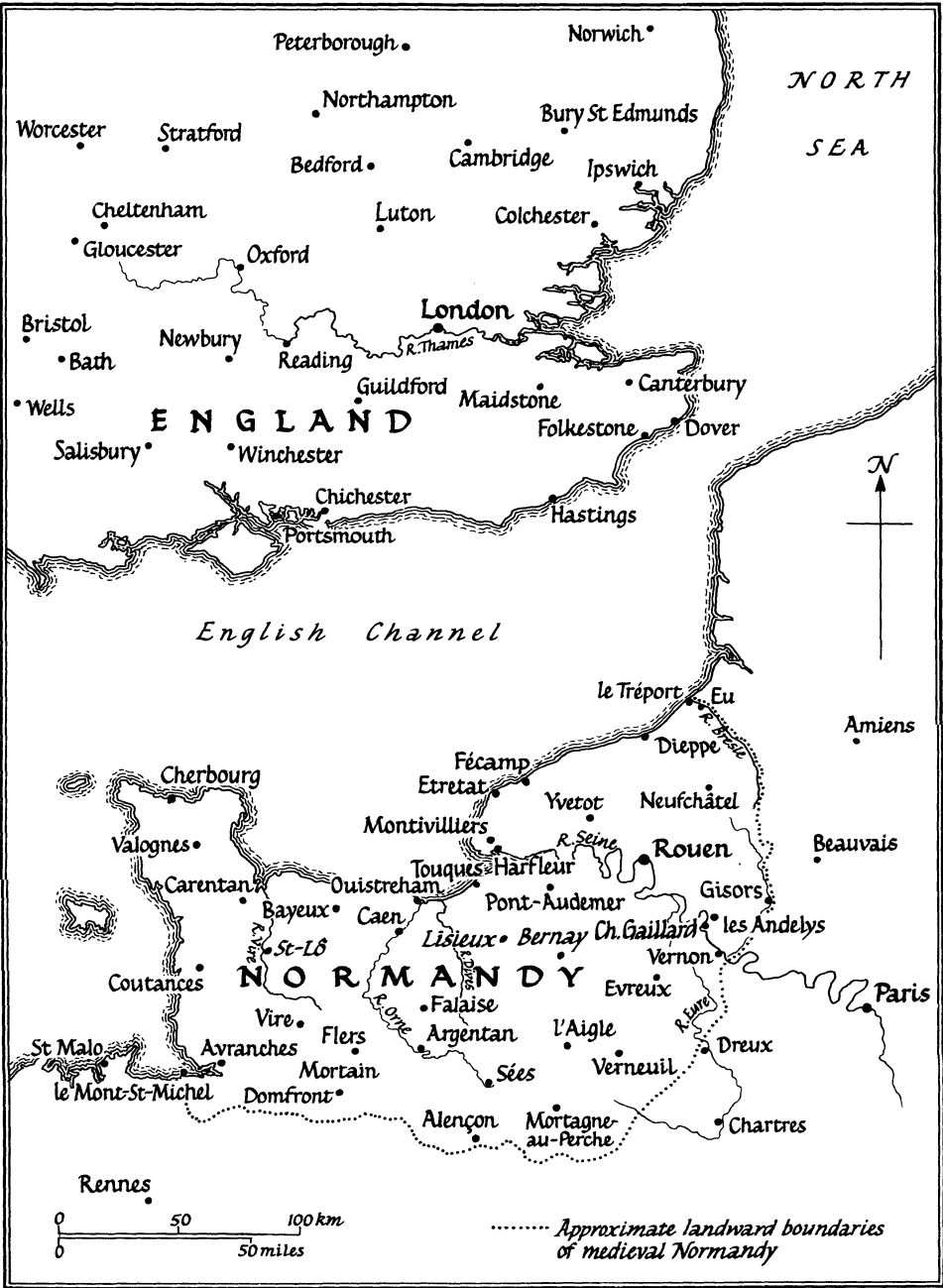


CHAPTER 1

THE EARLIEST SOURCES

The first Jews who settled in the territories collectively known today as France have left us no written records of their arrival or earliest settlement: all we have testifying to the presence of their more immediate descendants are several scattered inscriptions and some chance allusions in Latin codes and chronicles. For those regions of Gaul spreading out from Lyon to the north, west and east, there are references in the fourth century only to the Jewish community of Cologne, in the fifth to Jewish inhabitants in general, and in the sixth to Jews in Orléans, Bourges, Clermont-Ferrand and Paris; while decrees relating to the Jews are found in records of ecclesiastical councils meeting during the fifth to the seventh centuries in Vannes, Epaone, Orléans, Mâcon, Paris and Reims. No Hebrew records now exist describing these people whose forefathers had settled, along with their Roman fellow citizens, in the northern territories, and until the ninth century there is virtually no trace of their religious, political or social life. The description then unwittingly furnished by bishops Agobard and Amulo of Lyon, of the esteem and religious freedom enjoyed by the Jews in that former capital of Gaul and in its surrounding region, must surely be paradigmatic of the Jewish status in general in the Carolingian realm of their time, but even as late as the following century our sources relating to the Jews of the successor kingdoms are extremely sparse. Then, with the dawn of the eleventh century, the picture begins to change, and it is, however unexpectedly, the heartland of the former Neustrian realm, by that time developing into the Normandy of our historical records, where the most remarkable configuration of pertinent texts and archaeological evidence – yet more instructive than that concerning the Jews of Champagne or the Ile-de-France – is thereafter revealed.



Map 1
Medieval Normandy and southeastern England (modern nomenclature).

Jacob b. Jequthiel of Rouen

