

The Return *to* Judaism

Descendants from the Inquisition
Discovering Their Jewish Roots



Sandra Cumings Malamed

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Passover Haggadah, two-page spread, printed in Holland.
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Auto da fé or burning at the stake.
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PART ONE

The Inquisition and the Marranos



OVERLEAF: *THE DOMINICANS PREDICT...*
*From their headquarters on Lake Como, Italy, the
Fraternal Order of the Dominicans announced that an
Inquisition with persecutions instituted by the Papacy
would eventually take place in Spain.*

Throughout the history of mankind, for many reasons, whole civilizations of people have come into being, been successful, and eventually ceased to exist. For example, the Vikings, who thrived from 793 C.E. to 1066 C.E. with their navigational and mercantile strength and sea-faring capabilities, came, conquered, and then went. The Babylonians who destroyed the first Temple in Israel, Solomon's Temple, and then took thousands of Jews into slavery in what is today Iraq, no longer exist. The Roman Empire, which destroyed the second Temple in Israel, ruled many areas of the world over centuries, with military, intellectual, and political prowess; but eventually Rome too disappeared.

The Grand Inquisition of Spain and Portugal tortured and killed thousands of people from 1347 C.E. to late in the nineteenth century, simply because they had Jewish roots and were successful financially. In spite of far-reaching autos da fé (religious cleansings) in many parts of the world, used as a threat to convert Jewish people to Catholicism, the days of the Inquisition ceased to exist. That regime, as powerful as it was, with both the blessings from the mouth of the Pope and the Crowns of both Spain and Portugal, is gone.

And finally, during the rise of Naziism and World War II, from 1933 to 1945, six million Jewish people lost their lives, exterminated by the very organized, tyrannical Adolf Hitler war machine of Germany, referred to as "The Third Reich." In addition, many people other than those of Jewish origin also were exterminated, including cripples, homosexuals, Moslems, and Gypsies. Finally stopped by the Allies, led by the United States Armed Forces, the Third Reich and Hitler were defeated.

There is one group of people with Jewish roots who, although they were forced to abandon their society and the civilization they knew, remain today as more than a mere remnant of their glorious past. Not just in archaeological digs, museums, or stories that are told, these are living people who are scattered throughout the world now. These people were and are called by many names: Marranos (Spanish for "pigs"), Conversos, and Nuevos Cristos or New Christians. Forced during the Inquisition to convert to Catholicism or die, by order of the Catholic Church and the political arms of both the Spanish and the Portuguese governments, their descendants still today keep certain customs in their homes and in their lives that bring them back to the Judaism that their ancestors practiced openly 500 years ago. And today, these descendants are questioning their own "unusual" habits that they recognize aren't Catholic or Christian, to find the deeper ties to their families' original roots as people of the Jewish faith who once lived an observant life in the rich and beautiful lands of Spain and then Portugal and their colonies. This is their story and it is really they to whom this book is dedicated.

The Jews in the Iberian Peninsula

IT HAS LONG BEEN THOUGHT that Jewish people have lived in the Iberian Peninsula since the sixth century C.E., and had also come to the area as traders as early as 300 B.C.E. with ancient mariners. The Phoenicians, who considered these lands the farthest point of Western Europe, called the area Espania, or the Hidden Land. Since trade relations between the ancient mariners and Hebrews had existed since the time of King David and of King Solomon, it has been thought that the Hebrew traders often came along with the Phoenicians to Espania. Hebrew coins have been unearthed in the Iberian city of Tarragona, from long before the arrival of the first Romans and the Visigoths to that area.

The Jewish people who come from this area are referred to as Sephardim, which is a word derived from Sefarad, found in Verse 20 of the book of Obadiah, in the Old Testament. Sefarad was a body of land that the Aramaic language version called Aspania. The Latin for Aspania became Hispania, and today we refer to it as Spain.

When Jews settled into Spain, a part of the Iberian Peninsula, they became the people of Spain (Sefarad), or Sephardim (the plural). Eventually, when the Jewish Sephardim moved into the area next door, called Portugal, after their expulsion from Spain in 1492, to join the Jews already living there, they were still called Sephardim. Today those Jews whose ancestors came from Spain or Portugal, no matter where in the world they lived since then, are still known as Sephardic Jews, or Sephardim.

