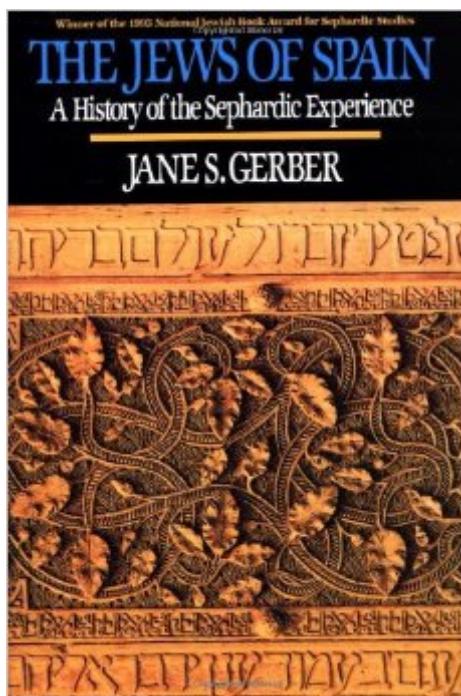


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The Jews Of Spain: A History Of The Sephardic Experience



Synopsis

The history of the Jews of Spain is a remarkable story that begins in the remote past and continues today. For more than a thousand years, Sepharad (the Hebrew word for Spain) was home to a large Jewish community noted for its richness and virtuosity. Summarily expelled in 1492 and forced into exile, their tragedy of expulsion marked the end of one critical phase of their history and the beginning of another. Indeed, in defiance of all logic and expectation, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain became an occasion for renewed creativity. Nor have five hundred years of wandering extinguished the identity of the Sephardic Jews, or diminished the proud memory of the dazzling civilization which they created on Spanish soil. This book is intended to serve as an introduction and scholarly guide to that history.

Book Information

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THE JEWS OF SPAIN is an eminently readable and important survey history of the Ibero-Jewish experience from Biblical times. The Jews of Sepharad (Spain) are first mentioned in the Prophetic Book of Obadiah. From this beginning in antiquity, they can trace their history on Spanish soil right down to the present day. Often abjured and ultimately expelled in 1492, the Sephardim nonetheless contributed much to the root stock of Spain and Portugal. One scholar estimates that 70% of all Spanish/Hispanic people today can trace their line back to some Jewish forebears, and in Portugal the percentage is an even more astounding 85%. Linguists are only now recognizing the strong Hebrew influence on the Spanish language (The honorific "Don" descends from The Hebrew word for Lord, "Adon"). Despite the institutional disabilities the Jews experienced as a minority in a land

that was first Greco-Roman, then Christian, then Muslim, and finally again Christian, they prospered and thrived, becoming so much a part of the fabric of Spain that certain Spanish kings had themselves declared "King of the Three Religions" and had their tombs inscribed in Latin, Arabic and Hebrew. A Jewish "Golden Age" occurred under Muslim rule in the 1000s, when Jewish courtiers became noted poets, philosophers, cartographers, merchants, and even Prime Ministers. This pattern continued for a while under the Christian Reconquest, although increasing pressures were brought upon the Jews to convert. Nationwide pogroms in 1391 caused about half of Spanish Jewry to leave the fold, and again in 1492 most Jews chose conversion rather than exile from their beloved land. All told, about 300,000 Jewish people left Spain, scattering throughout the world.

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