



THE JEW S IN SPAIN

With thanks to the many contributors to this feature in Spain, the UK, the USA and Canada and particular thanks to Michael Alpert and Dominique Tomasov Blinder for the advice they provided.



Statue of philosopher and poet Ibn Gabirol in Malaga
Born Malaga about 1021; died about 1058 in Valencia

PRE-ISLAMIC SPAIN

1st and 2nd centuries CE Following the destruction of the Temple and the defeat of Jewish rebellions, Jewish exiles reach Roman Spain.

586 The Visigothic king of Spain tries to force Jews to adopt Christianity.

ISLAMIC SPAIN 8TH-13TH CENTURY

711 Muslims conquer Spain: the Golden Age for Jews begins.

915-970 Hasdai ibn Shaprut, a Jew, becomes Chief Minister of the Caliph of Córdoba.

993-1064 Shmuel ibn Nagrela, the Jewish poet and military leader, becomes Chief Minister of Granada.

Poets, grammarians, Bible commentators and philosophers include Dunash ibn Labrat, Menahem ibn Saruk, Shlomo ibn Gabirol, Abraham ibn Ezra and Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides or the Rambam).

T I M E L I N E

MICHAEL ALPERT

CHRISTIAN SPAIN

13th century There is rapid Christian conquest of Islamic Spain and attempts to limit the administrative role of Jews.

1263 Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman (Nahmanides or the Ramban) defends Judaism at Disputation of Barcelona.

1348 The Black Death unleashes attacks on Jews who are thought to be responsible for the epidemic.

June 1391 Violent attacks on Jewish communities. Many Jews accept Christianity.

1413-1414 Disputation of Tortosa between Jewish leaders and converts leads to general weakening of Jewish solidarity and mass conversion. However, many converts (New Christians) continue to practise Judaism secretly.

1449 Statute of Toledo marks the beginning of ‘Purity of Blood’ discrimination against Jewish converts to Christianity, reflecting suspicions that the latter still live as Jews.

1449-1474 Widespread rioting against New Christians.

1480 Isabel of Castile and Fernando of Aragon, joint monarchs, establish the Inquisition to investigate religious conduct of converts and their descendants..

6 February 1481 In Seville, the first Auto de Fe ceremony takes place in which heretics confess and are reconciled to the Church, or are burnt at the stake if impenitent .

1481- Intense inquisitorial activity.

31 March 1492 Edict of Expulsion of all unconverted Jews.

Summer 1492 Tens of thousands of Jews leave Spain for Portugal, North Africa, Italy and the Ottoman Empire. Many others accept Christian baptism.

2nd August 1492 Columbus sets sail in search of India with converts in his crew.

1580-1640 Inquisition takes energetic steps against secret Jews.

16th-17th centuries Spanish and Portuguese New Christians leave Iberian Peninsula for Bayonne, Bordeaux and Italy, and establish communities in Amsterdam, Hamburg, the Caribbean, New York and London.

THE END OF THE INQUISITION

1768 Last Auto de Fe with Jews in Spain.

1834 Spanish Inquisition is abolished.

J E W S R E T U R N T O S P A I N

1834-5 Lionel de Rothschild is invited to Madrid to organise Spanish finances.

1859-60 Spain reconnects with its exiled Jews in Morocco. A Jewish community established in Seville.

1865 Statutes of ‘Purity of Blood’ abolished.

1924 Spain allows Sephardim to acquire Spanish nationality.

1931 The Constitution of the Second Republic allows public practice of Judaism.

1936-75 The Franco regime impedes the practice of Judaism but slowly comes to tolerate it.

From late 1940s There is a wave of immigration of Moroccan Jews.

1967 Law of Religious Liberty allows the open practice of Judaism in Spain.

1970s/ 80s Jewish immigrants arrive from South America, mostly from Argentina, fleeing the oppressive regime and, later, economic hardship.

1992 King of Spain abrogates the Edict of Expulsion.

2008 There are an estimated 35,000 Jews living in Spain, about 20,000 affiliated to congregations.

Michael Alpert is Emeritus Professor of the Modern and Contemporary History of Spain, University of Westminster.

Previous page: **Sinagoga Córdoba**
A Hebrew inscription indicates 1350 as the date of the synagogue’s construction. The interior features exquisite Mudéjar stucco tracery of plant motifs. The women’s gallery still stands, and in the east wall is the ark where the sacred scrolls of the Pentateuch were kept. With the expulsion of the Jews it became a hospital and in 1588 a Catholic chapel. Today it is a museum.

Right: **Sinagoga del Tránsito in Toledo**
Founded around 1356 by Shmuel HaLevi Abulafia, member of a prominent Jewish family and treasurer and advisor to King Pedro I of Castile. It defied all the laws about synagogues being smaller and lower than churches, and plain of decoration.

Featuring Nasrid-style polychrome stucco-work and Hebrew inscriptions of the names of God, it is one of the best surviving examples of mudéjar architecture.

After the expulsion of the city’s Jews it was converted into a church and is now a Museum of Sephardi culture.

Photos: Courtesy Turespaña

The Golden Age

MARION NINA AMBER celebrates a period when "coexistence was a fact of life"

It could have been a warm spring day, the kind full of promise. It was seasonal for apricot trees to be in bloom, massing white flowers against a clear blue sky. Absorbing their lightness and perfume, one could almost have hoped the situation would improve.

But then, perhaps the wind picked up; flowers floated to the ground, dogs chased their tails, wild children ran...the wind blew down from the direction of the palace, high on the cliff. The message it carried could not have surprised, only stunned affected ears. "King Fernando and Queen Isabel, by the Grace of God...to the prince Lord Juan...and all good men,...and to the residential quarter of the Jews,...and to barons and women...Salutations and grace." The year was 1492.

The Edict of the Expulsion of Jews goes on. "Wicked Christians who Judaized" (new Christians who followed any Jewish practices) were blamed for maintaining contact with Jews. It was felt that contact made it easier to re-convert them. Jews had therefore been isolated into separate neighbourhoods.

But the Inquisition judged this didn't remedy the situation. Hence the Edict, which reads to its final solution. "Those who perturb the good and honest life of cities and towns by contagion can injure others...therefore we...resolve to order the said Jews and Jewesses of our kingdoms to depart and never to return..."

Jews who wished to convert were welcome to stay, although there were actually only about 50,000 Jews (Henry

Kamen, *The Disinherited*) who hadn't converted by 1492. But the Edict warns, 'conversos' aren't trustworthy. Actually, neither fleeing as Jews nor staying put as Christians were particularly viable choices.

There had probably been a Jewish presence on the Iberian Peninsula from Roman times. In 711, Jews had supported and accompanied the conquering Moors to this western frontier. A synthesis of Jews from different traditions and Arabs had forged a civilisation rich in scholarship, culture and commerce known as the Golden Age. Coexistence, or *convivencia*, was a fact of life for the multi-ethnic community.

Key to the melding of peoples during this period was the Jewish capacity to separate religion and culture. Religion was private; the Jewish public face was international. Jews functioned as the courtier class between the Muslim and Christian communities. Multilingual, they also translated for local consumption the classical philosophy that Arabs had carried west. Jewish thinkers also benefited. Ibn Gabirol wrote a Neo-Platonic work, *Mekor Hayyim*, The Source of Life, that was read in monasteries throughout the Middle Ages. Kabbalah, first put into written form in Spain, came to incorporate Neo-Platonic thinking as well.

