

THE JEWISH COURTIER OF ARAGON
AND CASTILE
1250 - 1350

BY
Les Scharnberg

"A man sleeps here but sees Spain in his dreams."

(B. Talmud - Nida 30) (4:91)

INTRODUCTION

In writing of the court Jews of this time period it is well to keep in mind that although I tried to limit my focus to just two of the formative kingdoms of what was to become Spain, there is really too little evidence and the evidence is too conflicting to give us a clear picture of what took place in these far away times and lands.

To begin with the year 1250 C.E. and to include material only from this date until 1350 C.E. would be as serious a mistake as to exclude events that took place beyond the borders of the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile. So let me begin with some preliminary observations of the times and circumstances which help to shed light on the intriguing lives of the Jewish courtiers of Aragon and Castile.

First, these kingdoms were quite new and a map of the times is disorienting to the modern mind. Aragon and Castile were formed of The Reconquista through efforts of individuals such as Ferdinand III and James II. They wrested control of the area of Cordova in 1236, Murcia in 1241, Jaen in 1246 and Seville in 1248. Castile and the kingdom of Leon were united into one kingdom in 1230 and these became the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon under the rule of Ferdinand III and James I respectively. The national/kingdom borders were unclear during these times, witness the extent of what was called the German Empire in approximately the year 1000 C.E. It extended south of Rome, west to include Avignon, east to include Prague and North to the Elb River and the North Sea (12 p. 28)!! So, you can see we have some reframing in order to envision even vaguely what took place. Just as the borders of

Germany were under constant change and flux, so too the borders of Aragon and Castile.

The Reconquista was a long and hard-fought struggle in which Jews played central roles in the establishment of order and stability. Castile was not fully in control of its far reaching borders until nearly 1400, fully fifty years beyond the scope of this paper. In an existing document from Jerez de la Frontiera (Castile), written in 1266, Jews are described as "mounted bowman...military scouts, guards...and policemen." (1 p. 113). It appears that Jews were encouraged to settle the frontier and areas devastated by the Reconquista. As we shall see later, many privileges were proffered in such areas, but in the larger population centers there were more restriction. Often Jews were used as negotiators with the Moslems and this may have been their entry to the Courts. After their usefulness was no longer essential, courts continued relations with Jewish physicians and scholars. As the Arabic influence continued in Castile for quite some time but the Christian influence became dominant in Aragon by 1300, we can see dramatic differences in the two kingdoms from that time on (1 p. 112).

Just as the political kingdoms were in the midst of rebuilding during and after the Reconquista, so were the powers and dominions of the Church. It was early in the 13th c. that the formation of the Dominican and Franciscan orders came about specifically to deal with the problems of heresy (22 p. 360). These were trying times when kings did not always uphold the Church desires in these frontier lands. King Alphonso VI of Castile called himself the "Emperor of the Three Religions" (4 p. 21). This must have presented the Church with not a few serious problems at a

time when Christianity was trying to regain what it had lost to the Moslems. It was also early in the 13th c. that the Lateran Council (1215 C.E.) under the authority of Pope Innocent III proclaimed its series of laws concerning the Jews.

Several of the laws listed by the Lateran Council would have powerful effect on the Jews of Aragon and Castile. Among the more noteworthy are the following: (1) that tithes from Jewish property inheritance were to go to the Church; (2) baptized Jews were forbidden Jewish practices; (3) Jews were not to appear in public during Easter...no public offices were to be held by Jews and a moratorium on Christian debts to Jews was decreed, (all of this was in the name of preventing "mockery."); (4) distinctive dress was decreed (the EJ says that this is the first time in history, but that just is not so...it may be the first instance that the Church takes such an official position, more about this later); (5) Jews and Christians are not to dwell together, work together or trade together; (6) Jews are not to own land and any Christian who serves a Jew is to be excommunicated. There was one more important point made by this the 4th Lateran Council: it banned usury (making/charging interest on loans of money or property) of "immoderate" amounts by Jews from Christians. It does not specify what "immoderate" means but it is an attempt to clarify the earlier ban on usury in any form (3rd Lateran Council, 1179) which did not specifically mention Jewish moneylenders (26 p. 1446 Vol. 10). Perhaps an additional note on the issue of distinctive clothing might be appropriate at this point.

The first mention of such an order concerning the Jew is in the

years of the reign of Calip Omar II (717-20) where he orders non-Moslems to wear distinctive colored clothing (26 p. 62 Vol. 4). It is next mentioned by the "Abbasside Caliph, Haroun al-Rashid, who legislated that Jews must wear a yellow belt and tall conical cap (19 p. 117). So, we see that the Church was preceeded in these measures by more than 300 years! Later we will discuss its implications in the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile.

