

JULES B. FARBER

The Pope's Jews in Provence

Itineraries



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Introduction by Monsignor Jean-Pierre Cattenoz,

Archbishop of Avignon

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Monsignor Jean-Pierre Cattenoz, Archbishop of Avignon, who graciously accepted the first copy of the original edition of this book in the synagogue of Carpentras, marking also the first visit by the

leading Church figure in the former Comtadin Venaissin to this site of Jewish prayer since its construction in 1367. During a private audience with the late Pope Jean Paul, he presented him with the book. It was subsequently placed in the Vatican Library.

The Archbishop's introduction to the second edition underscores his faith encompassing all religions and his belief in the goodness of man.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Children love to turn the pages of the family photo album to discover the faces and the stories of their parents, their grandparents and their ancestors. Similarly, I have always enjoyed learning about the religious history of my “older brothers in faith.” Not only the story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but also the stories of those who, over the centuries, lived lives of undivided faith in God in our region of Provence.

Abraham is truly my father in faith and he continues to encourage me to leave my homeland, my kin and the house of my father to follow his lead. He is a role model for me when, responding to his beloved son Isaac who asked him where was the sacrificial lamb, he said : “God will provide!” Jacob is also ever-present, and with him I hear the Lord tell me : “I will be with you everywhere you go”.

I thank Jules Farber who gave me the opportunity to discover, with great humility and pain, the lives of my older brothers of the Jewish communities of Provence.

The words of the prophet Micah come to mind and in the light of history, they still ring true : “You were told what was right, what the Lord wants of

you : to do justice, to love goodness and to walk with humility with your God, nothing more.”

+ JEAN-PIERRE CATENOZ,
Archbishop of Avignon

Monsignor Jean-Pierre Cattenoz, Archbishop of Avignon, graciously accepted the first copy of the original edition of this book in the synagogue of Carpentras, marking also the first visit by the leading Church figure, successor of the Pope’s legates in the former Comtadin Venaissin, to this site of Jewish prayer since its construction in 1367. During a private audience with the late Pope Jean Paul, he presented him with the book. It was subsequently placed in the Vatican Library.

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II. FOREWORD

I was pleased to meet Mr. Farber when he was researching the history of the Pope's Jews in Provence with a view to writing this book. He took an interest in the many memories left by the Jews' presence in the region where he chose to settle. He was particularly puzzled by the persistence of Jewish communities in the territories of Provence under the rule of the Popes after the kings of France had expelled them and confiscated all their possessions at the end of the Middle Ages and was eager to know more.

Determined to find the roots of those who became the Pope's Jews, and fascinated by the relatively unknown fact that the Church protected these Jews, he took his route of discovery tracing their origins on their way to the papal state in Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin.

A comprehensive search followed to collect information and evidence of the Jews' existence not only in Provence, but also throughout the South of France. He was right in enlarging the scope of this study since Jewish historians in the Middle Ages termed "Provence" a territory which reached far beyond the region that bears this name nowadays. It

used to apply, in fact, to the whole region stretching from the Alps to the Pyrenees, as far as the Spanish border, and it corresponded to a homogeneous area of Mediterranean civilization quite foreign to the Ashkenazi Jews in the north of France.

However, it was in Provence, strictly speaking, that Mr. Farber found the largest number of vestiges, particularly in the Papal States where the Jewish communities could continue to exist in peace until the French Revolution – in spite of a few attempted expulsions in the XVIth century. After the Revolution, Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin were annexed to the kingdom and Jews were granted equal rights. As a result, those old *arba kehilot* (the four “holy cities”) split apart, their members left and were scattered throughout France.

But living safe from massacres and expulsions does not necessarily mean living in happiness and wealth. While the popes consistently protected the Jews – apart from a few occasional exceptions – they were motivated by an underlying interest which was not economic. The popes did not profit from the Jews financially, as is so often believed, though some of the popes’ officials unscrupulously exploited Jews for their own benefit. The Holy See’s government never burdened them with heavier taxes than those levied on other subjects. It was not the Jews’ gold that filled the papal treasury, while the popes were in Avignon or after their return to Rome.

The Church’s supreme dignitaries’ interest in the Jews was more elevated. It concerned theology. After the Jews had been replaced as “people of God” by the Church of Jesus Christ (in which the converted pagans soon outnumbered the Jewish-born sons

of Israel), their survival was only possible if the Jewish people had not become a people just like the others and still had a role to play – the role of a people entrusted with the mission of bearing witness. They were witnesses to the Scriptures which they took everywhere with them while the Christians discovered in the New Testament the fulfilled promises and prophecies.

