jews was not granted these safeguards and, due to the insecurity of the time, sought extra assurance.⁹⁶ The Jews sought the guardianship of the king both because he protected their trading class brethren and probably also as a manifestation of their belief

⁹⁵ Schroeter (2002) 92, referencing Corcos, 121-22.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

in the royal alliance. Therefore, they were shocked by the creation of the *mellah* and upset that the measure to protect them seemed like punishment, for to them, this action indicated that the king deviated from his natural inclination of goodwill towards the Jews.

These stories describe the Moroccan Jewish expression of the myth of the royal alliance. Similar to Ibn Verga's history, the stories show the Moroccan sultan as benevolent and protective, despite his traumatic decrees. The distress expressed by the Jews of Essaouira is the only story in which the population seems to realize that the king's interests may not be as benevolent as what they perceived. Additionally, these stories, like the ones that relate Jewish-Muslim relations, show the Jews as active participants in the relationship. This is particularly highlighted in the Essaouira story in which the Jews approach the king.

The creation of the *mellah* as both a protective action and punishment extends into the narratives of daily life in the *mellah*. These accounts focus on either the protective nature of the space or its vulnerability, reflecting the status of the people who lived in it, who were both protected as *dhimmi* and vulnerable as a minority.

1.3.3 Daily life: protection

The descriptions of the *mellah* and tales of events that portray the *mellah* as a protective space show how, despite the trauma of the move, the space of the *mellah* was sacred to the Jews. The stories from Meknes, Marrakesh and Fez describe the *mellah* as a space in which Jews freely expressed their religion, were protected by the king's actions and protected from natural disaster.

In *Vayehi Be'et Hamellah*, the author, Joseph Toledano, who, as mentioned in the introduction, was born and raised in Meknes, relates that from the beginning, the *mellah*

was a protective space. Unlike the *mellahs* of other cities, there is no written record of the foundation myth of the Meknes *mellah* (in the sources discussed). Furthermore, the Jewish sentiment regarding the foundation of this *mellah* is not one of exile or punishment. The one indication of the Jewish disposition to the Meknes *mellah* at the time of its creation is a quote from Rabbi Haviv Toledano of Meknes. The rabbi said, “this wall is nothing but a separation between the holy and mundane,”⁹⁷ thus indicating the community’s acceptance of the move to the *mellah* and its positive relationship with the space. In this sacrosanct space, separated from the worldly space of the Gentiles, the Jews were fully to express themselves religiously. Joseph Toledano argues that the positive relationship of the Jews of Meknes with the *mellah* stems from the fact that this *mellah* was built on Jewish-owned land, not royal land; thus, the Jews felt a sense of ownership rather than a sense of displacement. He continues to explain that the *mellah* was a place of physical security for the Jews of Meknes.⁹⁸

The security that the separating walls of the *mellah* provided is also illustrated in a description of the Marrakesh *mellah* given in the “Bein Akheinu Harikhoqim”, or Amongst our Distant Brethren, column of *Hatsfirah* on August 12, 1892. The description, given by a Jewish European tourist, is translated below.

Marrakesh is an old city, it has a big wall, a fortress of ancient times surrounds the city and there are six gates to the fortress. On each and every gate are armed guards, standing to guard (against), with watchful eyes, the travelling Jew, that he won’t enter the gates riding on his animal alone. Even he who has a European travel-letter in his hand, he who is a product of the land, just because he is a ward under the shadow of a different government, passage (through the gate) is not permitted to him. Thus it is all of the many decrees on the Jews of Morocco as according to the laws of the Islamic religion, even more so, the European Jews, who for him is the governor and ruler, will be considered by the Muslims and they will fear him a fear of death. As such, the many dispensations that the king gives to the Jews are from love, because he is a man of mercy and his heart

⁹⁷ Toledano, Joseph, 65.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.67.

believes that he should extend to them kindness and freedom, and in every place that the king's word comes, no harm to the Jews will occur.

The city of Marrakesh is divided into two parts, the road of the Jews only and the road of the Muslims only, and a big wall with a big gate is between the two parts, and at night the gate is closed so that the Muslims do not come to the street of the Jews at night and this is truly a wonderful protection for the Jews, so that robbery and breaking will not come to their area...⁹⁹

This passage describes the physical space of the *mellah* as a protective space for the Jews. However, the author further delves into the protection of the Jews as a product of the king's actions. As the author references, according to Islam, Jews may not ride alone on animals in public and are prohibited from other public actions. However, the king, in his mercy, protects the Jews. The author here does not recognize that protection is connected to the restrictions upon the Jews, viewing it instead as additional decrees in the face of Islamic law. While this is not factually accurate, it portrays a Jewish sense of a special relationship with the king, expressed by decrees and the physical space of the *mellah*.

The protection of the king via the space of the *mellah* is also related in a story from Fez. Presented in *Fes V'Ḥakhmeha*, the anecdote shows that the king protected the Jews via the space of the *mellah* during a time in which rebelling tribes attacked and plundered that very space.

...The holy man mentioned above (the head of the *zawiya*¹⁰⁰), Sidi Mohammed al-Hajj, who destroyed, with his decree, the synagogues, extended the days of his rule in the *zawiya*. In his days the Muslims rebelled in all of the lands, in Fez *al-jadid*, Sidi Mohammed al-Dridi ruled, and in Fez *al-bali* Ben Salaakh and one whose name was *al-Sughayr* (ruled). Thus, they fought with one another, and the misfortunes and taxes on the Jews increased to no end. [This continued] until the year 1665, when the king Moulay al-Rashid came and they (the Jews) opened *bab al-boujat* for him. He [the king] rested there in the *mellah* that night, in the courtyard of the Jew Mensano, who was the leader of the

⁹⁹ "Bein Akheinu Harikhokim", *Hatzfira*, 12 Aug. 1892, (*Historical Jewish Press*, National Library of Israel and Tel Aviv University).

¹⁰⁰ A *zawiya* is the Moroccan term for the house of a religious, often Sufi, brotherhood, or *tariqa*. In Morocco, *zawiyas* and their leaders often held political power both on the local and national levels. For more on this look at Deshen, 14-16, and Pennell, 9-11.

community. The next day they opened for him the *bab al-smarin* of Fez *al-jadid* and they hanged Mohammed el-Drīdi, mentioned above, on a tree. After three days they completed with him Fez *al-bali* as well. And Moulay al-Rashid went to the city of the *zawiya* and he overpowered Sidi Mohammed al-Hajj and he exiled the Berbers that were there and he shattered the *zawiya*. And the Jews that were there, he gave them three days to leave the city and they plundered what they could of silver and gold, because they were very rich, and the Jews came to Fez, 1300 masters of the house, on the first day of the new month of Av, the year 1668. On that day our teacher and rabbi, Rabbi Shmuel Ibn Danan was born.¹⁰¹

This story occurred during a time of political instability, with rebels vying for power. It begins by describing the destruction of many of the synagogues of Fez, the different fighting factions and the ensuing oppression of the Jewish community. Finally, the king arrives to deal with the situation. The monarch, after sleeping in the *mellah*, an indication of the protective nature of the space, is able to end the persecution of the Jews and defeat the rebels. This story seems to indicate that the combined power of the *mellah* and the king brought an end to the turmoil. Additionally, it depicts a special relationship between the king and the Jews, one in which the king protects the Jews and also trusts them.

In addition to the king's protection, the *mellah* also had a supernatural protective quality. In *Fez V'Ḥakhmeha*, Ovadia relates tales from the *mellah* that depict how the *mellah* was protective even during natural disasters.

The year 5385 (1625 CE), on the 22nd of *Iyyar* (29th of May) on the night of Shabbat, before the light of day, there was a great noise and a few houses in the *mellah* fell. Praise be to God that none died, and in Fez *al-jadid* (Fez the new) 11 Muslims died, and in Fez *al-bali* over 1,500 died, and the wall of the *mellah* was cracked. And in Sefrou 4 houses fell and none died, in Meknes, 2 Muslims died and two buildings were destroyed and it persisted for a quarter of an hour.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Ovadia (1979), 1:148

¹⁰² *ibid.* 1:148

This story shows that natural disasters affected Jews less than their Muslim neighbors. The record indicates a high number of Muslim deaths, relatively few Jewish deaths, and the crack in the *mellah* wall. This comparison seems to imply that the wall of the *mellah* absorbed the damage, protecting the people of the space.

