

# Turning Point

## *The Spanish Expulsion*

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On January 2, 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella marched triumphantly into the defeated city of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold on the Iberian Peninsula. On March 31 they promulgated an edict requiring that all Jews either convert or leave Spain within four months, on pain of death. This drastic edict of expulsion ended almost fifteen hundred years of Jewish life in Spain and irrevocably altered the unique Jewish civilization created on Iberian soil. Scholars still debate the origins of the expulsion decree and the identity of its authors; some question its inevitability, while others dispute the number of its intended victims. While historical questions about motivation and details of the expulsion abound, all researchers acknowledge that Jewish history assumed dramatically new demographic trends and spiritual expressions as a result of the draconian measure of expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and the expulsion of the Jews of Portugal in 1496/7.

Until the fall of Granada in 1492 a semblance of “business as usual” characterized many aspects of Jewish life in the Iberian Peninsula; contracts between Jews and Christians were renewed and renegotiated until the eve of the expulsion; communities went about their quotidian affairs despite the extraordinary levies imposed upon them to finance the final campaign against the Muslim Nasrid kingdom of Granada; selected Jewish courtiers continued to exercise power and gain access to inner court circles. Additionally, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella are recorded to have intervened repeatedly to defend their Jewish population against excesses or undue pressure on the part of the nobility, the *Hermandad*, a hostile clergy, and the general population. In retrospect, however, the signs of disintegration that prefigured the tragic end were clear; the newly established Inquisition commenced its self-appointed task of extirpating the conversos (those

Jews converted to Christianity) from the Spanish body politic in an orgy of cruelty unleashed initially in Andalusia in the 1480s; a policy of segregation and ghettoization of the Jews in Toledo was implemented in 1481, followed up by similar measures in many other towns in the kingdom of Castile. Yet antisemitic outbursts and expressions of anti-converso hostility had been a constant feature of life throughout the fifteenth century. Although the ongoing Castilian civil war produced persistent anti-Jewish fallout throughout the latter fifteenth century, life went on in the *aljamas* (Jewish communities) much as it had in the earlier decades of the century.

The Jews were not passive witnesses to their worsening situation. In the face of the rising tide of hostility directed against them, they repeatedly attempted to strengthen their weakening communal institutions and morale. In order to repair the declining social fabric of the community, a set of communal regulations or *Takkanot* was adopted at Valladolid in 1432, designed specifically to deal with the devastating effects of the pogroms of 1391 and the continuing flood of conversions from Judaism to Christianity sparked by the Disputation of Tortosa (1412–1414) and the aggressive proselytizing of the Dominican friar Vicente Ferrer (d. 1419). Measures were devised to restore decimated Jewish educational and judicial institutions and to minimize the areas of potential friction among the Jews, the conversos, and their Old Christian neighbors. A set of sumptuary laws was promulgated to curb manifestations of affluence and to limit conspicuous consumption. Special taxes were imposed on wine and kosher meat to provide additional funds for Jewish educational institutions in the decimated communities. Class conflict had become the bane of the internal life of the community. Rich Hebrew sources give voice to vigorous preaching against the moral laxities, particularly among the rich. With the deterioration of the Jewish economic situation, communal charitable societies expanded.

At the same time, strict regulations were drafted to curb the growing problem of informers (*malshinim*) and tax-dodgers who sought exemption from community fiscal obligations by exploiting their connections with the nobility and the court. Measures were also adopted to mitigate the fiscal damage caused by the imposition of prohibitive levies on the Jews to finance the “Granada campaign” and the ransoming of the Jews from Malaga in 1487 at the time of the city’s conquest from the Muslims. The rabbis repeatedly attempted to deal with the complexity of legal issues raised by the flood of converts to Christianity who were still attached in one way or another to the Jews.

Notwithstanding the darkening clouds and progressive Jewish impoverishment, the final generation of Jewish life in Spain was a time of continuing cultural creativity. The yeshivot of Guadalajara, Salamanca and elsewhere flourished until the end and poets, such as Saadia ibn Danan, were still creating Hebrew poetry in the fashion of the classical literary innovations of al-Andalus. Other Jews were pioneering in writing poetry and plays in Spanish.<sup>1</sup> Scientific inquiry was cultivated in small circles while kabbalistic ideas and literature, later to take root in the

Sephardic exilic communities, flourished. By the 1470s the new art of Hebrew printing was emerging in several Iberian centers. In short, fifteenth-century Spanish Jewry was still a vital and responsive community grappling with enormous challenges but scarcely on the cusp of extinction.

As the fifteenth century progressed, it became increasingly apparent, however, that Jewish life was unraveling under the strain of the complicated relations between Jews and conversos on the one hand, and the popular antagonism to both groups, who were frequently undifferentiated in Christian minds, on the other. In the background, larger unsettling issues loomed – the reconquest was almost complete, but the Ottoman advances in the East were posing new threats to Christian Europe. The anti-Jewish riots that had engulfed Spain in 1391 had already produced tens of thousands of converts to Christianity, some sincere but many simply victims of circumstances who chose conversion over martyrdom when faced with these two untenable alternatives. The scale of the pogroms in 1391 was unprecedented. By the time the storm had subsided, a significant new population of converts, perhaps in excess of a hundred thousand, had emerged. Although the Church prohibited forced baptisms in theory, and favored persuasion over coercion, in practice it would not permit forcibly converted Jews to revert to their former faith once the riots ceased. As a result of the 1391 persecutions, an unprecedented social situation emerged. Practicing Jews and forcibly converted Christians continued to live side by side. The New Christians, also known as conversos or *anusim* (Hebrew for “the forced ones”), were obliged to adhere to the faith imposed upon them but most still retained multiple familial and economic ties with their former coreligionists. Sometimes households were divided between the two faiths. At the same time that hostility to unbaptized Jews persisted, hostility to the Jewish converts and their descendants (whose sincerity in their Christian faith was suspected) increased over the course of time.