There are three other areas of general background that are important preliminary issues of concern for my paper: what atmosphere was there concerning philosophy in general; the problem of what the Church could do with the Jews as it moved back into the European world and the issue of converting the Jews which is actually a part of the latter issue.

Just prior to 1250 in the year 1242 the power of the Church was such that 24 cart-loads of Talmud and midrash were burnt in Paris. One is tempted to say that the anti-philosophic stance of the Dominicans and their extreme views of literature fit for the public was responsible for this tragedy. But Salo Baron points out that "The initiative...was taken not by Christian leaders...rather by Jewish anti-Maimonists." (3 p. 63 Vol. 9). We must remember that these rabbis issued a ban, in 1232, on Maimonides Guide To the Perplexed and it was they who informed the Dominican inquisitors of its "heretical" nature which resulted in the work being burned in 1233. This conflict was to continue throughout our period of history and we will see that Pope Clement IV issues a papal bull ("Turbato Corde") which demands that all Jewish books be turned over to the Dominicans so that they can expunge offensive passages. This followed the burning of 1242 by only 25 years.

The issue of such books and their contents was only part of a larger problem for the Church: what should it do about the Jews? This problem was not new. But the Reconquista posed the question in new light: here the Christian world was taking by military force a world where it was not tolerant to the other religions around it...it was notably intolerant of the Islamic tradition (3 p. 5) so, how could it tolerate the Jews? Generally the answer was typified by the view of Alexander of Hale who says that the Jews should be tolerated since Jesus prayed for them and "issued from their seed." (3 p. 6-7). This is further complicated, however, by the introduction of the Inquisition and by the fact that war brings about orphans and the long standing Gregorian Decretals had stated that children baptized "even without their and their parents' consent" were to be considered Christian and that the act could not be reversed (3 p. 15). Though some popes and scholars like Thomas Aquinas opposed such rulings, they remained in force and were popular for the masses.

Now for final introductory words about the Inquisition and the subject of massive conversions. Neither of these issues are subjects of this paper proper, but I feel compelled to make some remarks based upon my readings. We have been told that the Church did not really go after the Jew qua Jew but was instead interested in the convert to Christianity who reverted to Jewish practice. This is in line with Max Dimont, who writing of the infamous Torquemada and the Inquisition says, "Some Jews, of course, died violent deaths during these decades, but they were mainly victims of mob rule. They were not tried and they were not condemned by the official Church Inquisition." (9 p. 222). Again, it is not the scope of this study to investigate thoroughly this subject but rough reading of

the literature and in-depth study of the works cited in this paper question this type of view. First of all we have official Church Inquisitors like Bernard Gui who dedicates a whole chapter of his book on the Inquisition to methods of dealing with the "heretical Jews" and secondly, there are records of Jews being burnt at the stake in 1317, again in 1325 (where they were "tortured in every possible way") (1 p. 9-14). All of these were under official Inquisitors. It might be argued that this proves the point (that these were isolated instances), or it might be argued that while such things happened under the auspices of official Inquisitors, that they had not had a trial, that the Inquisitors gave in to lynch-mob measures. But such arguments only seem to me evasive and not very different than the argument of contemporary times: "What could we do against everybody?" To that I answer that it takes putting your life on the line, sometimes, to properly defend the morally correct position, further, that if the moral leaders don't take such positions then they are responsible. Finally, in this regard, even if the Church were to allow just a few to be put to death in this way this establishes the precedent for others to follow. In this regard the Church was certainly no different than the Church as depicted in the modern novel/play, The Deputy by Rolf Hochhuth. Now for some words about mass conversion.

The criticism has been voiced that it is hard to understand what caused the Spanish Jew to convert in mass rather than flee the country or to die in a form of "Kiddush Ha-Shem." Again, this is not the focus of this paper but a couple of brief observations seem in order. Often this criticism seems to come from within Judaism itself and is a kind of North

vs South or Ashkenaz vs Sephardi challenge verging on aspersion. Care should be exercised in such pride/arrogance for two reasons: many of the Jews who were leaders and many who were part of the larger populace of Jews in Spain by the time of the mass conversions (at the beginning of 1400's and at the time of the expulsion order) were families who had themselves fled Germany, France or England to begin with; in addition the first big examples of mass conversion were by the Ashkenaz themselves: from 1290 to 1294 "one of the largest group conversions recorded in Jewish history" took place in "the cradle of Ashkenaz culture..." (5 p. 465) In this case "at least 10,000" Jews converted on the spot in just one section of the Ashkenazi population. I did not stop to count the percentages in this instance (in any case such statistics could always be challenged) but because I had done another paper on the issue of the Marranos some time ago, I do know that the figures there (again, difficult to substantiate) tell us that just over 21% of the Spanish Jews chose to convert rather than emigrate or die (12 p. 43). This is certainly no higher than that of the Ashkenazi figure. As we will see, there were many reasons why conversion might have seemed a reasonable alternative. The wonder is that more did not convert.

