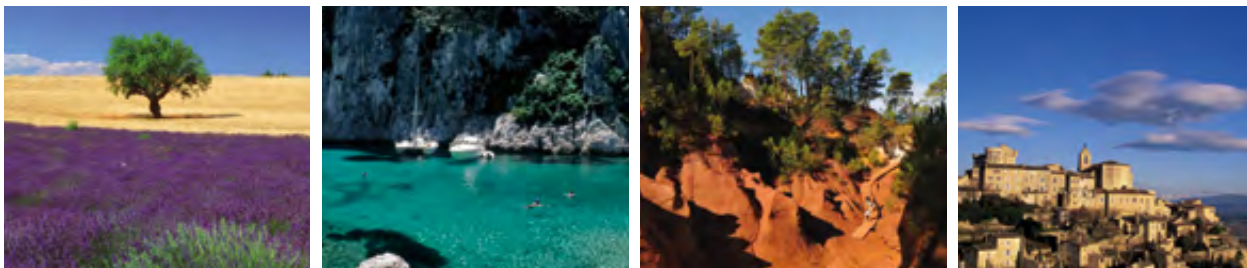




# PROVENCE JEWISH HERITAGE ROUTE





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## The Jews have a heritage in Provence dating more than two millenia.

They 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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, they brought Jews with them to Massilia as traders and slaves. In that pagan era, the Jews in this territory enjoyed total religious freedom from the Romans. Free Jews joined forces to buy the freedom of their brethren in bondage whenever possible - the first mitzvah (good deed) in Gaul.

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.

The Romans, who called their settlement Provinzia, valued the Jews's usefulness in the former Greek settlements, which retained a latent antagonism to Rome, and respected the time-honored Jewish religion. Thus it was not surprising that many Jews, who by the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. had taken on an important role in the Roman empire, representing 10% of the total population, made their way to Provinzia. Conceivably, since this was the period when many Romans were seeking new religious solutions,

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





monotheist ideals were on the verge of breaking through and the many local dieties 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. 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 the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. or the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.**

An oil lamp with a double 7-branch menorah (candelabra) from that era, was unearthed in Orgon, close to Cavaillon. Legends recount Jews growing wine with retired Roman soldiers as colleagues in Avignon vineyards in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. A sign, rue Vieille Juiverie, remains as a silent teestimony to the street's inhabitants in this old Jewish quarter from the 1<sup>st</sup> through the 13th centuries A.D. when they were forced to move to make room for

construction of the Petit Palace. 1<sup>st</sup> century relics depicted with menorahs were dug up in Arles , as well as tombstones with Latin and Hebrew inscriptions from this early period. A 4<sup>th</sup> century seal, bearing a menorah with only 5 branches and the inscription AVIN, an abbreviation of Avinonniensis, further symbolizes early Jewish settlement there.

**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 the mid-9<sup>th</sup> 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 brethren 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 and biblical understanding.

**Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela  
a tireless traveller who went  
far afield from Spain to Israel  
in his sociological investigations  
of Jewish life, came in 1165.**

The Spanish savant reported on the Jewish communities in Arles (200) and Marseille (300), which had a talmudic school. In his journal describing his travels throughout the Jewish world, he wrote that Rosh Hashanah was celebrated during two days in Israel, the custom having been brought there by Provençal Jews. Their influence was so great that all of Israel's Jews accepted a second day to conform with the Jews of the Diaspora.

**Medieval  
Provence was  
experiencing  
the advent of  
the Jewish  
mysticism.**

Medieval Provence - which in Hebrew texts encompassed all of southern France extending from the Alpes Maritimes to the Oriental Pyrenées - was experiencing the advent of a Jewish mysticism called Kabbalah. Grandson of a Lunel rabbi, Isaac the Blind, regarded as the "father of Kabbalah", defined it as a label for tradition based on a belief in the divinity of the Torah and that by studying its text one can unlock the secrets of creation.

This Provençal Kabbalism drew many adherents and the Kabbalistic mystique spread quickly far afield affecting thinking everywhere.