They had been degraded after the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth and the destruction of the Temple. In Christian eyes, the Jews were exiled, scorned and abused to atone for the sin committed by their forbearers who not only refused to recognize the Messiah but put him to death. The never-ending chastisement, which continued from generation to generation, was a very strong proof of the immensity of the fault and, consequently, the divine quality of the one who had been its victim.

The more Jews expelled by succeeding sovereigns, the more determined were the popes to assure their preservation to maintain their involuntary testimony. Their miserable existence could only continue to work if they remained alive – but they had to live in disgrace and destitution. The authorities used exclusion and severe regulations, particularly after the Catholic Reformation, which Mr. Farber describes in his *carrières* of Avignon and Comtat Venaissin texts.

This explains why the papal enclave was a refuge for the Jews at a time when they were driven out of all the provinces of the French kingdom. That is also the reason the refuge soon became a prison, from which the Jews fled as soon as they were able to. The most audacious and the wealthiest of them

had escaped in the second half of the XVIIIth century. During the Revolution, the majority of the ghetto-dwellers left their confined quarters to experience freedom elsewhere in France.

It is that story – which spans over two millennia – Mr. Farber tells, stage after stage, through a long route leading from Narbonne to Pernes, via many other places in the Languedoc and Provence, ending up in Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin. His book has no pretension of being a historical research document. Rather, as an experienced international journalist, he only wanted to write a well-founded popular account for a wide audience, while using extensive documented quotes from scholars and experts on the subject to underscore what he himself found en route in all the cities where the Diaspora Jews had lived and left their mark. As an enlightened history buff, he read the recognized researchers' published works in French, English and Dutch.

During the several years while Mr. Farber worked on this book, he continued to go back to the former Jewish settlements and left no stone unturned in his desire to share this remarkable history of the Jews in the south of France. On those roots-seeking journeys, he found a number of people, primarily Christian, concerned with preserving the remnants of the heritage, and he uncovered little-known traces which he describes as a passionate invitation for others to follow in his footsteps and see these discoveries themselves.

He recounts local history, anecdotes, human interest aspects and legends, which are colorful but cannot always be verified. And Mr. Farber insisted on

taking the responsibility for the iconography and secured in finding or organizing many illustrations rarely, if ever, published before. He felt that the lay reader, like himself, would want the history to come alive through visualization.

He achieved his objective by imparting to us, in geographically ordered chapters, the fruit of his harvest of information reaped in the course of his research. It is not a chronologically and rigorously composed history, but his book reads like a proposed pilgrimage in quest of roots so deep that they may have been forgotten or lost.

By conjuring up the past of those extinct communities, Mr. Farber has brought them to life and the reader will accompany him with much interest, even with emotion at times, on the historic route he invites us to follow.

RENÉ MOULINAS,
professor emeritus
University of Avignon

III. PROLOGUE

After we settled in Provence some years ago, I became intrigued by the phenomenon known here as *les Juifs du Pape* (the Pope's Jews), who were allowed to live in a territory owned by the Holy See – but surrounded on all sides by France which was openly hostile to Jews. This was the sole European sanctuary for Jews fleeing forced conversion or expulsion except for the papal states in Italy, while everywhere else they were persecuted or deported. Despite awareness of the Palace of the Popes in Avignon, the Church's paradoxical role in preserving Jewish life was interesting to explore.

In this papal enclave, which encompassed Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin, now the Vaucluse, seven popes and two anti-popes, followed by their designated apostolic legates, reigned with absolute power over the Jews from 1273 to 1790 – 517 years !

Jews had been expelled three times (1306, 1322 and, for good, in 1394) from the southeastern provinces of the Languedoc, Herault and Gard soon after these regions were conquered by French kings who happily acquiesced to public demand for the cleansings. Only Provence continued to provide

refuge for the Jews until the late 15th century. But after the death of the Good King René in 1480, Provence was united with the kingdom of France and anti-Jewish riots, led by the Carmelites and Franciscans, broke out everywhere. Violence, looting and destruction led to King Louis XII's expulsion orders in response to public demand. By the end of 1501, only converts remained. The last Jews on what had become French soil, to avoid forced conversion, had fled to the safety net offered by the popes or emigrated to Turkey, Italy and North Africa.