As for Aristotelian thought, Maimonides, son of a Córdoba rabbi, wrote of faith and reason in his *Guide to the Perplexed*. Published in Arabic,



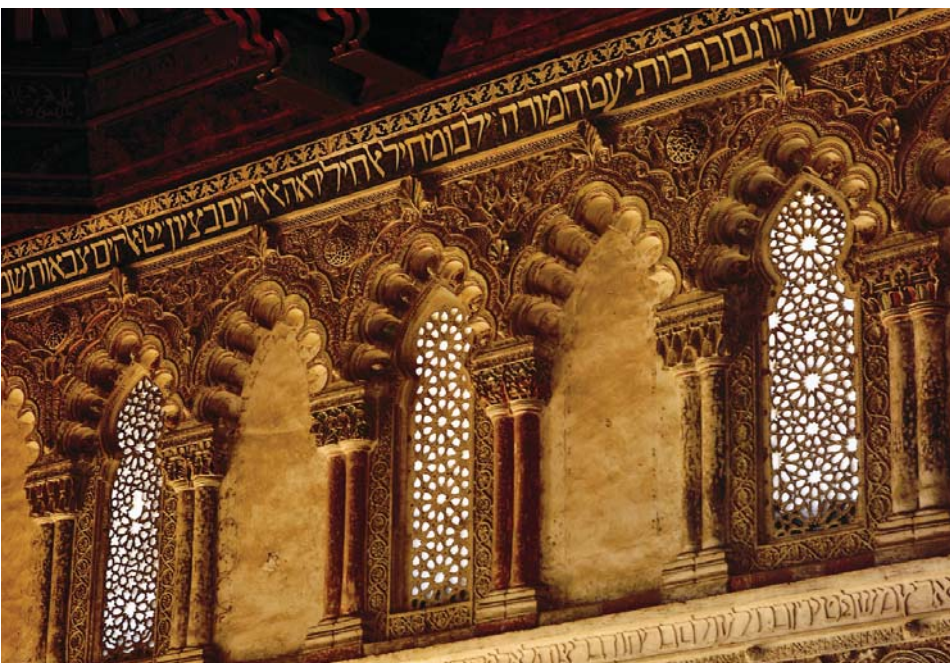
Statue of Maimonides in Córdoba
Photo: Courtesy Turespaña

translated into Hebrew and finally into Latin, it greatly influenced Christian and Jewish religious thinking. The philosophical and intellectual work done in Spain eventually supported the Renaissance in Italy.

The stage for this period was mostly in southern, subtropical Andalusia, specifically within the triangle of Córdoba, Seville and Granada. Economic prosperity was the Caliph's goal and Jews participated. They had vines and produced fine wines; they manufactured textiles, particularly silks, as well as being skilled at yarn dyeing and tanning leather. They made jewellery and weapons. They excelled as doctors, mathematicians and scientific researchers, while continuing as scholars, translators and court Jews. They were also international traders. Never before had Jews operated from such a broad base.

It was through speaking Arabic that Jews reconsidered the merits of Hebrew, remembered its past literary use and began to write Hebrew poetry. "Send a carrier pigeon/Though she cannot speak/With a tiny letter/Attached to her wings/Sweetened with saffron water..." (Nagrela).

Spain might have been far from the centre of the world, but there were lines of communication. Jewish poets were cognizant of crusader chaos in the Holy Land. "My heart is in the East and I in the



utmost West,/How can I find savour in food? How shall it be sweet to me?/How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet/Zion lieth beneath the fetters of Edom, and I in Arab chains?..." (Yehuda Halevi, tr. Nina Salaman).

And the Crusades were just one of the stressors; the pendulum swings. Time was running out for the Jews of Spain. "...like an Ethiopian woman in raiment of gold/And of blue inset with crystals./And the stars are confused in the heart of the sea/Like strangers driven out of their homes;...And the sea appeareth as a firmament—/They are two seas bound up together;/And between them is my heart, a third sea,/Lifting up ever anew my waves of praise." (Halevi, tr. Nina Salaman).

In the 11th century came the Fundamentalist Muslim Berber invasions, the sacking of Cordoba, followed in the 12th century by the conquest of southern Spain. The uneducated, uncultured invaders abhorred liberality and viewed the Andalusian Arab Muslims as weak. Thousands of Jews were killed, taken captive or forced to convert to Islam. The decimated Jewish community mostly fled north to Toledo and other cities in Christian Spain and southern France.

As the Christian Reconquista of Spain began, Jews served the courts, smoothing the way for their new leaders. The rich still flourished but in many towns, ghettos were established and baptism increased. In northern Spain, Jewish culture never reached the glory that it had in the south. And around 1400, many more Jews converted to escape violent antisemitic riots.

When the Expulsion came, it was in recognition of growing Jewish power rather than the stated reason that Jews were re-converting conversos. Thus the Edict comes to a close. "...And we likewise give licence and faculty to those said Jews and Jewesses that they be able to export their goods and estates out of these our said kingdoms and lordships by sea or land as long as they do not export gold or silver or coined money or other things prohibited...excepting merchandise and things that are not prohibited...Given in our city of Granada, the XXXI day of the month of March, the year of the birth of our lord Jesus Christ one thousand four hundred and ninety-two years. I, the King, I the Queen..."

Marion Nina Amber is a California-based painter, teacher and student of Spanish Kabbalah under London-based Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi.



From Golden Haggadah, Catalonia early 14th century, showing Miriam the prophetess

© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. Shelfmark 033161

Unlike the music of the European medieval Christian world, the music of medieval Jews and Muslims wasn't written down. But, while we don't know much about the music itself, we do know a fair amount about the role it played in medieval Iberian Jewish life. Jewish poetry and music were tied in many ways to the music of Muslim Al-Andalus and, later, to the music of the Iberian Christian world.

The 10th century Sephardi poet Dunash ibn Labrat adapted Hebrew poetry to Arabic poetry's quantitative metres and strophic forms with refrains. Besides major implications for composition, this meant that melodies could easily be sung by groups of people together and that they could be used interchangeably for poems of the same metre. Often Hebrew poems were sung to the melodies of secular Arabic songs, and later on songs in Romance languages. This practice of setting poems to pre-existing tunes, known as *contrafactum*, continues in Sephardi culture today.

Curiously, even as increasing importance was being given to the cantor's role and the beauty of his voice, some medieval Iberian Christians described synagogue singing as less than aesthetically satisfying. Some labeled it loud and disorderly; a frequent term for Jews and Conversos was *lamentadores*, referring to their use of the exclamation 'guay!' (woe). We don't know whether or to what extent these remarks may have reflected a perspective of denigrating or satirizing Jews.

Outside the synagogue, Hebrew

MUSIC AN

JUDITH COHEN

came to be used for secular as well as religious poetry. Learned poets often known as the 'rabbi courtiers' produced both secular, often quite earthy, poetry in Hebrew and Arabic, as well as religious poetry: Sometimes an ageing poet renounced secular genres and devoted himself to religious compositions. The work of the legendary poets of Sepharad such as Yehudah Halevy, Moshe ibn Ezra, and Shmuel ibn Nagrela ('Ha-Nagid'), remains timeless today.

Jewish musicians and poets were involved in non-Jewish settings as well. When the legendary ninth century musician Ziryab arrived in Al-Andalus, Jewish musicians were already associated with music at high levels, and their involvement continued in the Christian courts. There were Jewish troubadours, and an unusual collection of Judeo-Catalan wedding poems from the late 14th century offers quite practical advice to the newly-weds, incorporating Hebrew Biblical quotations into the Catalan verses.

Only three women poets are specifically known to us, though others may well have existed. The first, unnamed, is thought to have been the wife of the poet Dunash ibn Labrat. Her one surviving poem, in Hebrew, is unusual in that it speaks of both marriage and children. Toward the end of the medieval period, in the 15th century, Merecina of Gerona wrote religious poetry, in Hebrew, but we know almost nothing else about her. The Andalusian Qasmuna, who wrote in Arabic, is thought to have lived in 12th-century Granada and to have been the daughter of vizier and poet Shmuel ibn Nagrela. Apparently, when her father heard her poem about feeling like a garden ready for harvest with no gardener at hand, he married her off without delay.