Since the converts from Judaism (conversos) were now technically Christian they were no longer restricted in their choice of professions and rapidly rose to positions of prominence in the government, the municipalities and even the Church, positions that had heretofore been barred to them as Jews. Jealousy and suspicion towards them increased, erupting in anti-converso riots in 1449 in Toledo that spilled over in short order to engulf the Jews as well. Racial criteria were soon applied to defining who was a Jew in fifteenth-century Spain. The introduction of the first of many laws of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) in Toledo in 1449, barring conversos from choice areas of the economy reflected the mounting ethnic and racial definitions and distinctions that were applied to conversos despite the fact that they were Christian. The differentiation between Jews and conversos was somewhat artificial, however, given the intertwined relationships between the two. Racial distinctions would later become a prominent feature of the social landscape of Spain and Portugal, persisting long after the Jews had been expelled.

Still, Jews who had not converted were not the primary targets of popular animosity. Popular fury seemed to be focused more on the Jewish converts to

Christianity than on the members of the Jewish community. The practicing Jews hoped that stability would be enhanced with the apparent resolution of civil war in Spain, applauding and financially backing the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in 1474. The presence of so many conversos in the Queen's entourage seemed to be a positive sign. With the new political union of Castile and Aragon several Jews and conversos assumed their place as advisors, tax collectors, physicians, and even confessors in the court. As noted above, some scholars have pointed out that the king and queen rarely failed to defend the Jews up to the moment of the Expulsion, with only a few glaring exceptions.<sup>2</sup> Jewish hopes that security and political tranquility would prevail with the strengthening of the Spanish realm in the 1470s did not, however, take into account the deep-seated animus among secular and religious groups to the continuing interaction and the complex relationship of Jews and conversos.

A major turning point in the Jewish situation occurred with the introduction of a Spanish National Inquisition in 1480. Its establishment signaled a triumph of those factions within Spanish society agitating for stronger measures against the conversos as well as against the Jews. Henceforth, Church and State acted jointly to extirpate what they perceived to be the "Judaizing heresy" in their midst. From the moment that it began to operate, the Inquisition agitated for the removal of the Jews from Spain, arguing that the presence of Jews prevented the acculturation and absorption of the conversos into Christian ranks. Its opening salvos in Seville included massive roundups of conversos, the condemnation and public burning of thousands in autos-da-fé, and the introduction of harsh measures to segregate the dwindling Jewish community. The Inquisition's vigorous campaign was accompanied by bitter diatribes against Jews and Judaism as well as against conversos. A policy of partial expulsion was introduced by the Inquisition in Andalusia at the end of 1482, affecting Jews in the dioceses of Seville, Cordoba, and Cadiz, and soon thereafter Saragossa and Teruel. In retrospect, these expulsions appear to have been several simultaneous experiments in the treatment of the Jews. These included confiscation and expropriation of Jewish property as well as their segregation and local expulsion, in the hopes of separating the Jews in some definitive fashion from the conversos. But as the Inquisition uncovered nests of crypto-Judaism, some real and others extracted in confessions elicited under torture, the Holy Office decided that it no longer sufficed to isolate the Jews in order to minimize their supposed influence. Only a drastic measure such as a wholesale national expulsion of the Jews, some argued, seemed to be the answer.

The Jews couldn't be banished by the king and queen unless they were guilty of some crime or were deemed to be endangering the civil peace by their proselytizing. In 1491 the Inquisition engineered a blood libel, known as the blood libel of "El Niño de La Guardia." A trial was staged with great fanfare, intended to stoke popular passions against the Jews and to provide a pretext for expulsion. The trumped-up charge that the Jews were conspiring against Christianity through the desecration of the Host and the murder of a Christian child in order to use its blood

for ritual purposes was not new in Europe. Its effectiveness in demonizing innocent Jewish communities and stirring up the populace was generally assured. Confessions were extracted under torture from a converso that Jews and conversos were involved in this heinous crime.<sup>3</sup> Although there was no missing child in the town of La Guardia, nor the slightest foundation to the charge of ritual murder, the Grand Inquisitor Torquemada appointed a special investigative commission that predictably found the accused guilty, and a public execution followed in Avila. The townspeople became so agitated by anti-Jewish passion that the Jews had to seek special protection from the king. As the sixteenth-century Inquisitor Luis de Paramo later stated, the La Guardia affair was one of the decisive factors in moving the monarchs to sign the expulsion decree. The high-profile trial succeeded in creating a climate favorable to expulsion even though the decree itself, promulgated five months later, doesn't mention the blood libel. Meanwhile, the finishing touches on the expulsion decree were under deliberation.

Despite the heightened anti-Jewish agitation, the expulsion plan was carefully concealed from the public and from its intended victims. Indeed, if a plan to oust the Jews was long in the making, it was so carefully concealed that it has left no traces in the records. As late as 1488, King Ferdinand, still working hand-in-glove with his Jewish courtiers, extracted an extraordinary levy from the Jewish community payable over a period of several years. Similarly, in 1490, the sovereigns allotted tax-farming concessions to be paid out over the following four years. Additionally, the Treaty of Capitulation of Granada in January 1492 specified that the Jews could remain in the city. Either these several measures were intended to throw the Jews off guard, or, in all likelihood, the decision to implement a total rather than a partial expulsion was still being debated back and forth in the highest councils of state.<sup>4</sup>

There were other indications to the Jews that life might go on "as usual." Some of the most influential advisers to the king and queen, such as Isaac Abravanel and Abraham Senior, continued to retain the ear of their royal patrons even as the last chapter of Jewish life was unfolding. True, the converso population found itself suspended between two worlds, the Jewish and the Christian. Yet, there is no proof that it would have remained unassimilated, if properly instructed in the basics of Christianity. Where conventional wisdom has seen a certain inevitability in the expulsion, based upon the drastic decline of Jewish life in Spain on the heels of the pogroms of 1391, more recent research has noted that the decline was not uniform, some researchers even detecting a "renaissance" of Jewish life in the fifteenth century in smaller towns and villages, such as Morvedre near Valencia, whose ruling elite found it convenient and advantageous to protect their Jews.<sup>5</sup> Conditions on the ground were not uniformly bleak. In the kingdom of Valencia, for instance, the introduction of new credit mechanisms released the Jews from providing credit and lending at interest, thereby removing the major source of tension between the Jews and their Christian and Muslim neighbors. While jealousy at the political and economic ascent of conversos was ubiquitous, it was probably no worse in 1490

than it had been in prior decades. Neither were anti-Jewish satires in popular literature noticeably more biting than they had been earlier in the century.

