

# Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval Iberia: *Convivencia* through the Eyes of Sephardic Jews

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The Muslim conquest of the Iberian peninsula in 711 inaugurated the relationship among the three faith-communities of the peninsula, and the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 brought these interactions, at least officially, to an end. The contours of this *convivencia*, its limits in times of cultural openness, and its possibilities even in time of great decline, are our guiding theme.

When we employ the term *convivencia* in this essay, we are not attempting to conjure up an image of total harmony, of a cosmopolitan setting wherein all faith-communities joyfully infused each other with their particular strengths. Rather we are evoking images of a pluralistic society where communities often lived in the same neighborhoods, engaged in business with each other, and affected and infected each other with their ideas. At the same time, these groups mistrusted each other and were often jealous of each other's successes, and the ever-present competition among them occasionally turned to hatred.

The relationship of the Jewish minority to other groups within Iberian society dates well before the arrival of the Muslims. Indeed, the first bit of data that points to the existence of Jews in Iberia is also testimony to their integration into Hispano-Roman society. This evidence is a third-century tombstone, now lost, that commemorated the death of a girl, Annia Salomonula, at the age of one year, four months, and one day. In many ways this tombstone is an appropriate starting point for our story. The tombstone, on which the Latin word "IVDAEA" (Jewess) is inscribed, indicates Jewish acculturation to the norms of the ruling classes of Roman society even as it calls attention to the Jewish wish to be buried among one's own and for their religion to be identified.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 5 (opposite)  
Textile with Drinking Ladies, Spain, 13th century, The Cooper-Hewitt Museum, National Museum of Design, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of J. P. Morgan from the Miguel y Badia Collection, 1902-1-82 (cat. no. 106)

Under the caliphate, the norms of Islamic life were often observed in a lenient manner. Sensual pleasures such as the drinking of wine were routinely pursued.



The Jews had probably arrived in the peninsula alongside the Roman colonizers. In the early years of their community it appears that, aside from matters of faith, Jews could not be distinguished from the Romans. This situation caused much consternation to the leaders of the nascent Christian Church, which was much concerned with keeping the Christian community separate from other peninsular inhabitants and insisted that its members be possessed of a clearly defined religious identity. At a council that met around 313 in the town of Iliberis (Elvira), local churchmen attempted to regulate the practice of Christianity in Hispania or at least in the immediately surrounding area. The references to Jews in the canons of this council reflect the nature of Jewish interaction with the Christians; the local ecclesiastical authorities found these relations troubling.

The sixteenth canon of the council, which prohibited daughters of Christians from marrying sons either of heretics or of Jews, underscored the defensive nature of early Christianity. The main concern of these clerics was the preservation of their religion: had the daughters of Christians married men other than those of their own faith, the young women, the churchmen feared, would be forever lost either to Judaism or to unsanctioned forms of Christianity. The punishment for this offense—excommunication for five years—was inflicted on the parents of the girls. Evidently, not only were such marriages being celebrated, but, strikingly, it was the parents of these youngsters who arranged these matches.

Other canons of the council further served to restrict the interaction of Jews and Christians. One forbade clerics or lay Christians to eat with Jews, a rule that was probably intended to prevent Christians from participating in rituals that accompanied Jewish meals, especially those taken on the Sabbath and holidays. Canon 49 reflects the remarkable relationship that existed between Jews and Christians and indeed between Judaism and Christianity, and speaks volumes about Jewish symbiosis with the Christian inhabitants of the peninsula. It decreed that Christian farmers who had their crops blessed by the Church were not allowed to have their fields blessed as well by Jews. Evidently, not only were Christian farmers, after they had already besought the help of their priests, also requesting Jewish holy men to pray for the success of their harvest, but the Jews who were asked to perform the ritual may have been complying. Otherwise, there would have been no need to ban such activity. Christians and Jews may not have seen themselves as distinct peoples, despite the efforts of these religious leaders to create boundaries among people whose relationships may have been marked by great fluidity.<sup>2</sup>

When charting the elusive path of *convivencia*, it is important to realize the limits of cooperation between Jews and the dominant monotheistic cultures of the Middle Ages. Christian theological attitudes to, and estimation of, Judaism provided the ground rules by which



Figure 2

Basin with Trilingual Inscription, Tarragona, 5th century, marble, Museo Sefardí, Toledo

This is one of the few Jewish works extant from Visigothic Spain. Although its symbols (a menorah and tree of life) as well as its Hebrew inscription make Jewish usage indubitable, its exact function is uncertain.

these two faith-communities could interact in Christian lands. According to Christian theology, Jews were to be kept in a debased status because of their refusal to recognize Jesus as the Son of God, and God's rejection of them as his chosen people. In addition, they were to be kept separate from Christians so that the "True Israel" would not be influenced by the Jews' religious activities. Christians held out the hope that Jews who had rejected Jesus would in the "fullness of time" return to him in grace. While within these limits we can still observe evidence of interaction in late antiquity, we also note a gradual movement toward the debasement of Jews and even their exclusion from Christian society.<sup>3</sup>

In the fourth century Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and there are indications that Jewish status within Iberian society was threatened. In a letter attributed to Severus, bishop of Minorca, street fighting was reported between Jews and Christians in the island town of Mahón around the year 418; the synagogue was destroyed and Jewish books were burned. According to the account, many Jewish women and children martyred themselves while the most distinguished of the Jewish men converted after a debate with Christian clergy. While some of the details of this account are open to question, the existence on the island of both a Jewish community and a synagogue in the fifth century and its destruction by Christian mobs seem to be without doubt.<sup>4</sup>

By the end of the fifth century, new rulers were in place in most of the peninsula. Rome and the western half of the empire had fallen and most of Iberia had been overrun by Visigothic tribes. At the outset, the Arian Visigoths must have viewed the Jews as yet another indigent element within their new kingdom. Their first law code, a summary of the Theodosian Code compiled under the aegis of Alaric II in 506, retained only ten of the fifty-three provisions of the code relating to the Jews. Acknowledging the Jews' existing status and keeping only those Jewish-related laws that were relevant to the governance of the peninsula, the Visigoths were not preoccupied with the Jewish question [fig. 2].<sup>5</sup>

The Visigoths' attitude toward the Jews appears to have remained static until the accession of Reccared to the throne in 586. Reccared converted to the Catholic faith in the following year and seemingly in the wake of that decision issued a number of anti-Jewish laws. Almost thirty years later, in 613, Sisebut brought about an abrupt change in the status of the peninsular Jews when he ordered the forced conversion of all Jews within his dominions. Theories abound as to why Sisebut chose this course of action, the speculation ranging from religious to economic motivations, but his reasons remain a mystery. Forced conversion was contrary to the Christian teachings of his day and the publication of this edict does not appear to have been preceded by any policies pointing in its direction.

The policy of forced conversion was not particularly effective, but a number of Jews who wished to return to their former religion were not permitted to do so. By midcentury, whatever the reasons had been for the forced conversion and whatever the Jews' reactions might have been, the "baptized and unbaptized" Jews had not been successfully integrated into Christian society. The rulers became increasingly frustrated at their apparent lack of success and flailed about attempting to resolve this problem through laws, admonitions, and exhortations.

Suspicion of the loyalty and true affiliation of these converts plagued the ruling Visigoths. In 694, the Visigoths claimed, based on evidence obtained from "confessions," that Jews were conspiring with newly organized and triumphant Islam to overthrow them. In the absence of corroborating data, the most historians can assert is that Jews, converted or otherwise, may well have wished to rid themselves of their oppressive overlords.<sup>6</sup>

In 711 the Muslims conquered the peninsula. Paradoxically, the rare interplay among the three civilizations of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity—what is being labeled *convivencia*—emerged as a result of military adventure. According to the theological constructs of the victorious religion, soon to find expression in its classical form in the Covenant of 'Umar, Jews and Christians, although to be debased and treated as second-class citizens, were to be tolerated. As "people of the book," they were *dhimmis*, protected minorities, who while not enjoying the societal benefits that were solely the prerogative of Muslims, were not classified as pagans who could theoretically be put to the sword [fig. 3].

Ideally, the *dhimmis* were protected from injury to their persons and property; were granted freedom to pursue any occupation as long as it did not involve hegemony over Muslims; were allowed freedom of settlement and movement; and significantly were permitted freedom of religion that included the license to manage the affairs of their own faith-community. While the stipulations later developed in the Covenant of 'Umar were not the rule of the day in the immediate aftermath of the conquest, the Muslims did tolerate Jewish faith and



**Figure 3**  
Leaf from Qurʾān,  
North Africa, ca.  
1300, The Metropol-  
itan Museum of Art,  
New York, Rogers  
Fund, 1921 (21.28)  
(cat. no. 4)

Muslims share with Jews a strict iconoclasm regarding the decoration of biblical texts read for ritual purposes. Muslim calligraphers consequently emphasized decorative scripts and beautiful inks and materials.

giously inclusive policy dedicated to the pacification and unification of the Islamic Iberian state of al-Andalus. From his capital at Córdoba, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān greatly supported the arts and sciences, sparking a general cultural efflorescence. He stimulated the protected minorities to further their own intellectual interests by furnishing them with a model of how to proceed.