Several names of Jewish minstrels, *juglares*, have also come down to us, including some women's names. Indeed, Jewish women's knowledge of local melodies is evident in rabbis' criticisms of their singing lullabies with Christian tunes. In the life cycle, besides lullabies

D POETRY

and wedding songs, women were central in singing for birth and death. Women sang and played hand drums during their night vigils with new mothers, on the seven nights before the circumcision; this custom was important enough to have been continued by some Conversas and, as the Moroccan Sephardi *hadas* or *fadas*, into the 20th century.

Women were professional mourners, even sometimes employed by Christians. In 14th century Saragossa a chief woman mourner is described as accompanying herself on a hand drum while other women lamented and clapped their hands, and in the 15th century Jewish women mourners intoned laments, in public, on the death of Alfonso V.

The importance of music in medieval Iberian Jewish life and in the lives of the Conversos continued in the diaspora, where Jewish musicians distinguished themselves, for example, at Ottoman courts. At the very moment of the Expulsion of 1492, a Spanish priest penned the observation that “the rabbis encouraged the women and boys to sing and to play frame drums to cheer people up, and so they left...”. And so indeed they left – but today they continue to sing, and, centuries later, to bring their music back to Sepharad.

Judith Cohen is a Toronto-based musician and ethno-musicologist specialising in Sephardic music and the role of women in medieval Jewish music. Her CD *Canciones de Sefarad* features some medieval settings. Madrid, Pneuma PN270.

Jewish harpist with chess players in *Book of Games* commissioned by King Alphonso X of Castile in 13th century



POET and GENERAL MENASHE TAHAN

Shmuel Halevy ben-Yoseph ibn Nagrela, called *HaNagid* (The Governor), was one of the most towering and colourful personalities in Jewish history. He was a grand vizier, military commander, and governor of the Jewish community, a distinguished Talmudist, Biblical scholar and grammarian, a patron of the arts and a great poet.

He was born in Córdoba in 993 but at the age of 20 he had to flee the city when it was devastated and pillaged by rebellious Berbers. Lonely and impoverished he reached Malaga where he opened a spice shop and also worked as a scribe.

Legend has it that he used to write letters for a female client who was the concubine of a vizier (minister) at the court of Granada. When reading the letters the vizier was so impressed by Shmuel’s literary style that he summoned him to the city.

In Granada he first served as a tax collector, then as vizier’s assistant, and later as vizier to King Habus. In 1027 he was also nominated Nagid, ie a governor of the Jewish community of Granada. Ten years later he was appointed chief vizier of King Badis, and commander of the kingdom’s army.

Over 18 years Nagrela served variously as field commander, minister of defence or chief of staff. In his capacity as grand vizier, he helped establish Granada as one of the most prosperous and powerful of the Andalusian mini-states. He continued to serve the Jewish and Muslim communities until his death in 1056.

Despite his achievements, HaNagid had numerous enemies within the kingdom impatiently calling for his downfall. There were also enemies elsewhere, like Ahmad ibn Abbas the vizier of the kingdom of Almeria. Ibn Abbas aggressively demanded from

Granada’s rulers the dismissal of the Jewish minister, stressing the sin of giving ‘that infidel’ a senior position over Muslims.

In August 1038 ibn Abbas unexpectedly appeared in Granada at the head of his powerful army, demanding the downfall of HaNagid. All efforts to dissuade him failed and Granada decided to repel his army. Its forces set an ambush in the mountains and the following day in a fierce battle defeated Almeria’s army, killed the king and captured and executed ibn Abbas. Granada, HaNagid and the Jewish community were saved.

In gratitude to God, HaNagid wrote an epic poem (*Eloha Oz*) recording the events and describing the horrific battle of Alfuentes. The following is a short freely translated extract :

The ground shook to its foundations
and crumbled like the city of Gomora
The horses rushed to and fro
Like vipers gushing from a den
The soaring lances resembled lightning
Filling the air with glow
The arrows fell like rain
The shields turned into sieves
The bows in their hands looked like serpents
Each spitting buzzing bees

tr: Menashe Tahan

Like our biblical heroes, King David and Debora, HaNagid wrote a poem about every battle and sent it from the field to be read in the synagogue. He was unique among Sepharad’s poets in including war as a theme of his poetry.

A prolific writer, he composed some 2,000 poems, which have been gathered in three major compilations: *Ben Tehillim*, *Ben Mishle* and *Ben Koheleth*. His poetry, filled with elegance, wisdom and originality, influenced generations of Jewish bards including modern Israeli poets, such as Yehuda Amichai.

Fortunately most of HaNagid’s poems, which had been lost for centuries, were found in 1924 in a crate of old manuscripts. The discovery caused exhilaration throughout the Jewish world. The national poet Chaim Nahman Bialik wrote: “A kind of light shines on the marvellous Prince, upon him, his period and the poets of his day. The man is unrivalled in our history.”

Dr Menashe Tahan is a polymer scientist with a special interest in Jewish history and the poetry of Sepharad.

INQUISITION

MICHAEL ALPERT

THE 'NEW CHRISTIANS'

In Christian Spain, whose territories expanded rapidly southward into Muslim Andalusia during the 13th century, the increasingly powerful middle class and nobles challenged the Jews, whose role had been to serve monarchs by organising finances, collecting taxes and running the administration. The Church, for its part, strove to convert the Jews. And so, despite the tendency of the monarchs to protect them, the Jewish population of Christian Spain was constantly under pressure to accept baptism.

In 1391, Jewish communities all over Spain were attacked and wrecked. The next 50 years saw the growth of a new and identifiable sector of the population: converted Jews and their descendants, known as 'New Christians'. As the generations passed, many of these intermarried with 'Old Christian' families but a significant number continued to practise Judaism in the intimacy of their families while outwardly complying with their obligations as Christians.

By the mid 15th century, some second or third generation converts were important in town administration, tax collection and even in the Church hierarchy but the hostility often directed against Jews was also suffered by the converts, especially at times of distress.

The crisis came to a head in 1449 in Toledo when it was laid down that no descendant of Jews could be a member of the cathedral clergy. This was the beginning of what was to be known as the 'Purity of Blood' (*Limpieza de Sangre*) rule, by which one had to prove pure Old Christian descent in order to achieve high posts.

Suspicion that New Christians were still practising Judaism became the pretext for riot, which led to civil wars. Therefore, in 1480, the joint monarchs, Fernando of Aragon and Isabel of Castile, set up an Inquisition, run by the Church, but tightly controlled by the State. Its task was to investigate the heresy of Judaizing – baptised Christians continuing Jewish practices.

The Inquisition was extremely violent in its early years, harshly punishing those whom it judged to be secret Jews and who did not accept the opportunity to make a full confession. The Inquisition saw Judaizers as heretics

who were endangering their eternal souls and its task as rescuing these souls by whatever means possible.

While statistics are not available for the early years of the Inquisition, in later years, probably about 10% of people charged with secret Judaism were burned at the stake. There were a few Jewish martyrs, who died proclaiming that Judaism was 'the faith in which they hoped to live and die'. Probably several tens of thousands of secret Jews had unpleasant dealings with the Inquisition during its 354 years of activity.

A suspect would be arrested, often during the night, separated at once from spouse and family so that they could not collude in their statements. Their property was sold to pay for their upkeep while in gaol. They were imprisoned in solitary cells, though not ill-treated. It was not in the interest of the Inquisition for them to fall ill or die, but to make a confession, implicate others, and then appear at the public Auto de Fe and admit their sin, plead for forgiveness and make due penitence.

WHAT WAS JUDAIZING

In hundreds of pages of testimony at the trials, where for months or even years prisoners were rigorously interrogated, we learn about the limited Jewish practices of the New Christians as late as seven or eight generations after their ancestors had converted.