Given these mixed conditions, why was the drastic measure of total expulsion implemented in 1492? An examination of the text of the expulsion decree reveals the extent to which the clergy, in general, and the Inquisition in particular, was involved in this final measure against the Jews of Spain. By expelling the Jews, the decree argued, wavering New Christians would be protected from the pernicious influence of the Jews. The religious underpinnings of the political act of expulsion are explained as follows:

We are informed by the Inquisitors and by many other religious persons, ecclesiastical and secular . . . that the great damage to the Christians has resulted from and does result from the participation, conversation, and communication that they have had with the Jews, who try to always achieve by whatever means possible to subvert and to draw away faithful Christians from our holy Catholic faith . . . and to attract and pervert them to their injurious belief and opinion. . .

The Holy Office of the Inquisition, seeing how some Christians are endangered by contact and communication with the Jews, has provided that the Jews be expelled from all our realms and territories, and has persuaded us to give our support and agreement to this, which we do now, because of our debts and our obligations to the said Holy Office; and we do so despite the great harm to ourselves, seeking and preferring the salvation of souls above our own profit and that of individuals.<sup>6</sup>

Precisely what the “pernicious” Jewish influence was is spelled out. Conversos, according to the decree, would turn to Jews for religious guidance regarding the Jewish calendar, seeking instructions on proper observance of Jewish holidays, information on the content and mode of fulfillment of Jewish law and assistance in performing circumcisions and other ritual obligations. Jews would share their religious books and their ritual foods, such as unleavened bread on Passover and kosher meat, with their converso neighbors and relatives. This assistance allegedly stemmed from the conversos’ “diabolical cunning and subterfuge” as well as the Jews’ “criminality,” “perversity,” and “deceit.” As far as the accusation that Jews and conversos were in constant and intimate contact, there was more than a grain of truth to the charge. Jews and conversos were frequently part of one extended or nuclear family.

The first Inquisition trials in Aragon in 1484 had made it patently clear that conversos were still connected to the Jews, a conclusion previously demonstrated in Andalusia. Expulsion, according to the decree, was the sole answer to the Judaizing “danger” since the prior measures implemented in Andalusia of isolating the Jews or staging Inquisitorial trials, and all other measures short of expulsion had failed.

Conversos seemed to be unable to desist from their Jewish practices. The desire to expel the Jews was tinged with antisemitism. Although the language of anti-Jewishness is covered by a veneer of religious piety in the prolix decree, it is nonetheless palpable. Antisemitism is expressed in the use of the familiar metaphor of biology with the presence of the Jews likened to a dangerous infection.

The nature of the Judaism or Jewishness of the conversos has animated much of the modern scholarship on the conversos. According to some Spaniards of the post-expulsion period, the recidivism of the conversos was a factor in their expulsion. Ben Zion Netanyahu has argued, on the other hand, that many conversos had “made their peace” with their new Christian identities by the mid-fifteenth century, retreating to their former Jewish identities as a last resort only after they experienced rejection and racism on the part of the Old Christian population. Additionally, Netanyahu avers, many conversos were repelled by the excesses of the Inquisition and returned to their former Jewish roots out of remorse or even recoil or revulsion.<sup>7</sup> This attitude is expressed in the remark in 1491 of a converso to a young Jew who was considering conversion: “You see how they burn them, and you want to become a Christian?”<sup>8</sup>

The Hebrew chronicles penned soon after the expulsion were sensitive to the close working relationship between the Inquisition and the monarchy even though sixteenth-century Jewish historians didn’t seek causality in political terms. It was in the nature of late medieval and early modern Jewish thinking to regard history as a manifestation of the divine will at work. According to Elijah Capsali of Crete, Queen Isabella played a decisive role in pressing expulsion as a result of the influence of her confessor Torquemada, with Ferdinand playing only a secondary and somewhat reluctant role in the events. But, although the Spanish Inquisition was established by the papacy, it worked hand-in-glove with the secular juridical system, dividing up responsibility for its actions in the name of Christianity.<sup>9</sup> The decisions of the Inquisition were handed over to the secular authorities for implementation.

The Hebrew sources of the immediate post-expulsion period, which tended to view Torquemada as the active force behind the decree, have set the tone of later historiography. They ascribed hesitation and ambivalence to King Ferdinand in the unfolding of the events, seeing Ferdinand’s motivation as one of avarice while Queen Isabella was consumed by religious zeal. According to exiled historian Solomon ibn Verga (1450–1520):

In Spain there was a priest who had a tremendous hatred for the Jews, and the rule is that whoever afflicts the Jews becomes a leader by doing so. He was the confessor to the queen, and he instigated the queen for the Jews to convert. If they would not do so, they would be put to the sword. The queen pleaded to the king and begged him to do this. . . . Some time later, the king gave in and decreed, at the advice of his wife, that all the Jews had to convert, and those that did not had to leave his kingdom. This was issued as a royal decree.<sup>10</sup>