The Christians, having enjoyed political power in the peninsula under the previous rulers, accepted their second-class status with much reluctance, and consequently their community was often plagued by social and religious turmoil. The Jews, relishing their newly granted autonomy after their sufferings under the Visigoths, more easily adapted to these beneficent overlords. At any rate, as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III brought scientists, poets, musicians, and religious scholars to his glittering capital at Córdoba and supported their endeavors, his *dhimmi* subjects followed suit [fig. 4].<sup>8</sup>

It was precisely this complex interaction among the three civilizations that made possible this brief moment of cultural sharing. But the source of Jewish religious vitality came not

practice: a policy that surely was enthusiastically welcomed after the horrors of the Visigothic period. Although this toleration was celebrated and may have been perceived by some as a manifestation of divine deliverance, the relationship between the Jews and the conquering Muslims was not yet what later historians would call *convivencia*.<sup>7</sup>

The first glimmers of such symbiosis can be observed in the tenth century when the Umayyad emir ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III, who ruled the peninsula, from Córdoba declared his independence from the nominal authority of the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, like his father before him, pursued an ethnically and reli-

from the peninsula itself but from the east, from the center of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. From that nerve center of political power and intellectual achievement flowed biblical and Talmudic learning, knowledge of philosophy and the sciences, mastery of Hebrew and the art of the poet. Over the course of the two centuries since the Muslim conquest of Iberia, people and their learning—both Muslim and Jewish—had streamed from east to west, and Iberian Jewry slowly began to participate in the efflorescence of rabbinic and Muslim culture that emanated from Baghdad.

But from these sources alone a Golden Age did not emerge. The simple accumulation of eastern learning was not sufficient. The additional catalyst was provided by Muslim society in al-Andalus. As part of his policy of having all the local ethnic and religious groups participate in his rule, ‘Abd al-Rahmān looked to the highest-ranking government officials belonging to each minority and viewed them as the effective heads of their communities. These individuals were chosen—for example in the Jewish case—because of their value as members of the royal court and not as a result of their distinguished place within Jewish society or their mastery of Jewish lore. Such a courtier more often than not was a wealthy man, an aristocrat, often a physician, well versed in many languages: a person who mixed well with the royal entourage.

The man chosen by ‘Abd al-Rahmān III as the nominal head of the Jews, however, was also viewed by the Jewish community as a fine representative of its interests. Ḥasdai ibn Shaprūt was born in Jaén in 910 to an aristocratic family, knew Arabic and Latin, was a physician by

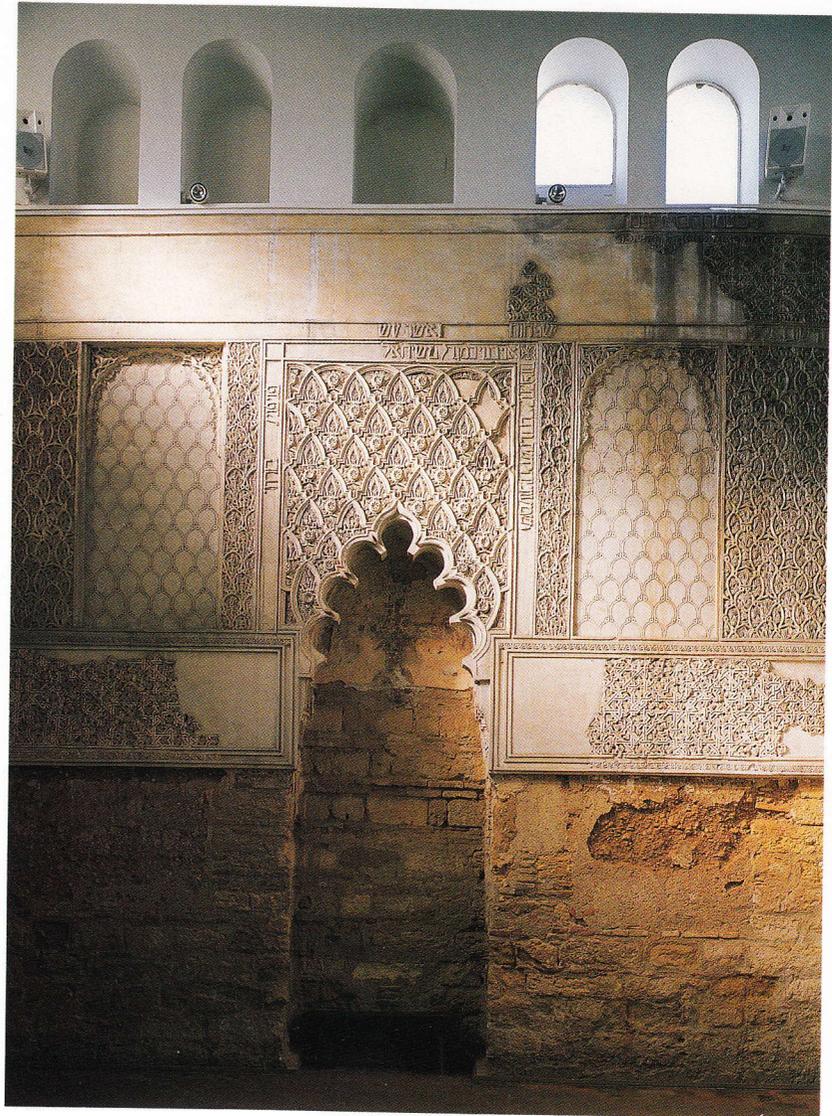


Figure 4  
Córdoba Synagogue, south wall, Córdoba, 1314-15 (see also cat. no. 56 a, b). The seat of the caliphate was in Córdoba.

profession, and first came to the attention of the caliph through his medical expertise. He was later appointed tax collector at the Andalusian ports. Since ʿAbd al-Raḥmān viewed Ḥasdai as the leader of the Jewish community, the Jews in turn saw him as their *nasi*—their prince.<sup>9</sup>

Ḥasdai's career was prototypical of the Jewish courtiers whose activities as representatives of Andalusian Jewry at the royal court can be traced from the tenth up through the end of the fifteenth century and the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Christian kingdoms. The foremost obligation and responsibility of Ḥasdai, as of all courtiers, was to be a faithful servant to the caliph, or whoever occupied the seat of central power, since he served at the ruler's discretion. There were structural tensions inherent in this reality, especially those that continually erupted between the courtier and the organized Jewish community. Clearly, their goals were not always the same. Ḥasdai fulfilled his commission in an exemplary fashion, serving both the Jewish community and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, and additionally, often without apparent mandate, acting as a representative of Andalusian Jewry to other Jewish communities.

At home in al-Andalus, Ḥasdai patterned himself after the Muslim example, specifically the cultural stewardship of the caliph, by inviting and attracting scholars to the peninsula: individuals trained in the traditional fields of Bible and Talmud scholarship, as well as philosophers, scientists, students of the Hebrew language, and professional poets. It was not simply the store of learning that had accumulated since the downfall of the Visigoths and the immigration of knowledgeable Jews to these western Mediterranean shores that provided the impetus for this golden age. Rather the ideal that Islamic society presented to Andalusian Jews embodied in its glorious architecture, Qurʾānic and Arabic scholarship, and glittering intellectual contributions in the poetical arts and in the sciences, challenged the Jews' self-definition and self-perception. The Jews strove mightily to display within this society of many cultures that they too possessed a rich and multifaceted civilization.

Jewish scholars were spurred on by Muslim achievements. If the Muslims studied the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* (an appendix to the Qurʾān containing traditions related to Mohammed) and were doctors of the *sharīʿa* (Muslim law), then Jews perforce would investigate the Bible, Talmud, and *ḥalakhah* (Jewish law). If the Muslims were advanced in their study of Arabic and believed that Arabic was suited more than any other tongue to the creation of verse, then the Jews for the first time would subject the Hebrew language and its structures to close scrutiny and expend much effort to create spiritual and sensual verse in Hebrew, as well as in Arabic. The ideal of *ʿarabiyya*, "the utter perfection of classical Arabic and its poetry...and the religious doctrine of the inimitable perfection of the Qurʾān,"<sup>10</sup> furnished the reference point for the Jewish intellectual and courtier. Ḥasdai, like the Muslims and the

Jewish aristocrats who followed his lead, employed family poets whose responsibilities included composing verses in praise of their patron, his family, and his entourage, and presenting them in the most favorable light to both Muslim and Jewish society. Blessed with the financial support of these benefactors, these poets were also able to produce religious and secular poetry of great beauty and significance.