Usually the prisoners denied that they were anything but sincere Christians. Some of them were, but thought they could be Jews at the same time. Others had family traditions which told them that 'the Law of Moses' had not been annulled by that of Jesus, as Catholic doctrine said. Revealing that they were "observers of the Law of Moses", as the Inquisition called them, (the Inquisition never used the word 'Marranos', meaning 'pigs' paradoxically employed by Jewish historians) in secret meetings with other New Christian Judaizers and the practice of seeking marriage partners among people like themselves was seen by the Inquisition as proof of Judaizing.

Over the centuries and with the experience of thousands of confessions, carefully counterchecked, the Inquisition grew to learn exactly what secret Judaism

was. Although few male babies were circumcised because of the risk of discovery, Judaizers tried to keep Jewish law on sabbath and festivals and in diet. Most importantly, they sought marriage partners from other 'observant' families.

REFUGEES FROM THE INQUISITION

One of the conditions for release of a prisoner who had confessed, appeared as a penitent at the great ceremonial Auto de Fe, suffered public humiliation and imprisonment, was not to approach a port or a frontier. The suspicion was that the Judaizers might try to emigrate to somewhere where they could practise their religion in freedom. This indeed is the origin of communities of Spanish and Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam, and London, and those of the West Indies and New York.

MAKING A JUDGMENT

It's not easy to judge the Inquisition. Other countries have had restrictions on the practice of religions other than the official one, but only under the Inquisition were ordinary people treated harshly for the absolutely private practice of their religion.

The worst aspects were not so much burning at the stake – for capital punishment was frequent enough everywhere – or torture – for judicial torture was widespread and employed with fewer safeguards than by the Inquisition. Rather they were the psychological torture of arrest, solitary imprisonment and the destruction of the inner strength and even the personality of the victim. The use of confessions of spouses, siblings and children broke up families and imposed a culture in which even silent dissidence was forbidden.

Michael Alpert is author of *Secret Judaism and the Spanish Inquisition*, Fiveleaves, 2008, pb, 260pp £14.99



BLANCA RAMIREZ

At Blanca Ramirez's 1523 trial in Toledo Blanca's maid, Ana Diaz, reported how the converso Ramirez family used to dress up on Friday nights before going to the synagogue, where they washed their hands at the door and lit candles. They contributed money for the Jewish poor. The Ramirez family kept as kosher a kitchen as possible, instructing their maids to "remove the fat and the vein from the leg of lamb, and to soak it three times in salt water." When Blanca baked she always threw a few bits of dough into the fire, telling her maid that "the smoke that rose from those pieces ascended to heaven..." On the day before Yom Kippur, Blanca washed herself in the mikvah with the Jewish women and then gathered with her family for a meal of olives and unleavened bread, followed by meat. On Sukkot, the converso women put on their finest clothes and went to visit the booths of the Jews.

A servant named Mana, who worked for Blanca's mother-in-law, contributed an extraordinarily detailed recipe for Sabbath stew (See *A Taste of Spain* page 55).

From *A Drizzle of Honey*, p.155

MARIA AND MARTIN GARDA

After their conversion Maria and Martin Garda continued to live in the same house in the old aljama of Almazan in which they had lived when they were Jews. In the early 1500s Maria's neighbours were critical of how she flaunted the Lenten dietary proscriptions against meat, for they reported that even though Maria was not ill, several times she had eaten fowl, or eggs, and once had eaten some pastries mixed with beef broth. One of the family maids, however, tried to excuse her mistress by saying that Maria ate meat during Lent because she was pregnant. She also said that Maria used to clean her shoes with the lumps of fat which she scraped from the joints of meat she was preparing. Another family servant, herself a convert, but from Islam, remarked how Martin was fussy about his food. He would not eat anything made with salt pork and demanded that his meat be stewed in his own special pot.

Maria and Martin evidently preserved a number of other Jewish customs. Their maid, Catalina, reported that every night before going to bed her master did something extremely odd: he washed his face and hands. Sometimes he would try to justify himself to Catalina: "It's good for a person to wash his hands and face so that he will be clean before saying his prayers". She also complained that she never saw him making the sign of the cross when he got up, or when he went to bed, or when he blessed the table.

From *A Drizzle of Honey*, p. 134

CONVERSOS ON TRIAL

ISABEL NÚÑEZ

In 1621, 129 years after the expulsion of the Jews, 38-year-old Isabel Núñez, the widow of Francisco Paulo, was arrested after having been denounced as a Judaizer in Ciudad Rodrigo by one of her deceased husband's bastard teenage sons. The boy accused Isabel of a host of Sabbath observances: cleaning her home thoroughly on Friday, sweeping the floor from the outside in, putting clean sheets on her bed, and lighting Sabbath candles with the words "Lord Adonay, bring me luck; Lord Adonay, free me from my enemies ..." He said she and his father called the holy images "idols", and when they were reading religious books and came to the name Jesus, they ripped out the page and threw it away. In church they avoided pronouncing the name Jesus by substituting the name Cristobal Sanchez and she made fun of the Eucharist and spit it out after the priest had given it to her. He reported that Isabel and her family were well aware of the risks of employing old-Christian servants, because they threatened them that if they ever spoke of anything they had witnessed in the house, Isabel would sew their mouths shut.

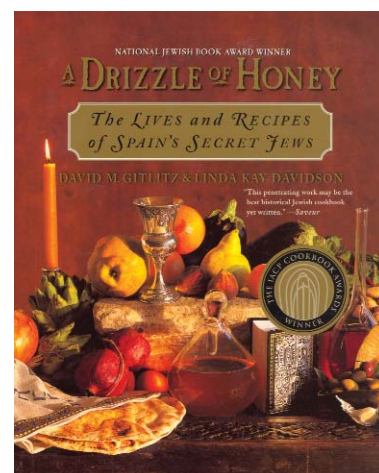
The boy said that Isabel was committed to Jewish cooking and that she koshered her meat by salting and soaking it. The boy added that she could not stand the taste, sight or even the smell of salt pork. On Passover she baked her own matzah and they broke their Yom Kippur fast with the Sabbath recipe of fish and chickpea broth.

In repeated testimony, sometimes under torture, Isabel denied all charges, protesting that she could not be a crypto-Jew because she frequently ate pork. Her lawyer called 54 character witnesses in her behalf, despite the fact that many of these were conversos and therefore automatically suspect. Even though their chief witness had been very specific about Isabel's Judaizing customs, the inquisitors decided that they did not have enough evidence to convict her. So, after two and a half years of incarceration, she was set free.

From *A Drizzle of Honey*, p. 91

DAVID M GITLITZ and LINDA KAY DAVIDSON, a husband and wife team, both professors at the University of Rhode Island, have each written several books on Spanish culture. In two decades of reading Inquisition testimonies they found 90 references to Jewish cooking and they used these to create a wonderful cookery book, *A Drizzle of Honey*. On our Food page (p 55) we give one of the recipes which are all based on ingredients specified by witnesses. Each recipe is preceded by a story on the lines of those above. This book is a treasure trove for those whose interests encompass cooking and history. See page 54 for more about the cooking practices of medieval Spain in general and its Jewish inhabitants in particular.

A DRIZZLE OF HONEY, DAVID GITLITZ AND LINDA DAVIDSON, St Martin's Griffin, 1999, pb, 332pp, £11.17 Extracts above and on page 54/55 copyright ©1999 by the authors and reprinted by permission of St Martin's Press, LLC



Catholic and Jewish

MYRNA KATZ FROMMER AND HARVEY FROMMER
visited Mallorca in the 1990s and discovered a
community with an unbroken link to Spain's
Jewish past

George Sand's *Winter in Mallorca* describes the time she spent on the island with her lover, Frederic Chopin. It has references, all unflattering, to Mallorcan Jews. She comments disparagingly on their dress, remarks on their ostentatiousness, faults them for manipulative bargaining to buy the valuable possessions of the impoverished aristocracy. The references are puzzling. Were there Jews in Mallorca in the middle of the 19th century? Kenneth Moore's *Those of the Street* (1976) answers the question. Sand was referring to descendants of Mallorcan Jews, commonly known as the *Xuetas* (pig eaters).