Modern scholars have interpreted Ferdinand's role differently, emphasizing his avarice and more active role in pressing for the expulsion.<sup>11</sup> True, immediately upon the promulgation of the expulsion decree confiscations and fire sales of private and communal Jewish property began. The *aljamas* (organized Jewish communities) were required to pay future taxes to the Crown in order to compensate the authorities in anticipation of their future absence from the tax rolls. A large bribe was allegedly offered by chief Jewish courtier Don Isaac Abravanel to persuade the monarchs to rescind the decree. It was reportedly accepted by Ferdinand and Isabella, although the Jewish courtier's pleas were rejected. Most of the voluminous archival documentation surrounding the expulsion which Haim Beinart examined in *The Expulsion of the Jews* relates to the disposal of Jewish property and reveals a monarchy especially eager to establish its prior claim to Jewish-owned property before local authorities, Christian creditors, or the clergy and the municipalities, could step in to appropriate Jewish communal and private property. Jewish historical accounts and personal introductory comments in rabbinical works of that era lament the enormous loss in homes, orchards, libraries, and communal buildings and cemeteries, leaving the impression that enormous assets were forfeited. But the economic role of the Jews in fifteenth-century Spain as well as their material well-being has been highly exaggerated. In contrast to popular stereotypes concerning the affluence and power of the Spanish Jews in 1492, the community at the time of the expulsion was composed primarily of artisans and petty tradesmen; there were a few wealthy tax collectors but most Jews were people of modest means.<sup>12</sup> The conversos, by contrast, possessed the wealth and conspicuous power and were not subject to the decree. Indeed, the expulsion was explicitly designed in order to "protect" them from the "influence" of the Jews, not to expel them from the Spanish nation. Given the realities on the ground, it is most unlikely that the putative wealth of the Jews entered into decision making at the highest levels. Moreover, most of the despoliation of the Jews had already taken place by 1492 as a result of the decrees of separation or ghettoization in the 1480s.

The 1492 decree provided the opportunity to rob the Jews of their last remaining personal possessions and their cherished communal property while at the same time wiping out whatever debts were owed to them. The king protested the random and wholesale looting that occurred at the time of the expulsion. After all, the property of the Jews was theoretically the property of the royal treasury and Jewish public assets were supposed to be relinquished to the crown. But royal protests at the disorderly confiscations and expropriations did not always avail. It should be noted that Ferdinand had no need for a drastic expulsion in order to squeeze the Jews' assets from them. They were already completely subordinate to his whims and sorely pressed to meet his continuous levies.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, more often than not, Ferdinand appears in the sources as a defender of the Jews against various hostile anti-Jewish forces in Spanish society. Moreover, when Pope Alexander VI endowed Ferdinand and Isabella with the title of Catholic Monarchs in 1496 he praised them for having expelled the Jews without regard for the personal financial



sacrifice it cost them! It is difficult to determine whether the personal portrayal of the monarchs in the several Hebrew accounts, written in Italy and the Ottoman Empire during the first half of the sixteenth century and based either on eyewitness accounts or sources close to the events, derived from a realistic assessment of the division of power between the king and queen or from other considerations of which we are unaware.

As a result of the many obstacles and disincentives to departure, the expulsion decree immediately resulted in the expansion of the converso community in Spain. Ironically, if the alleged reason for the expulsion of the Jews was to “protect” the conversos from harmful Jewish influence, the terms of expulsion were guaranteed to augment the numbers of insincere conversos by driving the Jews into the ranks of the conversos. Only a short time frame was provided during which the Jews were permitted to wind up their affairs while those who converted would be permitted to remain in Spain and to retain their property. Those Jews who departed would be allowed to return to Spain during a limited period of time subject to their conversion upon reentry; upon conversion, the returnees could retrieve their property for the price they had obtained at the time of departure. No exceptions to the departure date were to be granted. At the same time, no transportation was provided to actually transport the Jews out of Spain and exit taxes and other confiscatory levies were demanded at the limited number of permissible exits. The formidable obstacles to departure guaranteed that many victims would convert out of desperation. Indeed, the litigation regarding the restoration of property and the return of despairing exiles forms a major part of the archival material that Haim Beinart has examined in his magisterial study of the expulsion.

The campaign to convert the hapless Jewish victims commenced immediately upon the promulgation of the expulsion decree. The successful conversion of one of the most prominent Jews of Spain, the courtier and court rabbi Abraham Senior, was regarded as a psychological coup, his baptism taking place in the presence of the king and queen. It was hoped that the rest of the Jewish population would follow suit upon seeing one of its most prominent leaders embrace Christianity.<sup>14</sup> The available evidence strongly suggests that the conversion of the Jews, rather than their departure, was probably the principal goal of the expulsion decree.<sup>15</sup> The conversionary intent of the expulsion is further suggested by the involvement of the Inquisition down to its smallest details, such as how and where the decree would be pronounced, who would be present at the decree’s pronouncement and the minimal number of exits to be permitted. An ecclesiastical expert in official decrees was even involved in its drafting to determine how the decree would be phrased.

The responses of the Jews to the expulsion decree were not uniform. While despondency was widespread, the Jews were by no means passive in the acceptance of their bitter fate. One case is even recorded of Jewish rioting against the decree during which they demanded that they be given four years, not four months, to wind up their affairs. But Jewish physical resistance was swiftly quelled.<sup>16</sup> Spiritual resistance was widespread, taking several forms. The head of the Jewish

community, courtier Don Isaac Abravanel, movingly describes the dignity of the departing masses of Jews:

The people heard this evil decree and they mourned. Wherever word of the decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews. There was great trembling and sorrow the likes of which had not been experienced since the days of the exile of the Jews from their land to the land of foreigners. The Jews encouraged each other: Let us strengthen ourselves on behalf of our faith, on behalf of the Torah of our God . . . if [our enemies] let us live, we will live; and our hearts will not retrogress; we will walk forward in the name of the Lord our God.<sup>17</sup>

Despite his deep antipathy to Jews, even the Priest Andrés Bernáldez was moved to describe the procession of departing Jews with more than a hint of admiration and sympathy:

In the first week of July they took the route for quitting their native land, great and small, young and old, on foot or horses, in carts each continuing his journey to his destined port. They experienced great trouble and suffered indescribable misfortunes on the road, some falling, others rising, some dying, others being born, some fainting, others being attacked by illness. There was not a Christian but that pitied them and pleaded with them to be baptized. Some from misery were converted, but they were the few. The rabbis encouraged them and made the young people and women sing and play on pipes and tambours to enliven them and keep up their spirits and they left Castile and arrived at the ports where some embarked for Portugal.<sup>18</sup>