Although there were Jews in Provence in earlier times, a widespread presence was documented only from the Middle Ages.

**Jews were obliged to live  
in a *carrière* (from Provençal  
*carreira*), a short, single street.**

In these cramped quarters they always built a synagogue, which also served as a school and meeting place. They could become tailors, dyers, bookbinders, brokers, traders, doctors and surgeons. The IV<sup>th</sup> Latturan Council in 1215 had assured their easy identification by imposing a rouelle (wheel) for the men and a pécihoun, a piece of fabric affixed to the women's headwear. Christian theorists claim the Jewish badge of discrimination was yellow to represent a piece of money, stigmatizing Jews as accomplices of Judas Iscariot, and being the most conspicuous color to mark Jews as outcasts. Later, Jewish men also had to wear yellow hats.



**By the Middle Ages, there were some 80 to 100 thriving Jewish communities . But they enjoyed freedom of worship, owned land and lived in their carrières, restricted quarters.**

During centuries, Jews fleeing persecution along the Mediterranean basin as well as from other desperate situations further away, found a haven in Provence. Since wars and persecutions continued to plague the Spanish Jews, they came in regularly, long before the Inquisition chased them all out in 1492. English Jews had flooded in after their expulsion in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century (1290).

Askenazis from central and eastern Europe arrived in waves after the unending massacres. While their important contribution to the movement of goods, ideas, progressive techniques and the cultural climate, their key economic role in medieval society often fostered envy and riots by their Christian compatriots.

Jews were expelled in 1306 by the Phillip the Fair from the southeastern Provinzia regions of the Languedoc, Herault and Gard soon after these regions were conquered and became part of the French kingdom.

This was followed by numerous recalls and expulsions until 1395 when there was not a Jew left.

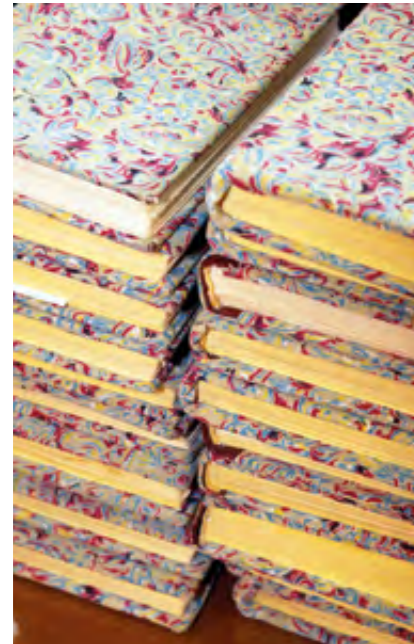
**Only Provence continued to provide refuge for the Jews until the late 15th century**

But after the death of the Good King René in 1480, when Provence was absorbed into the kingdom, anti-Jewish riots, sparked by the Carmelites and Franciscans, broke out everywhere. Violence, looting and destruction led to King Lous XII's expulsion orders in response to public demand. By the end of 1501, only converts remained. The last Jews, to avoid forced conversion, fled to the safety net offered by the popes in Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin (now the Vaucluse) or emigrated to Turkey, Italy and North Africa. Most remnants of Jewish life disappeared in the ensuing years. Abandoned synagogues deteriorated, were knocked down or converted for commerce and private dwellings. Cemetery stones were plundered for use in city walls and

buildings, while often the cemeteries were levelled to build housing or to make parking lots.

**In this papal enclave, 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.**

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 Comtat Venaissin, ceded to the Holy See in 1226, was confirmed as a pontifical possession by King Philip the Rash in 1274. Avignon, purchased by papal authorities in 1348, became Altera Roma - the Provençal Vatican.

Jews were the only non-Catholics - no Protestants, atheists, agnostics or followers of other religions - allowed to settle in the papal territory, surrounded by hostile France. The popes wanted the Jews, "chosen witnesses" of the deicide, to be humiliated and maligned but kept alive.