We visited Palma, the capital of Mallorca, in the 1990s. On our first day in the city we noticed in the window of a women's clothing store a pair of stone slabs with Hebrew lettering – the Ten Commandments. Inside a woman was reading the *Daily Bulletin*, the newspaper which serves Mallorca's sizable community of British transplants. "I'm Jewish," she told us when we asked about the slabs. She went on to relate how she is part of the Mallorcan Jewish community begun in the 1940s by Ashkenazi refugees who found sanctuary on the island. The burgeoning post-war resort economy spurred its growth, and today it is a growing international group with its own synagogue and cemetery.

"But," she added, "ask any native Mallorcan where the Jewish section of Palma is and they will direct you to the old section of town. Go to the Calle de Plateria (Street of Silver Shops) and see if you can meet a Xueta. Everyone still thinks of them as Jews."

Later we asked our guide Bernardo to show us the Calle de Plateria and told him we'd like to meet some Xuetas.

He seemed nonplussed. "Xuetas? I don't know what that means." But he drove us to the Gothic section and down the Calle de Plateria – a narrow by-way lined with small jewellery stores.

After a while Bernardo warmed up a bit and confessed that he did know a Xueta, a young woman who works for



Calle de Plateria (Carre de l'Argentaria) Photo: Nicky Black

Mallorcan television. He said he would call her and arrange a meeting.

We stopped for lunch. Bernardo had several glasses of wine. Then he turned confidential. "You know, my wife's sister is married to a Xueta," he said. "And at the wedding, my father-in-law said he would rather be at the cemetery than the church." Then Bernardo fell silent. The meeting with the television personality never came off.

That night, we walked down to the Calle de Plateria where storekeepers were standing in the doorways of their small jewellery shops. We stopped at one and asked the pleasant-looking man in front of it if this was the Jewish section of town. "We are not Jewish," he said. "The people in this neighbourhood are descended from Jews, but we are Catholic. There is our church, St Eulalia," he said, pointing to a large edifice at the corner of the street. "We have a Jewish history, and I suppose it is interesting, but it is from long ago."

He invited us into his shop and introduced himself, Joan Bonnin, and his son, a young man in his early 20s,

also Joan Bonnin. We began talking about the profusion of jewellery shops on the street, and the son said, "These shops have always been owned by the Jewish families."

Here lies the paradox of Mallorca, its oxymoron: Jews who are not Jews; Catholic Jews. These are people who follow no Jewish rituals, observe no Mosaic law, yet are still perceived as Jews – even by themselves.

Bonnin, it turns out, is one of 15 surnames that specifically identify the descendants of Mallorca's Jews who did not convert until late in the 17th century. The Inquisition ran out of steam here early in the 16th century, and its Jews were able to make their accommodations with the larger culture while secretly continuing to practise their faith with the tacit knowledge and consent of the rest of the population.

The fact that Mallorca was an island, isolated and cut off from the Iberian mainland, enabled its Jews to avoid conversion for 200 years after the Expulsion Edict until an Italian-Jewish trader carelessly alluded to their presence. Then the Inquisition finally came to Mallorca with a vengeance, breaking the will of the last holdout, forcing all to abandon their faith.

But the irony was that although the Jews sincerely converted at this point, the Old Christians did not allow them to assimilate into the larger society. And so they remained a sub-culture, cut off from social interaction and inter-marriage with the rest, sustained by generations of intra-marriage and powerful ties of kinship.

"When they call us Jews, it's not meant as a compliment," the younger Bonnin says. "But we are proud of our accomplishments. Our children do well in school. We are successful in business. And we take care of one another. They call us Jews, yes. But also People of the Street because so many of us live on this street with the jewellery shops."

"How about Xuetas?" we ask.

"That too," he says with some embarrassment. "It means bacon-eaters, and it comes from the time of conversion when our forefathers used to eat bacon in the doorways of their shops to prove they had really converted."

These are the Jews George Sand refers to and the ones Ann Maria Matutue speaks of in her novel of the Spanish Civil War years, *School of the Sun*. In the 1940s, Nazi sympathizers included the Xuetas in their antisemitic proclamations. And to this day, the church St Eulalia is

still derisively called the ‘Synagogue of the Xuetas’.

But things began to change dramatically after the Second World War when massive tourism shattered the provincialism that had sustained the status quo. Visitors from the Spanish peninsula saw no difference between the Xuetas and other Mallorcans. The common expression became that all Mallorcans are Jews. To which the Mallorcans began to reply, “Maybe we are”.

Under these changed circumstances the Xueta phenomenon became Mallorca’s shameful little secret, best kept within the family. The situation is rife with irony. All over Spain, people are curious to discover whether they have Jewish roots. In Mallorca, there is no doubt. The descendants of Jews know exactly who they are but there is very

little movement to re-assert Jewish identity.

Joan Bonnin Senior told us the Xueta community is very interested in Israel. They follow all the news; they were enthusiastic after the 1967 victories. But he will go no further. “As far as our becoming Jewish again, it is from too long ago. The possibility no longer interests us”.

Joan Bonnin Junior, however, is fascinated by his Jewish heritage. “I don’t know much about it except for the stories in the Bible. But I want to learn. I pay attention to the news from Israel. I read about the Holocaust. I have seen *Schindler’s List*.”

Then he adds: “My heart is Jewish. My blood is Jewish. But my religion is Catholic.”

A few years ago, this young man

married a non-Xueta. Only in this post-war generation has that begun to happen. “I am typical of my generation,” Bonnin junior said. “Many of us are intermarrying. It doesn’t matter any more. Also, we are moving out of this old neighborhood to the new sections of Mallorca.”

“It is a good thing,” he adds. “I am glad the old divisions are disappearing. But I do want to hold on to what I am and where I came from. I’d like my baby son to know something of my history.”

It is clear that their eventful story is about to end. No longer apart, they stand on the cusp of history, about to move out into the larger population – and oblivion.

Drs Myrna Katz Frommer and Harvey Frommer are US-based historians and writers.

JEWS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

ROSS BRADSHAW

There is that old joke – if one Jew does something there is a major feature in the *Jewish Chronicle*, two Jews and antisemites show an interest, three Jews and a range of competing books come out on the subject.

That is not the case with Jews in the Spanish Civil War, volunteers for the anti-Franco Republican side. There have been thousands of books in English on the Civil War, which ran from 1936-1939, yet barely a mention of the Jewish presence. And there were a lot more than three Jews... of the 45,000 or so volunteers from 55 countries who fought in the International Brigade at least 7,000 and probably 10,000 were Jewish. Of the 2,000 volunteers from the UK at least 200 were Jewish. Of these, between 40 and 50 were killed.

Exact numbers, however, are difficult as names alone do not always reveal the ethnicity of the person. And many travelled to Spain illegally, or under false names.

What we do know is that the first and last casualties from the Brigade were Jewish, and that from Poland about half of the Brigadiers were Jews – including the Yiddish-speaking Botwin Company, from Romania virtually all, and from Palestine came some 300-500 members of the Palestine Communist Party. They joined members of Hapoel who were



From left to right: Sid Avner, Nat Cohen (leader of the group), Ramona (who later married Cohen), Tom Wintringham, Georgio Tioli , Jack Barry and David Marshall. Photo courtesy of The International Brigade Memorial Trust

already in Spain for the Worker’s Olympiad. Jewish numbers were particularly high in the American Abraham Lincoln Brigade and in the medical services, with Yiddish being the lingua franca among surgeons and nurses.

