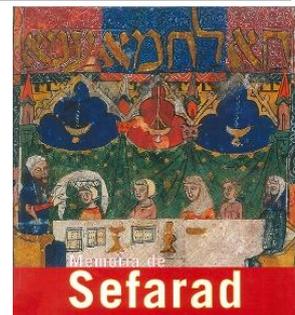


# The Jews of Spain: What happened?

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## 1. Introduction

The ‘**What happened**’ is relatively straightforward. Jews arrived in Spain under the Romans, the community grew during the era of the Visigoths, and then entered a ‘Golden Age’ when the Moslems conquered Iberia. The Jews created significant works in religion, philosophy, science, poetry and literature. But as the Christians increasingly regained the Moslem areas of Spain (Al-Andalus), their fate was increasingly troubled.

In 1391 there were widespread anti-Jewish pogroms and this led to a very significant number of conversions of Jews to Christianity. However, the Old Christians were suspicious of these so-called *conversos* and by the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Inquisition was brought in to defeat heresy among the alleged Judaising New Christians. Not surprisingly, the Jews were blamed for causing the conversos to ‘backslide’ to their original religion, and so King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella decided that the only solution was to expel all Jews. This occurred in 1492 and led to the end of a millennia of Jewish civilisation in Spain, the most populous and prosperous Jewish community in Europe.

Jews fled to Portugal, North Africa, the Ottoman Empire and ultimately to Holland, England, the New World and even Australia. They lived for centuries among the Arabs of the Middle East and North Africa but after 1948 they were rejected there and most can now be found in Israel. Twenty percent of all Jews in the world today are Sephardi.

Beyond the ‘what happened’ are two other related questions that will be explored in this series: ‘**Why did this happen in this way**’ and ‘**Why is this important, that is, what is the legacy of Spanish Jewry**’? Why were the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries in Moslem Spain a Golden Age? Why did the Moslems and then especially the Christians turn against the Jews? Why did anti-Jewish sentiment lead to such a vicious Inquisition and why were the Jews, who were not the direct victims of the Inquisition, get expelled? Finally, we will discuss – and celebrate - the wondrous intellectual, religious and cultural legacy of the Sephardim, from the beginnings in Spain till today.

## 2. Definitions

- **Sephardi** – Jews who trace their ancestry back to Spain.
- **Mizrachi** – ‘Eastern’ Jews who trace their ancestry back to ancient Israel, e.g. Iraqi and Yemenite Jews (till they left for Israel). As Sephardim inter-mingled with Mizrachi Jews following the Spanish Expulsion, especially in the Middle East, they have not always been easy to separate. They are therefore sometimes lumped together as ‘Sephardim’.
- **Ashkenazi** – Jews who originated from the German lands in the Middle Ages and then came to live in Poland-Lithuania, where they developed into the biggest Jewish population in the world prior to the Holocaust.
- **Al-Andalus** – Moslem Spain. This was gradually reconquered by the Christians in the Reconquista (see below)
- **Convivencia** – This means ‘living together’, i.e. when the Moslems, Christians and Jews allegedly lived peacefully side by side in Al-Andalus. However, Christians and Jews were *dhimmi* (see below) and so the whole concept of Convivencia is open to doubt.
- **Reconquista** – The gradual reconquest of Moslem Spain by the Christians, beginning in the north and working its way south to Granada, the last Moslem stronghold which fell in 1492. It took centuries.
- **Dhimmi** - Means ‘protected person’ (Jews and Christians), referring to the Moslem state's obligation under sharia law to protect the individual's life, property, as well as freedom of religion, in exchange for loyalty to the state and payment of a (jizya) tax.
- **Conversos** – They were also called New Christians, Crypto-Jews or Marranos (which means swine, so this is a term which has now fallen out of favour). The words are interchangeable.
- **Inquisition** - This was a judicial institution ostensibly established to combat heresy, i.e. it persecuted Catholics. In practice, the Spanish Inquisition served to consolidate power in the monarchy of the newly unified Spanish kingdom, but it achieved that end through infamously brutal methods. As many Jewish converts to Catholicism (*conversos*) practiced Judaism secretly (the so-called *Marranos*, or ‘pigs’), they were subject to the Inquisition. The inquisition began in 1478 and only officially ended in 1834. It spread to other counties, e.g. Portugal and Spanish colonies in the Americas.
- **The Expulsion** - Catholics were the target of the Inquisition, but as Jews were suspected of aiding their brethren that had converted (*conversos*), Ferdinand and Isabella decided to expel the non-converted Jews. The Edict of Expulsion of 31 March, 1492, is known as the Alhambra decree. Some 80,000 – 100,000 Jews were expelled, although the numbers are only an estimate (and some say it was over 150,000). At least an equal number had already converted to Christianity in Spain.
- **Sephardi diaspora** – The Jews who left Spain and escaped to a wide range of countries (see section 5 below).