Jewish people, or Sephardim, have lived in the Iberian Peninsula during the times of the Roman, Visigoth, Moslem, and finally, Christian governing bodies.

Jews became active participants in each of these societies; and although there were often periods of anti-Semitic rules and difficult, even torturous and murderous activities that they had to contend with, nothing matched in horror their treatment during the time of the Catholic Inquisition.

For many of those years, Jewish people were permitted some religious freedom and were even allowed to participate in the agriculture, merchant trades, and even public offices of Espania. All went well until King Reccared came to the Visigothic throne. He decided that all of his Visigothic people should be of Catholic persuasion, when he announced his own conversion at the Third Council of Toledo in



THE IBERIAN PENINSULA. This 1730 map of Spain and Portugal shows Granada, Toledo, Barcelona, Girona, Seville, and Córdoba, the main communities for Jewish population in Spain.

589 C.E. Included in his new edict were not only old Visigoths, but Hebrews (Jews) as well. General violence and open civil wars began to happen, leaving Spain (Espania) open to the next group of conquerors, who came from the Arab or Moslem world, beginning in 711 C.E.

Known as the people of the book, the Jews became the administrators of the Moslems' newly conquered towns and cities, serving often as treasurers, trading merchants, doctors, and scientists. Now under Moslem rule began what is known as the Golden Age for the Jews in Spain. During this time, Spanish Jewish people developed their sciences, arts, mercantile skills, music, poetry, and commentaries by citizens like Moses Maimonides, who codified all Jewish Law. They even developed a language of their own, called Ladino.

In the year 1107, the Jews of Moslem Spain began to see new rules from a fanatical faction of Moslems who were called Almoravides. They demanded all Jews be converted to their faith, called Islam, or be exiled. At the same time Moslems called Almohades came down from the north, also demanding that the Jews be converted to Islam or be exiled.

However, a greater threat to Jewish freedom in Iberia occurred in the form of the Christian re-conquest of Spain.



MOSES BEN MAIMONIDES. This statue of the doctor, teacher, scientist, and rabbi is now outside the Synagogue in Córdoba, Spain.



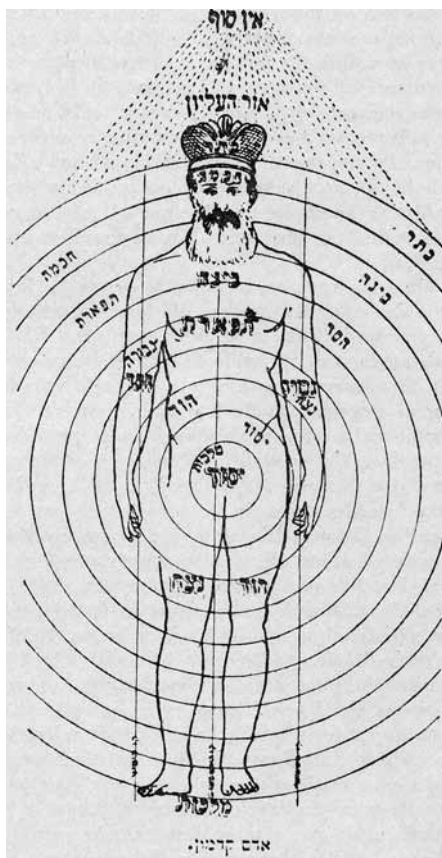
MAIMONIDES'S LOGICA. This title page is from the 1527 first edition of Rabbi Maimonides's Logica, written in both Hebrew and Latin. It was the first work on logic written by a Jew. Maimonides began it in 1158 while he wandered with his family in exile from Córdoba, Spain, before settling in Fez, Morocco. Originally written in Arabic and titled Magāla, Fi-Sina at Al-Mantiq, it is a treatise on the 175 most important logical, physical, metaphysical, and ethical terms used in a discussion of logical theory.