Who were these internationalist Jews? Here are few examples. London Jews Sam Masters and Nat Cohen, cycling in France, headed across the border to volunteer for the Republic, even before the International Brigade was formed. Lionel Jacobs’ father was a founder member of the British Communist Party, whose brother Juli Jacobs was founder of the Jewish People’s Council. Lionel had fought the fascists on the streets of London, and saw the Spanish War as a continuation of that



Abe Osheroff



Manfred Stern

fight. A tailor, Jacobs was captured and in prison made clothes from rags for other inmates. After the war he became a leading trade unionist in Nottingham. Just before his death, in the Nottingham Jewish old people's home, he remarked "I would do the same again. You have to do what your conscience dictates." His last word to me was "Salud!", the Republican greeting, given with the clenched fist salute.

Some of the Jewish volunteers played down their Jewishness. Not so Brigadier Maurice Levine, a cutter in the clothing trade, one of eleven children from Cheetham Hill in Manchester. In his autobiography, *Cheetham Hill to Cordoba*, he described his attendance at the Kovno shtiebl in Manchester, being active in the Jewish Lads Brigade, and being sacked from a job for punching out an antisemite.

Nor did American Abe Osheroff play down his Jewishness. He began his political activism in the Great Depression, once being caught and beaten by the police who called him a "dirty, communist Jew bastard". Osheroff remarked later "all of which was true, except for the bastard part". Like most of the volunteers Osheroff continued his active life on the left after the Spanish War, volunteering to fight in WW2, working for civil rights in Mississippi in the 1960s (where his car was blown up), working in Nicaragua in the 1980s, and, from 2003 against the war in Iraq.

Some volunteers were very much aware of the history of Jews in Spain. Moris Kornblum certainly knew that Converso stone masons carved stars of David on cathedrals they were working on: "As a kind of resistance. To say that they had been there, that they had lived in Spain. That this is Jewish history." Osheroff, again: "I came to Spain to fight for a country that in 1492 barbecued my people." He felt that "history would be a very different beast if the Spanish Jews hadn't been expelled in the first place."

Others go further back into Jewish history. Wilfred (Mendy) Mendelson, writing to his father on June 22, 1938: "Today Jews are returning welcomed by the entire Spanish people to fight the modern Inquisition, and in many cases the direct descendants of the ancient persecution... Yes, Pop, I am sure we are fighting in the best Maccabean tradition." Mendy was killed one month later.

Jews were active worldwide in Aid to Spain campaigns. Henry Suss, who died only recently, described how 60-70% of Manchester Jewish households gave every weekend for two years. His father, a minor official in a local shul, gave 10% of his meagre pension during that period. Suss was another activist in the tailoring unions. There are photos of him still demonstrating, against the war in Iraq, in his wheelchair. The London Arbeiter Ring/Workmen's Circle sent a two ton truck to Spain and sent 1,000s of cigarettes to the Jewish Botwin Company. Jacob Epstein was one of many Jewish artists who donated work for art sales for Spain; the anarchist Emma Goldman organised a tour of Spanish artists.

Meanwhile Sidney Silverman took legal action to prevent shipments of nitrates from Britain to the fascist forces. Other Jewish figures involved included the Hungarian war photographer Robert Capa.

Time after time Jewish activists remarked how they saw Spain as the front line against fascism. After all, Hitler and Mussolini both supported Franco with weapons and troops. The Francoist General de Llano, in a radio broadcast in October 1936, said: "Our war is not a Spanish Civil War, it is a war of Western civilisation against the Jews of the entire world." The fascist press referred to "Jews, Freemasons and Marxists" who must be wiped out, and in Tangier the Phalangists (supporters of Franco) put up notices encouraging Muslims to "declare war against Jews and communism."

The Zionist movement was less forthcoming. Though Hashomer raised a little money for POUM (George Orwell's group) and Histadrut made supportive noises, Ha'aretz, on 24th December 1937, denounced American Jews for fighting in Spain rather than coming to Palestine to work. The late Teddy Kolleck, never famed as a left-winger, on the other hand said more "The question is not why they went, but rather why we didn't go as well..."

It would be a mistake to eulogise all the Jews who went to Spain. Some Russian Jews played a nasty role in the suppression of POUM and the anarchists. Many of them, and other Russian Brigade members were killed by Stalin's purges. These included Yaakov Shmushkevitch, who organised the Republic's air force; Marcel Rosenberg, the Russian ambassador, and Manfred Stern, commander of the International Brigade on the Madrid front. Stern was accused of Zionism and Jewish nationalism, and died in Siberia.

The Republic of course was defeated. Thousands of Catalans and Republicans fled across the border to France. Many later joined the French resistance. Others were interned and died in concentration camps. Republicans were also deployed as slave labourers on Jersey, building underground facilities. Meanwhile, Franco's Blue Division fought on the side of the Nazis on the Russian front.

Though there is plenty evidence of antisemitism on Franco's side, thousands of Sephardim were able to claim Spanish passports and escape the Nazis.

Could something similar happen again? Post-war, Jewish ex-servicemen formed the 43 Group to fight British fascists, but, disregarding the nature of the opposition, the nearest equivalent to Spain has been the volunteer support for Israel's wars in 1948 and 1967. But the crucial difference is that in Spain the Jewish volunteers were fighting for a country with which they had no direct connection, though the link was clear enough and was expressed equally clearly on the banner of the Botwin Company, in Polish, Yiddish and English – "For your freedom, and ours".

A longer/version of this article first appeared in *Manna*: the forum for Progressive Judaism.

Ross Bradshaw runs Five Leaves Publications
www.fiveleaves.co.uk

Whose heritage?

Jewish heritage is now a major industry in Spain. Cities have cooperated to form a network of Jewish quarters – Caminos de Sefarad – conservation is taking place and many festivals and lectures are held, often without any Jewish participation and sometimes with doubtful authenticity. JANET LEVIN talks to Barcelona’s DOMINIQUE TOMASOV BLINDER, who is determined that the Jewish voice should be heard.

“I want to give a Jewish voice to the explanation of the Jewish past – and to connect it with the Jewish present. Many in Spain cannot see any connection. We are considered a species separate from our history. The authorities are not keen to talk to us. They say: “It is our history,

They say “It is our history, not yours”

not yours. It has nothing to do with religion”. This is partly because many of us are Ashkenazi and they don’t understand that Judaism is much more than religion.”

Dominique Tomasov Blinder, grandchild of Belarussian and Ukranian Jews who emigrated to Argentina, was born in New York and brought up in Buenos Aires. An architect by profession, she has lived in Barcelona for 17 years. She joined a group of families that were founding the city’s Liberal congregation ATID and in the last nine years she has become a passionate advocate of the preservation of Jewish heritage – but from a Jewish point of view.

Dominique told me that a campaign she had mounted with Israeli architect David Stoleru had born fruit. A medieval Jewish cemetery in the town was to have had a public toilet built over it. “It is

hidden from view but there are bones still there.” There were petitions and much pressure from the newly created Heritage Commission of the Jewish Communities of Catalonia, representing the three communities in Barcelona: Orthodox, Liberal and Chabad. Finally the Catalonian government agreed that the site should have the status of a landmark.

Dominique and David created the Zakhor Study Centre for the Protection and Transmission of Jewish Heritage earlier this year, with an office in the heart of the the old Jewish quarter. It also has funding from the Rothschild Foundation Europe to research the limits of the cemetery by study of local archives, and plans to publish a book on Jewish funerary customs. ““We have to explain that it is not acceptable for those laid to rest in a Jewish cemetery to be disturbed or removed, or for their bones to be unceremoniously dug up.” Now she and David Stoleru are advising on what form the memorial should take.

“Isn’t it strange,” I asked Dominique, “that it is Ashkenazi Jews that are at the forefront of such a campaign?”

“The Jews who came here before the 70s were mainly Orthodox from Turkey, Greece and North Africa. They kept a low profile, mostly determined by the local political context. Also,



monuments are not a first priority when you are shaping up a community. With South American immigration came along Liberal Judaism which had developed in those countries. We are keen to confront the outside world from a standpoint of Jewish identity.”