EARLY PERIOD 1255 - 1300

The ever-present influence of the Church under the leadership of Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254) in some ways is a paradigm for what was to be seen in Aragon and Castile during these times. On the one hand this pope renewed anti-Talmud legislation yet he wrote two strong letters which afforded some measure of protection for the Jews: one letter was a condemnation of accusations of ritual murder and the other warned people against false accusations of kidnapping by the Jews (24:414). As we shall see this is similar to the positions taken by the kings of Aragon and Castile. There may also have been this type of ambivalence in the surrounding nations of Europe but the record of these times indicates that the civil authorities did not act with as much ambivalence. King Louis IX of France condemned the Talmud in 1254; papal legate, Bishop Odo, confiscated all the Hebrew books he could get his hands on and ordered the Jews to sell all of their books on the Old Testament (in 1245); and the story of such activities could continue (3:66-68). As we shall see in Aragon some texts were expurgated, while in Castile virtually no effort was made to deal with Jewish writings. Instead, whether it be books or orders concerning the lives and livelihoods of the Jews under the kings of Aragon and Castile, the ambivalence of Pope Innocent IV was reflected by their actions. One example in this early period was that of James I of Aragon. In 1242 he ordered that Jews and Saracens were to attend sermons of the Dominicans and the Franciscans. A few years later he ruled that the Jews did not have to attend outside their quarter (and as the quarters were not yet places where the

Christians went, the effect of the ruling is obvious) (3:71-72).

Even while these oppressive conditions were being enacted elsewhere throughout Europe, the Jews of Aragon and Castile were able to live fairly dynamic religious lives. More than anything else this was probably a legacy of the Moslem rule but even during the Reconquista (something which continued in much of Castile for the entire time-span of this paper's concern) many religious freedoms continued to hold the lives of Jews in Aragon and Castile in sharp contrast to those of their counterparts in Germany, France, England and other communities of Europe. In any case, we see the Jews of Aragon and Castile often settling in one area and remaining there from the beginning of the 12th c. to the end of the 15th c. establishing strong religious communities (1:196). Thus changes in tradition as we know it sometimes had origins in these communities. For example: in these communities of locating the 'bima' in the center of the synagogue developed Rambam advocated this as the proper location for what was then called the 'almenor' - in Spanish) which the Sephardic communities follow to this day (17:71). Another example is the development of metal crowns and the naming of the handles on the Torah scroll. Rambam and the Jewish communities of called the handles 'rimmonim' (pomegranates) where as before they had been called 'tapuchim' (apples) and thus today we call them 'rimmonim.' (17:66-67). These were developments of the time period which opens our study.

In the work world Jews held many positions, the most important being those of the Jews affiliated with the courts of rulers. They looked after the kings' lions (26:210, Vol. 4), they were toreadors, furriers, blacksmiths, dyers, and shoemakers. While some were money lenders, many

were merchants but the greatest number "were artisans" (25:173).

Moneylending was always a difficult position particularly given the ever changing position of the Church and the political fickleness of the political leaders. Flannery points out that "Usury by Jews...considered a contravention of Jewish law as well as Christian...was formally forbidden but generally winked at and regulated." (10:129). For all of this the position became an endeavor practiced by some of the court Jews which was a natural outgrowth of their court positions: that of financial advisor and/or treasurer to the king. Thus we have the Benveniste family, the Alconstantini and the Ravaya families as members of the courts of various kings for more than 100 years.

Other important court positions were the "mandaderos" (ambassadors), "escrivanos" (secretaries), and two other positions again associated with the handling of money: the "porteros" or "entregadores" (tax collectors) and the "almoxarife" (tax farmers...customs collectors). One other position, though not as influential as the other court positions, was that of court astrologer which was sometimes filled by a Jew.

What we read tells us that there was a great deal of prestige attached to these court Jews. They were given the opportunity to buy property as well as land. On occasion they were given houses, "vineyards, olive groves, fields and mills" as gifts from the kings (1:112)1. More important than the monetary influence was their influence in cases of legal or Church difficulty. Time and again these Jews used their influence to intervene on behalf of their fellow Jews. Thus we see Beneveniste De Porta (the financial advisor in Aragon during the

reign of James I owning several grain farms and several flour mills in Barcelona) who loans money to the king using that debt to gain concessions in regard to a Jew accused of blasphemy against Jesus. He is able to get the Church sentence changed from banishment to a monetary fine (which he could well afford). (26:210). In spite of such endeavors these court Jews were in constant danger of losing their positions and they were not always seen favorably by other leaders in the Jewish community. The Alconstantini family were referred to disparagingly by Nachmanides, yet contributed much money in support of the study of Maimonides. They were the last family to serve in such high positions in the kingdom of Aragon when Moses Alconstatini served as royal treasurer and interpreter in 1277. (26:550-1, Vol. 3).