The manuscript that describes the earliest event contributing to this panorama is an anonymous Hebrew chronicle today preserved in Parma, Italy.¹ Although we cannot determine precisely when the chronicle was originally written, the scribal copy was executed in a late thirteenth-century script. The configuration of idiomatic expressions and scribal errors in the manuscript strongly suggests that the original author lived, at the latest, in the first half of the twelfth century, or approximately a century after the events he records. As we shall see below, he may have based his account on an earlier, non-Hebrew source no longer preserved.

The chronicle begins with incidents occurring “in 4767 of the Creation,” or AD 1007, “in the reign of Robert, King of Šārefat [i.e. France].”² In that year, it explains, a persecution was decreed against the Jews: Robert consulted his chiefs, who advised him to erase Judaism entirely from the land. The king proposed to some Jews assembled in his court that they convert, but according to the chronicle they refused, and many were subsequently killed and their property seized. Others martyred themselves rather than accept baptism, while elderly Jews “who did not have the strength to flee” were severely abused. As an example of such cruelty, the chronicle describes a “very wise and understanding man,” R. Senior, who, refusing baptism, was put to the sword and his body trampled.

At this time a Jew of Rouen (*RDWM*)³ named Jacob bar Jequthiel stood up to the murderers, denying them “authority over Israel to force them to change their religion or to do any harm at all to them, unless the Pope of Rome affirms this.” He proposed that he be allowed to go to Rome, and

1 MS Parma-de Rossi 563, fos. 127 verso–129 verso. First edition of the text: A. Berliner in the Hebrew supplement (*Oṣar tōb*) to *Magazin für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums* III (1876): 46–48, reprinted verbatim by A. Habermann, *Sēfer gezērōt ashkenaz wešārefat* (Jerusalem, 1945), pp. 19 ff.. The new edition (*TYR*, pp. 171–73) includes over fifty new readings of the text based on a fresh study of the manuscript. Discussions based on the earlier edition of Berliner include those by I. Levi, in *REJ* LII (1906): 165; Gross, *Gallia Judaica* (Paris, 1899), p. 72; S. Dubnow, *Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes* IV (Berlin, 1926), p. 133; S. W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd edn., IV, p. 265, n. 74; S. Schwarzfuchs, in *Evidences* VI, no. 41 (1954): 36–37; R. Chazan, in *PAAJR* 38–39 (1970–71): 101–18. See *TYR*, pp. 13–14; 171–73; and *ibid.*, Fig. 4.