## 3. Timeline

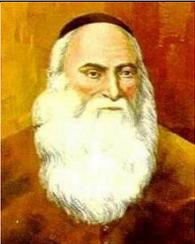
Date	Event
241 BCE	Carthaginians begin to conquer Spain
206 BCE	Romans defeat Carthaginians and become the new rulers of Spain. Jews begin to settle in Spain.
305 CE	Council of Toledo forbids Jews and non-Jews from eating together
Ealy 5 <sup>th</sup> century CE	Visigoths (Arian Christians) invade and conquer = a Germanic tribe
589 CE	Visigoth king (King Reccared) converts to the Roman Catholic faith

613 CE	Jews forced to convert to Christianity – the first <i>conversos</i>
711	Berber Moslems (Moors) conquer Spain – Umayyad dynasty established
756	Moslem Spain becomes an independent emirate controlled from Cordoba under Abd al-Rahman I
10 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> centuries	Jewish Golden Age
11 <sup>th</sup> century	Berbers invade again – Umayyads fall in 1031. Al-Andalus unity collapses and is divided into 23 principalities or <i>Taifas</i> (1039 – 1085).
1066	Anti-Jewish riots in Granada
900 - 1250	Reconquista – Granada is the last kingdom to hold out for Moslems
1085	Alfonso VI conquers Toledo – Almoravids from Morocco invited to protect remaining Moslem Al-Andalus (Almoravids: 1085 – 1145)
1147 - 1238	The Almohads take over Moslem Spain. Their ultimate defeat is a turning point in the Reconquista.
1212	Antisemitic riots in Toledo by invading Christians.
1263	Disputation of Barcelona
1391	Pogroms throughout Christian Spain – up to 1/3 of Jews (~ 100,000) in Spain covert ( <i>conversos</i> ) over the next 25 years
1413	Disputation of Tortosa
1449	Rebellion in Toledo. Beginnings of <i>limpieza de sangre</i> (purity of blood) laws
1478	Spanish Inquisition begins. Torquemada appointed Grand Inquisitor in 1482
1492	Fall of Granada and its Nasrid dynasty marks the end of the Reconquista March – Alhambra Decree. July – Expulsion of the Jews commenced.
1492 +	Jews end up in Portugal, Morocco, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Palestine, France, Holland, Italy and the Americas = the Sephardi diaspora
1497	Portugal expels a few Jews but forcibly converts the rest

#### 4. Major figures in Spanish Jewry

It is not possible to properly separate scientists, physicians, philosophers, statesmen, writers and poets, as these geniuses often combined talents in a way that has since become known as the Renaissance man (and they all seem to have been men!) or polymath. These giants have simply been placed in either Table A, B or C according to where their predominant fame lies. They helped to make medieval Jewish Spain a 'golden age'. (Please also note that the dates of birth are often in dispute; different sources quote different years.)