In Aragon these court Jews had nearly as many privileges as their Castilian neighbors and co-religionists...at least it would appear so at a glance. If they did, they lost it at an incredible rate so that by 1300, while the Jews of Castile were just reaching a peak of activities, the Jews of Aragon were virtually powerless at court. The difference between Aragon and Castile at the time of 1300, being that Aragon had stabilized its frontier settlements and borders, while in Castile there was still unrest in some areas, gives credence to the observations made by several historians that as long as Jews had skills necessary to the king, they were granted privileges and basic freedoms; when such skills were no longer necessary, neither were the Jews. Perhaps most important of these skills were those of the interpreter and those of the handler of money.. Interpreter because the Jew quite often read, wrote and spoke Arabic (while his Christian neighbor did not) and handler of money

because of the above mentioned Church positions exemplified by the Lateran Councils:

The position of Jews in Aragon and Castile (as elsewhere in Europe) can be best be summed up in the statements of two contemporary historians: Yitzhak Baer and Robert Seltzer. "Because a Jew could not aspire to political power on his own, he was considered a particularly dependable royal advisor." (22:365). In addition the "...crown had need of servants of proven fidelity, who could also be discarded with ease whenever the situation called for it." (1:163). The crown did not have to act precipitously as regards these Jews; it had the above mentioned precedent of the Church which demanded full tithe on Jewish inheritance. The crown went a step further: after death the holdings of influential Jews were "usually confiscated by the crown." (1:114)

All was not gloomy and the opposite side of this picture shows leaders such as Nachmanides on very friendly terms with James I (1213-1276) the king who was called "The Conqueror." As mentioned before Nachmanides did not care for other Jews who were influential in the same court (Alconstantini for example) but he was frequently in the company of this court, so it must have had more to do with personal issues than with the idea of being a part of the court entourage. Perhaps his influence was exerted or perhaps the combined influences of all the Jews in the court were responsible for the favorable treatment of Jews throughout the kingdom of Aragon. No matter what the specific cause that influence was substantial even in this early period. One example of that early influence is that James I allowed Jews to buy not only the homes of the defeated Arabs but in direct violation of earlier cited Church law, he

allowed Jews to purchase Christian-owned homes (with the restriction that such homes were within the confines of the "juderia"). (Baer). Also, while the Jews themselves were forbidden by these same Church laws to employ or retain Christian workers, there is evidence that the court Jew did just that and with the full blessing of the king. Judah De La Cavalleria (d. 1276), one of the "entregadores" of James I, was given permission (in 1263) "to keep" Christian huntsmen who provided him with game birds daily. While we might argue that he doesn't seem very "Jewish" if he participates/encourages hunting and eats non-kosher food, the Church had no such doubts and in 1266 brought charges against him. Nothing came of those charges, however, because James I refused to allow the Church officials to carry out the sentences (26:261, Vol. 5). As an early note this famous family would later split with some converting to Catholicism and others remaining Jewish. Indications that this course would be taken are evidenced by Judah's being a member of the Order of the Knights Templar.

Certainly other court Jews joined in the favorite associations and fraternities of the crown and the justification process which may have gone on in the minds of such Jews can only be speculated upon but permit me a speculation here. The Order of the Knight Templar was founded in 1118 and headquartered in Jerusalem. It was a military order of the Church, the purpose of which was to protect pilgrims from robbers and other dangerous elements. Perhaps Cavalleria justified his membership as protection of the stranger...who knows? As a side note, which illustrates the difficulty of seeing the Church as all-powerful, Phillip IV of France (1307-14) did not care for the organization and "forced the

pope to suppress the order and (King Phillip) executed the Grand Master and the other knights." (8:691, Vol. 2)

In Castile many of the same types of court positions were filled but there is also evidence of a bit fuller participation by the Jews of Castile when compared to their neighbors in Aragon.

Some of the Jews of Castile went so far as to use the coat of arms of the kings or princes under whose rule they lived. Not only did they use them as safe-passage when travelling, they used them also for the decorations of many of their manuscripts.(17).

As in Aragon the court Jews of Castile seemed to run the full range of the most observant to the least observant of religious affiliation and practice. Of the more famous court Jew families in Castile, one was certainly the family of Abulafia. Todros Ben Joseph Ha-Levi Abulafia (1220-1298) was a famous rabbi and kabbalist who lived in Toledo. He has been referred to as the "Spanish exilarch" (1:194-5) and Baer calls him the antithesis of the tendency of Jewish courtiers to assimilate. He was, however, quite involved with the court even accompanying the king and queen of Castile on a journey to France (1:119). This one family illustrates well the range of activities and behavior exhibited by the Jewish courtiers. Todros Ben Judah Ha-Levi Abulafia (1247-1298), a poet and court financier, was imprisoned for his escapades with women of the court (he was later released and reinstated as a member of the court). Another member of this family, Samuel Ha-Levi Abulafia was an engineer for the court of King Alphonso X (1252-1284) and perfected hoisting devices and constructed a water clock for the court (1:193).