**They might survive  
but not thrive, being restricted  
to selling second hand clothes,  
used bric-a-brac  
and money-lending.**

The Jews could practice Judaism, while papal bulls forbid forced conversion, though there were obligatory conversionist sermons in Hebrew in the church for boys starting at age 12. Co-existence included trading, financial dealings and Christians' preference for kosher meat, matzoh and Jewish doctors (while they were allowed to practice).

**In 1624, all Jews  
living in the  
region were  
ordered to settle  
in four designated  
cities: Avignon,  
Carpentras,  
Cavaillon and  
l'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue.**

They move into the ghetto-like carrières closed off nightly with a chain. Later, a papal law caused an even greater indignity and safety hazard by proscribing a Christian guard, paid by the Jews, to double-lock the ghetto doors from the outside. Arba Kehillot was their collective name for the four ghettos, recalling Israel's four holy cities: Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed and Tiberias. It was only in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that Jews were allowed to travel to fairs throughout Provence.

Some became wealthy but, being obliged to remain in the ghetto, put their capital into restoration of the decaying synagogues.

**In Avignon, the Pope's Palace,  
Europe's largest Gothic palace  
the equivalent of four Gothic  
cathedrals was for the Jews  
an imposing symbol of absolute  
control of their lives  
and destinies by their protectors  
and prison keepers.**

In 1221, they were ordered to settle in an Avignon carrière on the rues Jacob and Abraham in a ghetto limited to 100 yards by 100 yards, with people crammed into primitive, teetering walk-up skyscraper hovels, some 8 stories high, on polluted

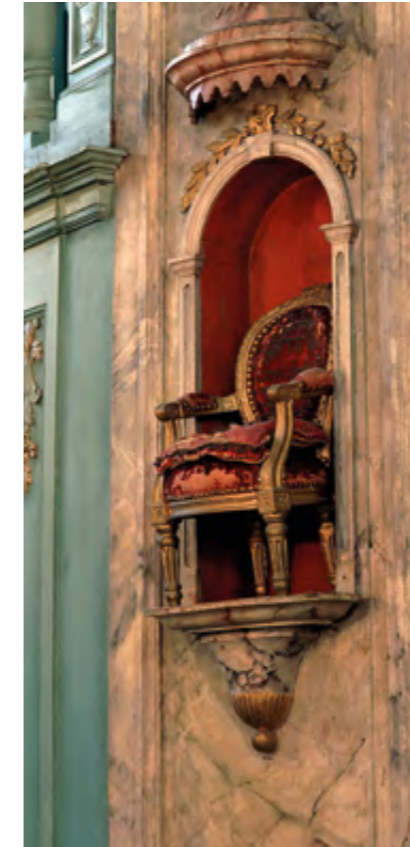


narrow streets. When a splendid house of prayer, built in 1348 on the neighboring Place de Jérusalem, fell into ruin, some newly affluent members of the community underwrote an elaborate restoration in 1766. But an accidental fire in 1845 left the city-owned property in ashen ruin. The municipality's Christian architect's synagogue built a neo-classical rotunda over the 14<sup>th</sup> century matzoh oven deep underground.

**Carpentras, Comtat capital and most influential community under papal rule, has the oldest French synagogue still holding services.**

Built in 1367, it was reconstructed in 1743. During renovation, the malevolent bishop forbid an outer stairway and limited the structure's height. The Jews placed a grand

stone staircase inside, while painting the uppermost ceiling blue with stars "since nothing is higher than the sky." The Catholic architect designed an ecclesiastical window so that Jews entering would pass under the cross. High up, the main prayer room has Louis XV style decoration. The rabbi's chair, placed on a balcony with a balustrade, towers over the male congregationists. Architectural originality peculiar to Comtat synagogues was the superimposing of two prayer rooms, with women relegated to cave-like underground areas. The 14<sup>th</sup> century mikvah (ritual bath) and bakery for bread and matzoh have survived in the lowest cellars. Ghetto walls were destroyed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to build le mairie (city hall). Near the synagogue, the cathedral's Porte Juive (Jewish Door), topped by a stone "Rats' Ball" to ward off heretics, including Jews and Moors, was for Jews who might seek conversion.