Not all the refugees were as steadfast. Many converted rather than enduring expulsion. A large percentage of those who left returned to Spain as Christians before the expiration of the deadline for lawful return of converts. According to Henry Kamen perhaps as many as 50 percent of Spain's Jews either converted in 1492 without ever departing or returned as converts.<sup>19</sup> Many undoubtedly converted at the difficult hour of departure, deluding themselves into thinking that the trial would pass and that they could eventually return to Judaism. According to the Hebrew chronicle of Rabbi Elijah Kapsali of Crete, based upon eyewitness accounts from survivors, "thousands and thousands of Jews apostasized." In Placencia, a major Jewish community in the kingdom of Castile we are informed that:

Some Jews, when the time for selling their goods ended, went about day and night in desperation. Many returned from the road and wherever they were and received the faith of Christ, Many others, in order not to be deprived of the homeland where they were born, and not to sell their property for a low

price, were baptized; some with sincerity and others to accommodate themselves to the time and protect themselves with the mask of the Christian religion. Others returned from the roads, seeking baptism if their houses would be restored to them, returning the purchase money, and to many this was granted.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike the Moriscos (the Muslim population of Christian Spain), whose expulsion from Spain in 1609 was facilitated by the king's provision of a fleet to transport them to North Africa, the Jews had nowhere to flee and no means of transportation to a distant place of possible refuge. Moreover, in contrast to the Moriscos, the Jews of 1492 lacked any protectors abroad to whom they could appeal.

The expulsions of the Jews from Spain and Portugal marked the last of the great medieval European expulsions. The nationwide expulsion of the Jews occurred in England in 1290, in France in 1394, and in Germany at the time of the Black Death in 1348 when many German towns expelled or destroyed their Jewish communities, accusing them of causing the plague by poisoning the wells. Jews were barred from almost all of Italy, except the Papal States, the territory of Duke Ercole I of the house of Este, and the kingdom of Naples. Moreover, the simultaneous expulsion of the Jews from the Spanish possessions of Sicily and Sardinia, both occupied by the House of Aragon, added thousands of additional homeless Jews to the crush of Jews seeking asylum. While north Africa was a possible haven, the Sephardim had to bribe ruthless captains to transport them there and to rely on unsafe vessels; in the event, many refugees wound up adrift on the Mediterranean. Morocco, in particular, was a possibility. It was accessible and the king of Fez was reportedly welcoming.<sup>21</sup> But the Mediterranean was infested with pirates and most of the north African coastline was either impenetrable or occupied by the Portuguese and hence impenetrable.

The deportees from Castile who sought to leave by sea for areas under Muslim control had to confront seemingly insurmountable problems. Perhaps as many as 20 thousand Jews flocked to the port of Cadiz en route to North Africa. The stories of many who departed, returned, and converted to Christianity, reveal only a small part of the torments they faced. Imprisonment, rape, capture by pirates, abandonment at sea, or robbery of their few remaining possessions was their fate en route. Further traumas such as plague and local marauding Arab tribes awaited them at their north African destinations. Frequently ships loaded with refugees were abandoned by their captains and left to float adrift. If the passengers did not die on the water, they might well suffer the fate described by the Portuguese Jewish chronicler Samuel Usque:

They were cast, like victims of contagion, upon a barren beach, far from human help. Babies begged for water and mothers raised their eyes to heaven for help, while others, reduced to despair by hunger and abandonment, dug their own graves.<sup>22</sup>

In a similar vein, Solomon ibn Verga provides additional details on those trying times:

I heard pass from the lips of the old, departed from Spain, of a boat, and the fatal blow it was dealt. The skipper cast all ashore in a place uninhabited, and there most of them died of hunger; those struggled to stay on their feet until they could find a place of settlement. And one Jew among them, his wife and their two sons strove to go on; the woman, rather than let her feet stray, fainted and died. The man bore his sons, and he also fainted, as did the sons, from the hunger cast over them. When the man overcame his weakness, he found his sons dead. In a frenzy, he rose to his feet and exclaimed, "Master of the universe! You hasten to make me abandon you! Know, my Faith, against the will of those residing in heaven. I am a Jew and a Jew I shall remain; and all that you have caused me to bear and will further bring upon me shall not hinder me from worshipping you." And he gathered dirt and weeds and covered the two children and went in search of a settlement.<sup>23</sup>

Given the insurmountable obstacles, the easiest and safest route out of Spain seemed to be either to enter the small, landlocked northern Spanish kingdom of Navarre or to cross the border to Portugal. Both destinations would prove to be lethal. The border crossings to Portugal were heavily taxed but Portugal proved initially welcoming to both Jews and fleeing conversos. King John II (r. 1481–1495) of Portugal agreed to admit perhaps as many as 120 thousand Spanish Jews temporarily in exchange for a payment of a head tax on each person of eight cruzados, granting the Spanish refugees the right to stay in his kingdom for up to eight months. An influx of this magnitude obviously had a palpable impact in a kingdom numbering only about one million souls.<sup>24</sup> In exchange for a much larger payment, eight hundred households were permitted to settle permanently in Portugal.

While the presence of so many immigrants in Portugal, some Jewish and others conversos, was unsettling, the Portuguese Crown regarded them as a useful population element in a largely rural country. Their reputed entrepreneurial skills would be an asset as Portugal was gearing up to exploit her imperial position in both Asia and the New World. But popular antagonism towards the Jews and the conversos was strong. Additionally, a potential union of the Crown of Portugal with Castile and Aragon was under consideration. With the death of King John II, political machinations for the royal succession began. Isabel, the daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, and her parents wouldn't even consider a marriage union with the new Portuguese king Manuel I unless Portugal also rid itself of its Jews. A reluctant king, eager to expand his empire and to counter Spanish territorial ambitions in North Africa, consented to the betrothal terms that dictated that he too expel his Jews. Thus, in December 1496, he declared the expulsion of the Jews from Portugal.