Such conditions made Andalusian Jewry ripe for a religious renaissance. The existence of a wealthy commercial class living in the midst of a politically, economically, and religiously confident Islamic society enabled a new and highly motivated Jewish intellectual class to be born. Menaḥem ben Saruq, Hasdai's personal secretary and family poet, while attending to his primary duties, was a masterful writer of Hebrew poetry, which he composed according to biblical meter, and blazed new paths as a pioneer in the scientific study of the Hebrew language. He fell out of favor with Hasdai for reasons that remain obscure, and was replaced by Dunash ibn Labrat. Born in Fez and trained in Baghdad, Dunash brought with him such radical notions as studying Hebrew, the holy tongue, by paying attention to its cognate languages such as Arabic, and creating Hebrew verse that did not hew to traditional Hebrew meter but followed the metrical system that Muslims employed in their Arabic compositions.<sup>11</sup>

Drawing upon Jewish traditions of communal responsibility and viewing himself as part of a larger cosmopolitan Mediterranean society, Hasdai saw in his position as *nasi* of Andalusian Jewry a mandate to be a spokesman for Jewry in general. Hasdai sent a personal emissary to southern France in an attempt to put an end to a Christian custom of having Jews render thirty pounds of wax to churches on Palm Sunday, on which occasion the Jews received a ceremonial slap. He wrote a threatening letter to the former queen mother of Byzantium warning that if the Jews continued to be mistreated in that empire, the Christian population in al-Andalus would find itself in a difficult position. Hasdai also sent a letter, written by his secretary Menaḥem, to the khan of the Khazars, who with his people had converted to Judaism, inquiring about his fabled kingdom. He asked the monarch if he had any knowledge of the whereabouts of the ten lost tribes, or if he possessed any information about whether the messiah was bestirring himself in the king's corner of the globe.<sup>12</sup>

Even with the downfall of 'Abd al-Rahmān's caliphate in the next century and the splitting of al-Andalus into over twenty small *taifa* (party) kingdoms, the three cultures continued to thrive. Each of the rulers of these tiny polities wished to support as sparkling a culture as that which had been fashionable in Córdoba. And it is in one of these kingdoms, the Berber state of Granada, that we encounter another glittering star of the Jewish courtier class, whose career, and that of his son, sketches for us the extraordinary possibilities yet, simultaneously, the harsh limits of *convivencia*.<sup>13</sup>

Samuel ibn Nagrela was born in 993 in Córdoba to an aristocratic family that had originated in Mérida. He had the best Hebrew and Arabic education, was accomplished in Latin, Romance, and Berber, and studied with the leading Hebrew grammarians and halakhists of his day. With the downfall of the caliphate, his family fled to Málaga, which was subject to the small kingdom of Granada. He entered government service and was extremely successful. But that was not the only arena in which Samuel shone. He produced over two thousand poems in Hebrew and Arabic, was a significant Hebrew grammarian, wrote a polemic against Islam—an activity that took much courage—displayed himself as a superb Arabic scholar, and exhibited a remarkable knowledge of the Talmud and rabbinic literature. While his rise into the upper echelons of governmental service was not without a hitch, by 1027 we see him referred to as the *nagid* (ruler), and by the 1030s he was no less than the vizier to Ḥabbūs, the Berber king of Granada.

In his role as leader of the Jewish community of Granada, Samuel, like Ḥasdai, was a great patron of Jewish learning, supporting scholars both at home and abroad and corresponding with Jewish scholars all over the world. In his activities on behalf of the king, Samuel proved himself a master diplomat and military strategist. In an intriguing combination of his rare talents, he apparently wrote poems on the battlefield. His poetry testifies to the external enemies of Granada who taunted Samuel because of his faith and criticized the Granadan king for employing a Jew in such an influential position. He also wrote of his internal enemies within the kingdom who wished to replace him in his role as vizier. These Muslim foes of Samuel were as motivated by their jealousy of his position as they were by their antagonism to the faith that he professed.

Surrounded as he was by enemies, Samuel's greatest accomplishment was to die of natural causes in 1056 at the age of sixty-three. He was succeeded in the post of vizier by his son Yehosef who was learned in Jewish subjects and an accomplished poet. We cannot determine whether or not Yehosef was as diplomatically gifted as was his father, but we do know that beset by all the palace intrigue in which he, like his father, was necessarily involved, he probably made a tactical mistake and was killed. Upon Yehosef's death a pogrom broke out in the streets of Granada, and the Jewish community was destroyed. Three hundred Jews were murdered.<sup>14</sup>

The Granada pogrom shows that Jews were able to attain lofty positions in the courts of the Andalusí monarchs despite the undercurrent of anti-Judaism in eleventh-century Islamic Iberia. The Jewish courtier was trusted precisely because both he and the royal authorities were aware that if he fell out of favor, the entire Jewish community could be made to suffer. The latent anti-Judaism that the royal authorities held in check was always in danger of being released.

The eleventh century was truly an insecure time for the Jews. The small kingdoms that emerged with the downfall of the caliphate were continually at war with each other. Most of the inhabitants of the peninsula suffered constantly, either as a result of the wars or because of continual famine. Whatever the nature of the *convivencia* during the period of the *taifa* kingdoms, it was always tenuous and at best enjoyed only by a tiny elite.

These glories, such as they were, were not to last. The small Christian kingdoms, which had survived in the far north of the peninsula during the years of Muslim hegemony, increased their political and military strength and soon posed a clear danger to the survival of Islam's dominion in Iberia. With the constant warring among the *taifa* kingdoms and the resurgence of the small Christian states, the situation of the Jews deteriorated. At first the *taifa* kings turned to the Almoravids, an ascetic Muslim sect that had recently gained control over North Africa and disdained the material and intellectual culture created by their coreligionists in al-Andalus. During the first Almoravid campaign in Iberia, the newcomers became quite upset over the loose way that they perceived that the Andalusians were interpreting the Qurʾān and the Islamic tradition. Sensual pleasure was celebrated [fig. 5, p. 10]; *dhimmis*—both Jews and Christians—occupied positions that granted them power over Muslims; taxes were collected that were not approved in Islamic law; and activities that were simply not in consonance with the pattern of life that a devout Muslim was to follow, such as the drinking of wine, were countenanced.<sup>15</sup>

After defeating the Christians, the Almoravids returned to North Africa, but as the military equilibrium in the peninsula shifted again in favor of the Christians, the Almoravids were invited back. This time they stayed and put their own Islamic ideas into practice in al-Andalus. Some highly placed Jews in government service lost their positions and the glittering society that was al-Andalus began to lose its luster. Over time, though, as the Almoravids extended their sojourn in the peninsula, they were swept away by the mood of Andalusī Islam. Creative juices still flowed through and amongst the Jewish intelligentsia, and the poetry of Moses ibn Ezra was a prime example of the symbiosis that continued to exist with the surrounding Muslim culture.<sup>16</sup>

When the Almoravids' base of operations in North Africa came under attack from other Muslim tribes, the Almoravids retreated from the peninsula. When Andalusī Muslims needed further military help against the Christians, they again turned southward to the tribes that had replaced Almoravid power in the Maghreb. The Almohads were even fiercer guardians of the strict interpretation of Islamic tradition than were the Almoravids. They saw little place for the protected *dhimmis* within Islamic society and initiated a policy of forced conversion, the second time in peninsular history that the Jews were forced under

penalty of death to abandon their religion. Some Jews fled the peninsula to other Islamic lands, the young Maimonides and his family being the most famous among them. Yet many traveled northward within Iberia. The memory of their treatment at the hands of the Visigoths did not have any discernible effect on the Jews' choice to put down roots in the growing Christian kingdoms.<sup>17</sup>

As the Christians emerged victorious and as the Muslim tribes pursued a course of intolerance, the center of gravity of Jewish and of course Christian culture shifted to the north. In the newly dominant Christian states of Portugal, Castile, Navarre, and Aragon, Jews were granted high diplomatic and cultural positions by the local rulers since their financial, administrative, and diplomatic expertise was sorely needed. These same rulers treated their Muslim population warily because of their potential as political adversaries.