**In Cavillon, there is the Comtat's last intact carrière, rue Hébraïque.**

The synagogue, re-built in 1774 on the 15<sup>th</sup> century synagogue foundations with its bread and matzoh ovens and mikvah, is like a Louis XV boudoir. It consists of two superimposed prayer levels for men only. Also on the outside is a round medieval turret which contained the original staircase entrance.

This smaller sister of the Carpentras synagogue has the chair of the prophet Elijah, who supervises circumcision ceremonies from a rococo base of painted blue waves close to the tabernacle. Women sat in the dark, airless basement space now serving as the Jewish Comtadin Museum.

**In Pernes-les-Fontaines, on the Place de la Juiverie (Jewish Square) in the former carrière is a decaying château with the region's only known private mikvah.**

Carved in rocks below and fed by a source. Locals still refer to les bains Juifs (Jewish baths) of this monumental structure which passed into Christian hands when all Jews in Pernes were forced to move into ghetto hovels in the four "holy cities." It was in 1790 - during the French Revolution - that the ghetto gates were unlocked and the Pope's Jews were freed to settle again in their beloved Provence.

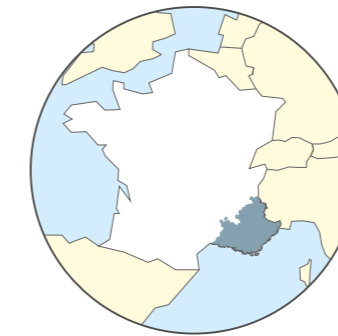
**Jules B. Farber**  
American journalist/author,





## PROVENCE JEWISH HERITAGE ROUTE

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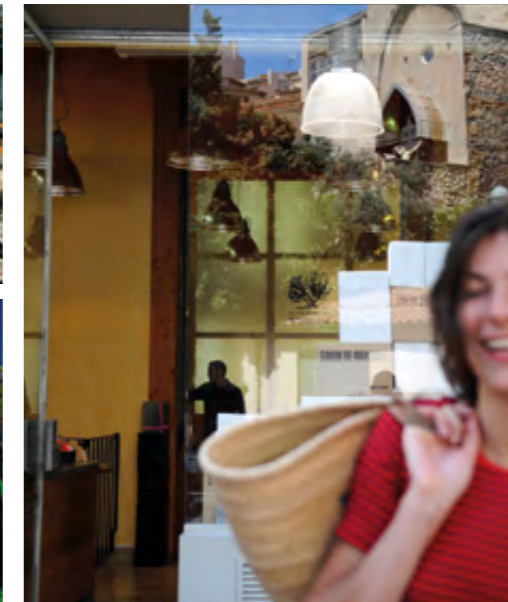


Look the map of jewish sites p.37

# 1. MARSEILLE

Attend a service in the opulent 19<sup>th</sup> century Temple Breteuil or in one of the 40 other smaller synagogues

See the Israeli gift sculpture "Marseille" on Prado beach. Experience a visit to Rabbi Jonas Weyel's tomb at the Saint Pierre cemetery. Check out Centre Fleg expositions.



## 2. TRETS



### Wander through the medieval gates of the historic

Walled center into the old Jewish quarter (now rue Paul Bert) with the 12<sup>th</sup> century building which locals always called the "synagogue." Archeologists are excavating to find a mikvah, ritual bath.



## 3. CAMP DES MILLES



### This 19<sup>th</sup> century complex,

which produced bricks and tiles until 1939, became a holding camp for Jews before deportation to the death camps. A cattle car train on tracks. Recently restored as a gripping memorial and educational center.



## 4. AIX-EN-PROVENCE

### Centuries-old street signs recall Jewish quarters

Modern Jewish life is centered on rue Jérusalem with its post-war synagogue and neighboring cultural center honouring Darius Milhaud, the internationally renowned Aix composer.