But King Manuel I probably had no intention of actually ousting the Jews from Portugal. He instead adopted a series of draconian measures, including the kidnapping and forced baptism of Jewish children, in order to compel all the adult Jews in his kingdom to convert. When the deadline for departure approached in 1497, the entire Jewish community of Portugal was dramatically converted en masse. At the same time, realizing that such a large number of forcibly converted Jews could not become true Christians overnight, the king agreed that they be granted a breathing space during which they would be exempt from any inquiry into their religious practices. In other words, the regime promised to resist the introduction of an Inquisition in Portugal. In order to thwart the establishment of an Inquisition the conversos organized to send an annual delegation to Rome, successfully lobbying to keep the Inquisition out of their country until 1536. At the same time, however, the former Jews who were now conversos were prohibited from leaving the country. One critical result of this involuntary incarceration and delayed introduction of a Portuguese Inquisition was that it enabled the Portuguese conversos – unlike the situation in Spain where the most stalwart managed to leave – to set in place a crypto-Jewish underground and to create some semblance of a clandestine Jewish religion before the Portuguese Inquisition was introduced. The phenomenon of crypto-Judaism, also known as marranism, was able to take root before the Inquisition began to spread its tentacles. Yet, with the passage of time, their “Judaism of memory” would inevitably become approximate and blurred.

With the departure of the Jews the expanded converso population in the newly unified country now known as Spain found itself alone. It had only its own inner resources to depend upon. Returnees, now Christians in name if not yet in deed, were permitted to retrieve their Hebrew books, but only those devoted to scientific or medical subjects. All Jewish religious texts were confiscated. Most of the Spanish and Portuguese rabbinic figures had managed to leave Iberia either right before or immediately after the expulsions, settling either in Italy, north Africa or the Ottoman Empire. Deprived of teachers and rabbis to serve as role models and mentors and Jewish books that might serve as sources of instruction, the conversos of the Iberian Peninsula began the unique process of transformation into a collection of individuals who were neither wholly Catholic, yet no longer Jewish. As time passed and Jewish practice and rabbinic knowledge began to dim, what survived was an ethnic awareness of kinship among former Jews, reshaped by Christian upbringing, the dreaded Inquisition or the reading of the Bible as taught through the prism of Christianity. An occasional visit of an Ottoman, Moroccan, or Italian Jew to the Peninsula might sometimes reinforce the few rituals that could be furtively performed in the secrecy of the home. Some books were secretly transferred by traveling merchants or diplomats. Partial fragments and echoes of this activity can be gleaned from the Inquisition dossiers of trials conducted against “judaizers” in the following centuries.

The impact of the expulsion on Jewish society everywhere was incalculable. The transition from life in Spain to life in Ottoman lands was especially difficult for the

first generation of Sephardic exiles. Many conversos were consumed by messianic anticipation as they eagerly awaited deliverance from their tormented state, searching for answers to the gnawing question of the “meaning” of the expulsion; why, some asked, had they apparently been “abandoned”? Messianic expectations quickened as the half millennium approached and other critical dates with “messianic” resonance passed, leading to occasional outbursts of messianic activity, in Italy, the Eastern Mediterranean, and even in Spain and Portugal. Messianic hopes were also stoked by rumors of the discovery of lost tribes of Israel that circulated throughout Europe in the sixteenth-century age of discovery of far-off lands and remote tribes. But messianic agitation among conversos in sixteenth-century Iberia invited harsh reprisals from the Inquisition and eventually died out.

Scholars differ dramatically in their calculations of the number of Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492. Estimates as low as 40–50 thousand people have been offered by David Wasserstein, Norman Roth, and Henry Kamen while figures as high as 600 thousand have also been hypothesized.<sup>25</sup> Some of the higher estimates include the many conversos who managed to leave with the stream of departing Jews. One chronicler, Alonso de Santa Cruz, offers the figure of 125 thousand Spanish Jews entering Portugal, breaking it down in the following manner:

It is certain that those who departed via Benavente so as to enter Portugal via Bragança were 23,000; those who left via Zamora for Miranda were 30,000; via Ciudad Rodrigo. to Vilar 35,000; via Valencia to Alcantara to Marvão in Portugal 15,000; via Badajoz to Elvas 10,000. And those who were at the border of Navarre, up to 2,000 and those at the border of Vizcaya boarded ships to Africq by sea; and those who were in Jerez and Medina Sidonia and in other places and boarded ships in Puerto de Santa Maria and Cadiz were 8,000.<sup>26</sup>

Several other sources, perhaps all based on one primary account, concur with the figure of 125 thousand for Portugal alone. Damião de Gois, a contemporary of the events, estimates that 20 thousand households entered Portugal and paid the fee of eight cruzadas per head. Infants were exempt from the fee and households are estimated at approximately six people. Comparing the methodology and figures proposed by several contemporary chroniclers and modern Spanish scholars, Haim Beinart concludes that about 200 thousand Jews *in toto* left Spain in 1492.

While the precise number of Jews departing from Spain will perhaps never be known, the expulsion marked a demographic turning point in Jewish history. Spanish Jewry was the largest Jewish community in Europe in 1492. The expulsion was accompanied by enormous human losses. Many thousands of Jews succumbed to disease in their wanderings; many more converted and returned to Spain when resettlement elsewhere proved impossible. The majority who chose Portugal as their refuge were caught in the expulsion/forced conversion of 1496–1497. Those Jews who proceeded directly to the kingdom of Navarre in 1492 were expelled in

1498. But this northern Spanish kingdom bordered the united kingdoms of Spain and *Judenrein* France, both areas that would not permit Jewish entry. Consequently the entrapped Jews of Navarre also underwent forced baptism or martyrdom in 1498. One contemporary, Rabbi Abraham Baqrat, alluding to the tragic fate of the émigrés, calculates a mortality rate of 25 percent in his convoy to North Africa:

And they all left, about two hundred thousand by foot, men and women and children, spread out over the mountains and the seas like a flock with no shepherd. And our enemies took pleasure in our grief, saying, these people have no Lord. And of that general number we arrived in the kingdom of Tlemcen [Algeria] with twelve thousand souls. And at that time there fell from the nation three thousand people.<sup>27</sup>

