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Welcome

An heavy influx of news items makes for a full calendar this month, and not all good news, either. The tension in Lebanon, in-fighting in Gaza, and increased violence in Iraq have all made news recently. The effect of the Iraqi refugees on the countries to which they are fleeing – primarily Jordan & Syria – is a cause for concern there; and they are not always well received by those governments.

If you have received newsletter from a friend, send a note by email to make sure you get your own!

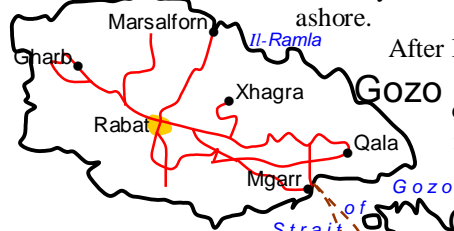
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Malta

Archaeological evidence suggests that Malta has been inhabited since Neolithic times. The Mnajdra temples on the southern coast are evidence of large scale occupation from this time.

During the thousand years before Christ the island of Malta was occupied by the Phoenicians (1000 BC), Carthage (400 BC) and Rome (218 BC). The apostle Paul was shipwrecked here, though the bay that bears his name may not be where

he was actually cast ashore.



After Italy's decline the Byzantine Romans of Constantinople controlled much of the Mediterranean, gradually ceding their territory to the Arab invasion of the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries. The Arabs conquered Malta in 870, and – in this island nation that does not have a single perennial river – introduced irrigation systems to enable them to grow citrus fruits and other crops. Some of the place names (Rabat, Gharb, Qala, reflect Arab influence), though the Maltese language is written with the Latin alphabet.

During the 11th century the island was conquered by the Normans of Sicily (who themselves had come to Normandy from Scandinavia).


After the period of the Crusades the Knights of St. John had set up residence in Rhodes, and then forced to leave by the Ottoman Turks. They were granted Malta by Charles V of Spain. Most of the great defensive systems around Valetta were their response to attacks by the Ottomans. In 1798 the French briefly took control of Malta, but offended the citizens by their secular attitude towards religion.

During World War II the perseverance and bravery of the Maltese people won the recognition of King George VI, who presented the island as a whole with the George Cross, an image of which now appears in the Maltese flag.

Malta was granted its independence in 1964, as part of the Commonwealth, but Elizabeth ceased to be 'Queen of Malta' in 1974 when the government became a republic. Since May, 2001, Malta has been the smallest country in Europe, and will adopt the Euro currency in 2008.

Maltese Facts

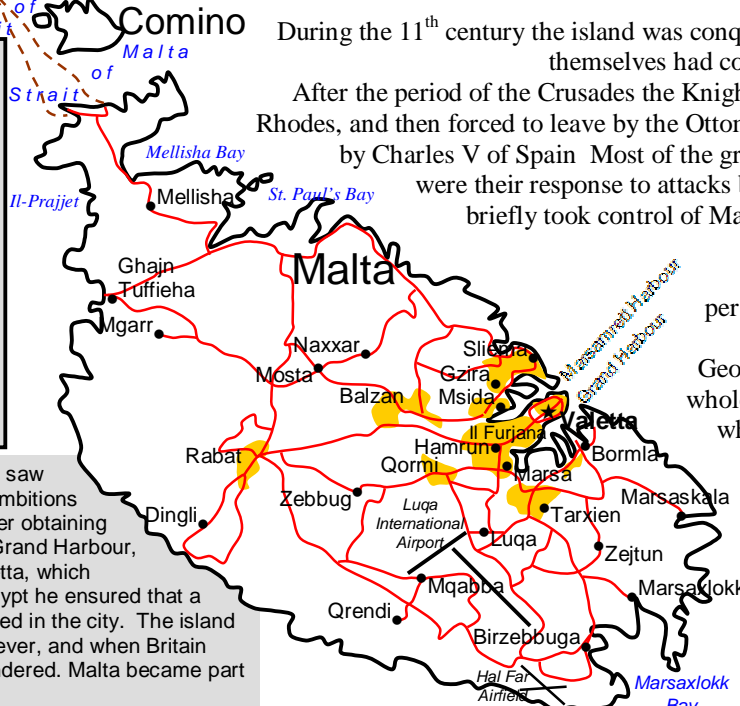
Pres: Edward Fenech Adami
P.M. - Lawrence Gonzi
Population – 404,039
Area – 1,282 km²
Currency – Lira
(1 MTL = \$3 approx)
Per Cap. GDP - \$19,302