## 5. TARASCON



On the *rue des Juifs* and the *rue Droit des Juifs*, you are in the heart of the old *carrière*,

Jewish streets, where medieval houses, including one from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, have been restored. Outside town near the St. Gabriel Chapel, a Hebrew-inscribed tombstone, dated 1196, embedded in a square tower presumably built with enclosure wall stones from an early Jewish cemetery.



## 6. SAINT-REMY-DE-PROVENCE



Nostalgic old cemetery.

Nostradamus's house of birth on rue Hoche in the Juterie, the former Jewish quarter. Though the family was baptized generations before, as Christianized Jews they were treated with suspicion and subjected to special exorbitant taxes. No visits possible to house privately owned.

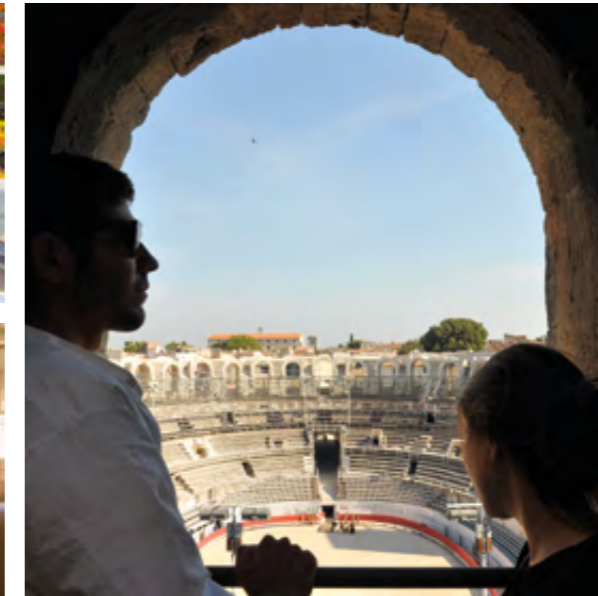
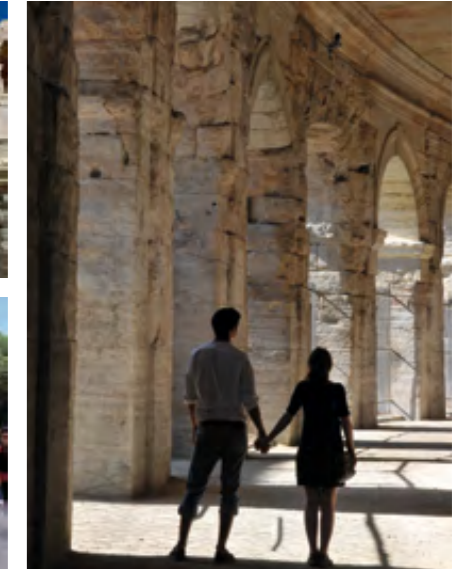


## 7. ARLES



For specimens of centuries-old Jewish heritage, visit the Musée d'Arles et de la Provence Antiques.

To view medieval tombstones with Hebrew inscriptions and a 4<sup>th</sup> century carved burial stone depicting Abraham with a raised knife recalling the biblical command to slay his son. The Muséo Arlaten has a vitrine juif (Jewish showcase) with Provençal ritual objects, yellow rouelles (wheels), pocket Torah and various curiosities.



## 8. COMTAT VENAISSIN



### Papal enclave including Avignon and the adjoining Comtat Venaissin (now the Vaucluse)

Was a refuge for Jews fleeing hostile France during expulsions. Popes welcomed Jews to prove their responsibility in the deicide as witnesses and punish them for not accepting Jesus as the Messiah by keeping them impoverished and humiliated, letting them survive but not thrive.