The Jews, skilled in crafts and commerce, were crucial to the continuity of urban life in the areas conquered from the Muslims. The Christians, who were mainly devoted to agriculture and herding, were not yet capable of performing these tasks. Jews were also helpful to their new overlords in the distribution of conquered land and in acting as diplomats and middlemen between the conquered Muslims and the newly victorious Christians. While the Jews' social and economic status markedly improved under the Christians, it took much longer for Jewish culture to flourish.<sup>18</sup>

Eventually, however, halakhists, poets, and Talmudic and biblical commentators all began to develop their traditions in Christian countries. But some aspects of the Jews' creativity only found full expression in settings in which Jews worked alongside Christians and Muslims. Members of all three faith-communities were to be found in thirteenth-century Toledo, serving the Castilian court. Jews and Muslims were utilizing their intimacy with Muslim language and culture to translate and thus help transmit the cultural glories of Islam to Christian society [fig. 6]. Under the rule of Alfonso X, the Wise, a Castilian cultural efflorescence was nurtured and carefully cultivated, as the monarch attempted to create an indigenous Christian Iberian culture in the Romance vernacular. The Muslims and Jews had their own areas of expertise: the Mudejars (Muslims living under Christian rule) were distinguished, for example, by their knowledge of art and architecture, the Jews by their astronomical expertise.<sup>19</sup>

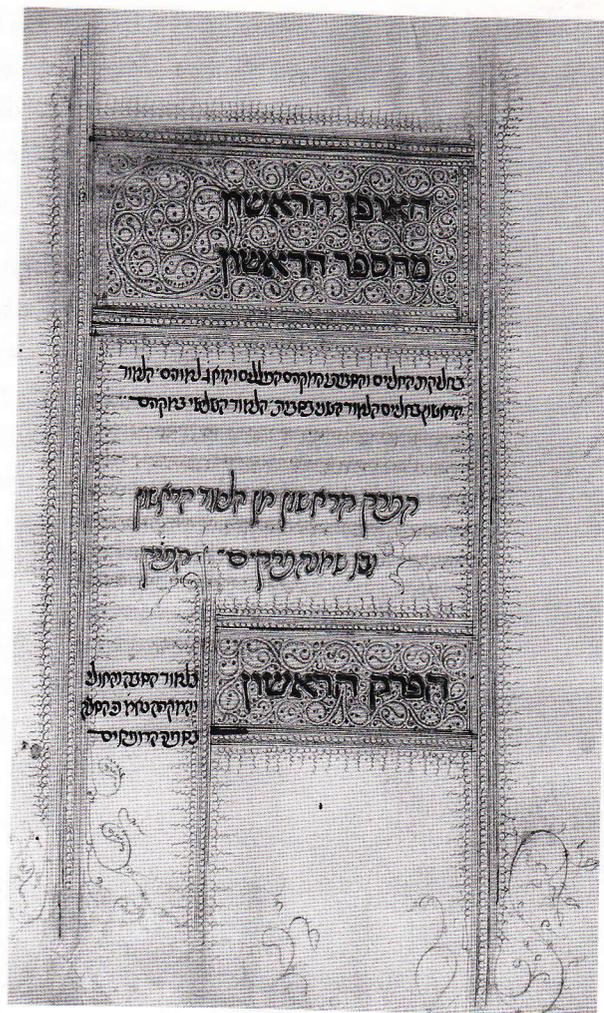
While the thirteenth century was enlivened by unusually positive interplay among the three faith-communities, we cannot help but notice that with Iberia now the southwesternmost appendage of European civilization, the prejudices of that culture toward other monotheisms began to infiltrate the Christian kingdoms of the peninsula. So while James I the

Conqueror of Aragon employed Jews in the highest administrative posts within his realm, he also presided over the first great public disputation between Jews and Christians, designed by the newly fashioned Christian Mendicant orders among whose goals was the conversion of Jews to the Christian faith.

In 1263 in Barcelona, Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides), was summoned by James I, and ordered to appear in a religious disputation with Paulus Christiani, a Jew who had converted to Christianity. The organizers of the disputation were eager for the public opportunity to test a method that they hoped would be effective in helping Jews recognize the true faith. Recently developed in southern France, this innovative approach, pioneered by the Mendicants, involved the use

of the Talmud and rabbinic literature, the Jews' own teachings, to prove that Jesus was the messiah whom the Old Testament had prophesied. It was Jewish sources, they hoped, that would underscore that Christianity indeed was the true religion. While Nahmanides put up a valiant fight against his Christian interlocutors, often taking control of the "debate," he had no opportunity to prevail since the goal of the disputation was simply the testing of the new method. Immediately following the conclusion of the disputation, Aragonese Jews were compelled to attend Christian sermons in their synagogues, where local preachers put these new ideas to use.<sup>20</sup>

Such was the nature of coexistence in the thirteenth century. On the one hand, at Alfonso's court, Jews, Christians, and Muslims could mix freely while contributing to a royally mandated intellectual agenda. On the other, the same Alfonso could also give voice to the Christian blood libel (though the king clearly stated that such charges against Jews would



**Figure 6**  
Avicenna, *The Canon*, Spain, 14th century and 1468, Courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, Mic. 8184, fol. 58r (cat. no. 28)

Avicenna, or Abu Ali al-Hussein ibn 'Abdallah ibn Sina (980-1037), was a physician, scientist, and outstanding Muslim philosopher. His *Canon of Medicine* was very popular during the Middle Ages among scholars of all religions, as is attested to by the many Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin manuscripts still in existence.

have to be proven) and the dissemination of anti-Jewish imagery through the publication of the *Cantigas de Santa María*, a collection of poems compiled in honor of the Virgin Mary. And if James I could appreciate more than any other Iberian Christian monarch the value of his Jewish communities, this did not prevent him, as we have just seen, from seeking to fulfill a millennial Christian fantasy that had been given fresh impetus in the thirteenth century: the conversion of the Jewish people.<sup>21</sup>

While political and economic relationships involved the Jews daily with Christians and at times with Muslims as well, the Jews also had an internal life that, while influenced by trends within contemporary Iberian society, owed the forms of its existence to the rhythms and dynamics of the Jewish religion. Organized Jewish communities (*aljamas*) were an ever-present feature of Jewish life in the diaspora and the communal structure that obtained in Sepharad was sophisticated and highly developed. Local governments supported the Jewish *aljama* for their own reasons; they did not wish to police the community alone. And since the main concern of all levels of government was the collection of revenues, it was far more cost-effective, not to say politically expedient, for Jews to assess, collect, and render their own taxes.

Members of the upper social and economic strata of the Jewish population formed the governing body of each *aljama*. Not surprisingly, this arrangement caused much strife between the richer and poorer classes, especially since the council was responsible for the *aljama*'s social and religious needs and for tax collection as well. The central institution of the community was the *bēt dīn* or court of Jewish law. It operated, as was its mandate, according to the *halakhab*, although its members were not necessarily great legal scholars. Additionally, the council empowered various committees to administer educational and charitable institutions, synagogues and prayer halls, ritual baths and slaughterhouses. Groups were also formally constituted to prevent religious and moral laxity and to oversee business practices, especially to supervise weights and measures. Of course a variety of religious functionaries were inscribed on the payroll of the community, from rabbis to schoolmasters, from ritual circumcisers to ritual slaughterers.<sup>22</sup>

It was precisely the *aljamas*' contacts and conflicts with the governments of the cities and towns in which the Jews lived that shaped the mandate of these communities and delimited the extent of their power. Generally, the Jewish community in the Middle Ages, and before and after as well, was very anxious about its authority over its members. The *kahal* (community) was anxious lest its jurisdiction be undermined and was therefore much troubled when Jews sought redress of grievances or adjudication of conflicts at the "courts of the Gentiles." Moral suasion and social pressure aside, the Jewish community had no truly effective means

to prevent their coreligionists from attending these courts. Contemporary rabbis inveighed against Jews who resorted to these non-Jewish institutions; reading their remarks brings home so clearly the limits of Jewish power even in, for medieval times, a tolerant society.<sup>23</sup>

And yet, surprisingly, the Jewish courts in Sepharad arrogated powers to themselves that quite outstripped their authority as delineated by Jewish law. We find these communal bodies issuing sentences of corporal punishment such as maiming and cutting off body parts and even ordering particular offenders to be put to death: actions that clearly violated the *halakhab*. The *bēt dīn* would not execute the sentence itself but rather would remand the guilty party to the local government that, for a fee, would carry out the wishes of the Jewish court. These harsh and extralegal punishments were usually meted out to those accused of slandering the Jewish community. This individual labeled a *malshin*—the word covered a variety of sins against one's fellow Jews and even entered the Castilian language as *malsín*—was the most feared and hated person in the organized Jewish community. The treatment of the *malshin* pointed up as clearly as could anything else that despite or rather as a result of the great power that the *aljama* possessed, it was terribly fearful lest anyone erode the integrity of the community.<sup>24</sup>

A curious side-effect of the tolerance, then, that allowed the Jews much autonomy over their communal affairs was their intense anxiety over the loss of their treasured status. It is significant that one of the rationalizations offered for these harsh penalties meted out to social offenders was that Gentiles ordered similar punishments for such crimes. To look at this in another way, it was the mores of the external society that were employed to preserve the inviolability of the internal community. It may have been that the extraordinarily grand self-perception of Sephardim allowed them to acquire rights, such as that of inflicting the death penalty, not permitted to Jewish courts of law since the days of the famed Sanhedrin of Greco-Roman times. Yet what lurked beneath this lofty self-esteem was a crushing insecurity about the enduring strength of the institutions themselves. While the king would encourage slanderers to spy out the closed-door decisions of the Jewish communal governing bodies, he would also allow the Jewish community to catch the slanderer and sentence him to death. Since the former spy became totally useless to the king, it was expedient for the monarch even to carry out the sentence for the Jews because at that juncture it would be in his best interests to strengthen the foundations of the community.