Between the thirteenth century and 1492, the Jewish people and the Moslem people of Spain were subject to the whims of the ecclesiastical proclamations of the Christian Church ordering their conversion to the Christian faith. This happened even though the Jewish people had been an integral part of Spanish and Portuguese society for generations, making many important contributions as scholars, scientists, map makers, merchants, royal treasurers, physicians, and advisors to many of the kings and queens who ruled. Even though Jewish citizens had helped to produce revenues for the Kingdom of Spain by developing industries and commerce and by representing the kingdom in diplomatic circles to ensure the continuation of trade with other countries of the world, Jewish people became the targets of abuse by the Church and the political bodies of Spain's territories, including the cities of Toledo, Seville, Avila, Córdoba, Granada, Barcelona, Girona, and Saragossa. Jewish people at this time also lived in the towns of Lucena, Daroca, Salamanca, Segovia, Tarragona, Tortosa, Tudela, and Vitoria. In each of these places Jewish people had distinguished themselves by creating poetry, literature, and the most important work of spiritual writing in the Jewish tradition, called the Kabbalah.

For the Jewish people in the Iberian Peninsula, the date June 6, 1391, marked the beginning of the end of life that, in that part of the world, was known as the Golden Age of contributions and advances. The blood that was shed that day in Seville, Spain began the pattern that was to be repeated in the many cities and towns where Jewish people lived. The conversion of the Jews became compulsory and for those Jews who did not cooperate, humiliating and insulting names were assigned to them by the Spanish Church. For example, even for those Jewish people who converted to Christianity in the public sphere but continued to practice quietly some Judaism privately in their homes, the term "Marrano" was assigned. The word "Marrano" was a derogatory word meaning "pig," which also refers to the Jewish dietary laws, which prohibited Jews from eating pig. Often Marranos were also referred to as Nuevos Cristos, or New Christians, because they had not been baptized Christian from the beginning of their lives as the Old Christians had been. They were



JEWS AT THE COURT OF PRINCE HENRY. Jewish doctors, rabbis, and scientists served as consultants to Prince Henry, the Portuguese navigator, during the period of intense scrutiny of Jews by the Catholic Church.



MAN FROM THE KABBALAH. This page is from the Kabbalah, also known as the Zohar, which is a collection of mystical writings from Spain, originally. The Zohar teaches goodness to help one become closer to God's ideals.



THE BARCELONA HAGGADAH. This Haggadah was published in the eighteenth century in England in the Barcelona style. Used during the Passover meals, it brought to the Portuguese and Spanish Jews a sense of their historic roots from the Iberian Peninsula.

also referred to as Conversos, or those who had been converted. Even Jewish New Christians who did not practice any form of Judaism were always suspected by Old Christians, the Crown, and the Catholic Church of not being true to the belief or doctrine of Christianity.

In order to seek out unfaithful or false Christians, at the request of Queen Isabella and other Spanish prelates, Pope Sixtus II issued a bull on September 17, 1480, instituting a holy tribunal called the Spanish Inquisition, made up of inquiring enforcers, who became the ones who judged the Jewish behavior, and established

Residuaz table festoz mobilis												
Anteus numerus	litera dominica	Intervallū Concurrentes		sebrnā septuage	martii q̄dageli	ap̄lis pascha	mai rogationes	Junii pentecoste	Junii corpus xpi	heb a pet ad Mo	dies superflui	heb a pad advent
3	e	8	4	9	2	13	18	1	12	3	2	26
	f	8	5	10	3	14	19	2	13	3	1	26
11	g	8	6	11	4	15	20	3	14	3	0	26
	A	9	0	12	5	16	21	4	15	2	6	26
19	b	9	1	13	6	17	22	5	16	2	5	25
8	c	9	2	14	7	18	23	6	17	2	4	25
	d	9	3	15	8	19	24	7	18	2	3	25
	e	9	4	16	9	20	25	8	19	2	2	25
	f	9	5	17	10	21	26	9	20	2	1	25
	g	9	6	18	11	22	27	10	21	2	0	25
	A	10	0	19	12	23	28	11	22	1	6	25
	b	10	1	20	13	24	29	12	23	1	5	24
	c	10	2	21	14	25	30	13	24	1	4	24