The expulsion of 1492 marked a major shift in the Jewish population distribution from the West to the eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans. The most attractive site of resettlement was the Ottoman Empire. Welcomed by a succession of dynamic Ottoman Turkish sultans, the Spanish and Italian exiles found new opportunities in the expanding Muslim Empire. The Sephardim represented a skilled, urban population with many features that the Turks found attractive. For one, the loyalties of the embittered Spanish refugees against the Habsburg enemies of the Ottomans could be assured. Their knowledge of Europe and its languages might also be exploited to Ottoman advantage. As early as 1493 groups of Sephardic Jews began to arrive in Salonika and Istanbul. They kept arriving throughout the course of the sixteenth century. At first, they came directly from Spain or Italy. By mid-century, Portuguese secret Jews with little knowledge of Judaism also began to arrive in Ottoman ports along with a second generation of Sephardim who had found initial refuge in Italy only to be expelled once again in the sixteenth century. The immigrants who arrived in the middle of the sixteenth century after first recouping some assets in Europe also brought attractive commercial connections and know-how with them. Moreover, the Sephardim could boast a network of family members among the major emporia of Europe and the Far East, a trait that was especially attractive to the militant Turks who were not eager to personally settle in the dynamic ports of Christian Europe.

The shift of Jewish population from Iberia to the Eastern Mediterranean produced enduring cultural changes among the indigenous Jewish diasporas in the lands of Islam, particularly in its Turkish-speaking regions. The exiled Jews of Spain rapidly assumed cultural hegemony among the old Greek-speaking Jewish population, the Romaniots, previously the Jewish majority in the Balkans and Asia Minor. Within one generation, the exiles from Spain provided the leadership for a dynamic resurgence of Jewish life. They also built the institutional framework for a great cultural reawakening in the form of schools, libraries, printing presses, and publishing houses. Their skills as artisans, munitions makers, physicians, and multilingual merchants were harnessed by the Turks in the new Ottoman ports

and inland towns. Hundreds of new Jewish settlements dotted the Balkans, north Africa, and the Near East.

The exiles of 1492 were a survivor community that looked back to Spain with a combination of nostalgia, pride, and disbelief. Many, especially the Portuguese among them, were initially ill at ease in the alien and less sophisticated environment of the Ottoman Empire. Among the cultural traits that they brought from Iberia was an inflated sense of lineage and pride in their purported aristocratic lineage or genealogy. Their meeting with the Jewries of Muslim lands was fraught with misunderstandings, some based on these pretensions, some grounded in the clashes in customs and disparate traditions of the different Jewish diasporas. Former conversos also raised an enormous number of halakhic issues as a result of their wanderings, divided and broken families, and their personal experiences of having lived as Christians or in families that had been sundered by forced conversions. The tragedy of 1492 and the reconstitution of the Sephardic masses in the East produced an intellectual ferment among the Jewries of the Eastern Mediterranean during the sixteenth century that was unprecedented.

The new burst of intellectual energy among the Sephardic refugees took several forms. Communal pride in their Iberian Jewish legacy mingled with deep fears that this cultural legacy would be extinguished. The stream of refugees included many rabbis, teachers, poets, and doctors. They were animated by a determination to assure that the civilization that they had constructed in Spain would not be lost in the unprecedented historic upheaval. Printing presses were almost immediately established by Sephardim in Ferrara, Istanbul, and Salonica to preserve and disseminate the fruits of the final generation of Jewish scholarship in Spain. Printing presses also produced “how-to” books in Spanish to assist conversos who had been deprived of Jewish knowledge. Voluminous quantities of Responsa were written, especially in Salonica but also in Cairo, Edirne, and elsewhere, not only to resolve the thorny problems raised by divergent customs, but also to explain and preserve the rabbinic insights of Spanish-Jewish scholarship in its twilight years. Prayer books were specially printed to capture for the refugees and their heirs, and probably also with an eye to posterity, the nuances of difference that had characterized the many Jewish communities of Iberia and the several communities of Sicily. A rash of historical writing also poured forth from among the immigrant Jews as an unprecedented group of historians emerged, intent upon recording the events that had transpired.

The impulse to preserve extended beyond the common reflexes of all first generation immigrants to live among one’s fellow countrymen. The Sephardic immigrants were characterized by separatism and uncommon persistence of their regional loyalties based on Spain, Portugal, or Italy. They soon established a multiplicity of congregations bearing the names of Saragossa, Aragon, Toledo, Murcia, Catalonia, Apulia, Calabria, Sicily, etc. in their new home cities of Istanbul, Salonica, and Safed. These congregations endured, not for one generation as is ordinarily the case, but for several centuries! The meeting of Ashkenazic, Sephardic,



Italian, Moroccan, and other Jewries evoked different interpretations of the law and frequent conflicts of competing customs in contact. One major fruit of the upheaval and reconfiguration of world Jewry in the sixteenth century was the creation of a classic compilation of Jewish law by Spanish émigré Joseph Karo, known as the Shulhan Arukh. This clear and concise work became the definitive law code among the Sephardim. With Ashkenazic glosses added, it emerged as the handy legal manual for all of world Jewry, serving at the same time as a unifying force throughout the deeply divided Sephardic diaspora.

Perhaps the most paradoxical result of the expulsion from Spain was also the least predictable. In their new lands of refuge, out of necessity or as a result of the demographic weight of the Castilians among the Spanish exiles, the various dialects of Spain were discarded in favor of Castilian. Before long, the fragmented refugees began to share not only a legacy of tragedy, but also a common language of Castilian (written in Hebrew characters and soon known as Ladino). Given the emergence of a common language in Ladino and a newly standardized set of legal traditions in the Shulhan Arukh a Sephardic quasi-national cultural entity was born. It was a culture that also preserved and nurtured the popular proverbs, ballads (*refranes* and *romanceros*), and culinary customs of medieval Spain. These fruits of medieval Spain were passed down from mother to daughter and father to son for five hundred years. Thus, paradoxically, a people previously divided into disparate groups with various regionalisms and local dialects while in Iberia, became united culturally in the Ottoman Empire to form one Sephardic transnational people. They were no longer Catalans, Castilians, Catalanians, etc. but now Sephardic Jews.