The protective space of the *mellah* was also afforded by supernatural powers in the form of saints. In Morocco, Jews and Muslims believe in the power of the saints, called *baraka*, or a charisma comprised of the person's holiness.¹⁰³ This holiness allows the saint to perform miracles and transfer his/her blessings by touch. Even post-mortem, the saint's power continues through his/her property and tomb.¹⁰⁴ Gottreich relates a story in which a Jewish saint, Mordechai b. 'Attar, by the power of his *baraka* saved the Jews of the *mellah* from tribesmen who invaded the city "intent on pillaging." The myth claims that when Ben 'Attar heard the noise of the pillagers, he "fervently prayed for divine intervention. Suddenly, a flaming barrier appeared, blocking all entry to the *mellah*."¹⁰⁵ This action, in addition to the burial of some of his vestments near the gate, extended his *baraka* into the gate of the *mellah*, imbuing the physical barrier with supernatural protective powers. Henceforth, Marrakushi Jews attributed their safety from marauders and natural disaster to "the sanctity of the *mellah* and especially the *baraka* of the space."¹⁰⁶

The space of the *mellah* therefore was protective, due to physical segregation, the temporal power of the king and divine intervention. Furthermore, within this space, the

¹⁰³ Pennell, 9.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Gottreich (2007), 34.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

Jews practiced freely. However, the *mellah* was also, at times, a vulnerable and dangerous space.

1.3.4 Daily life: vulnerability

As seen above, personal anger and political challenge were expressed by attacking the *mellah* and the vulnerable minority living there. Both *Divrei haYamim* and *Fez V'Hakhmeha* relate the story that occurred in 1465, in which Muslims came to the *mellah* to avenge a murder.

The vulnerability of the *mellah* extended beyond sporadic events into the daily lives of the residents. In the story below, the effect of the vulnerability of the Jews is transcribed into the space of the *mellah*. The passage in *Kehillat Sefrou* was written as a footnote to the physical description of the Sefrou *mellah*.

The courtyard fences were low so that animals would not be able to enter. The Arabs who came for the market day would send their animals into the neighborhood of the Jews, HaRav Sisha Avnei Shayish, H'b, Siman q'd, explains that the donkeys would wander in the streets at night and dirty up the courtyards, and when a donkey would die and its owners were silent, there was a conflict with the courtyard owners that they killed it. Therefore, they began to lower (as in, make shorter) the gates of the courtyards. This is what I heard from the mouth of my teacher and rabbi, my father, may his memory be blessed.¹⁰⁷

Thus, not only was the *mellah* a place which rebels could plunder for the sake of power and money, but it was also a place where daily frustrating events could be taken out on others. Yet, simultaneously, stories of the protective nature of the space abound. The dual role of the *mellah* as both a protective and a vulnerable space, is a spatial description of the Jews as a minority. As *ahl al-dhimma*, Jews were protected by the state in exchange for their subordination. However, as Jews are seen as second class, it is tolerable to attack them in a way that Muslims cannot attack fellow Muslims.

¹⁰⁷ Ovadia (1975) 3:25.

1.4 Conclusions

The Jewish stories telling of the foundation of the *mellahs* and life in them, teach us about various aspects of Jewish life in Morocco including the sultanic-Jewish relationship and Muslim-Jewish relations.

The sultanic-Jewish relationship is characterized by the Jewish subscription to the myth of the royal alliance, an ideology that remains with the Jews of Morocco throughout the centuries of these stories, but subsides in those who were born and raised elsewhere. Because of this myth, the Jews perceived the king as benevolent and protective of them. Despite the trauma of the move to the *mellahs*, often considered punishment, the Jews continued to view the king as righteous and as a mediator between the Jewish and Muslim communities.

The stories teach that the punishment of the *mellah* is due to discord in Muslim-Jewish relations. These tales indicate that the Pact of 'Umar shaped the social hierarchy of Morocco and provided legal statutes. As intended, the Pact created a gap between the Muslims, believers to whom honor is due, and the *dhimmi*, non-believers who must be subordinated. When the laws of the Pact or the gap it created was transgressed, the community was punished with physical segregation in the form of the *mellah*.

Once the *mellahs* are established and inhabited, the themes of benevolence and punishment become evident. The benevolence of the king and his involvement with the Jewish community, as seen in the stories of Marrakesh and Fez, is what makes the space of the *mellah* a safe and protected space. Furthermore, the area seems to be protected by a supernatural force, as seen in the case of natural disaster and saintly protection. The vulnerability of the *mellahs* to rebel tribes and angry locals reflects the lower status of the

Jews as *dhimmi* and the punishing nature of the Muslim-Jewish relations as described above.

The next chapter will show how the dualities present here are also reflected in Muslim perspectives. The Arabic sources provide insight into the dual nature of Muslim-Jewish relations and of Muslim perceptions of the space of the *mellah*.

Chapter 2: Muslim perspectives

Understanding the Muslim relationship to the space of the *mellah* is vital in further understanding Moroccan Muslim-Jewish relations. Stories about the *mellah* are found in Arabic history books and are related within the broader historical context, rather than just the individual experience of their creation. The narratives below look at the foundation of the *mellah*, its physical space and the activities therein. These stories portray how the Muslim relationship with the Jews is translated into the Muslim perception of Jewish space. It is apparent from these tales that the Muslims perceive the Jews of Morocco as being both separate and part of Moroccan society. The space of the *mellah* is similarly liminal. It is part and parcel of the city that it is in and also separate from it; the physical separation of the *mellah* and the illicit activities pursued there make the space “other”. Thus, entering the space can be sanctioned or unsanctioned, depending on who enters and what activities they pursue. These themes will be examined first in the narratives around the foundation and space of the *mellah* and then in stories of activity within the *mellah*.

2.1 Foundation stories

The Muslim stories around the creation of the *mellah* do not delve into the reasons for its building, unlike the stories related in the Jewish tradition. Rather, the stories here are descriptive of the events and the space of the *mellah*, with only a slight mention of the possible reason. The reason for this difference is explained by the Muslim conceptualization of what the *mellah* is.

The records below are from *Tarikh al-Du'ayyif* in the section of the year 1807 and describe the move to the *mellah* in Rabat and Salé.

The building of a new *mellah* for the Jews

Then the command of the king came to the people of Rabat and the people of Salé that the Jews, may Allah curse them, must leave behind the *mellah* of Rabat and the *mellah* of Salé and they should build [another two *mellahat*]²¹ on the fringe of the city. They should not remain mixed in their houses with the houses of the Muslims. Al-Janat, which was in the neighborhood of Waqasah, was assigned to the Jews of Rabat. He (the king) bought the land from himself and set it aside for the Jews. They (the Jews) cultivated the grapevines and the trellises, and the plums and the pears. On the thirtieth of Jumada al-Ula the teacher Hassan al-Sudani went up and separated for them the *mellah* in the neighborhood Waqasah [that is mentioned] and the Jews began to build houses and public ovens /426/ and windmills and stores.¹⁰⁸

...

The Departure of the Jews to the new *mellah*

On Sunday, the 25th of Sha‘ban of the aforementioned year, the Jews, the people of the *dhimma*, who were in Rabat left their old *mellah* and went to the new *mellah* that was in Waqasah when they finished building it. On Wednesday, the 27th of Sha‘ban that is mentioned, the last of them (the Jews) left tearfully, crying and wailing, and concurring with the 6th day of October. [On Sunday, the 25th of Sha‘ban, the rabbi of the Jews in Rabat became deaf and the noble person jailed him in order to move him to the new *mellah* in Waqasah]¹⁰⁹¹¹⁰

The editor adds some more information about the *mellah*’s creation in a footnote, presented below:

In 1222 H./ 1807 CE, Moulay Sulayman commanded the movement of the Jews from the neighborhood “al-Buhaira” to the new *mellah* in the neighborhood “Waqasah”. Its land was purchased from his money that was specifically allocated and he put it away for the Jews after he supplied it with facilities and buildings.

The records depict the Muslim perception of the foundation of the *mellah* and describe how the Muslims conceptualized the space of the *mellah* and related to the Jews as both Moroccan and other.