Upon his arrival in 1798 Napoleon saw Malta as a strategic base for his ambitions in the eastern Mediterranean. After obtaining permission to water his ships in Grand Harbour, Napoleon turned his guns on Valetta, which surrendered. When he left for Egypt he ensured that a large enough garrison was stationed in the city. The island almost immediately revolted, however, and when Britain supported them the French surrendered. Malta became part of the British Empire in 1814.



Looking west at the complex of bays and inlets that form the twin harbours of Valetta, Malta; to the north (right), Marsamrett Harbour and Grand Harbour to the south.



Counter-Reformation in Judaism

The Karaite 'heresy' was a long-term challenge for Rabbinic Judaism. The tradition of debate and argument within Judaism had been a long one, however, and some of Rabbinic Judaism's most respected writers gained their reputation from their responses to the Karaite position.

Having been established in 8th century Babylon by Annan ben David, by the 11th century Jerusalem was a strong center of the Karaite teaching. This ceased abruptly at the Crusader conquest, but amongst the students of the Karaite leader, Jeshua ben Judah, were a number from Constantinople, and they ensured the movement's continuity in the Byzantine capital. The consequence was that the centers of Karaite activity moved from Palestine to Cairo and Constantinople, and eventually included some populations in Lithuania and other parts of eastern Europe.

Separately, Egypt maintained a strong center of Karaite teaching in Cairo. This did maintain its links with Jerusalem, being part of the Islamic Empire. Much of today's Karaite community – in Israel and in America – is descended from the Egyptian Karaites. About 10,000 Karaites live in Israel today, most of them in Ramleh.

A leader of the early Geonim (from *gaon*, teacher, or *gonim*, pl.), was the 10th century Rabbi **Saadia** (d.942), originally from Fayyum, Upper Egypt. He argued strongly against Karaism; at the age of 23 he wrote a treatise against its founder, Anan ben David, and moved permanently to Palestine, eventually becoming Gaon at Sura while still in his 30s. Besides his defense of traditional rabbinicism against the Karaite teachings, Saadia is renowned for his work on Hebrew grammar, establishing rules and practices that were crucial for the development of the language.

In the 12th century we meet three more characters that argued in Rabbinicism's favor against Karaism. These were Judah Halevi (1075-1141), Abraham ibn Daud (1110-1180), and Maimonides (1135-1204).

Halevi wrote his treatise, the *Kuzari*, in part to defend the Rabbi's exclusive right to interpret biblical revelation. It is in the format of a dialogue between a Khazar king

Annan Ben David was the nephew of the Exilarch in Babylon. When his uncle died childless, Ben David expected to be awarded the important position, ruling on Jewish matters across the Muslim world. However, his younger brother was chosen – probably because Ben David had not hidden his lack of sympathy for the Talmud. Thereupon, Ben David moved to Jerusalem and established himself as exilarch of the dissenters known as Karaites.

Ben David was not the first to take this position, at war with the *Oral Torah*. It seems that the remnant of the Sadducees, after the destruction of the Temple, had maintained the stance against the new material treated as canonical by the Pharisees. In various comments in the Talmud they are known as 'adherents of the text', and even referred to as 'the Karaites' (Talmud: Pesachim 117a)

and a Jew whom he has asked to teach him about the Jewish religion. **Ibn Daud** wrote a historical account of Judaism, in which the role of the Rabbis in defending and promoting the *oral Torah* was central. His 'chain of traditions' (*Sefer ha-Kabbalah*) ties the medieval rabbis firmly into a chain of transmission and tradition that goes back to Moses.

Maimonides' argument was from the legal aspect.

Originating from Spain, but teaching in Cairo and then in Palestine, he asserted the requirement that the Rabbinic sages' word be accepted as law by the community. (An assertion that was strengthened by the Exilarch's position as ultimate arbiter of Jewish law – under Islam.)

From the 14th century Karaite writings gradually became more tolerant of their Rabbinic cousins. More serious for continuity, however, was the increasing dissension in Karaite ranks with each succeeding generation. When Anan Ben David's successor, his son, Saul, amended some of his father's dictates his father's adherents rejected his changes, becoming known as *Ananites*.