The relationships between Jews and others in Iberian Christian society, while not a major factor in shaping the structure and activities of the Jewish communities, did mold aspects of the social and religious agenda of individual *aljamas*. The influence of Christian Europe and of Christian Iberia upon Jewish culture is also evident. In al-Andalus, the study of philoso-

phy had been considered the capstone of the education of a well-educated man, whether Jew or Muslim. However, as the Christian reconquest achieved its greatest successes in the peninsula, this exalted appreciation of philosophy slowly came under attack. Philosophy was not an unalloyed blessing in the eyes of Christian society nor was it to Jews who lived in Christian realms. This changing attitude toward the study of philosophy was openly manifested in Provence during the fourth decade of the thirteenth century amidst the controversy over the writings of Maimonides. Not coincidentally, the Church was investigating heretical ideas within the Christian community in an attempt to stem the activities of the Cathars and Albigensians in the same region of southern France.<sup>25</sup>

Just as uncertainty about the appropriate role of philosophy within the religious curriculum spread to the Iberian peninsula, theosophical mysticism emanated into Sepharad from sources that also originated in southern France. These mystical reflections found earnest expression in the search for the true meaning of Scripture and of the appropriate prism through which to view rabbinic traditions. Such ideas were given important encouragement by Moses de León and his circle of mystical adepts with the authorship of what would emerge as the classic work of Jewish mysticism written in the Middle Ages: the pseud-epigraphic *Sefer ha-Zohar* or *Book of Splendor*. And using the more conventional form of biblical commentary but infusing it with novel mystical ideas, the distinguished Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, communal leader, profound Talmudist, and representative of Judaism at the Barcelona disputation, was able to introduce many of these concepts to a learned public audience.<sup>26</sup>

The more traditional vehicles of intellectual expression within the Jewish community, biblical and Talmudic commentary, continued to thrive. Talmudic exegesis especially was enriched by the introduction of northern European methods of Talmudic analysis that were publicized in the peninsula by that literary virtuoso, Nahmanides himself. The poets of the period such as Todros ben Judah Abulafia also scaled new heights in the era of the *reconquista* and their poetry assumed new forms, thanks to the influence of Christian society.<sup>27</sup>

It remains difficult to characterize Jewish society in the years that followed the Christian conquests of the thirteenth century and preceded the eruption of the anti-Jewish outbreaks at the close of the fourteenth century. One is tempted either to trace the lingering effects of the new Christian hegemony and concomitantly the important role that Jews played in the society, or to stress aspects of the decline of Jewish power as an adumbration of the erosion of Jewish society that is evident at the end of the fourteenth century. Either way, by the 1300s, after the Christians had completed their most significant conquests within the peninsula, the Christian population gradually began to develop the urban talents in which they

had been sorely deficient a century earlier. Their acquisition of commercial skills was especially rapid in the Crown of Aragon and was reflected in the growth of its Mediterranean empire. As a result, Jewish status in that eastern kingdom declined, unlike that of Castilian Jewry, which remained relatively stable.<sup>28</sup>

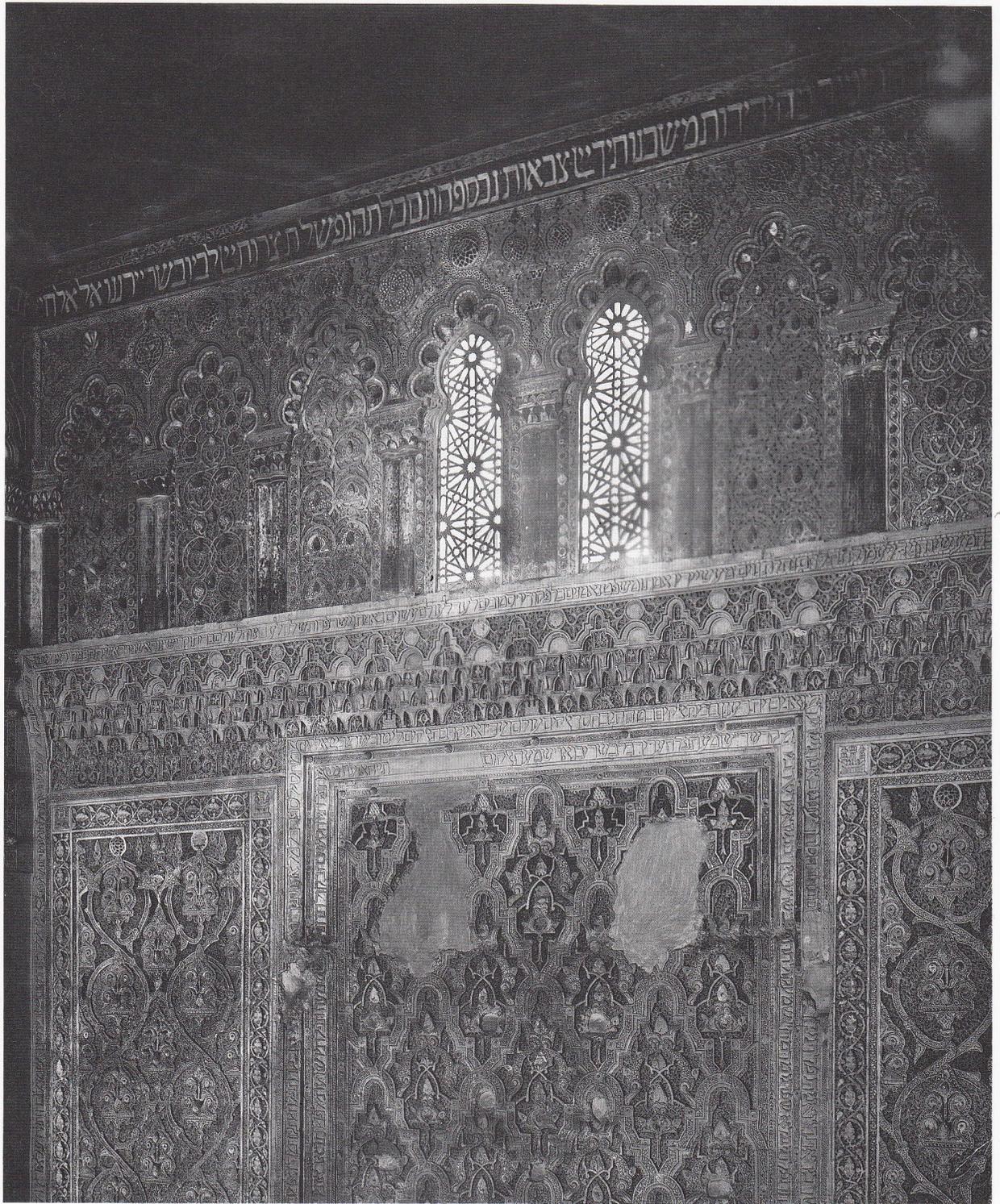
The Black Death, which devastated Europe's population in the fourteenth century, had a profound impact upon the peninsula including its Jewish communities. Indeed, Jews may have endured greater trauma than others since they were often accused of having instigated the outbreak of this dreaded disease, and in some instances were attacked and even killed. Jewish suffering was especially acute in the Crown of Aragon where the Jewish communities met in 1354 and presented a rare united front to confront the aftermath of the devastation.

