

The particular migrations of Moroccan Jews

The history of Moroccan Judaism is punctuated by geographical mobility, consisting of successive waves of migrants. This form of Judaism, traditionally linked to trade and craft, involved long-distance travel.

These journeys were also motivated by pilgrimages, sometimes making use of the Hajj caravans to Mecca to reach Jerusalem. In the early 19th century, the opening up of Morocco to the West through maritime trade led many Moroccan Jews to head for the coastal towns, gateways to Europe and Latin America. Immigration to Brazil and Peru often began in precarious economic conditions before becoming more permanent with the boom in the rubber industry.

Another wave travelled to Europe to settle in England, where some important Jewish families from the Maghreb had already established themselves. These migrants would maintain strong ties with their country of origin, using the British or Brazilian passports they obtained.

So the Jews of Morocco formed genuine diasporas around the world very early on, maintaining family, commercial and cultural networks. One wave of the diaspora also headed for Palestine to reach "the Land of Zion". For a while, the Moroccan authorities attempted to prevent this emigration as it deprived them of the taxes paid by Jews and destabilised the Muslim populations in Palestine.

After the French protectorate, the fight for independence in Morocco, the creation of Israel, then the Arab-Israeli conflict and growing anti-Zionist sentiment in Morocco, once again led many Jews to leave the country. Apart from Israel, their preferred destinations were France, Spain and Canada. 20,000 Jews left Morocco starting in 1948, then another 45,000 left after the Six-Day War in 1967.

In Belgium, the migration of Moroccan Jews came indirectly from Morocco. Reasons for emigrating included study, marriage and economic opportunities. The first Moroccan Jew, Abraham Sicsu, a consul in Tangier, obtained Belgian nationality in 1887, and around 1,500 Sephardic Jews

moved to Belgium around the 1970s. They are very active on a cultural and religious level, in particular through the creation of new synagogues. In 2000, only 4,000 Jews were still living in Morocco. However, thousands of tourists of Judeo-Moroccan origin have reconnected with their roots, especially since the signing of the Abraham Agreements in 2020.