Expliciūt table tablarū astronomice Raby abraham zacuti
 astronomi serenissimi Regis emanuel Rex portugalie et cet
 cū canonicis traductis alinga ebrayca in latinū p magistrū
 Joseph vizinū discipulū ei⁹ actoris opera et arte viri solet
 tis magistri ortas curaqz sua nō mediocri inpressionē cōple
 te existūt felicib⁹ astris aṅo ap̄ma rez ethereaz circuitiōne
 1496 sole existēte in 15 g 53 m 35 ē piscinaz sub celo leyree

ZACUTO'S ASTROLOGICAL CHART. Abraham Zacuto was a scientist who produced this astrological chart and the astrolabe, both of which were used to help the first explorers from Spain and Portugal to seek new territories to colonize.

the punishments that accompanied the Inquisitors' decisions. In 1483, under the first Inquisitor General, Frey Tomás de Torquemada, who supposedly had Jewish roots himself, the Inquisition developed a process, which included the Inquisition's rights to inquire about the purity of one's commitment to Christianity or the purity of one's blood. It was thought that investigating one's blood helped to cleanse the Catholic Church of false commitments and non-believing members of Christian society. Because of Torquemada, an important position in the Catholic Church was granted to a body of people called Inquisitors, not only by the Church but also by the political arm of the Spanish states and eventually by Portugal as well.



GRAND INQUISITOR TORQUEMADA. Tomás de Torquemada was the Grand Inquisitor who made the rules other Spanish Inquisitors followed in investigating and questioning Jews for the purpose of accusing Jews of practicing their religion and to force them to convert to Catholicism.

Autos da Fé Celebrated in Spain, Portugal, and Their Colonies

Here is a list of documented autos da fé, including what statistics are known on the numbers of those victims punished and burned.

Autos da Fé Celebrated in Spain

**Indicates that Jews were punished but numbers unknown*

Date	Place	Punished	Burned	Date	Place	Punished	Burned
May 10, 1484	Saragossa	4	—	1578	Toledo	1	—
June 3, 1484	Saragossa	—	3	March 13, 1587	Saragossa	—	1
Dec. 20, 1485	Saragossa	—	2	1591	Toledo	—	24
Feb. 18, 1486	Saragossa	1	—	1598	Seville	1	—
Feb. 24, 1486	Saragossa	—	3	1598	Toledo	1	—
March 17, 1486	Saragossa	—	3	Nov. 7, 1610	Lograno	6	—
April 28, 1486	Saragossa	—	4	Oct. 15, 1619	Toledo	1	—
May 21, 1486	Saragossa	7	—	Nov. 30, 1624	Seville	*	—
June 25, 1486	Saragossa	5	—	Dec. 14, 1625	Seville	67	4
June 30, 1486	Saragossa	—	3	Dec. 21, 1627	Córdoba	71	—
July 28, 1486	Saragossa	—	3	July 22, 1628	Seville	2	—
Aug. 6, 1486	Saragossa	5	—	April 27, 1630	Toledo	1	—
Sept. 4, 1486	Saragossa	—	—	June 29, 1634	Cuenca	57	—
Oct. 21, 1486	Saragossa	—	6	June 22, 1636	Valladolid	28	—
Nov. 29, 1486	Saragossa	—	11	1641	Toledo	1	—
Dec. 15, 1486	Saragossa	—	1	April 17, 1644	Seville	1	—
Dec. 17, 1486	Saragossa	—	1	Aug. 2, 1644	Valladolid	1	—
Jan. 15, 1487	Toledo	700	—	Feb. 24, 1647	Córdoba	12	—
Jan. 21, 1487	Saragossa	—	5	March 29, 1648	Seville	—	29
Feb. 15, 1487	Saragossa	—	—	Dec. 28, 1649	Toledo	—	3
March 15, 1487	Toledo	1000	—	1649	Valladolid	—	1
May 7, 1487	Toledo	22	—	Jan. 1, 1651	Toledo	—	2
May 20, 1487	Saragossa	—	9	Jan. 1651	Toledo	—	63
Aug. 18, 1487	Saragossa	—	3	Nov. 30, 1651	Toledo	*	—
Aug. 20, 1487	Saragossa	—	3	April 28, 1652	Toledo	4	—
Dec. 8, 1487	Saragossa	—	—	Aug. 24, 1652	Toledo	4	—
Feb. 10, 1488	Saragossa	—	4	Nov. 3, 1652	Toledo	2	—
Feb. 15, 1488	Saragossa	—	1	Dec. 28, 1652	Toledo	*	—
July 30, 1488	Toledo	—	16	May 11, 1653	Toledo	*	—
March 2, 1510	Las Palmas	3	—	May 18, 1653	Toledo	*	—
March 2, 1511	Cuenca	—	—	Aug. 10, 1653	Toledo	*	—
Feb. 24, 1526	Las Palmas	5	—	Aug. 31, 1653	Toledo	3	—
May 21, 1559	Valladolid	—	2	March 15, 1654	Toledo	7	*
Dec. 22, 1560	Seville	—	1	June 29, 1654	Cuenca	47	10
Sept. 18, 1560	Madrid	—	29	Sept. 27, 1654	Toledo	*	—
March 15, 1562	Murcia	—	1	Dec. 12, 1654	Granada	*	12
March 20, 1562	Murcia	16	—	March 1655	Compostella	—	1
June 17, 1565	Toledo	1	—	May 3, 1655	Córdoba	78	—
Nov. 6, 1569	Las Palmas	*	—	Oct. 31, 1655	Toledo	7	—
June 18, 1570	Toledo	7	—	Jan. 30, 1656	Toledo	1	—