In the neighboring kingdom of Castile in midcentury, Jews still held important posts within the royal government, as evidenced by the career of Samuel Halevi, who served as treasurer to King Peter I. When Samuel had a private synagogue (later called El Tránsito) built in the capital city of Toledo [fig. 7], he dedicated the chapel to Peter. Muslim artisans employed in its construction fashioned the building according to the prevailing Mudejar style. In Navarre, the Jews were recuperating from the pernicious effects of the Shepherds' Crusade of the 1320s and the outbreaks of violence that accompanied the end of the Capetian dynasty in 1328. Still the existence of highly placed Jews such as Ezmel de Ablitas and a prevailing atmosphere conducive to the general social and economic integration of the Jews were features of Navarrese society. Portugal, blessed with royal stability, also seemed to provide the necessary conditions for a flourishing Jewish community.<sup>29</sup>

After midcentury, however, Castile was wracked by a long civil war as Henry of Trastámara, half-brother of Peter, challenged Peter's right to occupy the throne. One of Henry's devices in gaining the support of the nobility and others within the kingdom was his promulgation of fierce anti-Jewish sentiments. Such tactics reveal the attractiveness of such arguments to many within Castile. With the progress of the civil war, many Jewish communities, especially the *aljama* in Burgos, were threatened, attacked, and ultimately impoverished. Surprisingly, after the murder of Peter by Henry at Montiel and the accession of Henry to the throne, Jews resumed their elevated positions at the royal court.<sup>30</sup>

Prior to the civil war, there had been plans afoot to harm the Jews physically and financially such as that devised by Gonzalo Martínez de Oviedo, the majordomo of Alfonso XI, but it is impossible to gauge their importance or assess their influence. What we can observe during the 1300s is the persistence of the Christian-Jewish polemic that we first saw emerge publicly in 1263 and that continued dramatically to affect Jewish-Christian relationships in

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Figure 7 (opposite)  
Interior of El Tránsito  
Synagogue, Toledo,  
1357 (see also cat.  
no. 58 a, b, c)



the peninsula. A significant figure in the religious debates of the time was Alfonso of Valladolid who was born Abner of Burgos and was a practicing physician and prolific Jewish intellectual prior to his conversion to Christianity. As a Christian he continued his profound literary efforts, now directed toward the conversion of his former coreligionists.<sup>31</sup>

While the fourteenth century did witness a decline in Jewish status, an increase in physical attacks against Jews, and an escalating tempo in attempts to convert Jews to Christianity, the pogroms that broke out in June 1391 against the Jews of Seville shocked Jews and Christians alike. The riots rapidly spread to Córdoba, Jaén, Ubeda, Baeza, Carmona, and many other communities throughout Andalusia. Contemporary Hebrew poetry reveals that many of these attacks occurred simultaneously. They were not, however, coordinated; evidently, anti-Jewish sentiment was simmering right beneath the surface. By the onset of summer, Jewish communities in the Crown of Aragon were assaulted. Rioters traveled up the Mediterranean coast wreaking havoc upon Jewish communities in their path. Large and distinguished Jewish communities like that of Barcelona suffered such devastation that they never recovered.<sup>32</sup>

What had happened to the famed *convivencia* of Iberian society? In Seville, Archdeacon Ferrante Martínez of Ecija had been preaching hatred against Jews for more than ten years and encouraging anti-Jewish violence. In 1390, the death of the archbishop of Seville had provided the opportunity to Martínez to act as he wished. Moreover, King John I of Castile had died in the same year, leaving an underage son, and since the royal government frequently acted as the traditional protector of Jewish rights, the Jews were left defenseless. It was the weakness of royal government that had been the crucial factor in the devastation of Navarrese Jewry in 1328, as well as other outbreaks of violence against the Jews in the Middle Ages. In 1391, on the other hand, the throne of Navarre as well as that of Portugal were occupied by strong and capable rulers, so that the Jewish communities in these kingdoms appear to have escaped unharmed.

While the killings of Jews were unexpected, so were other results of the devastation. Jews are recorded as having taken their own lives in response to the choice of baptism or death, but others preferred to convert when faced with the same alternative. It is striking, however, that of the many Jews who converted to Christianity, a number did so willingly. Although volition is hard to establish given the pervasive atmosphere of intimidation and fear, Jews did flock to baptismal fonts across Castile and Aragon. While this wholesale acceptance of the majority religion could be considered a natural extension of *convivencia*, it more accurately reflects a loss of faith on the part of large segments of the Jewish community. This decline of morale was the end result not just of successful integration but of unceasing anti-

Jewish polemic and of relentless Christian preaching to which the “successful” Jewish community had been subjected ever since the heyday of the Reconquest and of the disputation at Barcelona. As the number of those baptized increased over time, the morale of those who remained Jews sank even lower and the tide of conversions surged. The Jews were extremely vulnerable. Attempts at punishment of the rioters and of reconstruction of the communities met with mixed success. Things would never be the same.<sup>33</sup>

Many leaders of the Christian community were energized by the messianic possibilities inherent in the widespread Jewish conversions, and attempted to gather all of the former chosen people—“Israel in the flesh”—into the bosom of Christianity. Vicente Ferrer, the charismatic preacher of the Antichrist and the Second Coming, sparked the desire of the Avignonese Pope Benedict XIII to stage a great public disputation between Judaism and Christianity, and thus to bring about the Messianic Age. From a more earthly perspective, Benedict seized this opportunity to impress those who were wavering in their support of his claim to the papacy. Ferdinand I, the king of Aragon, who as regent of Castile was much influenced by Ferrer, provided the additional impetus for the public debate. Accordingly, a disputation was held in 1413 in Tortosa, at the mouth of the Ebro in Aragón.<sup>34</sup>

The goal of the disputation was to effect the theological grand coup and stampede the remaining Jews to the baptismal font. And try the Christians did. The Jewish representatives were implored to convert and their families were harassed as the “debate” dragged on for over a year and a half, for sixty-nine sessions. During the disputation, converts were often paraded before those assembled to make clear, if it had not already become transparent to all, what the purpose of the debate was. Some Jews did “embrace” Christianity in the wake of the events at Tortosa but in a short time, the three men who were responsible for the planning and production of the debate departed the Iberian stage. Ferdinand I died in 1416, but not before renouncing Benedict XIII, and Vicente Ferrer wandered off to southern France where he died in 1419.

The result of this tumultuous period from 1391 to 1415 was that at least one-third to one-half of Iberian Jewry converted to Christianity. The Jewish communities of the large Castilian cities were decimated. As part of a larger demographic trend involving all Castilians, Jews moved to smaller villages and towns and to areas outside the control of the royal authorities. In Aragon, many Jewries did not recover; only eight were left in Catalonia, five in Valencia, and twenty-two in Aragon. Portuguese Jewry, although escaping the ravages of the pogroms, suffered from anti-Jewish legislation in the early years of the fifteenth century. The Majorcan Jewish community, which suffered greatly in 1391, found its numbers even more depleted by the emigration of many of its members. A ritual murder accusation was leveled against the

remaining Jews in 1432 and the case was brought to trial. In 1435 after the Jewish population was physically threatened, many fled, and seemingly all those who remained were converted.<sup>35</sup>

Remarkably, Jews began to recover. Perhaps they did not scale the social and economic heights to which they had ascended before, but they continued to function as artisans, small-scale merchants, and moneylenders. We do not know if these relationships assumed a different texture after the events of 1391, but instances of the greater tolerance—*convivencia*, if you will—that had existed prior to 1391, can still be found in the fifteenth century. In 1433, the Jew Moses Arragel—with the help of two Christian friars—completed a translation of and commentary on the Hebrew Bible for a Christian patron, a Master of the Military Order of Calatrava, Don Luis González de Guzmán. And in these years when most Christians were not interested even in feigning religious dialogue, but rather were openly antagonistic to the culturally weakened Muslim communities, Juan of Segovia produced a trilingual translation of the Qurʾān.<sup>36</sup>

But the fate of the Jews and the destiny of the fragile coexistence that Iberian society had managed to construct was not bound up either with the Jews themselves or with the relationships they maintained with Christians and Muslims. Rather, the large numbers of Jews who had converted to Christianity proved crucial to both the survival of the Jewish community and its relationships with other faith-communities in the peninsula. The New Christians, or *conversos*, as the converts were called, remained at first in the same quarters they had lived in as Jews and continued to work at the same professions. But as the years passed some moved out of their former dwellings and attained positions from which they had been excluded as Jews, such as those of public notary, city magistrate, and other municipal posts.