Alphonso X, who was called "The Wise", allowed the Jews under his

rule to attain a great deal of prestige (10:130) while not being particularly favorable in his treatment of the Arabs under his rule. His rule showed more consistency than many of the rulers of Aragon and Castile and perhaps because he generally ruled favorably with the Jews, the kingdom of Castile was a better place for Jews for a longer period of time than Aragon. Early in his rule he established the study of Hebrew at leading universities throughout the kingdom (remember this was a time in which members of the Church were attempting to take out of circulation many Hebrew books) (3:73). In the same year (1254) he granted free trade and tax exemptions for the Jews who wished to attend the "two annual fairs in Seville." (26:1202, Vol. 14). King Alphonso X ruled from 1252 - 1284 and while there were rare exception where he enforced rules to the detriment of the Jews (such as his 1272 ruling that the Jews of Murcia were forbidden to live among the Christians) (Baer) his rule was characterized by the operation of his royal court and "Las Siete Partidas."

In Castile the "alcaldes" (judges of the Royal Court) were required to have "adelantados" (Jewish administrative officers) and rabbis sit with them "to advise them in rendering a decision." (1:118). Such a process is in keeping with the generally favorable side of Alphonso "The Wise." Equally important to keep in mind, however, is what are called "Las Siete Partidas." In English this translates to "The Seven Distinctions" or, "The Seven Separations."

There seems to be some debate about the enforcement of these rulings. Chazan says that it, "...is not clear...how real [the acceptance of these laws] was." (7:190). Baer seems certain that the

rulings were not in effect until 1350 or later and that its "...legislation effecting the Jews never carried much wight." (Baer). My own sense of this is that negative rules were not (with rare exception) carried out under the rule of Alphonso X but that beginning with the rule of Alphonso XI (1312 - 1350) there were alternating periods of enforcement and neglect where the periods of neglect were much longer than the periods of enforcement. We shall see this as we continue our study.

It is not clear to me why they were called "Las Siete Partidas".. probably because I did not see a copy in Spanish and because the rules in translation are quite numerous with no obvious groupings. A good listing of the rules is given by Chazan (where he has 11 groupings) and the following are taken from that listing:

I. Defines "Jew"

II. Laws for Jews living among Christians

They are allowed to practice their own rights.

Jews may not speak ill of or blaspheme the
faith of Jesus.

Death penalty if a Jew attempts to converts
Christian.

Death penalty if a Jew goes out on Good Friday.

III. No Jew may hold office or employment where he
can oppress Christians.

IV. Jews allowed a synagogue...no new buildings and
Christians forbidden to interfere with Jewish
worship. They were specifically forbidden to

break into or rob synagogues.

V. No one was to interfere with Jewish Sabbath worship.

VI. Advantages to Jews who convert. Penalties against those Jews who interfere.

VII. A Christian who becomes a Jew (converts) shall be put to death.

VIII. No Christian man or woman shall live in the house of a Jew. Christians were not to eat or drink with a Jew, not to take any medicine made by a Jew.

IX. Death penalty to a Jew who has intercourse with Christian women (the "spiritual wives of Jesus.").

X. Jews were to own no Christian slaves. Jews were not to convert other slaves.

XI. Jews were to wear distinguishing marks... badges and special capes.

(7:191-195).

As I said above, it seems to me that the negative rules were only occasionally enforced, I should add that the rules which seemed to favor the Jews were often enacted under Alphonso X but less so with other rulers. One other note of great importance concerning these rules. The Rulers of Aragon and Castile were quite often related so the ideas and methods for rule were certainly known and shared in both kingdoms. What we will see (and have seen) happening is the rules which are articulated

here are enacted in both kingdoms at different times. Examples of this are to be seen in the above mentioned charges against a friend of Benveniste De Porta (blasphemy against Jesus) and in the imprisonment of Todros Ben Judah Ha-Levi Abulafia for his relationships with court women. A final note at this time in regard to "Las Siete Partidas"...it seems obvious when we look at these rules that they were not all original with Alphonso X, in fact many are merely repetitions of laws written by the Church in other times and places. Thus, it appears that more than the sharing of ideas between relatives and neighboring kings is at the heart of the appearance of these rules in both kingdoms simultaneously. Chazan says that the articulation of these rules was Alphonso's concession to Church pressure (7:190) and it would appear that many of these rules can be traced more to the Church than to Alphonso. In any case, the life of the Jew (particularly the court Jew) under Alphonso X, as a rule, does not reflect enforcement of the restrictive and negative laws contained in "Las Siete Partidas." With this in mind let us examine the lives of these court Jews with particular emphasis on their religious activities.