In view of the Catholic French kings' continuing oppressive laws, supported by popular anti-Jewish sentiment, the popes' tolerance appeared extremely humane and enlightened but Professor René Moulinas, an authority and author of the definitive study on this subject, explained that papal ambivalence to the Jews had a deeper, more nuanced motivation. He said, « We Christians can learn a lesson from this. After seeing what had happened to the Jews during World War II, I wanted to find out how the Jews of Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin had been treated under the Holy See's sovereignty. Though the popes did abuse their new subjects with restrictions on trades to keep them poor and dependent, their motivation was theological. They wanted to expose the Jews as despised, homeless wanderers because they did not recognize and accept Christ as the messiah. Thus they chose to humiliate them and subjugate them, while protecting their existence, so that these descendants of Israel, threatened with extermination, would not disappear ».

It was this scholar who, with great and patience and respect for my quest for accuracy, read my texts, made suggestions and corrected historical errors. Without his guidance my route would have been a journey without a compass.

Curiosity about how the Jews came into southern France led to searching for their roots tracing a centuries-long trek. Supposedly they had been brought here by the Greeks and Romans before Christ as traders and slaves. Though Jews are forbidden to proselytise, many Gallo/Roman pagans of that early era went into the synagogues, found them like churches, followed the teachings and asked for acceptance – conversion – into the Jewish faith. Free Jews joined together to buy freedom of their brothers in Roman bondage : the first *mitzvah* (good deed) in Gaul. Provincial museums have archeological proof of the Jews' presence in Provence during the Roman occupation. Julius Ceasar codified the rights of the Hebrews in Gaul to practice their religion and retain their solidarity with Judea, while Augustus gave special privileges to the Jews in Massilia (Marseille). The Jews had been here many centuries before the Franks.

Embarking on the historic trail in the regions stretching from the Mediterranean and the Spanish border, passing through Provence and ending up in the old Comtat Venaissin, resulted in a stock-taking of what remained actually or in name only of the many medieval communities. There was clear evidence that the Jews had been confined to *carrières*, from the Provençal *carriera*, meaning street – a forerunner of the Venetian ghetto long before the name was coined there.

Though most carrières have disappeared, traces of the original designated quarters are visible on signs where Jews lived centuries ago, such as Puits Juif (Jewish wells) in Aix-en-Provence. Béziers has the *Carriera de la Judaria a la Catedrale*, old Provençal for the tight, constricted section assigned to the Jews adjoining the cathedral for close surveillance. One finds these markers everywhere, grim reminders of a people and culture chased away during the expulsions.

In many cities en route, names have been retained such as *rue Juif* and *rue Juiverie* (street of the Jews). *Pech Judaïc* still denotes an early cemetery area on a Carcassonne hillside. In St.Remy's former Jewish quarter, *la Juterie*, is the house where Michel de Nostredame, popularly known as Nostradamus, was born to Jewish parents recently converted to Catholicism.

There are historic vestiges in unexpected places. While Nimes has a late 18th century synagogue with doors from its medieval predecessor, the nearby countryside offers surprises : in Mende, a wooden house synagogue in a rural courtyard ; a garage synagogue in Sauve ; and in Teilhan a château with a *menorah* carved on a wall next to the noble family's coat of arms – and a *mikvah* on the grounds. Under Montpellier's fortified walls is the impressive pool of natural water for the ritual bath used by Jewish women starting in the 12th century. Walking through the intact Pezenas ghetto provides insight to the imposed squalid, congested living conditions.

But the most rewarding places with the richest vestiges are in the Comtat Venaissin and Avignon,

where the Jews were allowed to live under papal protection for over 500 years. Ranking among the oldest surviving relics of ghetto life in France, these medieval *carrières* are, simultaneously, among the most recently occupied. Many of the older, poor and infirm inhabitants feared going out into the strange Christian world until the mid-19th century when the ghetto walls were pulled down.

The Carpentras synagogue, rebuilt on its 14th century foundations with the surviving *mikvah* and *coudolle* (*matzoh*) bakery in the heart of the old *carrière*, is France's oldest Jewish house of worship still holding services. Only steps away, a side entrance to the imposing Gothic cathedral is the « Jews' Door », topped by a sculpted « Rats' Ball », which Jews wishing to convert had to use. There is a bucolic atmosphere in the Carpentras cemetery with an immense necropolis from the centuries when upright tombstones, forbidden by the popes, had to be buried.