2 See full translation in Appendix I.

3 On the equivalence *RDWM*/Rodom/Rouen, see pp. 11–13 below, and following chapters.



Figure 1
MS Parma-de Rossi 563, fo. 128 recto, line 19:
Jacob b. Jequthiel is described as being “of the city of RDWM.”

that the persecutors heed the Pope’s decision in the matter. Duke Richard – that is, Richard II of Normandy, who ruled from 996 to 1026⁴ – seized Jacob and threw him in prison along with his wife Hannah and four sons, Jequthiel, Isaac, Joseph and Judah. At one point the duke decided to kill him, but while drawing his sword he cut himself accidentally and, quick to seize the opportunity, Jacob shouted out that a dire end always awaits the persecutors of the Jews. The duke, deciding that the time was not propitious for Jacob’s execution, then allowed him to travel to Rome to petition the pope on condition that one of his children remain behind as hostage. Judah – evidently the youngest son – was left in the duke’s custody, while Jacob proceeded to Rome with the rest of his family and his entourage, including four servants and twelve horses.

Once in Rome, Jacob secured a papal audience.⁵ He stood before the pope without bowing, and the latter, greatly surprised, immediately asked him who he was. The pope agreed to speak with this “Jew from a distant land” in private, and was then asked by him to repeal Rôbert’s decree by sending a seal, emissary and personal ban “so that no gentile may be free to kill an Israelite . . . otherwise harm him, deprive him of his earnings, or force him to leave his religion.” Jacob also delivered a substantial sum of money to the pope and promised to finance the proposed mission, assuring him that his emissary would be honoured in Jewish communities everywhere by means of a letter with Jacob’s own seal.⁶

4 On Richard II, see especially T. Licquet, *Histoire de Normandie I* (Rouen, 1835) pp. 180–22; A. Chérueil, *Histoire de Rouen* (Rouen, 1843), pp. lix–lxiv.
5 Since the chronicle does not give the precise date of Jacob’s arrival, we do not know which pope this was. The pontificate of John XVIII lasted from 1003 to June 1009, and that of Sergius IV from the end of July 1009 to May 1012.
6 On medieval Jewish seals, see B. Bedos, “Les Sceaux,” in B. Blumenkranz (ed.), *Art et archéologie des Juifs en France médiévale* (Toulouse, 1980), pp. 207–28.

THE EARLIEST SOURCES

5

The pope told Jacob he needed two weeks to discuss the matter with his counselors, promising to answer through “the Jews who serve me” [literally, ‘who see my face’],” and requesting that important Roman Jewish dignitaries, Moses the Nasi, Abraham and Sabbathai, act as Jacob’s hosts. Jacob then informed the Jewish community about the persecutions in the north. The two weeks having passed, the pope gave notice that he would send his emissary on the proposed mission. Jacob remained in Rome for the four years it took the latter to complete his mission successfully and return.

The sequel to this account is of considerable interest for the history of the Jews in early eleventh-century northwestern Europe: Jacob returned “to his family in Lorraine” – not Rouen – and lived there for ten years.⁷ Afterwards he accepted the invitation of Baldwin Count of Flanders to settle in his country along with thirty of his coreligionists. He was received in Flanders with much honour, but only three months after his arrival, i.e. in approximately 1022, he died on the banks of the river in Arras, the old Flandrian town now part of the Artois in France, where he apparently had settled. His sons then brought his body to Reims, where he was interred in the Jewish cemetery.⁸

There are several contradictions in the chronicle as it now stands: Toward the beginning of the story Jacob is described as being of Rouen, and the incident involving Duke Richard makes it clear that the chronicler understood Jacob and his family to be living in Normandy at the time of the outbreak of the persecution. We then learn that after living in Rome for four years he “returned” to Lorraine, which was far from Normandy. Moreover, why should the sons have elected to bury their father in Reims, situated in the county of Champagne, rather than in his native city of Rouen, only a few miles further from Arras than Reims and also having, as we shall soon see, an important Jewish cemetery? And how could the

7 Not twelve as previous historians, relying on an erroneous reading by the manuscript’s first editor, had thought.

8 The account of Jacob’s vicissitudes given by S. Schwarzfuchs in C. Roth (ed.), *World History of the Jewish People* XI (Rutgers, 1966), pp. 147–48, is based not directly on the Parma manuscript but on Berliner’s faulty edition. (The author appears unaware that in the eleventh century Arras was in Flanders, not in France; but his observations at all events show a good awareness of the equivalence of the Hebrew toponym *RDWM* with Rouen.)

chronicler have him return to “his family in Lorraine” if indeed they were with him in Rome, as stated earlier in the chronicle?

