**[Muslim-Jewish ties](https://www.dawn.com/news/1627030/muslim-jewish-ties)**

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THROUGHOUT history, Muslims and Jews have lived in peace, in sharp contrast to the persecution the followers of Judaism suffered during the 2,000 years of their life in Europe’s ghettoes. That Arabs and Jews were Semites only partly explains the reason for Muslim tolerance; Turks and Persians aren’t Semites, but they treated the Jews with respect.

One major reason why the Arabs valued and sought Jewish cooperation was the financial problem faced by the Umayyad caliphate stretching from Iberia to Sindh. Lacking experience in governance, the Arabs had to rely on the Jews and Persians because of their vast experience in the collection and management of revenues. The caliphate didn’t have a coinage of its own, and all official transactions were done in Roman and Persian (and partly Ethiopian) coins. It was on Jewish commendation that the Arabs moved in that direction, and the first Arab coin was minted during the reign of Abdul Malik bin Marwan (ruled 685-705). That the coin, called ‘dinar’ (derived from Roman denarius) had Jewish symbols, including the menorah, shows their influence with Arab rulers.

As Abba Eban in his fascinating book, My People, remarks, under Muslim rule “world Jewry entered into a new period of physical and intellectual expansion. […T]he Jews not only retained their ancestors’ creed but gained new strength in the land of Muslim conquest”.

Financial problems often led the Arabs to seek Jewish cooperation.

The change in power structure from the Arabs to the various Turkic tribes didn’t affect the Jewish people. When the first Crusade took Palestine (1099) it had a Christian majority, but the European knights slaughtered the Jews as well, and it was Saladin who brought them back. Also at Saladin’s court was the greatest Jewish thinker, Maimonides (Moses ben Maimon), who was born in Spain. The finest account of Moorish Spain as a joint Arab-Jewish enterprise is given by Eban, whose book dwells at length on Spanish society and the cultural activity of the elite of which the Jews were an integral part.

As in Palestine, so in Spain, as theReconquista began, Jews, too, had their throats slit. When he heard of this genocide, Ottoman sultan Bayazit II wondered how Ferdinand and Isabella could kill the goose that laid the golden egg. Bayazit then offered asylum to the persecuted Jews in his empire. Today’s Bulgarian Jews are the descendants of the Spanish Jews who the Ottoman sultan had offered asylum.

Throughout the Middle Ages and right up to the modern times, the periodic massacre of Jews was a regular feature of European life. In his book, The First Crusade, Thomas Asbridge quotes an eyewitness as saying that Jews were “killed like oxen and dragged through the marketplaces and streets like sheep to the slaughter”. As Crusaders planned to go to the holy land, a Jewish chronicler summed up their feelings in these words: “here are the Jews dwelling among us, whose ancestors killed [Jesus Christ] and crucified him groundlessly. Let’s take vengeance upon them. Let us wipe them out as a nation. Israel’s name will be mentioned no more. Or else let them be like us and acknowledge [Christ]”.

Such was the ‘sadistic persecution’ of the Jews and the geographical expanse of the flames of death and destruction that Asbridge quoting other authorities calls it “the first holocaust”. As Barbara Tuchman points out in her book Bible and Sword, by the Third Crusade (1190) “the association of Crusade and pogrom was automatic”.

The coming of modern times made no difference to the plight of European Jews. In the 1890s, Theodor Herzl, covering the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, a French Jew accused of spying for Prussia, heard the crowd shouting: “à mort les, Juifs!” (“Death to the Jews!)

In Russia in 1881, writes Tuchman, “a mass savagery on a scale and to a degree of brutality unknowns since the Middle Ages exploded upon the Jews”. Hitler, she says, “added the concentration camps and the gas chambers but otherwise he invented nothing. It had all been done before in Czarist Russia.”

How have a section of descendants of the European Jews responded to the Muslim goodwill mentioned above? Here are two quotes: Menachem Begin, one of Zionism’s ruthless murderers, told the New York Times Palestinians would be crushed “like grasshoppers ... heads smashed against the boulders and walls”, while Rafael Eitan, chief of staff of the Israeli Defence Forces (1978-83), expressed himself thus: “When we have settled the land, all the Arabs will be able to do about will be to scurry around like drugged cockroaches in a bottle.” And here is Robert Fisk at Sabra-Chatila: “Women lying … with their skirts torn up their waists […], children with their throats cut, rows of young men shot in the back […]. There were babies — blackened babies because they had been slaughtered more than 24 hours earlier… .”

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