Cavaillon's synagogue, like a Louis XVI jewel box in the heart of the *carrière*, has a modest Judeo-Comtadin museum on its lower level exhibiting archeological evidence from the 1st century of Jewish life in the region to liturgical and everyday objects used during hundreds of years. L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue's sprawling cemetery, with elaborate headstones bearing names of the popes' most illustrious Jewish subjects, was recently fenced in against vandalism and opened to the public. In nearby Pernes-les-Fontaines, the Comtat capital before Carpentras, a stately house in ruin, the Hôtel de Cheylus on the *Place de Juiverie*, has the region's only private *mikvah*, called a *cabussadau*

in Provençal, an L-shaped basin fed since the 16th century with cool mineral spring water.

While travelling this route of discovery, one also becomes aware of the apartheid symbol – the yellow ‘Jewish badge’ of shame – imposed during the IVth Lateran Council by Pope Innocent III in 1215. This was intended as a caution especially against any illicit sexual intercourse between Christians and Jews.

One might have thought that Hitler and his henchmen had invented this discriminatory symbol but theirs was a throwback to the Dark Ages of Christian prejudice put into effect in all occupied countries. There are medieval examples in museum showcases, old prints relating to the early 13th century when Jews were obliged to attach a yellow cloth *rouelle* (wheel) on their outer clothing for immediate identification. In the 16th century, the law was tightened since the badge might not be visible in the folds of the cloaks. Men had to wear yellow hats, while women had to sew a yellow rosette, called the *pecioun* in Provençal, to their headwear. The Calvary in Carcassonne has a sculptural depiction of men wearing the designated « Jews’ hats ».

Though papal bulls forbade forced conversions, ordinary people went to extremes to achieve this in response to the constant haranguing from the pulpit. When children sprinkled gutter water on Jewish youngsters, recited prayers and announced their baptism, they were claimed by the Church as their own. Jews, from the age of 12, obliged to attend conversionist sermons in a church, often filled their ears with wax and chewed chestnuts to avoid hearing the preaching. They were fined for

absenteeism or causing an uproar during the sermons. Through centuries of incessant efforts, relatively few Jews converted.

Despite frequent Church-imposed restrictions on the Jews, many of which went to severe lengths to warn against familiarity with Christians, there was often a great deal of amicable contacts between the two groups. Aside from the occasional violence or pogroms, the most dangerous period was during Holy Week when Jews were locked in the *carrières* as protection from the hysterical townspeople. But in everyday life, the co-existence was reflected in trading, financial dealings and often Christians' preference for kosher meat, *matzoh*, and Jewish doctors (while they were allowed to practice).

In essence, it became a Judeo-Christian route that was followed. The Jews' existence, life and death, was always controlled by the Church, kings, aristocrats, administrators and the populace. Interestingly, many of the people now most actively involved and concerned with documenting and preserving *le patrimoine juif* (Jewish heritage) are Christians whose insight and dedication becomes apparent underway to the area when Avignon was known earlier as the *Altera Roma* (Other Rome).

JULES B. FARBER

IV. FIRST JEWS IN GAUL

Arrived with Greeks, Romans as slaves and traders Before Christ

The Diaspora – the dispersion of the Jews from Israel starting at least nine centuries Before Christ – took them to far-flung outposts strung from Babylon to North Africa and, subsequently, a number came to southern France as slaves, traders or exiles.

Presumably, Jews had been taken along as merchants by the Hellenistic tribe of Phoacians, Greeks who had settled in Asia Minor, when they founded Massilia (Marseille) in the 6th century B.C. Likewise, when the Romans responded in 125 B.C. to their Greek allies' request for aid in the war against the Salyens, it is believed that they brought Jews with them to Massilia as traders and slaves. During a conflict between Ceasar and another consul, Pompeii, after Massilia sided with Pompeii, Ceasar conquered the Greek city, punishing it by suppressing its importance. In that pagan era, the Jews in this territory enjoyed total religious freedom from the Romans.

In 49 B.C., when Julius Ceasar took command in Gaul, he codified the rights and privileges of the

Hebrews, certifying their liberty to practice according to their belief, to keep alive their bonds of solidarity with Judea and be exempted from submission to foreign gods. Likewise, Emperor Augustus in 31 B.C. also granted beneficial conditions to the Jews in Massilia. Free Jews joined forces to buy the freedom of their brethren in bondage when possible and this was the first *mitzvah* (good deed) in Gaul.