NUREMBERG CHRONICLE
ACCOUNT OF PERSECUTION.
This leaf from the fifteenth-century Nuremberg Chronicle shows both the horrors of the treatment of Jews by Spain during the Inquisition and the anger and disgust Germany felt towards Spain.

Date	Place	Punished	Burned
Sept. 10, 1656	Toledo	8	—
Sept. 17, 1656	Toledo	2	—
Oct. 8, 1656	Toledo	2	—
1657	Córdoba	—	1
1657	Córdoba	13	—
Feb. 11, 1657	Toledo	3	—
March 11, 1657	Toledo	3	—
May 6, 1657	Toledo	3	—
July 1, 1657	Toledo	8	—
Sept. 16, 1657	Toledo	6	—
Dec. 9, 1657	Toledo	17	—
Aug. 24, 1658	Toledo	7	—
May 9, 1659	Toledo	*	—
Sept. 7, 1659	Toledo	*	—
1660	Toledo	—	1
Jan. 11, 1660	Toledo	—	1
Feb. 9, 1660	Córdoba	13	—
March 19, 1660	Córdoba	*	—
April 11, 1660	Seville	80	7
June 13, 1660	Toledo	2	—
Sept. 26, 1660	Toledo	*	—
April 4, 1661	Toledo	*	—
Aug. 8, 1661	Toledo	*	—
Dec. 4, 1661	Toledo	6	—
Feb. 24, 1662	Córdoba	38	—
April 11, 1662	Toledo	*	—
May 6, 1663	Córdoba	19	—
Oct. 7, 1663	Toledo	*	—
Feb. 22, 1665	Toledo	*	—
June 29, 1665	Córdoba	96	—
1666	Toledo	—	1
June 7, 1666	Córdoba	23	—