In this early period there were already substantial differences between the religious lives of the Jews in Aragon and those of Castile. James I, while a friend of Nachmanides and other Jews of his court, never-the-less introduced several restrictions that were either not applied in Castile or were seen much more rarely in Castile than Aragon.

At the outset of our time period, 1250, the "blood libel" appears for the first time on Spanish soil in the town of Saragossa, Aragon.(Baer). Not long after this (in 1265) we note that first known instance of "the Inquisition in Spain" being occupied with "Judaizing Christians" (1:156). So, it would appear that the Jews of Aragon began with more restrictive lives than the Jews of Castile. We must be careful though about such concepts because just as there seem to be inconsistent application of laws and ruling from one kingdom to another and from one time-period to another (one ruler to another), there were also inconsistencies from one area of a kingdom to another. The issues mentioned here were reflective of only those instances and while the general atmosphere of Castile might be seen as more just (or equitable) than the one in Aragon, the fact is that the outset of this period in Castile sees an equally anti-semitic law acted upon. In Cordova the official Church laws against building of a new synagogue (or expanding an already established one) which had been in effect since Roman times, are enforced in 1250 (3:10). Perhaps the difference is that in James I the Church sensed a ruler that they could pressure more successfully than in Alphonso X. On the other hand James I was quite bold in some of the acts he undertook which were looked at with disfavor by the Church.

Probably the most notable act which James I took regarding the Jews would be highlighted by controversies surrounding the famous debate between Nachmanides and Pablo Christiani.

The year 1263 was a busy and important one for James I and the Jews of Aragon. The apostate Christiani first arranged for James I to decree that Jews were to be forced to listen to Christian sermons (10:114), then

arranged for the famous debate with rabbi Moses ben Nachman (known as Bonastrug de Porta to his friend King James I.). Christiani was strongly supported by the Dominican confessor to the King, Raymond of Pentaforde (who had converted Christiani), thus it appears that this was not just a case of an apostate's enthusiasm for his new religion but an effort directly attributable to the Church leaders. As an aside, the ruling that the Jews could be forced to attend Christian sermons was not officially abolished by the Church until 1848 by Pius IX. This certainly seems to me to be in support of my earlier contention that the Church was after the Jew qua Jew and did harass and persecute the Jew. But, back to the debate of 1263. Because of Nachmanides' court connections he was able to get assurances that the debate would be "fair" and that he would be free to defend his faith fully. The debate lasted 4 days and was called off for fear of mob reaction. Baer tells us (1:152-53) that there were two versions published after the debate: one in Latin and a version published by Nachmanides in 1265. The Latin version, says Baer, is "biased" and Nachmanides version is "not careful with details...[but] is an authoritative account." The pope himself (Pope Clement IV) was very critical of James I for allowing Nachmanides to publish his account of the debate (24:117). The ambivalence characteristic of rulers in Aragon and Castile was to be seen even here. At the same time that these events were taking place, Jewish court influence was powerful enough that James I granted permission for the Jews of this same community to establish a synagogue!! Not only that, but Baer points out (1:156) that he issued orders that the Jews had the option of not attending these sermons...this order was issued in the same month as the original order demanding their

attendance!! When reading about this event the thing that is striking is that one historian includes all such information and another does not. Baron, for example, mentions the 1263 ruling forcing Jews to attend the sermons and even elaborates on the ruling saying that the Jews were not to "respond verbally to the sermon," but he does not mention the order being rescinded. (3:71-72). It is my opinion that the Church was only restrained by its lack of power to implement its laws and desires in the face of these monarchs, thus the equivalent ambivalence on the part of the Church can not be seen in the same light. As far as I could tell there was uniform anti-semitism in the laws of the Church unmitigated by laws opposing such cruelty and hatred. The objections came from philosophers like Thomas Aquinas, not the chief legal authorities. Further, as stated above, when the kings issued rulings and laws of anti-semitic nature they were as often as not direct results of Church pressure. Thus, we see a rule in "Las Siete Partidas" which specifies the death penalty for Jews who attempt to convert Christians preceeded by the 'papal bull' called "Turbato Corde" which gives the Inquisition jurisdiction over the Jews who induce Christians to convert (24:118). On the other hand the kings directly disobeyed Canon Law and allowed Jews to convert mosques into synagogues (Baer). Another example is that of forced entry to the Jewish houses of worship...the Dominicans were given sanction by the Church in doing so, but Alphonso X expressly forbade it and James I issued a decree limiting such entry to "no more than 10 monks and attendants (3:71-72m Vol. IX)."