It was not until she came to Barcelona and got involved in community life that Dominique reconnected with her Jewish roots. Now she conducts tours of Jewish Barcelona and maintains the website: www.jewishspain.info which has information on all of Jewish Spain for residents and visitors.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BATTLES

The activities of Barcelona’s Jewish Heritage Commission have generated a debate in the Catalan press.

In May 2007, an ancient Jewish cemetery was discovered in Tárrega, a small town west of Barcelona. The authorities decided to excavate the site and had planned to send the human remains for tests at the laboratories at the University of Barcelona.

The Jewish Heritage Commission approached the authorities and explained the Jewish tradition that made this unacceptable. They succeeded in persuading the authorities to rebury the

exhumed bodies in the Jewish cemetery of Barcelona.

This resulted in a manifesto from three archaeological associations deploring that respect for a religious tradition had impeded scientific research.

When this appeared in the press, letters from the public unanimously supported the Jewish community’s position. Dominique repeated to me the comment of a workman on the site: “I may only be a tractor driver but I am far from being simple and I read a lot about Jewish culture. By seeing the way you handled these dead yesterday, I

was able to understand how you survived until today, regardless what you were subject to during all history.”

Said Dominique: “Unfortunately exhumation continued at Tárrega and we still are pressing for the remaining bodies to be reburied. There is still a lot to do. We have to work through Zakhor to create the legal framework to prevent excavations of Jewish cemeteries, anywhere in Spain.”



Tárrega Jewish cemetery



Photo: Lyn Julius

THE TALE OF ONE CITY

LYN JULIUS VISITS VALENCIA

Look for evidence of Valencia's wealthy and influential Jewish past and you will be disappointed. There is nothing in the city museum to suggest that the Jews lived here for 14 centuries. Not a street, square or synagogue. Nada. This is a city so busy building the future, it seems to ride roughshod over the past.

Several Jewish scholars lived and died in Valencia. Shlomo ibn Gabirol passed his final years near Valencia. Gabirol wrote 20 books and composed over 300 poems, one of the most famous of which is Adon Olam. In medieval

times, the Jewish population was perhaps 8% of a total of 50,000. The Jews and Muslims were close; according to Alba Toscano, our tour guide, there were conversions in both directions. When James I of Aragon ended 400 years of Moorish rule by making his entry into the city on 9 October 1238, the Jews went out to meet him with their rabbis and delegates at their head, and presented him with a scroll of the Law in homage.

As a reward for important services rendered in the conquest of the fortified city, he presented to some of the Jews houses belonging to the Moors, as well as land in the city and its precincts. Among those rewarded by the king was Abraham ibn Vives, probably the father of the wealthy Joseph ibn Vives who in 1271 held a lease of the salt-works of Valencia, and who was probably the ancestor of Juan Luis Vives. (see box). Presents were also received by the gold-workers, merchants, and money-changers. James offered the Jews tax inducements and free land to settle in all the ports and cities of reconquered Christian Spain.

King James I invited 60-odd families from Barcelona to come to build up the economic potential of Valencia. To sweeten the offer he gave the Jews one of the nicest parts of town and the franchise over salt. During the reigns of his son and grandson, James II and James III, most trades and many professions were closed off to the Jews. Some worked as import-export merchants. Others were embroiderers and cobblers or acted as agents or accountants for religious orders such as the Hospitaliers and Templars, military monks, who had established businesses in the Middle East during the Crusades.

In 1969-70 about one third of the Jewish cemetery was dug up to make way for underground parking. Stones, bones and all layers of history unearthed, whether Arab, Christian or Jewish, were unceremoniously dumped in Valencia's port as a foundation for the Great Wharf.

In 1994-5 a careful archeological study was made of a section of the cemetery found when yet another underground park was constructed. One romantic curiosity was a young couple found as they had been buried, in a trapezoidal grave. The girl lay atop the boy, her arms draped over his, her legs crossed between his, her head resting on his shoulder. Who were this Romeo and Juliet? We shall never know but this time the remains of approximately 200 graves were eventually reburied in the modern Jewish cemetery in Barcelona.

Assigned a spacious residential quarter by King James, the Valencian Jews aroused envy through their wealth and luxurious lifestyle. In 1370 people complained loudly that the Jews had built houses outside the Juderia, although the Jews protested that they had the consent of the king. At this time there was a concerted effort throughout Europe to convert all Muslims and Jews living under Christian rule in an effort to push back the double Islamic threat on the Holy Roman Empire coming from both Northern Africa and Turkey. This precipitated the pogroms of the summer of 1391.

An angry mob, screaming for the Jews to be baptised, attacked the Jewish quarter of Valencia. On the black day of 9 July 1391, the mob massacred 260 individuals. The majority of those still standing were baptised in the cathedral.



PHILOSOPHER AND EDUCATOR

Valencia does commemorate one Jew, who, ironically, spent most of his life outside Spain.

A renowned philosopher, Juan Luis Vives, grandson of Jews who had converted to Christianity, was born in

1492 – the fateful year of the expulsion of the Jews by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel. In 1880 the university erected a bronze statue of Vives. In his writings, Vives recalls the alleys and squares of his home town, the market, the inns, the school, the university. His aunt, who had converted but continued to practise Judaism, cheated her pursuers by dying a few years earlier. Her remains were disinterred and tossed into the fires of the Inquisition.

Even to a converted Christian family, there was always the threat of danger and Vives himself fled from country to country to escape the Inquisition, finally settling in Bruges. He presented a treatise on the education of women to Queen Catherine of Aragon, with a view on how she should bring up her daughter Mary Tudor.

The New Christians came back to their former synagogue now converted into a church, the Fraternity of Saint Christopher. Those few who were not converted eventually moved to Sagunto, a town 12 miles north of Valencia which became the new centre of Jewish life in the Valencia area.

The writing, however, was on the wall. Over the next 100 years, there was

a constant exodus out of Spain and a century later on 31 March 1492, Isabel and Ferdinand gave the remaining Jews in Spain the choice of converting or emigrating.

The inexorable march of commercialism, modernity and city planning eventually took its toll. The church for the New Christians became the Monastery of San Cristobal and

slowly fell into ruin. The well, the only surviving remnant of the synagogue, was transported to the other side of the River Turia to the new monastery of San Cristobal around 1910 where the monks of a dying order to this day celebrate the 9 July as the happy day of the founding of the Church of San Cristobal in Valencia.

No ordinary Valencian ALBA TOSCANO

his evening, Alba Toscano is 'happy as jam-filled doughnuts and plum pudding' to show us around Valencia. Alba did not say she was 'happy as churros con chocolate or turrón con piñones' – for Alba is no ordinary Valencian but a Canadian who came to Valencia 19 years ago as a post-doctorate fellow in agriculture and as she puts it "...forgot to go home".

Neither is Alba, her hair primly pinned up, attired in tartan stockings and breeches, your average city guide but the Harry Potter-loving president of La Javurá, Valencia's 11-year old Conservative (Masorti) synagogue in a town that can't boast of more than 400 permanent Jewish residents most of whom are not, nor want to be, affiliated to a Jewish organisation. Nevertheless, Alba gives tours of Jewish Valencia, along with organising Hebrew classes, introductory courses to Judaism, cooking and chazanut.

From five her community has grown to 47. La Javurá (Hebrew for 'the group of friends') germinated in the city's Botanic Gardens on Tu B'Shvat, 1997. That day the founding members of La Javurá paused before each fruit tree to eat the fruit thereof. They planted a maple tree. They read poems and stories from an anthology for Tu B'Shvat. They drank four types of wine. Alba ended up under the table.

By settling in Valencia, Alba was, in a sense, returning to her own roots. Her Canadian mother was French Sephardi probably descended from Jews expelled from Barcelona. Her father was Italian. When Alba first arrived in Valencia, she joined the only synagogue in town, the Orthodox Sephardi Synagogue, whose 35-strong congregation comes mainly from Morocco. However, Alba was searching for a more modern structure that would allow her to play an active part so she

founded a congregation herself.