Historicity of the Parma chronicle

We can best explain some of the chronicle’s difficulties by considering the nature of the Hebrew text. This is not the author’s holograph original, but rather a copy made by a scribe at least some decades after the original chronicler’s recounting of a series of events taking place considerably before his own time (“in the reign of Robert, King of France”). The chronicler himself either learned about the events from eyewitnesses or their descendants, or else used an older written source contemporary with the events. In either case, he was sometimes confused by his source’s idiom, such as when he wrote that Jacob was carried to Reims and buried “in the *qeber* of the Jews” there. This Hebrew term actually means a grave, rather than a cemetery (signified by the phrase *bēt haqebārōt*, literally “house of the graves”) – an error that might reflect the easy confusion of Latin *sepulcrum* with *sepulcretum* or *sepultura*.

There are other similarly awkward expressions in the text. In some cases they reflect a scribe’s confusion, in others an author’s difficulties in finding the correct Hebrew term or in rendering words from a source that apparently was not Hebrew. Hence, when Richard is about to draw his sword and attack Jacob, he seizes “his horse’s tail” (*zenab sūsō*) – rather than the expected reins or stirrups. The Hebrew is also unclear as to exactly how the duke wounds himself in drawing his sword: the text’s literal translation at this point is: “but the blade’s gold rim turned about in the joints (*qishré*) of his fingers, and he pricked his palm.” Here as well the chronicler seems to be using a source he does not perfectly understand.

Likewise, in the passage describing Jacob’s return to his family in Lorraine, we seem to have a misunderstanding of the verb *venire*, which can mean either “to go” or “to return,” and a confusion of *cum* with *ad*, or even a misunderstanding of an ablative usage. It is clear that Jacob had to go to Lorraine *with* his family, which had previously stayed with him in Rome for four years: the animosity between Jacob and Richard (who continued to rule until his own death in 1026) would have discouraged any wish of Jacob’s to return to Normandy.

THE EARLIEST SOURCES

7

In any case, we have no reason to question the account of Jacob's burial in Reims. While it is true that Rouen is not much further than Reims from Arras, Richard would still have been ruling when Jacob died. This would have been no later than 1023, even granted his departure from Normandy a year or two after the persecution began. Even if burial in Rouen were not dangerous, Jacob's reluctance to resettle in Normandy was probably reflected in his family's choice of Reims – like Rouen a city of large population relatively close to Arras and containing an important Jewish cemetery.⁹ It is moreover quite possible that the burial in Reims of a Jew who had passed away in Arras is in some way, not otherwise illuminated by written sources, connected with the fact that for many centuries Arras was in the ecclesiastical province of Reims.¹⁰

Other elements in the account are historically accurate. The chronicler, or at all events his underlying source, knew that in 1007 Robert the Pious (son of Hugh Capet) was reigning in France. (He was crowned in 987 and continued to rule until his death in 1031.) He also knew that Richard of Normandy was ruling during the same period. Richard began his reign by suppressing a peasant's revolt, and devoted much time afterwards to establishing domination of the nobility; he was often militarily allied with Robert. We can understand his enthusiasm in carrying out Robert's decree against the Jews as a measure of the accord between the two rulers.

On the other hand, Baldwin II Count of Flanders, who ruled from 989 to 1036 – and who is mentioned prominently in the last part of the chronicle – enjoyed a military victory over Robert and Richard in 1006, and the emperor, Henry II, was forced to grant him various territories (*viz.* the so-called German fiefs, or Imperial Flanders).¹¹ The chronicler's mention of Baldwin's invitation to Jacob to settle with other Jews in Flanders points to an element in his policies according both with his acquisition of new lands and his conflict with Robert. (The chronicle,

⁹ In a similar manner, the English Jews buried all their dead in London until, becoming more numerous, in 1177 they were granted cemeteries in all of the English cities where they were to be found. See K. Norgate, *England Under the Angevin Kings II*, London 1887, p. 486, citing Richard of Devizes, *De rebus gestis Ricardi Primi regis Angliae*, edn. J. Stevenson (London, 1838), p. 62.