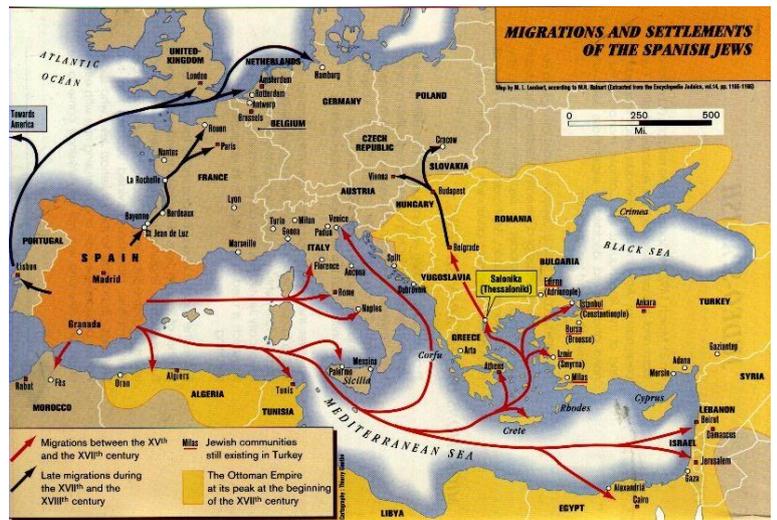
Person (date of birth)	Image	Main achievements
<b>A. Statesmen</b>		
<b>Hasdai ibn Shaprut</b>  (915 – 970)		Scholar, physician, diplomat, and patron of science and Jewish learning, supporting poets and Talmud scholars alike. He, more than anyone, laid the foundation for the post-biblical Hebrew revival that took place in Cordoba. He kept alive national Jewish consciousness and reoriented Jewish scholarship from Babylonia, where it had declined, to Spain, where it flourished for several more centuries. Became court physician and acted as vizier to the caliph.

Person (date of birth)	Image	Main achievements
<b>Samuel Ha-Nagid (ibn Nagrela)</b>  (993 – 1056)	 Samuel ha-Nagid	Scholar, grammarian, philologist, soldier, merchant, and politician, and also a famous Hebrew poet. Perhaps the most politically influential Jew in Moslem Spain. His unique position as the vizier made him the highest ranking Jewish courtier in all of Spain. Recognizing this, in the year 1027, he took on the title of <i>nagid</i> , or Prince. That a Jew would command the Moslem army in Grenada was an astonishing feat.
<b>Don Isaac Abravanel</b>  (1437 – 1508)		Statesman, philosopher, Bible commentator, diplomat and financier. Treasurer and a highly influential diplomat in Portugal. Escaped to Spain following anti-Jewish sentiments in Portugal after 1481. In 1484, King Ferdinand invited him to be the collector of royal revenues, even though it was illegal for a Jew to hold such a high position, and the Spanish Inquisition was in full swing. He offered a huge bribe to Ferdinand and Isabella to rescind the expulsion edict of 1492, but failed. He joined the other expelled Jews and ended up in Italy (Venice).
<b>B. Scientists, philosophers and religious thinkers</b>		
<b>Bahya ibn Paquda</b>  (11 <sup>th</sup> century)		Neoplatonist, and served as a judge of the rabbinical court in Saragossa, Spain. The author of the first Jewish system of ethics, written in Arabic in 1040 under the title <i>Guide to the Duties of the Heart</i> .
<b>Abraham ibn Daud</b>  (1110 – 1180)		Astronomer, historian and Aristotelian philosopher. His chronicle, <i>Sefer ha-Qabbalah (Book of Tradition)</i> , fiercely attacked the contentions of Karaism and justified rabbinical Judaism. Now a Hebrew classic, it is replete with valuable general information, especially relating to the time of the Geonim and to the history of the Jews in Spain.
<b>Maimonides</b>  (1135 – 1204)		Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, also referred to by the acronym Rambam, was a philosopher who became one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages and among the greatest Jewish scholars of all time. He made enduring contributions as a philosopher, legal codifier, physician, political adviser and local legal authority.
<b>Nachmanides</b>  (1194 – 1270)		Known as the Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman). Talmudist, Kabbalist and biblical commentator. Famous for a disputation in Barcelona with the convert to Christianity, Pablo Christiani, in the presence of the king; emerged the victor. As this was not allowable, he was forced to leave Spain at age 70 for the land of Israel, where he settled in Acre, compiling there his great Commentary.
<b>Hasdai Crescas</b>  (1340 – 1411)		Philosopher and a renowned halakhist (expert on Jewish law). Along with Maimonides, Gersonides ('Ralbag') and Joseph Albo, he is known as one of the major practitioners of the rationalist approach to Jewish philosophy. His concise philosophical work, <i>Or Adonai, The Light of the Lord</i> became a classical Jewish refutation of medieval Aristotelianism, and a harbinger of the scientific revolution in the 16th century.