In the aftermath and as a result of the special circumstances of the expulsion the countless conversos who remained in Spain and Portugal also left their mark on history. While they became progressively more estranged from Judaism, many infused critical questioning into the Catholic body politic as a result of their past. A good number of the converso intellectuals could be found among the followers of Erasmus. Some left their particular creative mark on Spanish literature in its sixteenth-century Golden Age by virtue of their alienated position in Iberian society. Other conversos, how many cannot be determined, joined the Spanish and Portuguese in the voyages of exploration and played a critical role in the development of the Portuguese Empire in Brazil and Goa or in Spanish America, many doing so with the hope of leaving the traces of their Jewish ancestry behind in Europe. Still other New Christians of Portugal ranging from wealthy merchant bankers and *asientistas* to modest farmers, blacksmiths, itinerant peddlers, and weavers, having endured exile from Spain, were determined to create a crypto-Jewish culture regardless of the obstacles or the personal dangers. As a result of the special circumstances of their forced conversion, their crypto-Judaism was more vigorous and long lived. Eventually, the Portuguese diaspora, most of whom were lineal descendants of the Spanish expulsion of 1492, paved the way for the resettlement of the Jews in Western Europe and the Atlantic world.

The repercussions of the expulsion of 1492 thus had a ripple effect throughout Jewish history and the far-flung Jewish Diaspora for centuries to come.

### Notes

- 1 Conversos were especially active in Spanish belles lettres both before and after the expulsion, particularly in the crafting of pastoral and sentimental novella. Early theater, prior to Lope de Vega, was overwhelmingly a converso invention. Many Iberian Jews remained attached to Castilian literature after they left Spain for the Netherlands and the Ottoman Empire.
- 2 For an apologetic defense of the king and queen in English see Roth (2002: 271–316).
- 3 Baer (1992: vol. 2, 398–423).
- 4 Kriegel (1992: 79).
- 5 A growing literature on the expulsion includes the massive data collected by Haim Beinart in *The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (2002). A summary of this major work can be found in Beinart (1992). For a revisionist view of fifteenth-century Spanish Jewry based upon data from Morvedre in the kingdom of Valencia see Meyerson (2004). See also Gutwirth (1992).
- 6 Kamen (1992: 75 n. 8). See text of the decree in Gerber (1992: Appendix I).
- 7 Ben Zion Netanyahu (1966) argues forcefully that rejection of the conversos by the Christian population was an important factor in the perpetuation of crypto-Judaism among the converso population. His study of the Responsa literature of the fifteenth century traces the evolution of both the attitudes of the rabbis and the behavior of the conversos leads him to this conclusion. Other scholars, such as Yitzhak Baer, have argued with equal passion that the conversos and the Jews were one nation in sentiment.
- 8 Yitzhak Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, 2 vols (Berlin, 1936), vol. 2, p. 405 cited by Bodian (forthcoming).
- 9 See Llorca (1946: 118).
- 10 Solomon ibn Verga (1947), the 44th conversion.
- 11 See Netanyahu (1987 and 1968: 41).
- 12 Kriegel (1992: 73ff.).
- 13 Machiavelli invokes King Ferdinand as his model of a pragmatic, wily and calculating statesman, hardly a man to be cowed by his spouse. Royal confiscation was, however, rampant. In Sardinia, for instance, an emblem was placed on Jewish houses when expulsion was decreed, indicating that the houses were now Crown property. Those who didn't obey the decree were to be executed.
- 14 Some evidence exists that Senior was blackmailed into conversion, threatened with dire consequences to the entire community if he and his family did not convert. After conversion, he continued to enjoy vast resources and a glorified position at the royal court.
- 15 The data collected by Haim Beinart (2002: 329–412) amply illustrates how Jewish exiles in the thousands straggled back into Spain after harrowing attempts to reach north Africa, Italy and elsewhere or unsuccessful attempts to start life anew in foreign

ports. Their attempts to retrieve their property frequently resulted in litigation, records of which have been preserved in the archives. There is small but intriguing evidence that some conversos who were active in court circles, anxious to distance themselves from the Jews, were also involved in pressing for the expulsion. This suggested theory, based on cryptic evidence, would be consistent with the frequently tense relations that existed between some courtiers and clergy of converso background and the Jewish community and is consistent with the familiar phenomenon of the zealous neophyte who was anxious to distance himself from his former coreligionists. See Marx (1908).

- 16 In the town of Huete see Beinart (2002: 213); Suárez Fernández (1964: 401–402).
- 17 Cited in Schwarz (1943: 46–47).
- 18 Andrez Bernaldez, *Historia de los reyes Catolicos Don Fernando y Isabel* (Seville, 1869) as quoted in Raphael (1991: 71).
- 19 Kamen (1992).
- 20 Roth (2002: 309), quoting from Alonso Fernandez de Placencia, *Historia de Placencia* (Madrid, 1627), vol. 2, ch. 14.
- 21 Gerber (1981).
- 22 Usque (1964: 200).
- 23 Solomon ibn Verga (1947: the 52nd conversion).
- 24 On the immigration of Spanish Jews and conversos to Portugal see Tavares (1992: 131–139) and Soyer (2007: Introduction). Many Spanish conversos joined the stream of Jews entering Portugal in 1492, perhaps hoping to revert to Judaism once on Portuguese soil or to use the opportunity to escape to the Ottoman East.
- 25 Kamen (1988) and the discussion of demography in Beinart (2002: 284–290).
- 26 Alonso de Santa Cruz, *Cronica de los Reyes Catolicos*, ed. J. de la Mata (Seville, 1951) I, pp. 491–504 as quoted by Beinart (2002: 85 and n.336).
- 27 See Ben-Sasson (1961/2: 63).

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