La Javurá has members from Canada, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Venezuela, Mexico, Italy and France. Most have Spanish spouses. La Javurá has no school, no synagogue building, no rabbi, but with modern technology, rabbis and chazans can participate in the La Javurá activities and vice-versa. Alba takes chazanut classes with the chazan of Belsize Square Synagogue in London via Skype.

Plants threaten to overrun La Javurá's focal point, Alba's kitchen. In the window of a bedroom of her apartment, which has been converted into the synagogue with a sefer torah, aron hakodesh and ner tamid, there are flowering pomegranate bushes in three huge flower pots in the window. Whether there is a minyan or not, Kabbalat Shabbat is celebrated in the converted bedroom synagogue and sometimes, on special occasions, at other La Javurá homes. Transient businessmen and tourists pop in, usually unannounced.

Every year, wrapped in her tallit and wearing a kippah, in a lounge at a local hotel, Alba conducts the Yom Kippur service in Spanish, a language she now speaks like a native. The high holiday services have drawn as many as 50 people from all over the world.

They're showing a documentary on Spanish TV tonight. It's about the Jews, who as conversos dominated cultural and intellectual life in Spain. It's about their modern communities and it's about the *Bnei Anusim* – or 'Coerced Ones'. Spain has witnessed a resurgence of interest in Judaism. The descendants of converso Jews are looking for their Jewish roots. A few are converting back to Judaism, from which they feel their ancestors were so cruelly cut off.

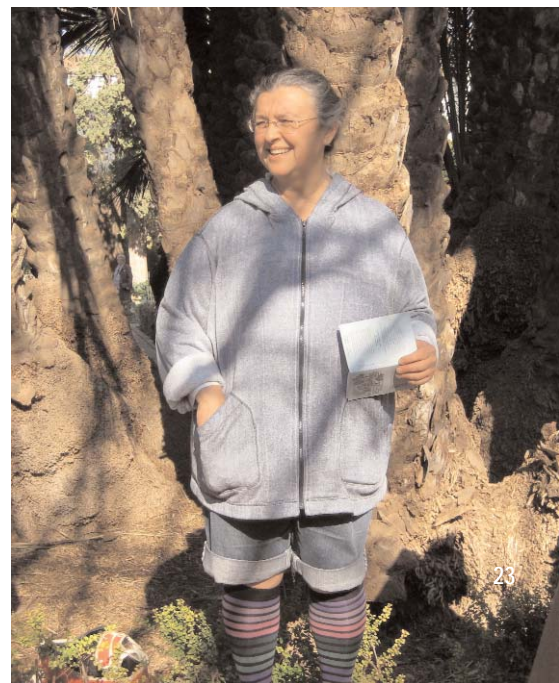
"Not another one," scoffs Alba

Toscano. "They show these documentaries every six months!" It has been said that the history of the Jews is the history of all Spain, and Spain's history is the history of the Jews. As many as 50% of Spaniards living in Catalonia, the province to the north of Valencia, may have Jewish ancestry.

But Alba gives the Bnei Anusim short shrift. "It's sort of trendy to say you have Jewish roots. Those who remained in Spain after the Inquisition chose to convert to Catholicism. Fifteen generations have passed," she explains. "They might just as well identify with the Christians in their ancestry as with the Jews! People should want to be Jewish because of what they feel inside."

This Tu B'Shvat, La Javurá members met in the Botanic Gardens for the 12th year running. They tasted the seven species of fruit. They danced and sang and read poetry. The maple tree, 'strong, and loved by those who planted it', had grown a little stronger – like Jewish life in Spain.

Lyn Julius is a journalist.





On the Costa del Sol



from being vice-president of Marbella’s Jewish community.

Maurice was born in Dublin to a medical family and “forgot to tell them” when he decided to leave school at 15 and run away to Germany with a beat group. He went on to run a successful discotheque and a life-style that had him appearing frequently in Dublin’s gossip columns. It was boredom, he says, that led him, with his family, to Marbella in the 1980s – to set up a club, followed by a radio show and a celebrity magazine – and then to launch REM.fm

Maurice speaks proudly of the Marbella Beth El synagogue,

built in 1979 by the O’hayon family who had come from Gibraltar a few years earlier. The current rabbi, Meir O’hayon, is a member of this family. Synagogue president is Raphi Cohen, born in Morocco and brought up in Paris. Many have a similar background in this francophone community, though half of the 380-strong community are now Ashkenazi. Services are swelled by part-time residents, mainly Brits, who have made some impact on the way things are done, including an extra Ashkenazi style service on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. “I fly the flag for Ashkenazi practices though having been here for 20 years I am almost Sephardi,” says Maurice.

Maurice is confident that the community, now very vibrant (“all our charity events are sold out”), will grow in size. “We are looking to the future”, he says. “We have plans to build a school, a home for elderly people and a Jewish cemetery in Marbella.”

FOR VISITORS



SYNAGOGUES

The only cities with synagogues surviving from the Golden Age are Toledo (Santa Maria La Blanca, now a church – pictured above – and El Tránsito, now a museum) and Cordoba. Neither of these cities have current Jewish communities.

The ‘Major’ synagogue in Barcelona, consisting of two underground rooms (picture below), was discovered only in 1995 and has been restored by the Call Association which includes both Jewish and local government



representation. Its foundations date back to the Roman occupation.

+34 93 31707 90
www.calldebarcelona.org/

There are five active synagogues in Madrid. The first purpose-built synagogue since the 15th century was the Beth Yaacov, constructed in 1968 by Moroccan Jews from the Spanish-speaking community in the north of Morocco. Communities in Madrid and other cities have been swelled since the 1970s by immigrants from South America, most recently from Venezuela, some of Moroccan or other Sephardi origin, others Ashkenazi. Beth Yaacov now offers an Ashkenazi rite service for the high holidays and is popular with visitors.

+34 91 5913131

There are also active congregations, in some cases several, in Alicante, Mallorca, Oviedo, Barcelona, Malaga, Seville, Catalonia, Marbella, Ceuta Melilla, Torremolinos, La Coruna, Murcia and Valencia A good link to full details is: www.kosherdelight.com/SpainSynagogues.htm

MUSEUMS

Cordoba
The Casa de Sefarad in the Jewish Quarter, just opposite the

synagogue partly dates from the 14th century and the careful restoration has been a sensitive attempt to portray Sephardi history and traditions. It contains items from local pre-expulsion Jewish homes and an exhibition on the Sephardi tradition, including music and a library. The interior courtyard is used for concerts.
+34 95 7421404
www.casadesefarad.es

Girona

Museo de Historia de los Judíos near the site of the 15th century synagogue.
La calle de la Força 8.

Toledo

A Sephardi Museum is housed in the El Tránsito synagogue.
www.museosefardi.net (Spanish only)

TOURS

The Network of Jewish Quarters (Red de Juderías), a cooperative of 14 city authorities, is

encouraging the provision of guided tours, lectures, exhibitions and concerts, though these usually do not have Jewish participation.
www.redjuderias.org

Members of the Jewish community offer the following tours:

Barcelona: Dominique Tomasov
Blinder info@urbancultours.com
Madrid and Toledo: +34 60 7716 642
jewishspain@puertademadrid.com
Seville: Moisés Hassán
jewishsevilla@gmail.com
Valencia: Alba Toscano +34 96 3802129 lajavura@ya.com

CULTURE

There is an active Jewish cultural life in Madrid and in Barcelona where there is an International Film Festival each year. There are courses, lectures and concerts. A good guide to cultural events and other aspects of Jewish life in Spain is on www.jewishspain.info

A communal seder in Barcelona. As with most congregations, visitors are welcome to join the community