Person (date of birth)	Image	Main achievements
<b>C. Poets and writers</b>		
<b>Menahem ben Saruq</b>  (920 – 970)		He was a Jewish lexicographer and poet who composed the first Hebrew-language dictionary, which was disputed in part by Dunash.
<b>Dunash ben Labrat</b>  (920 – 990)		Commentator, poet, and grammarian, Dunash is called the founder of Andalusian Hebrew poetry. In the field of grammar, Dunash's major work was a book attacking Menahem ben Saruq's grammar (see above). He dedicated his work to the leader of the Jews of Spain at the time, Hasdai ibn Shaprut.
<b>Solomon ibn Gabirol</b>  (1021 – 1058)		Andalusian poet and Jewish philosopher with a Neo-Platonic bent. He published over a hundred poems, as well as works of biblical exegesis, philosophy, ethics and satire.
<b>Moses ibn Ezra</b>  (1055 – 1138)		Hebrew poet and critic, and one of the finest poets of the golden age of Spanish Jewry (900–1200). He was one of the first Jewish poets to write secular verse; his surname, “ha-Sallah” (Hebrew: Writer of Penitential Poems), however, was bestowed because of his penitential prayers (selihot). Penitential = showing you are sorry for wrong things that you have done.
<b>Yehuda Halevi</b>  (1075 – 1141)		Halevi is considered one of the greatest Hebrew poets, celebrated both for his religious and secular poems, many of which appear in present-day liturgy. His greatest philosophical work was <i>The Kuzari</i> .
<b>Abraham ibn Ezra</b>  (1089 – 1167)		Biblical commentator and philosopher. Most famous work was his commentary on the Bible. Unlike Rashi, Ibn Ezra didn't want to use midrash in his explanations. He concentrated on the grammar and literal meaning of the text. Also wrote many poems. The crater Abenezra on the Moon was named in his honour. Somehow related to Moses ibn Ezra. He travelled widely later in his life.
<b>Benjamin of Tudela</b>  (1130 – 1173)		Traveller who visited Europe, Asia, and Africa in the 12th century. His vivid descriptions of western Asia preceded those of Marco Polo by a hundred years. His travel writing made him a major figure in medieval geography and Jewish history.

## 5. The Sephardi diaspora

As the map shows, many Spanish Jews went to other parts of the Mediterranean, including North Africa, Palestine, the Ottoman Empire and Italy. However, the vast majority went immediately to Portugal, from where they were again expelled in 1496 (very few), or forcibly converted (*conversos*) en masse, which was the vast majority. Many of the Portuguese *conversos* subsequently went to northern Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, e.g. Holland, and reverted to their Judaism. Others followed those who originally left from Spain for the Mediterranean basin. Some Portuguese Jews left for the New World, e.g. Brazil, the Caribbean and New Amsterdam (New York City), where many were able to become Jews again.



## 6. Sephardim today

The majority of Jews ended up living in North Africa, Turkey (then the Ottoman Empire) and the Middle East. With the creation of Israel in 1948, Jews were rejected by their Arab hosts and the vast majority migrated to Israel. Some Jews remained behind in Iran and Turkey. A small number made it to Australia.