¹⁰⁸ Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Salam bin Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Ribati al-Ḍu‘ayyif, ed. Muhammad al-Buzidi al-Sheikhi, *Tarikh al-Du‘ayyif al-Ribati*, (Casablanca, Morocco: Jami’ Huquq al-ṭab’ maḥfuzah, 1988), 2:638.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 2:642.

¹¹⁰ A note on the translation, the phrase written is “ṭarasha al-buhloul ḥazan al-yehud wa-sajanahu.” ṭarasha is translated as “to become deaf” (Hans-Wehr) and in form Six can mean to feign deafness, and buhloul can mean a jester (al-maany) or a noble person (Lane’s Lexicon). Perhaps the authors meant to write the fool, the Rabbi of the Jews, feigned deafness and he jailed him. Another possibility is that the Rabbi of the Jews feigned deafness and the noble man jailed him. Schroeter explains the general meaning of the line as, “the Rabbi, who had delayed leaving, was struck by an official and imprisoned.” Schroeter, 92.

As mentioned above, in contrast to the Jewish narratives, these stories do not delve into the catalyst for the decree. This is because the decree was neither shocking nor traumatic to the Muslim observer. The normalcy of this edict is explained by three factors: the conceptualization of the *mellah*, the historical precedent, and the relationship with the Jews.

From this and other Arabic stories, it is clear that the space of the *mellah* was a conceptual space, not merely physical. The parameters of the technical *mellah* were the proscribed Jewish settlement, segregation from Muslim inhabitants and, generally, that it was on government-owned land (with the exception of Meknes). However, most of the Arabic sources refer to all Jewish neighborhoods as the *mellah*, even if they were mixed neighborhoods in the *medina*. For example, al-Du'ayyif above writes that the Jews had to leave their old *mellah* and move to the new *mellah*, showing that both neighborhoods were *mellahs* in his eyes. Therefore, to the Muslim Moroccan, “the term *mellah* connotes not the physical space, but the communal space of the Jews.”¹¹¹ Because of this conceptualization of the *mellah*, the new location was not notable to the Muslim observer. Additionally, this conceptualization allows us to look at stories that occurred in what the Muslims called *mellah* but were simply Jewish neighborhoods.

Historical precedent may also explain the ordinariness of the decree to the author. For the Jews, each move was unique because it directly affected them. However, for this author, who had lived in Fez and travelled throughout Morocco, the *mellah* as a segregated space was something that he had already seen.

Lastly, perhaps the move was customary because the Jews were *ahl al-dhimma*. Although the Pact of ‘Umar does not ordain separate neighborhoods, the lower status of

¹¹¹ Schroeter (2002), 90.

the Jews and the gap between them and the Muslims rationalizes their physical separation. The author's use of the phrase "may God curse them" to modify the term Jews indicates the author's condescension toward the Jews and his view of them as subordinate.

Although al-Ḍu'ayyif views the decree as normal, the event was significant enough that he included it in his history. Both his inclusion and description of the event indicate the significant role and place of Jews in Moroccan society.

The author's description of the event provokes sympathy in the reader. He describes the resistance that the Jewish community had toward the move, including the rabbi's refusal and subsequent arrest, and the trauma that the move caused, noting the Jews' tears and laments. By describing the event as such, the author demonstrates his compassion for the Jews and their plight. Furthermore, al-Ḍu'ayyif illustrates the king's benevolence towards the Jews by mentioning that the king gave fertile land to the Jews without charge. Acknowledging that the Jews are also subjects of the king and recipients of his benevolence may have strengthened al-Ḍu'ayyif's own shared identity with the Jews. Both al-Ḍu'ayyif's sympathy and recognition of the Jews as the king's subjects indicate that despite their lower status, he shared an identity with them as the king's subjects.

The Jewish identity as both separate from and common to Moroccan Muslims is commonly found in the study of Moroccan Jews. As Clifford Geertz wrote in "Suq: the bazaar economy in Sefrou", the Moroccan Jewish community was "Moroccan to the core and Jewish to the same core, they [the Jews] were heritors of a tradition double and

indivisible and in no way marginal.”¹¹² Jews identified as such in cities throughout Morocco. The common identity was not just Moroccan, but also that of a locality, for example, Jews from Salé were Salawi¹¹³ and those from Marrakesh were Marrakushi¹¹⁴. The Muslim records above imply that this dual identity was externally applied as well and is expressed through inter-communal relations and the Muslim relation to the *mellah*.

The record below, from *Tarikh Titwan*, illustrates how this dual identity was physically manifested in the space of the *mellah* by describing the Jewish impact on the landscape of Tetouan and the space of the *mellah*.

The sections of the first Tetouan and its outskirts

There is no doubt that this suburb (the suburbs al-Asfal, the lower) was small at first, then it began to extend piece by piece until it became one of the biggest neighborhoods of the city. It encompassed a number of sections also called neighborhoods. These were the neighborhoods of: al-Janwi, al-Masda’, Bab al-‘Aqlah, al-Saqiyah, al-Fuaqiyah, al-Sawiqah, al-Manjarah, and Wiqa’ al-Hafah. Of this neighborhood were two other sections, one of which was called the neighborhood of Sidi ‘Abbas next to Bab al-Rumuz and the other was, and continues to be, called al-Musalla al-Qadima. The first of the two sections had been in ruin and in the other, the majority of its inhabitants died in the epidemic, so dilapidation increased there and the remaining Muslim inhabitants moved to live in other neighborhoods¹.

...

At that time itself, or during a time close to it, some expansion in the east of the city occurred as well. There, the two important gates, Bab al-Sa’idah and Bab al-Jiyaf¹¹⁵ were opened. Perhaps the naming of Bab al-Sa’idah came from the discovery of the shrine of Sidi al-Sa’idi next to the gate, and perhaps the name Bab al-Jiyaf came from the fact that they used to take their dead to the cemetery through this gate.

It is known that the *mellah*, i.e. the neighborhood specifically for the inhabitation of the Jews inside of the city of Tetouan, was found close to this gate, i.e., in the northeastern corner of the original city, i.e., in the neighborhood that is now known as the *mellah al-bali* (old *mellah*). This *mellah* (the old one) was populated with Jews and foreigners until the building of the most beautiful mosque of the time near to it. Therefore, a new *mellah* was built for the Jews. This is the one that is found now between the neighborhood al-Suqiyyah, al-Musalla al-Qadima, and the courtyard of al-Fuddan. The area they built in was, before that (the building), a big garden that was in the possession of the state, tied to the *makhzan*. Because of the delay in building the *mellah*

¹¹² Geertz, 164.

¹¹³ Brown, 258.

¹¹⁴ Gottreich (2007), 4.

¹¹⁵ Gate of the corpses.

after the decree, the architecture of its buildings was the most elaborate of the original *medina* and its suburbs. If you walked in its streets and its alleys, it was all straight and governed by division and orderliness, devoid of deviation and minimal of curvature.

As for the old *mellah*, “*al-bali*”, it became a neighborhood that only Muslims lived in. Many of its houses had been destroyed and in its place new houses that were of the best of the houses of Tetouan were built.

...

The fifth neighborhood is the *mellah* and it was built specifically for Jewish residence. It only had one opening, a solid gate that opened and closed at known times. Then, after a little, it happened that it (the *mellah*) had a number of openings (as in, gates), for the Jews participated in living and doing business with people who were other than them.¹¹⁶

In a footnote, the author explains the movement of the inhabitants of Tetouan that was described in the first paragraph.

In the beginning of the century, when the neighborhood of the Jews (the *mellah*) became crowded with its inhabitants, a number of their rich ones undertook the building of new residences in the modern architectural style on the main street of the neighborhood, al-Mussalla al-Qadima. Then, when it was the Spanish Protectorate in Tetouan and its region, the buildings of this street increased and big businesses spread, a cinema, and other things spread. However, the majority of its inhabitants were not Muslim.

A few details of this record portray the impact that the dual identity of the Jews had on the city’s landscape. First, the gate was named *bab al-jiyaf*, after a Jewish activity, the custom of bringing corpses through the gate to the graveyard. This naming demonstrates the Jews’ incorporation into Moroccan society. Yet, it also indicates their segregation. The Pact of ‘Umar prohibits the *dhimmi* from burying their dead near Muslims¹¹⁷, perhaps explaining why the Jews had a separate gate.