¹⁰ Gallia Christiana IX, p. 1.

¹¹ Cf. L.A. Warnkönig, *Flandrische Staats- und Rechtsgeschichte bis zum Jahre 1305* (Tübingen, 1835), pp. 116–18; E. le Gay, *Histoire des Comtes de Flandre I* (Lille, 1886), pp. 83–90.

however, indiscriminately uses the Hebrew term *paḥat*, in the Bible signifying a chieftain of high rank, both for *count* and *duke*.)

The persecution of Jews in Capetian France and in Normandy during the first few decades of the eleventh century serves as the rather detailed backdrop to the chronicler's opening remarks. Other sources, both Hebrew and Latin, describe persecutions of Jews in northwestern Europe at the time. Adhemar of Chabannes describes a persecution at Limoges in Aquitania in AD 1010, instigated by the bishop Audouin; he forced the Jews to debate with the local clergy about the relative merits of their religions, offering them a choice between conversion and expulsion from the city.¹² A decree of expulsion was enacted against the Jews of Mainz in 1012, according to the almost contemporary *Annales Quedlinburgenses*; the dirges of Gershom of Mainz and Simeon the Great probably refer to this expulsion.¹³ And Raoul Glaber, close to the middle of the eleventh century, describes a general persecution of the Jews of northwestern Europe in 1010, certain characteristics of which – e.g. martyrdom, drowning, slaughter by mobs, and forced conversion – match those of the anonymous Hebrew chronicle describing events of a few years before.¹⁴

Another clearly authentic element in the story is the pope's statement to Jacob that he would answer his petition "through the Jews who serve me." These crucial words were overlooked by the text's first editor, and subsequent historians have not consulted the manuscript. What the passage means is that during the period being chronicled the pope had Jewish advisors serving as his liaison with the Jewish population. Such an office also existed in the twelfth century: Benjamin of Tudela, describing his visit to Rome in the course of his travels east (*circa* 1165), states that there were 200 prominent Jews in Rome, some serving Pope Alexander; among the Jewish scholars was "R. Yehiel *the pope's servant*, a handsome, wise and learned man who enters and leaves the pope's residence freely."¹⁵

Beyond this, certain papal actions described in the Hebrew chronicle are consonant with others of the same general period known from Latin

12 Dom M. Bouquet in *RHGF* X, p. 152; Gross, *Gallia*, p. 308.

13 J. Aronius, *Regesten zur Geschichte der Juden* (Berlin, 1902), pp. 61–62; I. Elbogen *et al.*, *Germania Judaica*, p. 207, note 34.

14 See M. Prou (ed.), *Raoul Glaber, Les cinq livres de ses histoires*, 900–1044 (Paris, 1886), p. 72.

15 See M. N. Adler (ed.), *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (London, 1907), Heb. text, pp. 6–7; Eng. trans., pp. 5–6.

sources. The pope described in the chronicle sends a legate to northwestern Europe, and he does so in order to vitiate the efforts of secular authorities to force the Jews to convert. During the pontificate of Pope John XVIII (1003–1009) – that is, in the very decade in which the French and Normannic persecutions described in the chronicle were taking place – the pope sent to France another such legate (if not the identical one), who sought the aid of the same King Robert the Pious mentioned in the chronicle, in an affair involving the archbishop of Sens and the bishop of Orléans.¹⁶ Then, later in the same century, another pope, Alexander II (1061–1073), again intervened with secular authorities in favour of the Jews – just as the pope described in the Hebrew chronicle was willing to do. In Alexander's case, he praised both Viscount Berenger of Narbonne and Prince Landulph VIII of Benevento for having protected the Jews in their respective domains when they were in danger of being attacked.¹⁷

The identity of the pope described in the Hebrew chronicle remains, however, somewhat uncertain. The author states that the persecutions began in the year AM 4767, most of which fell within the first nine months of AD 1007, when John XVIII was still reigning; but he does not indicate how many months elapsed after the onset of the persecutions before Jacob's actual arrival in Rome. If he indeed reached the city by as late as the spring of 1009, he would have found John still on the papal throne. Between July 1009 and May 1012, however, he would have found Sergius IV occupying that throne. The chronicler's statement to the effect that the papal legate was away on his mission for a total of four years in turn implies that his return to Rome after the completion of the mission would have taken place at the end of the reign of Sergius or the beginning of that of Benedict VIII, who reigned from 1012 to 1024.