Date	Place	Punished	Burned
June 15, 1666	Toledo	*	—
May 1, 1667	Toledo	3	—
Oct. 30, 1667	Toledo	3	—
1669	Córdoba	13	—
April 7, 1669	Toledo	*	—
Nov. 17, 1669	Toledo	*	—
May 18, 1670	Toledo	*	—
July 20, 1670	Córdoba	21	—
Oct. 19, 1670	Toledo	*	—
Sept. 6, 1671	Toledo	*	—
Sept. 11, 1672	Toledo	*	—
Feb. 11, 1674	Toledo	*	—
Oct. 14, 1674	Toledo	—	1
Feb. 14, 1679	Toledo	4	—
Dec. 17, 1679	Toledo	5	—
Oct. 6, 1680	Toledo	5	—
Dec. 21, 1680	Toledo	*	—
Sept. 29, 1681	Toledo	*	—
1683	Seville	—	1
April 25, 1683	Toledo	*	—
1684	Granada	—	—
May 22, 1684	Toledo	2	1
April 1, 1685	Toledo	1	—
Aug. 18, 1686	Toledo	3	—
Oct. 15, 1686	Toledo	1	—
April 18, 1687	Toledo	1	—
1689	Granada	—	—
July 2, 1691	Majorca	38	37
May 18, 1692	Seville	1	—
Nov. 9, 1692	Toledo	1	—
Feb. 7, 1694	Toledo	*	—
June 6, 1694	Toledo	3	—

Appendix A

Timelines for Spain, Portugal, and the World

These timelines give a chronological overview of the history of Jews in Iberia and in Spanish and Portuguese colonies in other parts of the world, during the period from 1600 B.C.E. to 1996 C.E.

Spain

- 1600 B.C.E. Immigration into the area now called Spain (Espania, the hidden land).
- 586 B.C.E. Babylonians seize Jerusalem and destroy the Temple of Solomon and David. Jews taken captive and brought to Babylonia. Some Jews flee across Africa and settle in the area now called Spain.
- 534 B.C.E. Persian King Cyrus conquers Babylonia and helps Jews return to Jerusalem.
- 6th cent. B.C.E. Phoenician colonies established in the Iberian Peninsula.
- 300 B.C.E. Jewish traders already in Iberian Peninsula, according to legend.
- 30 C.E. (approx.) Crucifixion of Jewish rabbi known as Jesus Christ.
- 1–400 C.E. Christianity is a grassroots, non-hierarchical popular movement.
- 2nd cent. C.E. Important Spanish cities in Roman Empire: Augusta Emerita (Mérida), Córdoba, Seville (Hispalis), Zaragoza (Caesar Augusta), Lugo, Cádiz (Gades), and Tarragona.
- 2nd cent. C.E. During the reigns of Roman Emperor Hadrian and the Antonines (Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Verus, and Commodus), more Jews move into what is now Spain, enjoying greater freedom throughout the empire.
- 280–500 C.E. Compilation of the Talmuds.
- 359 C.E. Hillel II fixes the Jewish calendar.
- 400 C.E. Christians severely persecuted by the Romans.
- 409 C.E. Iberian Peninsula invaded by three Germanic tribes, the Suevi, the Vandals, and the Alani.
- 450 C.E. Official signs of Spanish anti-Semitism appear at a meeting of the Council of Elvira, and the Roman Empire, now Christian, implements anti-Jewish laws.
- 476 C.E. End of the Roman Empire.
- 5th cent. C.E. Visigoths, another Germanic tribe, invade Spain and overcome earlier invaders.
- 480–711 C.E. Visigoths accuse Jews of plotting against the kingdom and declare, “only Catholics live in Spain.”