The description of the *mellah* further demonstrates the inscription of the Jews’ dual identity onto the space of the city. On the one hand, the *mellah* was physically separate from the city, with only one gate for entry/exit that was periodically closed. On

¹¹⁶ Muhammad Daoud, *Tarikh Titwan*, (Tetouan, Morocco: Jami’ Huquq al-ṭab’ maḥfuzah l-lmu’alif: 1959) 1:100-103.

¹¹⁷ ”The Status of non-Muslims under Muslim Rule”.

the other hand, the author describes the architecture as the most elaborate of the *medina* and its suburbs, indicating both its beauty and its integration as part of the city. Despite its physical separation, the *mellah* was an “integral, organic part of the city as a whole”¹¹⁸ in cities throughout Morocco.

Another indication of the Jews’ double character is the reasoning that Daoud provides for the Jews’ movements between neighborhoods. In the records above, the Jews move twice, once as a community that is “other” and forced to live in a segregated neighborhood, and then, as a group of elites who moved voluntarily. The reason for the first move is that the Jews were, at the time, living too close to a mosque, the exact same reason given in the Jewish sources. Both sources indicate that as Jews and the other, they do not have the right to live near a mosque, the sacred space of the majority Muslims. The voluntary movement however demonstrates the integration of the Jews. It reveals that although technically illegal to live outside the designated areas, not all Jews were required to live in the *mellah*. In Essaouira, the elite traders of the sultan were never required to live in the *mellah*,¹¹⁹ and here too, the rich elite were able to leave. Thus, the segregation of the Jews was not complete. However, it is interesting that the new neighborhood that the wealthy Jews built, did not take on the property of the *mellah*. Rather, it was a business neighborhood while the *mellah* remained the space of the Jews.

Al-Du’ayyif’s and Daoud’s records regarding the foundation and space of the *mellah* portray the Jews and their space as both Moroccan and other, a duality felt by Jews as well. Expressions of this duality are found in Muslim use of the space of the *mellah* as well.

¹¹⁸ Gottriech (2007) 91.

¹¹⁹ Look at Daniel Schroeter, Merchants of Essaouira: Urban Society and Imperialism in Southwestern Morocco, 1844-1886, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 92.

2.2 The *mellah* as a political tool and source of monetary gain

The stories below tell of Muslim use of the space of the *mellah* during turbulent times. Those with political power as well as those challenging political authority plunder the space of the Jews for the purposes of monetary gain and achieving greater power. Average residents also plunder the *mellah* as an expression of fear during a time of instability. This consistent use of the space of the *mellah* signifies the second-class status of the Jews. At the same time, the stories also describe instances in which the Jews were taken in, expressing their common identity.

As previously noted, the protection of the Jews was both a fulfillment of religious imperative and indicative of the king's power. However, royal protection of the Jews in fact varied by the ruler. The king Moulay al-Yazid, the predecessor to Moulay Sulayman, who decreed the later *mellahs*, is an example of a monarch who did not safeguard the Jews, and used the space of the *mellah* for political power and monetary gain. Although these neighborhoods were not technically *mellahs*, they were Jewish space and thus teach about Moroccan Muslim-Jewish relations. Below are a few examples of this from *Tarikh al-Du'ayyif*.

The sultan Moulay al-Yazid commands the plundering of the *mellah* of Tetouan

On the second Saturday of Sha'ban, the aforementioned, Moulay al-Yazid, God be with him, commanded the plundering of the Tetouan *mellah*. They found in it a lot of money, around one hundred qintars. Included in the money was merchandise, linens and blankets. (Included) in the jewelry of the Jews was gold, silver, gems, etc. /213/. They (the plunderers) deviated from the right path with the Jewish women and raped the virgins, they did not leave behind a single one of them. They (the plunderers) also seized what was upon them (the Jews, plural male) and they left them barefoot and naked, a lesson to those being warned. They also demolished the roofs of the houses and they ambushed them (the houses) by descending into the wells. They committed error, and (did this) to some of the Muslim houses, the neighbors of them (the Jews), this was a distressing event. Moreover, someone said that one of the plunderers seized a Jewish virgin girl; she was seized from the wooden window at the top of the house. He acted immorally

(fornicated) with her in the window. Then she and he who had seized her fell, the two of them died. ...¹²⁰

A description of Moulay al-Yazid and some of the events about him that the author has cited

His noble description is tall of stature, handsome in likeness, a handsome face, curved of nose, black eyes, their whites tend toward yellow ... He is generous, honorable, worthy of reverence, valiant and unconcerned with money; he gives many presents. The news of the death of his father on the eve of Wednesday, the twenty-eighth of the month of Rajab, afflicted him. Around this time he went up to Tetouan and he entered it (the city) on the first Friday of Sha'ban the holy, in the year 1204 H. Then he went up to the pulpit and he gave the Friday sermon, and he named himself (king), Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Yazid. The next day, he commanded the plundering of the *mellah* of Tetouan. On the third of Sha'ban he came down upon the head of (overthrew) the servant, the judge al-Abbas al-Sufyani. He killed him, twisted in the wrap of Sidi Ali in dominance. He began to divide the money amongst all the groups (who) came to him of the nobles, religious thinkers and students.¹²¹

Moulay al-Yazid decrees the plundering of the *mellah* of Rabat and some of the other cities

During it (the month of Sha'ban) his decree was mentioned to plunder the *mellahs* of Rabat and Salé. Abdallah Birkash replied to Moulay al-Yazid suggesting to take money from the Jews (rather than plunder), as the Jews were very poor.

They (the Jews) began selling their belongings such as the money saFez, copper and similar things, and they paid the Sultan around 500,000 mithqals. On the 13th (of Sha'ban), he (the Sultan) sent for the seizure the rabbi of the Jews in Rabat, may God destroy him, and his house was plundered and he was [the rabbi Dabil¹²²]. He and his children were whipped, because he was his father's friend. So he seized from him 4,000 mithqals and commanded the plundering of the Jews. The *mellah* of Meknes was plundered, as well as its booty of the Loudaya, and they raped their (the Jews') unmarried women. They plundered the *mellahs* of al-Qasr, al-'Araish, Tangier and Tetouan and they hanged three Jews in Meknes. And the reason for their hanging was that one of them complained to his (al-Yazid's) father, while he was alive, concerning his (the Jew's) daughter who was with Moulay al-Yazid. He, his (al-Yazid's) father, sent for him (al-Yazid), and he (the father of al-Yazid) wrested her from him (al-Yazid). Then, he took an oath (to get revenge) on the Jew, and he (the Jew) said to him (al-Yazid) "when you become prince, then hang me." When he came to power, he hanged him. He also killed the Rabbi Bakha, may God destroy him, after he had bestowed upon him 40 qintars, however, he did not accept it, only the cutting of his neck¹²³ and none the Jews remained there.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ al-Du'ayyif, 1:375-376.

¹²¹ *ibid.* 1:377.

¹²³ There are two possible explanations for this line. It could be that the Rabbi gave al-Yazid 40 qintars to spare his life, al-Yazid did not accept his money and killed him instead. However, the verb in the text is an'am, indicating that someone of higher stature bestowed the gift on someone of a lower status. As Professor el-Tobgui stipulated, perhaps the king offered the rabbi 40 qintars in a bribe of sorts, and the rabbi did not accept it, therefore he was killed.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 1:380.

In a footnote to the last record, the author adds:

¹ Maybe he meant the Rabbi: “Sumbel”, who translated for Sidi Muhammad bin Abdallah in his conversations with foreign ambassadors.

These stories occurred in the late 18th century spanning the time from when Moulay al-Yazid was a prince to when he became king. Moulay al-Yazid was the son of the previous king, Muhammad III, and therefore, he and his many brothers and cousins were contenders for the sultanate at the time of his father’s death. Whenever a sultan died “ there was a surfeit of legitimacy... brothers and cousins scrabbled for power,”¹²⁵ leading to violence and turmoil. Moulay al-Yazid ruled for “two disastrous years”, from 1790-1792 CE, before being defeated by his brother, Moulay Sulayman. During these two years, Moulay al-Yazid “tried to appease a fractious and motley collection of allies”, but failed and a civil war began. It was during the years of Moulay al-Yazid’s rule that the plundering of the Jewish neighborhoods described in these narratives took place. His reign “may be seen as an aberration, a gross violation of the pact of protection guaranteed in Islam.”¹²⁶ Although an unusual occurrence, it provides insight into the use of violence to legitimize power and the need to collect money.