The converts began to incur the wrath of the Old Christians as they competed for the social and economic benefits Iberian society had to offer. Not only were the erstwhile Jews enjoying the professional opportunities available to Christians, wealthier New Christians were often marrying into the nobility, especially those noble families that had fallen on hard times. Through these unions the *converso* family was able to achieve the social respectability and the noble family the wealth that seemed otherwise to elude the grasp of each. The suspicion emerged among Old Christians that the conversion of so many of these Jews was simply opportunistic and did not reflect a sincere attachment to their newly embraced religion. As these sentiments festered, antipathy toward the neophytes rose and the wrath of the people was now directed against the New Christians. While these events took place in Toledo in 1449, across the peninsula during this same year but apparently unconnected to the events in Castile, riots broke out in Lisbon, but here the target of the attacks was the traditional enemy of the Christians: the Jews.<sup>37</sup>

Thus while the Jews recuperated to some extent following the devastations of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and in some measure may have recaptured those feelings of *convivencia* that had been understandably destroyed during those years, it was the New Christians who were generally the objects of violence, hatred, and suspicion during the second half of the fifteenth century. Debate erupted at all levels of Castilian society over the question of how to handle the *converso* problem. Whatever the original motivations were that prompted the large-scale conversions at the turn of the century, New Christians, as a group, were perceived as presenting a major problem for Iberian society. Among the many solutions that were suggested, one was chosen as the best means of ascertaining the truth of the *conversos'* actual religious allegiance: to investigate the religious beliefs and practices of the New Christians. Armed with this information, the rulers hoped they would be able to make the appropriate decisions about the treatment of *conversos*.<sup>38</sup>

Ferdinand and Isabella, upon their accession to the thrones of Castile and Aragon (and indeed even earlier), requested Pope Sixtus IV to grant them permission to found an ecclesiastical inquisition that would function in their own kingdoms under crown control. In a politically weak moment for the papacy, Sixtus IV agreed, and the "Spanish Inquisition" was born. Four tribunals were created in Castile in the early 1480s, and in 1485, despite much local opposition, the Aragonese Inquisition was also established. After the earliest inquiries, the officials of the Inquisition decided in 1483—and then effectively persuaded the monarchs—that in order to repress the judaizing practices that they believed were rife among the *conversos* of southern Castile, all Jews needed to be expelled from Andalusia. It was not the New Christians who were the subject of this order. Rather the inquisitors believed that if the Jews were eliminated from Andalusia they would not influence the *conversos* to continue their secret practice of Judaism.

But the rulers did not intend to eliminate Jews from their dominions. There were many within the kingdoms who were in favor of a continued Jewish presence, a policy that appealed to traditional elements within the government. This conservative position was expressed in actions of Ferdinand and Isabella that indicated that the Jewish connection to Iberian society was not being severed but rather was continuing. Jewish communities were protected during the reign of the Catholic Monarchs and through the 1480s and early 1490s Jews still attended the Castilian court as high-ranking officials, among them the great Jewish scholar and financier, Don Isaac Abravanel and the official head of Castilian Jewry, the *rab de la corte*, Abraham Seneor.<sup>39</sup>

During the 1480s and after many more investigations, the Holy Office firmly concluded that the New Christians were generally involved in Jewish rituals and obeyed precepts of the

Jewish religion, and that their heretical behavior should not be tolerated. Ominously, there were also conflicting signals from other groups during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella about the future treatment and ultimately the protection of the Jews. Jews were still participating in the social and economic life of the kingdoms but there were movements afoot within the Church, the cities, and the Castilian Cortes or parliament to separate Jews from Christians, initiatives that were probably influenced by the Inquisitorial argument that Jews should be prevented from exercising a baneful influence upon the New Christians.<sup>40</sup>

If we read the words that Isaac Abravanel wrote many years later, when he was reflecting on the years before the expulsion, we would imagine that the Jews lived very comfortably in Sepharad, that they were at peace with their neighbors. It would appear that elements of the *convivencia* that the Jews had enjoyed were still more or less intact. But this was to change. In 1490 and 1491, the officials of the Inquisition accused a Jew, Yuce Franco, of the ritual murder of a Christian child—named the Holy Child of Laguardia—and they mounted a show trial. This spectacle also served as a vehicle for the Inquisition to publicize its views about what it believed should be the fate of all the Jewish communities of Castile and Aragon.<sup>41</sup>

Very soon, these views became the policy of the rulers. In January 1492, after a protracted ten-year war, the Muslim emirate of Granada was conquered. The Reconquest was officially over, and so was *convivencia*. On the last day of March of that same year, Ferdinand and Isabella signed the edict banishing the Jews from Castile and Aragon [fig. 8]. The reasons given in the edict were strikingly similar to the arguments that the Inquisition had been articulating in the last few years. The Jews were setting a bad example for the New Christians by their mere presence and, through the performance of their rituals, were proving to be a negative influence on the newcomers to the Christian faith. To safeguard the *conversos*, the Jews needed to be eliminated from Castilian and Aragonese society.<sup>42</sup>

Given the choice of conversion or exile, half of the Jewish population converted. Was conversion a foolhardy decision considering what had happened to the New Christians over the course of the fifteenth century? Did these Jews possess such strongly held beliefs in the possibilities inherent in *convivencia* that they elected to remain in Castile and Aragon? Or was it simply too difficult to give up all their economic, social, and family ties and to depart into the unknown? Those who opted for exile traveled mainly to the remaining Iberian kingdoms that still permitted Jewish residence, Portugal and Navarre. They were accepted in both of these kingdoms but not without much bitter debate among their Portuguese and Navarrese hosts.

Figure 8 (opposite)  
Edict of Expulsion  
of the Jews from  
Spain, Granada,  
March 31, 1492,  
Exmo. Ayuntamiento de Avila,  
Archivo Histórico  
Provincial de Avila,  
1/77 (cat. no. 47)



In Navarre, some of the exiles prepared to settle permanently. But Portugal was to prove inhospitable to the immigrants and the situation of the native Jews began to deteriorate as well. Accusations abounded that the immigrant Jews had brought the plague with them. In 1493, when most of the Jews were supposed to leave, their departure was restricted and they were accused of violating the terms of their entry. Many were enslaved and Jewish children were sent to the newly discovered island of São Tomé to test the possibilities of settlement there. When Manuel succeeded John II on the Portuguese throne, he freed the enslaved Jews and seemed to be turning from the anti-Jewish policies of his predecessor. But the rising tide of anti-Judaism in Portugal and the increasing pressure of the Spanish rulers, who insisted on expulsion of the Jews as a condition for Manuel's marriage to their daughter Isabella, led the Portuguese king and his royal council to order the banishment of the Jews in December 1496. But then, probably because there were not enough New Christians in Portugal who could pick up the economic slack for the departing Jews, the king blockaded the harbors in 1497 to prevent their leaving. Instead, almost the entire Portuguese Jewish community was forcibly converted to Christianity. Similarly under pressure from Ferdinand and Isabella, the Navarrese monarchs expelled the Jews in 1498, and having no place to go and no safe passage through which to leave the peninsula, they, too, were obliged to convert.<sup>43</sup>

Although Iberian society had decided that it no longer had any room for Jews or for Judaism, and despite the fact that the expulsion was a time of great hardship and trauma for the exiles, Sephardic Jews preserved aspects of the *convivencia* that was part of their daily lives. Those who left the peninsula took with them their well-defined Sephardic traditions. Included in this baggage was pride in their attachment to the peninsula—after Palestine, their “second homeland”—and the love of Iberian languages, which they continued to express through speaking, writing, and singing in Ladino.<sup>44</sup>

Among those who stayed and converted, there were many who were successful at assimilating into Christian society. Some continued to practice Judaism in secret while publicly continuing their daily involvement in Iberian Christian life. But even for those who attempted to acculturate, their Jewish heritage often fueled their creativity. Some of these *conversos*—such as Fernando de Rojas, the author of *La Celestina*—creatively infused Iberian Christian culture with their own ideas, which they dressed in new religious garb. Other *conversos*, from writers to mystics, attempted to fuse the two cultures together in ways that made sense to them in their lives.<sup>45</sup>

While the *conversos* were harassed by the Inquisition in newly united Spain and in Portugal, the *moriscos*—those Muslims who were forcibly converted over the course of the early sixteenth century, Muslims whose allegiance to the Christian state was doubted and so were

considered politically dangerous—were expelled a century later. Moreover, although many descendants of the formerly Jewish *conversos* did lose the memory of their ancestry, a few did not. Many of these individuals left the peninsula as late as the seventeenth century and continued their lives as Jews in countries where Judaism was allowed to flourish. They carried with them what they perceived to be authentic Jewish culture and an awareness of contemporary Iberian intellectual trends. These refugees infused the Jewish communities and the countries where they established their homes with novel syntheses of these disparate ideologies, born of a latter-day though painfully strained *convivencia*.

## NOTES

Notes for this essay have been kept brief and to a minimum. I have chosen to emphasize recent works that are readily available and studies that contain detailed bibliographies. Where possible I have cited titles available in English. Robert Singerman, *The Jews in Spain and Portugal: A Bibliography* (New York and London, 1975), is a helpful compilation.