Often the court Jew in Aragon and in Castile was himself a rabbi as we saw in the case of Nachmanides. The chazzan of the Toledo Synagogue

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At the outset of our time period, 1250, the "blood libel" appears for the first time on Spanish soil in the town of Saragossa, Aragon.(Baer). Not long after this (in 1265) we note that first known instance of "the Inquisition in Spain" being occupied with "Judaizing Christians" (1:156). So, it would appear that the Jews of Aragon began with more restrictive lives than the Jews of Castile. We must be careful though about such concepts because just as there seem to be inconsistent application of laws and ruling from one kingdom to another and from one time-period to another (one ruler to another), there were also inconsistencies from one area of a kingdom to another. The issues mentioned here were reflective of only those instances and while the general atmosphere of Castile might be seen as more just (or equitable) than the one in Aragon, the fact is that the outset of this period in

Castile sees an equally anti-semitic law acted upon. In Cordova the official Church laws against building of a new synagogue (or expanding an already established one) which had been in effect since Roman times, are enforced in 1250 (3:10). Perhaps the difference is that in James I the Church sensed a ruler that they could pressure more successfully than in Alphonso X. On the other hand James I was quite bold in some of the acts he undertook which were looked at with disfavor by the Church.

Probably the most notable act which James I took regarding the Jews would be highlighted by controversies surrounding the famous debate between Nachmanides and Pablo Christiani.

The year 1263 was a busy and important one for James I and the Jews of Aragon. The apostate Christiani first arranged for James I to decree that Jews were to be forced to listen to Christian sermons (10:114), then arranged for the famous debate with rabbi Moses ben Nachman (known as Bonastrug de Gorta to his friend King James I.). Christiani was strongly supported by the Dominican confessor to the King, Raymond of Pentaforte (who had converted Christiani), thus it appears that this was not just a case of an apostate's enthusiasm for his new religion but an effort directly attributable to the Church leaders. As an aside, the ruling that the Jews could be forced to attend Christian sermons was not officially abolished by the Church until 1848 by Pius IX. This certainly seems to me to be in support of my earlier contention that the Church was after the Jew qua Jew and did harrass and persecute the Jew. But, back to the debate of 1263. Because of Nachmanides' court connections he was able to get assurances that the debate would be "fair" and that he would be free to defend his faith fully. The debate lasted 4 days and was

called off for fear of mob reaction. Baer tells us (1:152-53) that there were two versions published after the debate: one in Latin and a version published by Nachmanides in 1265. The Latin version, says Baer, is "biased" and Nachmanides version is "not careful with details...[but] is an authoritative account." The pope himself (Pope Clement IV) was very critical of James I for allowing Nachmanides to publish his account of the debate (24:117). The ambivalence characteristic of rulers in Aragon and Castile was to be seen even here. At the same time that these events were taking place, Jewish court influence was powerful enough that James I granted permission for the Jews of this same community to establish a synagogue!! Not only that, but Baer points out (1:156) that he issued orders that the Jews had the option of not attending these sermons...this order was issued in the same month as the original order demanding their attendance!! When reading about this event the thing that is striking is that one historian includes all such information and another does not. Baron, for example, mentions the 1263 ruling forcing Jews to attend the sermons and even elaborates on the ruling saying that the Jews were not to "respond verbally to the sermon," but he does not mention the order being rescinded. (3:71-72). It is my opinion that the Church was only restrained by its lack of power to implement its laws and desires in the face of these monarchs, thus the equivalent ambivalence on the part of the Church can not be seen in the same light. As far as I could tell there was uniform anti-semitism in the laws of the Church unmitigated by laws opposing such cruelty and hatred. The objections came from philosophers like Thomas Aquinas, not the chief legal authorities. Further, as stated above, when the kings issued rulings and laws of

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James II of Aragon who rules to the end of this period begins with rulings favorable to the Jewish communities. This is particularly evident after the blood libel in Saragossa which took place in 1294. As soon as it was determined that the accusation was a false one, James II issued a decree stating that false accusers and slanders of the Jews would result in severe punishment (7:126-28). He later confronts the Church and declares " that the Jews are not subject to the jurisdiction of the Inquisition." As we shall see later he was not always successful in preventing the brutality of the Dominican and Franciscan Inquisitors.

As we close out this period a large influx of Jews from other countries in Europe begin to find their way into Aragon and Castile. More would go to Castile because by 1300 the Jews had been forced out of most of the court positions in Aragon while this did not come to pass in Castile until nearly 1400. (1:120). Castile was still a frontier kingdom.. We close out this period with an additional note about the Church. First, Pope Nicholas III issued a bull which required preachers to be sent throughout Europe "to convert Jews." In Aragon the person in charge of this program was the Dominican Raymond Martini, author of Pugio Fidei adversus Mauros et Judeos. To say that such action is not against the Jew qua Jew takes a stretch of the imagination; to say that Raymond Martini was not really acting within Church law is to say that Colonel North was a wild maverick, operating completely on his own. Finally, Pope Honorius gives us insight to the Church positions on the Jew: in communities where an undetected murder had taken place, the pope gave permission to fine the local inhabitants.. If the victim was a Jew or a saracen an amount was set, but if the victim was Christian than twice the

former amount was to be assessed (3:9).