- 567–586 C.E. King Leovigild decides Spain should be Catholic, in an effort to unify the Iberian Peninsula.
- 586 C.E. King Recarred converts to Catholicism and adopts the Nicene Creed. Thus begins a period of persecution of the Jews.
- 589 C.E. At the Third Council of Toledo, the first anti-Jewish laws are passed, ruling that children of a mixed Jewish–Christian marriage should be baptized, leading to a policy of forced conversion of the Jews.
- 612 C.E. Ten years after Reccared’s death, Sisebut ascends the throne. Anti-Jewish laws no longer being enforced at this time.
- early 7th cent. C.E. Visigothic King Sisebut persecutes Jews, passing edicts forcing Jews to convert and receive baptism. Those who refuse are tortured, their property is confiscated, and their families are scattered.
- 7th cent. C.E. Visigoths in Western Europe rely on a council called *Aula Regia*. This group of advisors to the court includes Catholic bishops, strengthening ties between Church and State.
- 627 C.E. Council of Clichy forbids sales of Christian slaves to Jews, fearing Jews will try to convert these Christians to Judaism.
- 631 C.E. Sisenand seizes the Visigothic throne and holds power for six years. As a Unionist, he seeks to have both Jewish and Christian converts surrender their faith under repressive rule.
- 633 C.E. Fourth Council of Toledo declares that forced conversions (as practiced by King Sisebut) are ineffective and in violation of “the full form of justice.” However, the Council orders the separation of Jewish husbands from their Christian wives, unless the Jews convert to Christianity, and orders the separation of children from their converted parents to prevent them from learning Jewish customs.
- 638 C.E. The Sixth Council of Toledo, in which Sisenand’s successor, Chintila, will not permit non-Catholics to live in Spain. Kings of Spain are required to enforce laws against Judaism.
- 642 C.E. Chindaswinth ascends the throne. He is more tolerant of Judaism, and many converts return to their faith during his reign.
- 653 C.E. Recceswinth assumes complete control of the throne, having ruled jointly with his father. Recceswinth is more zealous than all his predecessors in oppressing the Jews. At the Eighth Council of Toledo he proposes that converts who continue with their Jewish observances be put to death at the hands of converts, as well as other laws to deny unconverted Jews the practice of their religion and to limit their civil rights.
- 672–680 C.E. The reign of Wamba, who relaxes persecution of the Jews, concentrating instead on building monarchic control through a strong army.
- 680–687 C.E. Wamba’s successor, Erwig, regresses to persecuting the Jews in his realm, changing legislation affecting Jews and recent Christian converts.

- 702–710 C.E.** Witiza changes legislation concerning Jews and converts. His legislation abolishes forced conversion, but orders Jews to sell their property acquired from Christians at a fixed price to the treasury, forbids Jews to trade with Christians, and removes their small children, seven and under, to be raised as Christians.
- 709 C.E.** Late in Witiza's reign, Jews join forces to protest his harsh policies.
- 710 C.E.** Witiza's rule ends, just before the Moorish invasion of the Iberian Peninsula.
- 711 C.E.** Moslem commander Tariq bin Ziyad, acting on behalf of Caliph Walid I of Damascus, leads a small force across the strait from North Africa to Gibraltar. Visigothic resistance is weak, the Moslem forces capture Córdoba and the Visigothic capital of Toledo, and Tariq defeats Roderic, the last Visigothic king. Within three years most of the Iberian Peninsula is under Moslem control.
- 717–720 C.E.** Spain under Moslem rule is far more hospitable to the Jews, ushering in what is now called the Golden Age for the Jews in Spain. Known as "the people of the book," the Jews become administrators of cities and towns. Jews develop their arts and sciences, their mercantile skills, their literature and music, and the language of Ladino.
- 718 C.E.** Pelayo (Pelagius) stops the Moors at Covadonga and becomes king of Asturias. He is credited with the beginning of the Reconquista, a long campaign on the part of the kings of Asturia, in concert with the Catholic Church, to reclaim Iberia from the Moslems. Early in the Christian reconquest, the kings of Asturias gain control over León.
- 719 C.E.** Narbonne, part of Spain under the Visigoths, is captured by the Moslems. The location of the city makes it ideal for trade. It lies at the end of the trade route stretching from the East, through Spain, to the border of the Christian West.
- 751–763 C.E.** Galicia joins Asturias.
- 759 C.E.** Narbonne taken by Pepin I. Jews had a strong presence in Narbonne during the Visigothic rule, and enjoyed relative freedom from the more extreme persecutions elsewhere in the Visigothic realm.
- 768–814 C.E.** The reign of Charles the Great (Charlemagne). During this period Jewish merchants are able to acquire wares and products from Charles's domains and transport them to remote markets. They make contact with suppliers in the East, having kept ties with Moslem Spain. Radhanites, a group of international Jewish merchants, prosper as well. Jews are very important in the area of world trade.
- 810 C.E.** King Alfonso II, "The Chaste," moves his capital to Oviedo.
- 891–960 C.E.** Fernán González, appointed Count of Castile by the King of León, makes himself virtually independent.

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