Maimonides full title is Rabbi Moses bin Maimonides, and, in the Jewish tradition of abbreviating names by taking their first syllables, he is also well known as 'the Rambam.'



Synagogue in Jerba, Tunisia.

Said to be the oldest Synagogue in Africa, it is located in Tunisia, on the island of Jerba, in the south of the country.

The island no longer has the Jewish population it once had, but the

village of Riadh, where the synagogue is located, still has a population of about 700 Jews living there. The current building dates from about 1920, but the site is said to date back to 586

BC, the time of the Babylonian captivity. Jews from all over North Africa come to visit on the Passover festival, with tributes dedicated to the Talmudic scholar, Shimon bar Yashai.



A letter written by Judah Halevi in 1125, from Toledo, Spain.

Hawala

In medieval times, as Arab traders traversed the Silk Road eastwards as far as China, they ran the risk of being robbed. However, if they had a contact person at the destination point they could carry a promissory note from Arabia, which would be good for cash at their destination. These contacts – financiers at both ends of the journey – allowed money to be transferred between two parties, without actually having to be transported.

Today, a Somali refugee in Wembley, London, can provide his family back in Mogadishu, with much-needed cash in their desperate situation. No money needs to be transported, in this instance, since the broker in Wembley has a colleague in Mogadishu, who already has the necessary cash. The developing debt between these two brokers, who may well be family, eventually needs to be settled, but with multiple transactions between different countries (not just Somalia and the UK) the amount that will need to be transferred will be substantially less than the sum of the individual remittances.

The two major advantages of this system of money transfer, known as *Hawala*, are 1. the avoidance of actually transferring the money from one place to another, 2. the ease in which money could be obtained in the local currency, and 3. the avoidance of transfer charges imposed by banks or other formal financial institutions. Historically the first two reasons had priority, but gradually the development of international banking systems have seen financial charges increase, while *hawala* has remained stable.

Hawala depends upon trust between the brokers, known as *hawaladhar*, and is usually found in countries which maintain strong clan or tribal relationships. These relationships provide security for the persons making the transfer, but also for the *hawaladhar*, who can, within the clan structure, be sure of the identity of the recipient.

Hawala, however, has caused concern to international regulators, having drawn suspicion of involvement in money laundering. After 2001 some companies had their assets seized, though it was later found that *hawala* was not implicated in the financial transactions involved in that act of terrorism. Where *hawala* may be more significant is in the money transfer involved in international drug dealing, particularly to countries with weak infrastructure, such as Afghanistan.



A Hawaladhar in Kabul

Christian Zionism: Identity-No Shortcuts

It seems that there are but two basic positions possible, as Christians interested in the prophetic Israel. One of these is to have our focus on the goal, and allow that to guide our actions, conclusions, decisions, and energies. This could mean that when we are given the choice of two different politicians - one who expresses the *intention* to act (for which politician ever followed through 100% on their words?) in a way that resonates with our view of prophecy, and one whose concerns relate more to the day by day existence of the people – we would tend to lean towards the ‘prophetic’.

At one extreme – depending on whether your prime interest is religious, geographical, racial, or social – this may mean preparing to vote for a candidate who...

- refuses to relinquish territory currently controlled by Israel
- wants to extend Israeli control to include trans-Jordan
- proposes to expel all Arabs from the West Bank & Gaza
- refuses to allow expatriate Israeli Arabs with Western passports to return to Israel
- proposes to change the status of the West Bank from ‘occupied territory’ under military rule, to Israel proper
- refuses to allow citizenship to Christian Jews

...though a number of these could be accused of being more like flashpoint issues than day to day concerns, they are ‘solutions’ that have been proposed in the past.

The second approach would, then, be to have our focus not on the goal but on the present issues. This might be the approach of someone who, when we asked *Whose Task Is It?* (e-NEWS 79) answered question 2 with, “Let go and let God” in regards to whether it was necessary to strive to accomplish the prophetic state, or not. This approach may well choose to put social issues at the fore, or religious revival, or even – with this month’s revelations about senior politicians and military leaders in mind – ethical integrity.

Next Issue: Geography (“No, not more maps! Please...”)