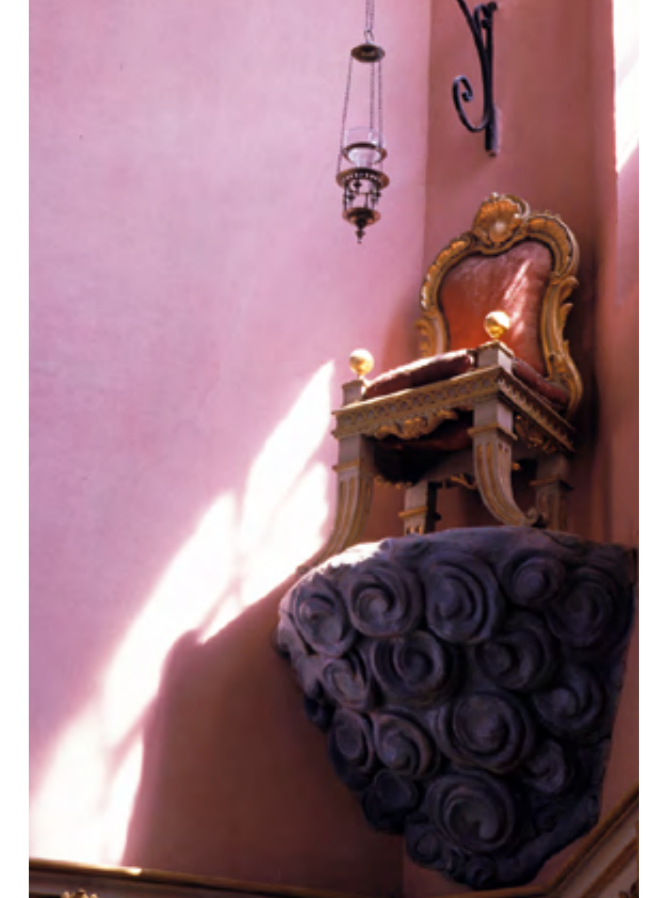


## 9. CARPENTRAS



### Oldest French synagogue (built in 1367) still holding regular services.

Walk up the high stone stairway to the main sanctuary decorated in grandiose Louis XV style, with rabbi's chair on balcony above the men-only prayer room. Peek through the grilled wall where women were hidden out of sight. Note the miniature chair for the prophet Elijah to watch circumcision ceremonies from his niche near the Holy Ark.



## 10. AVIGNON



### Wander on the rues Jacob and Abraham,

looking up at the high buildings which replaced the Jews' 14<sup>th</sup> century precarious skyscrapers. When the city-owned synagogue on the adjoining Place Jérusalem burned down, it was replaced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with one looking like a Greek temple built over its 14<sup>th</sup> century basement containing a matzoh oven. Ask the rabbi about the old cemetery.



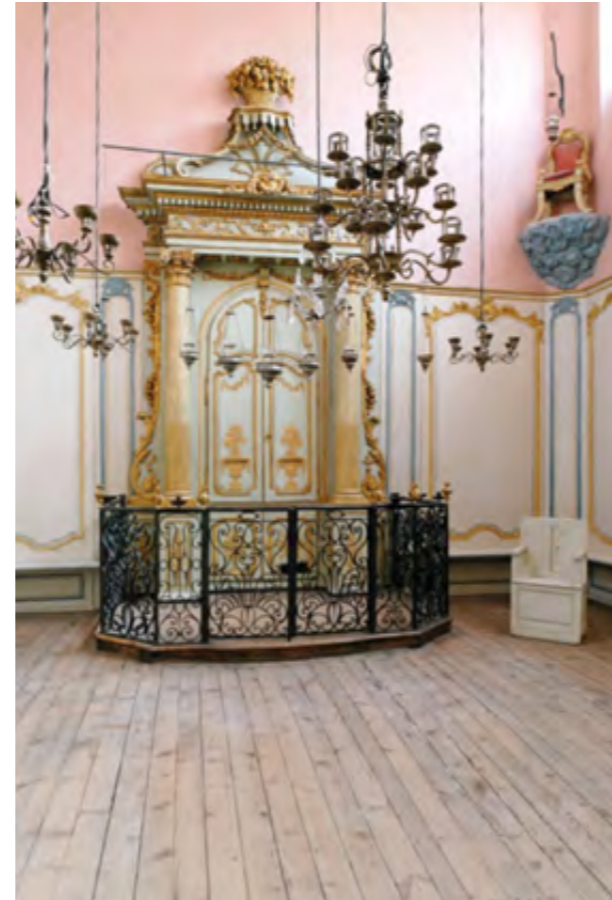


## 11. CAVAILLON



### Called the “small sister” of the Carpentras synagogue

This late 14<sup>th</sup> century house of prayer has the same configuration except that the women had to follow the services through tubes leading down to their basement space. Unique is the last-surviving Comtat carrière, a short, narrow street, with gates at either end, for confinement in crammed living quarters and access to the synagogue.