The Romans called their province, *Provinzia*, and their settlement in the transalpine region, extending from the Alps to the Pyrenees, was named the *Narbonnaise*. Narbonne, its capital, also attracted Jews. The Romans, who had not taken over the Greeks' animosity to the Jews, preferred them over the Greeks, valuing their usefulness in the former Greek settlements which retained a latent antagonism to Rome. They highly respected the time-honored Jewish religion. Thus it was not surprising that Jews, who by the beginning of the 1st century A.D. had taken on an important role in the Roman empire, representing 10% of the total population, made their way to *Provinzia* and the *Narbonnaise*.

Conceivably, since this was the period when many Romans were seeking new religious solutions, monotheist ideals were on the verge of breaking through and the many local deities were being judged as manifestations of one all-powerful God. Attracted to the Jews' high moral character and prizing their teachings of the Torah, a number converted to Judaism but refused to be circumcized. They became dedicated members of the congregation and were called « *the God-fearing* ». A number of slaves and lower class Romans also found their way into the synagogue and requested conversion.

So the Jewish population, without proselytizing, which is forbidden by Jewish law, expanded significantly in Gaul.

The first Jew recorded by name in France was Archéolas, king of Judea, the son and heir of Herod the Great. He was banished with several servants in 6 A.D. to Vienne, near Lyon, while his younger brother, Herod Antipas, governor of Galilee and Perea, was exiled to Lyon in 39 A.D. by Caligula. After the destruction in 70 A.D. of the Second Temple by Titus, the leading families of the House of David and the Tribe of Judah were shipped off to southern Gaul which the Romans used as a dumping ground for political undesirables.

An age-old legend insists that the Romans put those captives – the « Jewish kings » – in three rudderless boats. Purportedly, the vessels landed in Arles, Lyon and Bordeaux, which lacks a port. Traditionally, the Jews have long linked that legend with the *Vehu Rahoum* (God is gracious) prayer which contains three texts supposedly composed by three persons in those boats.

Actually, there is archeological evidence in provincial museums confirming a Jewish presence which experts date from probably in the 1st century B.C. or the 1st century A.D. An oil lamp with a double 7-branch *menorah* (candelabra) from that era, was unearthed in Orgon, near Cavaillon. A 4th century seal bearing a *menorah* with only 5 branches and the inscription *AVIN*, an abbreviation of *Avignonniensis*, symbolizes the Jewish settlement in Avignon in that era. 1st century relics depicted with *menorahs* were dug up in Arles while tombstones

with Latin and Hebrew inscriptions from this early period were also found there.

More Jews had arrived during the first century. According to another story still told today, Lunel was founded in 68 A.D. by Jews who fled Jericho – « city of the moon »— after its conquest by the Roman Emperor Vespasien. *Luna* in Hebrew means « New Jericho ». Inhabitants of this Languedoc town are called *Pescalunes* « fishermen of the moon ». The ancient archives of the Penitents' Order of Lunel hold commentary on the etymological development of the name, corresponding with the first « Jewish house » from that era. After Massada, the last Israel fortress which fell to the Romans in 73, many exiles arrived in Gaul, settling in Arles, Narbonne and Vienne.

In 212, Caraccala bestowed citizenship on all Roman Jews, just like all other inhabitants. But in 313, when Christianity was adopted as the state religion of the Roman Empire, Théodose II promulgated the rights and obligations of Jews, which blocked access to public functions and forbid proselytizing and mixed marriages, while guaranteeing freedom of religion. These restrictions stimulated their emigration to Gaul, where Christianization was only taking hold and the Jews could benefit from rights and privileges guaranteed by the Antonine constitution. There is varied evidence of an extended Jewish presence in the 4th century. In 506, the Visigoth King Alaric issued legislation more favorable to the Jews. The Visigoths, considered heretics by the Romans, did not limit the Jews' rights in view of how they themselves were also regarded.

But while the Franks had a completely other policy regarding the Jews, Provence stubbornly resisted their call for forced conversions. This resulted in King Childebert – son of Clovis, the first Frank king converted to Christianity – convoking a bishop from southern France to Paris in 558, guarding him there in exile until his final agreement to harden his conduct against the Jews and expel those who refused to be baptized. Though the Jews in the Frank kingdom were subject to this fanatic policy, Provence remained a welcoming region where they could escape religious oppression.