The sums of money offered by Jacob to the pope included two hundred “*liṭ[rā'ōt]*,” that is, *litres*, *livres*, or, in more modern English terminology,

16 Cf. P. Jaffé and G. Wattenbach, *Regesta pontificum Romanorum*, 2nd edn., I (Leipzig, 1885), nos. 3958–3961; Migne, *PL* 139, col. 149; A. Vacant *et al.*, *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique* VIII (Paris, 1924), p. 630. The affair concerned the privileges claimed for the abbey of Fleury-sur-Loire by the two church figures, who were summoned to Rome to do penance for the stand they took in the matter. The pope sought Robert's aid in getting the prelates to obey his summons, but the outcome of this affair is apparently not known.

17 Cf. Migne, *PL* 146, col. 1387 (*Non esse occidendos Judaeos* etc.); S. Loewenfeld, *Epistolae pontificum Romanorum ineditae* (Leipzig, 1885), p. 52, no. 105.

“pounds.” This sum is described as having been half in Angers specie (Heb. *angevis* = Lat. *andegavis*) and half in that of Limoges (Heb. *limodens* = Lat. *limovix*, *lemoricus*, etc.). The local mints established at Angers and Limoges during Carolingian times continued to function throughout the feudal period, and coins produced there still survive.¹⁸ Jacob also offered to provide the papal legate with seven gold marks (*zeqūqim*) and, in addition, two hundred coins of silver (*shiqle kesef*) for his journey; but the lack of more precise terminology prevents one from knowing where these particular denominations may have originated.

Geographical terminology of the chronicle

The Hebrew geographical terminology used in the chronicle is entirely authentic. The Biblical term *Ṣarefath* (I Kings XVII, 9–10; Obadiah I. 20) was used persistently in the Middle Ages to signify the regions making up northern France (the Biblical texts denote another area much nearer to Palestine). At some time during the eleventh century it began to displace the non-Hebrew *França*, perhaps because of the two words’ three identical consonants. Thus the explanation of Solomon b. Isaac (Rashi) in his commentary on Obadiah I. 20 (written around 1100): “The interpreters say that *Ṣarefath* [in this Biblical verse] is the kingdom we call *França*”; similarly Moses ibn Ezra (Spain, at approximately the same time): “The [our] nation has a tradition according to which *Ṣarefath* is *Ifranja*.”¹⁹ During the twelfth century and after, the term came to be used constantly in Hebrew texts for this region, in contrast to Provence, which was called *Provença* or *Provinşia*. When Languedoc began to denote southwestern France (and the name Provence to denote only the southern area east of the Rhône), a Hebrew term was coined to reflect this word – *Leshon Oc* (language of Oc). Medieval Hebrew texts consistently distinguish northern France – *França*,

18 Cf. M. Prou, *Les Monnaies carolingiennes* (Paris, 1892), nos. 429–437 (atelier of Angers) and nos. 773–787 (atelier of Limoges); F. Poëy d’Avant, *Monnaies féodales de France I* (Paris, 1858), pp. 200–18 (Angers) and pp. 352–58, nos. 2274–2290 (Limoges).

19 See Moses ibn Ezra, *Kitāb almuḥāḍarah wa’lmuḍākara*, edn. S. Halkin (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 54; and, for this and other early Hebrew sources for these terms as well as those designating the Midi, cf. B.Z. Dinur, *Yisrā’el bagōlāh* 1.i (Tel-Aviv/Jerusalem, 1958), pp. 309–10. Cf. also Gross, *Gallia*, pp. 485–89 (Francia), 489–93 (Provença) and 537–38 (Ṣārefat).