## 12. ISLE-SUR-LA-SORGUE



### Enter the cathedral to see the grill separating the congregation from the altar.

This was salvaged from the synagogue destroyed during the Reign of Terror following the French Revolution. See a very high, U-shaped building still called la maison juif (the Jewish house) on the Place de la Juiverie (Jewish square). The city restored the cemetery, putting up protective walls around it, just outside town.



## 13. PERNES-LES-FONTAINES



### Go down to the Comtat's only private mikvah, dating from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century,

in the château on the Place de la Juiverie. Locals still refer to it as les bains Juifs (Jewish baths). The now-crumbling building had to be sold off to a Christian when the Jews of Pernes were expelled.



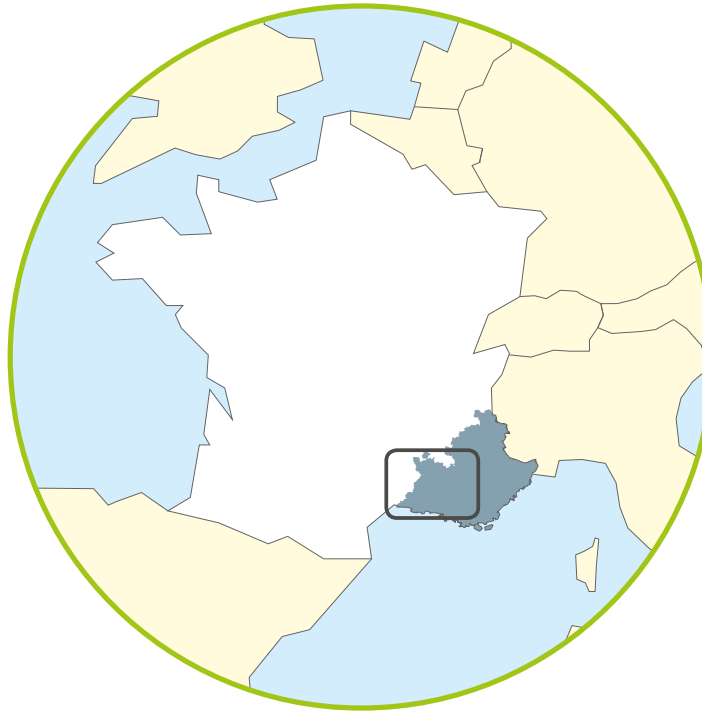
**Jules B. Farber**, American journalist/author, edited text based on his book, *Les Juifs du pape en Provence, Itinéraires* (Actes Sud), also in English Ebook form. Visit highlights: opulent 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanesque-Byzantine Temple Breteuil in Marseille; Arles museums with 4<sup>th</sup> century carved burial stone depicting Abraham with a raised knife to slay his son and a “Jewish showcase” containing Provençal ritual objects; Nostradamus’s house of birth in the Juterie , former Jewish quarter in Saint-Remy-de-Provence; Camp des Milles, near Aix-en-Provence, a “holding place” for Jews doomed for Nazi deportation, restored

as a gripping memorial and education center; 14<sup>th</sup> century synagogue in Cavaillon, now a museum, situated in last surviving carrière (ghetto), whose collection includes oil lamp found nearby with double 7-branch menorah dating from 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. or 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D; and oldest French synagogue (1367) still holding services , with miniature chair for prophet Elijah to watch circumcision ceremonies, in Carpentras .

This English Ebook is distributed through Amazon and all the other channels.



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Maison de la Région - 61, La Canebière - 10009 - 13231 MARSEILLE Cedex 01 - Tel. : +33 (0)4 91 56 47 00

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