1. L. García Iglesias, *Los judíos en la España antigua* (Madrid, 1978), 53.
2. *Ibid.*, 69–81.
3. See generally Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1974).
4. García Iglesias, *Los judíos en la España antigua*, 87–92.
5. *Ibid.*, 93–99 and Alfredo Mordechai Rabello, *The Jews in Visigothic Spain in the Light of the Legislation* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1983), 32–37.
6. Much has been written on Visigothic Jewry in the last few years: for synthetic treatments, see García Iglesias, *Los judíos en la España Antigua*, 103–202, Rabello, *The Jews in Visigothic Spain*, 43–85, and also Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400–1000* (London, 1983), 129–42.
7. Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands* (Philadelphia, 1979), 25–28. On the shift from Christian to Islamic domination and its effects on the inhabitants of the peninsula, see the provocative work by Thomas F. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J., 1979), especially, 19–42.
8. W. Montgomery Watt, *A History of Islamic Spain* (Edinburgh, 1965), 39–80, and Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain* (Philadelphia, 1973) 1: 155–59.
9. Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 1: 159–63.
10. The quotation is from Raymond P. Scheindlin, “Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra on the Legitimacy of Poetry,” *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 7 (Medieval Poetics): 113.
11. Jefim Schirmann, “The Function of the Hebrew Poet in Medieval Spain,” *Jewish Social Studies* 16 (1954) 235–52, and Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 1: 228–63.
12. *Ibid.*, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 1: 163–217.
13. Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 1: 3–40. Also see David Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party Kings: Politics and Society in Islamic Spain 1002–1086* (Princeton, N.J., 1985), 190–223.
14. Jefim Schirmann, “Samuel Hannagid: The Man, the Soldier, the Politician,” *Jewish Social Studies* 13 (1951): 99–126, and Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 2: 41–189.
15. Watt, *A History of Islamic Spain*, 95–102.
16. Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 3: 3–58.
17. On the Almohads, see Watt, *A History of Islamic Spain*, 103–11. Gerson Cohen’s edition of Abraham Ibn Daud’s *Sefer Ha-Qabbalah* (Philadelphia, 1967) is valuable; see on the period, pp. xvi–xxviii. On the Jews in these Christian kingdoms prior to the major Christian conquests of the thirteenth century, see Francisco Cantera Burgos, “Christian Spain,” in *The World History of the Jewish People: The Dark Ages*, ed. Cecil Roth, 357–81. For the early years of the Christian kingdoms, see Collins, *Early Medieval Spain*, 225–68, and Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 42–50.

18. Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia, 1961) 1: 39–185.
19. On the transfer of Jewish culture, see Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982). On the court of Alfonso “el Sabio,” see Evelyn S. Procter, *Alfonso X of Castile: Patron of Literature and Learning* (Oxford, 1951) and Robert I. Burns, ed., *Emperor of Culture: Alfonso X The Learned of Castile and His Thirteenth-Century Renaissance* (Philadelphia, 1990).
20. Nahmanides’s report on the disputation is in Chaim Chavel, ed. and trans., *Ramban: Writings and Discourses*, (New York, 1978) 2: 657–96. Robert Chazan, “The Barcelona ‘Disputation’ of 1263: Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response,” *Speculum* 52 (1977): 824–42 is an analysis of the debate and its implications.
21. See Dwayne E. Carpenter, *Alfonso X and the Jews: An Edition of and Commentary on “Siete Partidas” 7.24 “De los judíos”* (Berkeley, Calif., 1986).
22. Baer, *A History of the Jews*, 1: 212–36, and Abraham A. Neuman, *The Jews in Spain*, 2 vols., (Philadelphia, 1942).
23. Yom Tov Assis, “The Jews of Spain in Gentile Courts (13th and 14th centuries)” [Hebrew] in *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry*, Menahem Ben-Sasson et al., eds. (Jerusalem, 1989), 399–430.
24. Baer, *A History of the Jews*, 1: 322–25, Neuman, *The Jews in Spain*, 1: 134–45, and Eliyahu Ben-Zimrah, “Ha-Malshinut ve-ha-Mesirah be-Mishnatam shel Hakhmei Sefarad” [Slander and informing in the writings of Sephardic sages] in *Studies in Memory of the Risbon le-Zion R. Yitzhak Nissim*, ed. Meir Benayahu (Jerusalem, 1985) 1: 297–321.
25. Baer, *A History of the Jews*, 1:96–110, and Bernard Septimus, “Piety and Power in Thirteenth-Century Catalonia,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 197–230.
26. See the compilation of Isaiah Tishby, ed., *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3 vols., (Oxford and New York, 1989) and Moshe Idel, “We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This,” in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 51–73.
27. On Todros, see Hayyim Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Sepharad and Provence* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1954–56) 2: 413–48 and T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York, 1981), 410–16. The essays in Twersky, *Nahmanides*, are illuminating.
28. Baer, *A History of the Jews*, 1:306–78 and 2:1–94 treat Castile and Aragon respectively up to the end of the fourteenth century. For a characterization of the period from the late thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth century, see Julio Valdeon Baroque, *Los judíos de Castilla y la revolución Trastámara* (Valladolid, 1968), 15–25.
29. On synagogues generally, see Don A. Halperin, *The Ancient Synagogues of the Iberian Peninsula* (Gainesville, Fla., 1969). On the Toledan synagogue called today *El Tránsito*, see 49–55. Fourteenth-century Navarrese Jewry is described in Beatrice Leroy, *The Jews of Navarre* (Jerusalem, 1985) and in Yom Tov Assis and Ramón Magdalena, *The Jews of Navarre in the Late Middle Ages* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1990). On Portugal, see J. Mendes Dos Remedios, *Os judeus em Portugal* (Coimbra, 1895), vol. 1, and Maria José Pimenta Ferro, *Os judeus em Portugal no século XIV* (Lisbon, 1979).
30. See generally Valdeon Baroque, *Los judíos de Castilla*.
31. On Abner, see Baer, *A History of the Jews*, 1: 327–54.
32. *Ibid.*, 2: 95–110. Philippe Wolff, “The 1391 Pogrom in Spain: Social Crisis or Not?” *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 4–18 and Don Pagis, “Dirges on the Persecutions of 1391 in Spain,” [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 37 (1968): 355–73.
33. Baer, *A History of the Jews*, 2: 110–66.
34. *Ibid.*, 166–232.
35. A. Lionel Isaacs, *The Jews of Majorca* (London, 1936), 103–17.
36. Baer, *A History of the Jews*, 2: 244–70 and J. N. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms 1250–1516* (Oxford, 1978), 2: 156–63, and ff.
37. Baer, *A History of the Jews*, 2: 270–83; Angus MacKay, “Popular Movements and Pogroms in Fifteenth-Century Castile,” *Past and Present* 55 (1972): 33–67; Humberto Baquero Moreno, “Movimentos sociais anti-judaicos em Portugal no século XV,” in *Jews and Conversos*, ed. Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem, 1985), 62–73; and Maria José Pimenta Ferro Tavares, *Os judeus em Portugal no século XV* (Lisbon, 1982), 1: 421–23.
38. Haim Beinart, *Conversos on Trial* (Jerusalem, 1981), 1–47.
39. On the policy of Ferdinand and Isabella toward the Jews, see the fine article by Maurice Kreigel, “La prise d’une décision: l’expulsion des juifs d’Espagne en 1492,” *Revue Historique* 260 (1978): 49–90.
40. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, 2: 438–47.

41. See the biography by B. Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher* (Philadelphia, 1968), specifically, 53. On the "Holy Child of La Guardia" trial, see Baer, *A History of the Jews*, 2: 398-423.
42. Baer, *A History of the Jews*, 2: 424-39 and Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, 2: 447-52.
43. On Navarre, see Benjamin R. Gampel, *The Last Jews on Iberian Soil* (Berkeley, Calif, 1989), 71-134. On Portugal, a convenient summary of these years is Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *A Jewish Classic in the Portuguese Language* (Lisbon, 1989), pp. 9-22. This volume, published separately, also serves as an introduction to Samuel Usque, *Consolação as tribulações de Israel*, 2 vols. (Lisbon, 1989). The relevant pages in this format are 19-32. See also Isaiah Tishby, *Messianism in the Time of the Expulsion From Spain and Portugal* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1985).
44. See Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "The Generation of Spanish Exiles on Its Fate," [Hebrew] *Zion* 26 (1961): 23-42.
45. Yirmiahu Yovel, *Spinoza and other Heretics*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1989). In the first volume, he relies on other scholars; on Fernando de Rojas, see 1: 85-127.