In these stories, the immediate catalysts for the events are the political and monetary needs of the royal authority, rather than a Jewish offense. In the first and third records, the royal authority plundered the *mellah* for money. The second story illustrates the plundering of the *mellah* to show strength and thus claim authority in the wake of Muhammad III’s death. However, the third event also includes a story that could be a cause for the pillaging.

¹²⁵ Pennell 18.

¹²⁶ Schroeter (2002), 87.

Moulay Sulayman, in power after years of civil war,¹²⁷ commanded the building of the later *mellahs*, possibly also due to the violence of the time. One explanation for Moulay Sulayman's decree is to protect the Jews and thus show his political power.¹²⁸ He did, in fact, succeed in shielding the Jews and stabilizing their security.¹²⁹ However, this safeguarding was coupled with close control of the community in the form of the *mellahs*.¹³⁰ Another possibility is that the decree was to prove his religious zeal. Moulay Sulayman was of "austere faith"¹³¹ and known to be harsher in applying the laws of the *dhimma*, particularly with the *jizya* tax.¹³² Perhaps the *mellahs* were another expression of his orthodoxy.

The first and third narratives also give a detailed account of individual encounters within the larger context of plundering. The encounters discussed portray the oppression of the Jews at the hands of the plunderers and al-Yazid. These details illustrate the horrors that were committed, eliciting sympathy for the Jews and perhaps even implicating the perpetrators.

These historical accounts illustrate the *mellah's* use as a space through which royal authority attempted to solidify power. The story below, from *Tarikh al-Du'ayyif*, shows that the royal authority also made use of the *mellah* to quell revolts.

Muhammad al-Salawi's descending upon the people of 'Adutin

At the end (of the month), on Saturday the 29th of the aforementioned Shawwal, the minister of the Sultan, Sidi Muhammad al-Salawi of the sands of Salé, descended upon the people of 'Adutin, upon those who chose who would lead them of the peoples of Rabat and Salé. And he agreed on the 4th day of November. In the morning of Sunday ... [the thirtieth] of Shawwal, Muhammad al-Salawi crossed over from Salé to Rabat and he went up to the *qasbah* and, along with the master of the jails of Rabat, ordered the capture of the leaders of the peoples of

¹²⁷ Pennell, 18.

¹²⁸ Dshen 20.

¹²⁹ Schroeter (2002), 87.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Pennell, 20.

¹³² For more on this look at Schroeter (2002), 90.

Rabat and Salé, and he (the jail master) declined him. They (the leaders) were the *faqih* (religious scholars) Muhammad bin Jalun and Sidi Muhammad al-B'zawi and the faithful/heads al-Hajj Ibrahim Ibratil...

He captured those leaders and the master, Hajj al-Arabi... He jailed the group in the prison of the *qasbah*, locked them in and appointed guards over them. Then, after that, he opened the door of the prison for them and the people began to be connected with (follow) them in the prison. On Monday the second of Dhi al-q'dah I went up to the prison of the *qasbah* to look (visit) at our friend, the *faqih* Sidi Muhammad ibn Jalun. On this day, al-Salawi ordered the student, Ahmad Marsail al-Ribati, to destroy the synagogues of the Jews in Waqasah and to burn their books in Salé and Rabat, and he began to do so. He (al-Ribati) wanted to burn the Torahs, but he (al-Salawai) held him back.¹³³

In this story, Jewish space and sacred belongings are used to warn against revolt.

Although not explicitly stated, the juxtaposition of the author's visit to one of the rebels with the order to destroy synagogues and Jewish books implies a connection between the two events. The decree was not a punishment for the Jews, for they were likely not involved as they had no political, physical or military power in Morocco¹³⁴ and because stability correlated with safety. By the time of this story, 1811 CE, the segregated space of the *mellahs* of Rabat and Salé had already been established. The entrance into this separate area and the destruction of synagogues and books serves as an effective warning to rebels because of the Jews' dual status. On the one hand, destruction of the synagogues and Jewish religious texts are not repulsive to their Muslim neighbors to the extent of further kindling revolt, as they are the *dhimmi*. Unlike destruction of sacred Islamic property, ruining the *dhimma*'s religious belongings does not forfeit the king's status as a religious authority. On the other hand, the rebels and neighbors likely sympathized with the Jewish plight given their strong sense of a shared local identity.¹³⁵

The detail of restraining the burning of the Torah also indicates the liminal status of the *dhimmi*. As the Torah is a text sanctified by Islam as well, it is a shared value of both

¹³³ al-Du'ayyif, 2:679.

¹³⁴ Deshen, 18.

¹³⁵ On local identity shared by Jews and Muslims look at Brown, 258.

communities. Additionally, Jewish subscription to the Torah is ultimately the reason for their guaranteed protection. However, it is also what makes the Jews different, non-believers to be subjugated.

Conversely, rebels also attacked the *mellah* to challenge the authority of the king. The story below, from *Tarikh al-Du'ayyif*, is an example of this. In 1840 CE, the king orders the Pasha Ikkran to go to another city, where there is a rebelling tribe.

The sultan's command to Muhammad Ikkran that he leave Casablanca and take up quarters in the *qasbah* of Settat

At the end of Rabi' al-Thani the Sultan ordered the Pasha Muhammad Ikkran that he leave Casablanca and settle in the *qasbah* of Settat. He (the Pasha) responded to the Sultan saying, "I am fearful of the tribe Mazamazah". The prince responded to him, that he (must) leave for Settat, even if with ten horses. So, on Monday, the [7th] of Jumada al-Oula, he rode with some of the sons of Ihriz and he entered the *qasbah* of Settat and he was scared. The market of the Mazamazah was violently broken up, so they came to an agreement with the sons of Burzuk. On the next day, they (the Mazamazah and sons of Burzuk) surrounded him (Ikkran) and the *qasbah*. Then, they entered upon the *mellah* of the Jews, (there) they plundered [and they were excessive] the Jews and their women, they took everything that they found in it and they raped their virgins. Then Ikkran came to the house of Abbas the son of Moaq, and he hid¹³⁶ amongst their women...¹³⁷

Whereas the story ends by describing Pasha Ikkran's escape, the important part of the narrative are the actions of the Mazamazah tribe. Here, the Mazamazah tribe, in its revolt against the Pasha Ikkran, plunders the *mellah* as an expression of their anger towards and challenge of the royal authority. Below is an example of a similar situation, taken from *Kitab al-Istiqsa* in which a rebelling faction plunders the *mellah* as part of its challenge to the rulers. However, here the rebels are the cavalry corp. of the sultan's army.

The recollection of what happened during the chaos in Fez and its acts after the sultan Moulay Sulayman's travels to Marrakesh

¹³⁶ The word in the text is *zak*, *zawak* and seems to be a Moroccan word, however, from context here and later, hid or found refuge makes sense. An Arabic-speaking friend who I consulted agreed that *zak* likely means to gather and hide somewhere.

¹³⁷ al-Du'ayyif, 2: 724.

...

The Wadaya in Fez set out for the Jewish neighborhood that was amongst them in Fez al-Jadid and they plundered it. They confiscated its property, and they took what the Jews owned of linens, silk, silver and gold for the merchants of the people of Fez. Innumerable amounts of money was lost in this. Then, they stripped them, men and women, they captured their (Jewish) women, and they deflowered their virgins. And they shed their blood. And they drank alcohol during the daytime during Ramadan. They killed the children who were jostled together with the plunder. Then they surpassed all of this (their actions) to digging (under) the houses for the hidden treasure, and they did this for the reason of their (Jews') abundant money.

When they saw this (the hidden treasures) they captured their (Jews') prominent members and their traders. They seized them with hitting and shackles so that they would show them where they buried the money. Whoever had a beautiful Jewess, they made him and her inaccessible to one another until he ransomed her with money.

This was the trying event in the year 1235 (H.) (13 Ramadan 1235/ 24 June 1820).