The Frank kings and the Church had one goal in common : reduction in the Jews' numbers or their complete disappearance, while the popes were less hostile, seeking to win over the Jews to conversion by persuasion or by providing financial advantages, counting on future generations of converts to thin the ranks. Things changed after the Visigoth King Reccared became a Catholic in 587 and his kingdom of Spain, which included the Languedoc, adopted Catholicism as the official religion. The liberal king issued a special statute for the Jews : the right to buy or receive a slave as a gift ; mixed marriages were totally forbidden, but if they had already taken place the children were obliged to have a Christian education. His successor in 613 was more radical, forcing the Jews to be baptized with no right of exile. However, a number managed to escape and settle in Narbonne.

Meanwhile, in 632, the death of the prophet Mohammed also had its effect on the Jews and their flight to Provence. Fearing a collusion between the Jews and the Moslems, who were incited to embark

on new conquests in the name of their late leader, the Roman emperor Héraclius ordered the conversion of all Jews and convinced the Frank king Dagobert to follow the same doctrine. Jews fled in great numbers to Provence which had remained a shelter from this fanaticism.

In 719, Narbonne was taken by the invading Moslem forces and two years afterwards, Carcassonne, Agde, Béziers and Nimes were invaded, later freed by the Franks. But during the 40-year occupation of Narbonne, a significant Judeo-Arab culture developed which positioned the city to prime importance and exemplified a new society in which Moslems, Christians and Jews lived together in an unprecedented sphere of tolerance. Pépin le Bref (the Short), aided by the Visigoths and the Jews, captured the city in 759 and, in gratitude, he confirmed the legal status of the Jewish community in Narbonne and gave the Jews hereditary rights of property ownership.

His successor, Charlemagne, in 797 sent a Narbonne Jew named Isaac as his ambassador to the Calif in Bagdad. The envoy returned five years later, bringing two unexpected gifts : a highly perfected clock and an elephant. He also brought from Babylon a scholar, Rabbi Makhir, who settled in Narbonne, married a woman from a prominent Jewish family and produced an illustrious prodigy who later became known as « prince » Kalonyme. The rabbi founded a school of traditional Jewish studies following the Babylon model.

Charlemagne, wanting to assure this school's authority, made a large part of the city available for this purpose and this meant that Jews, for the

first time, did not have to pay taxes for land ownership to the ecclesiastical or civil authorities. Thanks to this special dispensation, many Jews purchased property and the enclave became a mini-kingdom with Rabbi Makhir as the *Nassi* (prince) at its head. During many following centuries, this « prince of exile » role existed through hereditary transmission.

Louis the Pious, Charlemagne's son, continued his father's protective policy for the Jews as individuals and, collectively, like he did for the Banyuls community. He assured Provençal Jews autonomous, peaceful lives practically without arbitrary persecution by the clergy. During this period, Rabbi Makhir's school studied mystical and philosophical principles formulated in the *Sepher Yetsira* (Book of the Creation), which was still transmitted orally, having been codified only in Aramic during the second century by Rabbi Akiba.

When news of this Narbonne project reached the infuriated Agobard who had become archbishop of Lyon in 816, this Spaniard – earlier a long time Provence resident extremely hostile to the Jews – exerted pressure on Louis the Pious to repress the Jewish scholars on numerous occasions but to no avail. After inaugurating a severe campaign of forced conversions, he ordered Jews to leave this city headed for Provence. Despite, or due to, the archbishop's widespread objections, theological debate followed, broadening interest in the Kabbalistic texts, which attracted students from all over to Narbonne, and no interference followed.

Thus, in this mid-9th century period of darkness elsewhere, Provence continued a welcoming policy of asylum, tolerance and comprehension for the

exiles in its midst. Facile contact with their Jewish bretheren in the Middle and Far East and northern Europe led to intellectual and commercial exchanges. Since the Jews contributed significantly to the progress and enrichment of the communities, they were accepted without resentment. In a number of the Provençal cities, the Jews organized study centers which promulgated the awakening and development of new thinking.

By the Middle Ages, there were some 80 to 100 thriving Jewish communities in the region which old Jewish texts refer to as Provence, the Roman *Provincia*, extending from the Alpes Maritimes to the Oriental Pyrenées, encompassing cities such as Marseille, Narbonne, Avignon, Carpentras, Cavaillon and Lunel. In this territory, where they spoke *la langue d'oc*, the Jews had been living long before the Franks came.

Until recent years, there were two Avignon families which could trace their geneological roots to the Roman period. And René Cassin, Nobel Peace Prize winner for his work as one of the founders of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, said, « My ancestors, with almost certainty, arrived in the Roman province, *la Narbonnaise*, before the destruction of the Temple by Titus and were established near the Durance river at Cavaillon. In the 13th century, some of them were the Pope's farmers ».