When they were finished with the Jews, they turned to the people of Fez. They herded the freely grazing (cattle) and the livestock of the plows and gardens. They prohibited entrance and exit, thus a great agitation arose in Fez and they locked the gates (of the city). They were hostile towards whomever they found of the Wadaya inside the town. ...¹³⁸

The story here begins with an explanation the Sultan's movement from Fez to Meknes to be with the 'Abid. The 'Abid and the Wadaya were two corps in the sultan's army, with the 'Abid based in Meknes and the Wadaya in Fez. There was a long-standing rivalry between the two groups, each of which had also often acted to promote for their own interests rather than the sultan's. The Wadaya "became increasingly unruly and defied efforts at reform" under Moulary Sulayman, refusing the monarch's request to move to Meknes in 1816. Two years later, a plague in Fez killed many members of the Wadaya, bringing it close to collapse and lowering their moral.¹³⁹ It was in this context that the Wadaya plundered the Fez *mellah* violently in pursuit of financial and power gains.

¹³⁸ Muhammad al-Nasiri, *Kitab al-Istiqaşa fi Duwwal al-Maghrib al-Aqşa* (The Ministry of Culture and Communication, 2001) 7:181.

¹³⁹ Susan G. Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 15-16.

The army was only paid when fighting, thus “they provided for themselves from booty”¹⁴⁰ during peaceful times and pillaging was common. However, not only were spoils taken from the space of the *mellah*, but the people were violated as well. The Jews were “natural targets for insurgents against the sultan” for their protection represented his power.¹⁴¹ Thus, “ attacking the Jews of the cities who were close to the sultan was an affront to the sovereign.”¹⁴² The Wadaya, in their revolt, then moved on to attack other parts of Fez, albeit, less violently.

In this record, Al-Nasiri notes that the marauders drank alcohol during the daytime of Ramadan, a prohibited activity available only in the *mellah*. Drinking alcohol is expressly prohibited in Islam, but even more so during the holy month of Ramadan, a time in which the Muslim is expected to refrain from worldly pleasures. The author’s mention of these actions indicates his repulsion of the Wadaya’s actions. He mentions drinking amongst murder and rape, associating the three of them as abominable. Therefore attacking the Jews, even as they are separate, is negatively portrayed. Additionally, as *makhzan* official, al-Nasiri likely opposed the ill-reputed Wadaya¹⁴³ corp. and their revolt against the king.

Typical Moroccan residents plundered the *mellah* during times of instability as well. As seen in the story below from *Tarikh al-Ḍu’ayyif*, rumors of the king’s death caused frenzy amongst the people, and resulted in the plundering of the *mellah*.

The sultan’s illness and the publication of his death and the turmoil that was caused by it

...A Jew who was a doctor entered upon the Sultan to treat him and he wrote to the Jews of Rabat and informed them that the Sultan was close to death. Agitation grew strong in

¹⁴⁰ Pennell, 21.

¹⁴¹ Deshen, 22.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 20.

¹⁴³ Miller (2013) 16.

the people and the people (plundered the grain storehouses)... The people suffered by this and they said that the Sultan had already died, this news reached Meknes, Fez, then the Loudaya region /408/. They (the people) destroyed the edges of the new *mellah* of Fez. Then the people wanted to [enter] upon the treasury but the witnessing judge, al-Bukhari, cleared them of (this) and he said: ‘ Verily you are free for the Sultan is alive’.”...

... The rumors of the king’s death spread to Rabat and Salé [...] Then the Jews left the city, meeting the caravans, buying grain from the group of them, and they (the tribes) said that the Sultan had died. Thus, Muhammad al-Salawi crossed from Salé and he seized the Jews, and he jailed them in the prison of the *qasbah*. Then he sent for asphalt and he decreed of the cuppers to cut the hands of the Jews. Then the Jews hid in the *zawiya* of Moulay al-Tahami and the others hid¹⁴⁴ in the house of Sidi ‘ab, the *mellah* was deprived of its belongings and they protected them in the homes of the Muslims. (At this time) Sidi ‘Ali had already arrived to the conquered Rabat in Dhu al-Hijja the year of 1218 (H) and he was known from Ouzzane upon Rabat. When he looked to the Jews in the *zawiya* he became angry with the people of the *zawiya* and he said to them: ‘ this is forbidden by God, how do they teach him, the Jew.’ He wanted to expel the Jews from the *zawiya*. Then the Jews came to Sidi ‘Ali with 200 riyal, and the next day he became desirous of the Jews, after he had previously rejected them. Then he sent for al-Salawi and he (Sidi ‘Ali) interceded on their behalf. ...¹⁴⁵

Although the records portray the pillaging of the *mellah* and arrest of the Jews, both of which are expressions of the Jews’ otherness, they also depict ways in which Jews were integrated into Moroccan society. Some of these are the doctor being Jewish, the Jews who trade with the Amazigh tribes and the Muslim protection of the Jews.

In the first half, a Jewish doctor to the Sultan tells his community of the sultan’s illness, fueling extant rumors of the king’s death, ultimately leading to the plundering of grain houses and the *mellah*. As noted before, the sultan’s death led to a time of war and instability, therefore, the people’s response to snatch food and money is understandable. However, the specific pillaging of the separate Jewish neighborhood indicates the otherness of the space and the people therein. The fact is, that during “times of

¹⁴⁴ The verb *zak* is used twice here.

¹⁴⁵ al-Du‘ayyif, 2:613-614.

upheaval[,] the people of the countryside made forays into the cities, and usually the *mellah* suffered the worst damage”¹⁴⁶ showing this distinct role of the Jewish space.

During this same time period of unrest, the plundering of the *mellah* and capture of the Jews in the second half of the story was politically motivated. Mentioned in multiple records, Muhammad al-Salawi is clearly allied with one of the sultanic contenders, probably Moulay Sulayman.¹⁴⁷

However, this record depicts another aspect of the plundering as well that the Jews had recourse in the space of their Muslim neighbors. The *zawiyas*, homes of religious brotherhoods, and Muslim neighbors protected the Jews. Moroccan *zawiyas* historically “ provided services as hostels for travelers, sanctuaries for fugitives and refuges for the sick”¹⁴⁸ and for the oppressed fugitive slaves and women,¹⁴⁹ services extended to Jews as well. Additionally, their Muslim neighbors hid the Jews from al-Salawi, echoing practices common throughout Morocco. For example, in Meknes, Jews “when threatened by insurgents, gave their valuables for safekeeping to Muslim acquaintances,”¹⁵⁰ demonstrating positive interfaith relations. These practices of hiding and protecting Jews and their valuables attests to the shared sense of a local, common identity amongst peoples of the two faiths even in times of instability.

A third facet of this record is the topic of blame. In the above story, the Jews are active and seem to be responsible for their misfortunes, deviating from most of the other Arabic stories that portray the Jews as passive. First, it is a Jew who tells of the king’s

¹⁴⁶ Brown, 273.

¹⁴⁷ see “Muhammad al-Salawi Descends on the people of ‘Aduatin.” This event took place in 1811, when Muolay Sulayman reigned, and Salawi is clearly acting as a government official.

¹⁴⁸ Pennell, 10.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵⁰ Dshen, 22.

illness, spreading the rumor of his death and causing the first plundering of the *mellah*. Then, the Jews who traded with the Amazigh tribes, a common function of the Jews,¹⁵¹ were again active in the rumors of the king's death, leading to al-Salawi's arrest of the Jews and the plundering of their space. Placing the onus of responsibility upon the Jews is similar to the Jewish stories around the *mellahs*.

These stories of turbulent times highlight issues of the Muslim perception of the Jewish identity through use of Jewish space. The plundering of the Jewish space, for political and monetary gains and as an expression of anxiety, indicates the subjugation of the Jew as the other. Yet, the use of Jews to teach a lesson and the Muslim protection of Jews demonstrates their commonality. Protecting the Jews, who were mostly attacked by rural tribes, is an expression of the shared local identity between the two faiths.

For most of the time, "the people of the *mellah* and *madina* ... lived peaceful and secure lives, both separately and together."¹⁵² The duality of the Jews was also expressed in the activities pursued by Muslims within the *mellahs*.

2.3 Activity in the *mellah*

Like the Jews themselves whose differences and commonalities with their Muslim neighbors were apparent, the space of the *mellah* was similarly liminal, both allowed and prohibited to the Muslim population. Both the sanctioned and unsanctioned activities pursued in the *mellah* contributed to this dual role. Sanctioned activities included Muslim entrance for economic purposes, such as buying and selling merchandise, owning real estate, and other possible economic opportunities, and, in Marrakesh, religious purposes,

¹⁵¹ See Schroeter (1988), 86.

¹⁵² Brown, 273.

such as visiting the sites of saints.¹⁵³ Unsanctioned activities were actions deemed illicit by Islam, such as drinking, gambling, and engaging with prostitutes.¹⁵⁴ Both types of activities made the *mellah* a porous space, despite its physical separation. The permeability of this space was another factor that allowed for nuanced relationships between Muslims and Jews to develop, and “mutually reinforc[ed] their sense of... *mudduniya*, being both in and of a place”¹⁵⁵ and local identity. However, the illicit activity also reinforced the otherness of the Jews, their space and even those Muslims who engaged in unsanctioned activity.

The source below, brought in *Kitab al-Istiqsa*, portrays the space of the *mellah* as a space of illicit activity, and the effects on Muslims who engaged in those pursuits.

The murder of Gharsiya bin Antwal the leader of the al-Nasari and the killing of his army along with him and the reason for that

When ‘Umar bin Abdallah captured the ambassadors Masud bin Abdallah al-Rahmin bin Masa and Sulayman bin Daoud, he imprisoned them separately. He took Ibn Masa to the place of his in-laws from him and he handed Sulayman bin Daoud to Gharsiya, and Sulayman bin Wanisar had fled from the Sultan Abi Salim, as recorded. ... Whoever stayed with Gharsiya, he (Gharsiya) accepted and honored him (the guest). He (Gharsiya) made him (Sulayman bin Daoud) addicted to wine, and that night, he negotiated with him a revolution against ‘Umar ibn Abdallah...

The Benu Merin jumped on him (Gharsiya bin Antwal) and they killed him at his time. They surrounded those who they found in the house of the army of al-Nasari upon their entrance with their leader. A number of them fled to their camp, and it was known in the *mellah* of the in the neighborhood of Fez al-jadid (the new Fez). The mob spread rumors in the *medina* that Ibn Antul had acted treacherously against the minister. So they killed the army of al-Nasari wherever they found them in the residences of the *medina*. They advanced to the *mellah* to surround the remainder of them... On that day, much of their money, pottery and possessions were seized and al-Nasari was killed as well as many of the impudent Muslims who were addicted to alcohol in the *mellah*.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Gottreich (2007) 71-75.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁵⁶ Muhammad al-Nasiri, *Kitab al-Istiqsa li-Akhbar al-Maghrib al-Aqsa*, (Casablanca, Morocco: Dar al-Kitab, 1900) 4:41.

This story was written in the late nineteenth century about an event that occurred in 1361 CE, about a century before the first *mellah* was built. It demonstrates the Muslim perception of the *mellah* as a Jewish and unsanctioned space as well as the negative association with some of the activities of the *mellah*.

Although the *mellah* did not even exist, the nineteenth century author refers to a specific space at the *mellah*. Given al-Nasiri's historical context, one in which *mellahs* proliferated, it is clear that he means to refer to the Jewish neighborhood. His use of this term to refer to a Jewish enclave before *mellahs* existed shows how ingrained the term as a conceptual Jewish space was in Moroccan society. He even associates the space with activities connected to the *mellah*, such as consumption of alcohol. Al-Nasiri's use of the term proves that the *mellah*, with all of its trappings, was truly the space of the Jews rather than necessarily a specific physical neighborhood.

The unsanctioned activities of the *mellah* not only designate the space and the Jews as other, but also taint the Muslims who pursue those forbidden amusements. The murder of the addicts, in addition to the revolutionaries, shows the reprehensible nature of the people themselves, those who imbibe alcohol. Not only are the Benu Merin of this opinion, but the author too agrees, as he calls them "impudent Muslims", those Muslims who have gone astray and are presumptuous. Therefore, even though unsanctioned activities contributed to the porousness of the *mellah* and thus the shared local identity of the Muslims and Jews, it also ostracized the Muslims who participated.

This second record discusses the space of the *mellah* from the outsider's perspective. The letter below, presented in *Tarikh Titwan* but written by a foreign traveler, explores the functions of the space of the *mellah* by commenting on both the

common aspects of the Jewish neighborhood and Jews to the city and Muslims, as well as the illicit activities pursued there.

The emissary of the king of England to the Sultan of Morocco visited Tetouan in the year 1139 (H., 1727 CE)

...

And Tetouan, is the nicest of the cities that I visited in all of the lands of the Maghrib, and we had already spent time in it

...

We did not lose any from our comrades, rather we gained for our group. There were the English, the four residents of Tetouan, and two or three garrison officers from Gibraltar, they did not leave us. Although we did not have the freedom to have contact with the Muslim women, it was easy for us to see them from the top of our house whenever we desired it. As for the Jewish women – and they were extremely handsome and beautiful of physique- not a single one of them remained whom we did not see, they had invited us to their homes and they received us with hospitality as though we were in our homes.

As long as we are on the topic of our entertainment, I will give the reader a description of how we spent our time during the two months that we were obliged to spend in Tetouan. The admiral Piris has a passionate and extreme love for tea, therefore, it was certain that he would eat lunch with us whenever he had news of our concerns. When he finished lunch, it was our custom for all of us to walk on the roof of the house to see the women that were ascending masterfully to the roofs of their houses, for they did not go out into the streets and the houses in Tetouan were built so that you could circle the city moving from roof to roof. As for the Jewish women of our neighbors, they nearly were unable to leave their places, and it was prohibited for us to wander about the Jewish neighborhood. Our entire trip was distinguished by charity and generosity...

From our good luck, we had always found one who would fulfill the role of translator for our benefit, for everything that consulted our curiosity. Amongst our company were a number of Jews and a number of Muslims who had visited England with the former ambassador. They spoke our language up to a certain point, and it was rare that we would sup together, but at times we were invited to dinner outside and we ourselves would invite one of the excellent people. After lunch we played papers (cards), or we went to the houses of the Jews until the time of our walk. ...

...

The Jews of Tetouan produced top-notch alcohol, such as the arak (the water of life) (*mahiya*). It improves amongst them after a few years in which they do not mix it often, during distillation of the anis (a sweet grain). Mr. Russell bought six vats of the alcohol for less than ten riyal for one, during our stay in the city.¹⁵⁷

This letter shows how even a foreigner experienced and perceived the dual role of the Jews and their space. Here, the Jews and their space are both inaccessible and accessed, separate and common. The author points out that both Jewish and Muslim

¹⁵⁷ Daoud, 2:124-125.

women travel about the city by walking on the roofs of their houses, as opposed to in the streets, a practice shared by both communities and contributing to a shared culture. While this may seem trivial, the sharing of the roofs indicates trust between the two communities. Another Jewish myth regarding the foundation of the Tetouan *mellah* expands on this sharing. The narrative claims that the *mellah* was created because Spanish, i.e. Christian, consuls and merchants moved into the Jewish neighborhood, and therefore had access to the shared roofs. Due to distrust of the Spanish and the perception of Christians as “a threat to privacy and morality” of the Muslims, the *dhimmi* had to move.¹⁵⁸ This story highlights the fact that there was sharing between the Jews and Muslims, especially at the time of the letter above, that was later disrupted by the Spanish. Additionally, both Jews and Muslims were translators for the group, highlighting the mutual language of the two communities, a characteristic that contributes to a common identity.¹⁵⁹ Despite these similarities, the Jews and Muslims were also separate, or different.

The first difference is the inaccessibility of the Jewish space. This trip occurred before the declaration of the *mellah*, explaining the lack of the term *mellah*. As a non-Moroccan, this term would not have applied to just any Jewish neighborhood. However, the Jews of Tetouan did live in a confined, separate neighborhood even before the establishment of the technical *mellah*.¹⁶⁰ Thus, this area is still representative of Jewish space. While the group was free to wander about the *medina*, they were prohibited from entering the Jewish section. This did not stop the group from fraternizing with the Jews and entering their space when they were invited into Jewish homes. The activities

¹⁵⁸ Brown, 254.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 267.

¹⁶⁰ Schroeter (2002) 91.

pursued therein seem to be consistent with the vices associated with the *mellahs*. In particular the travelers, consumed, enjoyed and even bought the alcohol found there.

The travelers' experiences with Jewish women highlights another difference between the Muslim and Jewish communities. In the letter, the author writes that Jewish women invited the travelers into their homes and were hospitable to them. While the author does not specify that they were prostitutes, the Jewish women were readily available to spend time with these men. This difference is even more notable when contrasted with the complete inapproachability of the Muslim women. The distinction underscores the sexual vice that was prevalent in the *mellahs*¹⁶¹ as well as the higher public visibility of Jewish women. The difference in visibility between Muslim and Jewish women was evident throughout Morocco;¹⁶² Jewish women went to work and appeared in public forums, both within the *mellah* and the *medina*, and Jewish women did not wear veils.¹⁶³ Therefore Jewish women entered the public sphere more often and were physically less covered than their Muslim counterparts, explaining the interaction that the travelers were able to have with them.

This letter aptly conveys the dichotomy of the role of the Jews within the broader context of Muslim society and of the *mellah* within the city. As such the Jews are at once part of the traveler's general Moroccan experience and supplementary to it.

Just as the stories of plundering the *mellahs* teach about the duality of the Jews, so too, these stories tell of the binary role of their space. Although the stories focus on illicit activity, even that which is unsanctioned facilitated cultural sharing and a common

¹⁶¹ Gottreich (2007) 80.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* 79.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* 80.

identity. All the more so, sanctioned activities made the *mellah* part of the space of the city. The *mellah* therefore, embodied the limits of the Jews themselves.

2.4 Conclusion

The Arabic sources elucidate the Muslim conceptualization of the *mellah* and perception of the Jews as both Moroccan and other through the stories about Jewish space and the activities pursued therein. It is clear from the sources that the *mellah* is a term to refer to the conceptual Jewish space rather than a specific physical location. Because of this, the reasons for the move to the *mellah* were not worthy of various investigations. These stories also indicate that the Jews were seen as both a part of and separate from the Muslim majority. The narratives describing both the plundering and protecting of the *mellahs* further illustrate this duality in Muslim-Jewish relations. Lastly, the duality is expressed by the Muslim interaction with the space of the *mellah* that was both sanctioned and unsanctioned. The Muslims' dichotomous perception of the Jews and their space, along with the Jewish stories that depict inter-communal interactions, demonstrate the complexity and multifaceted nature of Jewish-Muslim relations in Morocco.

Understanding the stories

In the narratives about the *mellah*'s foundation and events therein, the records illustrate various aspects of inter-communal and sultanic relationships. As seen with the Jewish sources, the sultan was the arbitrator between the Jewish and Muslim communities meting out punishment and protection as he saw fit, and Muslim-Jewish interactions were informed by the Pact of 'Umar. These relationships were manifested in the Jewish experience with the space of the *mellah* as a protected and vulnerable space. In the Muslim narratives, the Jews are portrayed as both Moroccan and other, characterizations that reflect in the space of the *mellah* and activities available there. In comparing and contrasting narratives from both communities, a few trends are elucidated. Similarities include the *mellah* as both a physical and conceptual space and the sultanic-Jewish relationship. Differences found relate the topics of responsibility and blame and of violence and vice.

In both the Jewish and Muslim accounts, the *mellah* is both a physical space and a conceptual one. The two communities describe the neighborhood as physically segregated from the rest of the city, locked behind a wall. This physical segregation reflects each community's conceptualization of the space. The Jews understand the physical segregation as protective; behind the wall they are safe from natural disaster and attack, they are under the divine protection of the saints and temporal protection of the king. Additionally, the segregation allows for freedom of religious expression, for any ritual practiced within the space would not have offended the Muslims nor broken the Pact of 'Umar. For Muslims, the physical segregation of the space makes it independent of the city and thus outside of the jurisdiction of the '*ulama*' and Islam. However, the

exact physical location is less important for the Muslims than for the Jews. For the Jews, the trauma in the *mellah* is the physical transfer to another neighborhood, a transfer that signified a change in Moroccan Jewish history¹⁶⁴ This physical location represents a particular space and time in the Jewish experience. Thus, other Jewish neighborhoods in other time periods are not also *mellahs*. Contrastingly, in the Muslim perspective, the *mellah* moves with the Jewish people, for it is the conceptual space of the Jews. The difference here explains the diverging focus on the *mellahs*' foundations.

Another shared theme is the sultanic-Jewish relationship. In the Jewish stories, the king plays the role of arbiter between the two communities. Often, he is the benevolent ruler who must curb the anger that the Muslim masses have toward the Jews. Most stories relate only the results of the intervention. However, in the story of Essaouira, the Jews approach the king, asking him to arbitrate. The Muslims approached the king for intercession with the Jews as well. Kenneth Brown explains that the “sultan had the *mellah* built at the instigation of the city’s Muslim population because they had become fed up of living amongst a people contemptuous of Islam and of Muslims.” Therefore, the Muslims of Salé broke a bottle of wine on the steps of a mosque that was near Jewish homes and blamed it on the Jews in a document that they presented to the king.¹⁶⁵ Thus, both populations approached the king to intervene in their relations. An additional perspective of the sultanic-Jewish relationship is brought forth in the Arabic sources. The Muslim narratives clearly show that the Jews and Jewish space were symbols of the king’s power and political authority, thereby identifying the unique relationship between the king and the Jews that was created by the Pact of ‘Umar.

¹⁶⁴ Gottreich (2003) 294.

¹⁶⁵ Brown, 255.

Although these similarities show a great deal about the inter-communal relationships, a deeper look at the stories, and their differences, teaches us about each individual community as well.

A notable difference between the narratives of each community is the Jewish focus on blame and responsibility compared with the Muslim discussion of violence and vice. In the Jewish sources, blame and responsibility play a central role in explaining the misfortunes that fall upon the Jews. Generally, the Jews are responsible for their afflictions because of either religious iniquities, which consist of haughtiness and transgression of Jewish religious law, or violations of the Pact of ‘Umar. In Jewish religious law there is a precept called *dina de-malkhuta dina*, Aramaic for “the law of the land is the law”, i.e. “the law of the land is supreme.”¹⁶⁶ This ruling states that Jews are religiously obligated to obey the ruling apparatus even if it contradicts some Jewish laws.¹⁶⁷ Thus, violation of the Pact of ‘Umar is a sin. Jewish culpability is reinforced by the myth of the royal alliance, which claims Jewish responsibility for hardships. This myth was developed to justify the continued inhabitation of the lands in which the Jews abided. Therefore, the guilt of the Jews is more prevalent in the stories written by Jews who lived during the time of the events or, at least, in Morocco. Regardless of the level of responsibility, the Jewish stories portray the Jews as active in their relationships and what transpired. Contrarily, the Muslim narratives mostly paint the Jews as passive.

In most of the Muslim narratives, the Jews as a community are not responsible for the events that occur. In fact, the sources rarely dwell on the catalysts for the recorded events, but rather describe the violence and vice in the *mellah*. Violence is a prominent theme

¹⁶⁶ Gottreich (2002) 291.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

and acts of violence are described in detail in the records. While it is described neutrally most of the time, there are a few instances in which the plunderers are negatively judged for their actions, situations in which they crossed the line of acceptable plundering norms. The authors also pass judgment on those who pursue illicit activities in the *mellah*. These Muslims are portrayed as lesser due to their violation of Islamic jurisprudence. By focusing on the violence and vice of the Muslims, the stories demand an internal look at the Muslim community.

Although the stories, both Jewish and Muslim tell of the other, the ultimate lesson is internally focused. Stories about the other provide a stick by which one can measure one's own flaws and actions. In the context of Jews and Muslims in Morocco, the stories that relate the relationship with the other, especially as expressed through the space of the *mellah*, highlight aspects of the narrator's own community. Whether intentionally or not, the narratives point out facets of the internal community that warrant examination. Fundamentally, the stories are not truly about the other, rather they are stories that tell of the internal community's vices and weaknesses. These stories are told by community members to community members and intended to portray daily life, not to explain the other.

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