We now turn to the last part of the paper.

LATE PERIOD - 1300 -1350

Of Aragon during this period there will not be much to write. Essentially, the court Jews of Aragon were no longer in existence after 1300. There will be an occasional exception but the influence of the court Jew in Aragon was over. After James I the Inquisition made steadily more inroads and acquired ever growing power in the kingdom to the point where they were able to go after Jews from other nations, such as France (where they were expelled in 1306) who had sought refuge in the northern part of Aragon. King James II did attempt to intervene on behalf of some of these Jews but with only occasional success. Beginning with the Inquisition burning Jews at the stake as early as 1317 (1:9-11, Vol. 2) in the northern reaches of Aragon, they move ever deeper into the kingdom and torture Jews in Calatayud (1:12-13, Vol. 2) in 1325 and going into Saragossa where the Inquisitors destroyed the synagogue and put to death "several Jews." (1:14, Vol. 2). As the Church sets the example we soon see the Christian populace asking the crown for more and more restrictive measures to be enacted against the Jews. By the end of this time period (1350) Christian businessmen have succeeded in restricting Jewish trade with Egypt and Syria in an effort to gain more and more dominance (26:210, Vol. 4). Perhaps a note of irony is added when we note that the influence of court Jews in the neighboring kingdom of Castile tried to do what the lack of court Jews in Aragon left in a void. Joseph de Ecija (a.k.a. Josepn ben Ephraim ha-Levi ibn Shabbat - d. 1339/40) the "almoxarife mayor" of Castile under the rule of Alphonso

XI attempted to influence King Alphonso IV of Aragon to free "Aragonese Jews from the obligation to wear the Jewish badge.." (26:356, Vol.. 6)..

The Jews who fled France, England and Germany brought terrible news with them: John Duns Scotus had ruled that Jewish children should be refused permission to leave the country and "forced to grow up as Christians." (3:16). This is only a restatement of the official Church position as stated in the Gregorian Decretals which we mentioned earlier. As part of the terrible years leading to the expulsion/"mass conversions" this position would be repeatedly invoked. It would reach its most horrible extreme centuries later in the conquest of the Central American Aztecs and Incas where in the name of these laws (official Church laws) baby Indians would be baptized, grasped by the heels, swung overhead and brought down headfirst onto a wagonwheel or boulder splitting their head open (see any number of histories which re-count these terrible stories - notably: The Inquisitors and the Jews in the New World by Seymour B. Liebman...). It raises the question (again) about criticism of the idea of mass conversion: how often was this pressure applied? How many parents would choose conversion rather than the abandoning of their children?

In 1290 the Jews were expelled from England and in 1306 these acts emboldened the general populace. So excited by the new "Christian" fervor were the people of France that a new group of crusaders was formed called "Pastorelli." Not satisfied that the Jews of France were expelled they invaded Aragon in 1320 massacreing Jews in small frontier or border communities. James II did send knights to protect them but was not successful in many instances. (1:15, Vol. 2). At the same time this was

happening Pope John XXII authorized the Inquisition to again place the Talmud on trial and we see the Church burning the Talmud (again) in Toulouse and Perpignon. (1:15, Vol. 2). As noted above the Church begins to apply more and more pressure after 1300. Just before Pope John's ruling Pope Clement V begins to compel the Jews in some areas (Aragon among them) to forego interest on money or loans (1:310) and the Ecclesiastical Council (Zamora Synod) then demands (in 1313) Church authority over the Jews. (1:310).

Notwithstanding these developments there were still a few Jews attached to the court of James II and Alfonso IV who were the last rulers in our time span. Names we have heard before are again heard at court: Samuel Beneveniste is physician at court and another was a translator of medical works for the court (26:558-563, Vol.. 4); Vidal De La Cavalleria mints coins for the court and Judah Bonsenyor is court physician and Arabic translator for the court. By 1350 there were no such courtiers.

The situation in Castile was quite different. Most notably there was no Inquisition in Castile. Ferdinand IV ruled from 1295 - 1312 (whose mother ruled nearly as much as he did) and Alphonso XI ruled from 1312 - 1350. Alphonso was only 14 years old when he first wore the crown... Not much information is given about the rule of Ferdinand but he seemed to be like others before him: ambivalent and constantly "wavering between a policy favoring the Jews and overt anti-semitism." (1:360). In 1348 Alphonso XI introduced the Church law forbidding Jews to charge interest on loans but as most Jews did not depend on moneylending for their livelihood, the law had little effect. Baer points out that the court was asked to abolish the law in 1351 "and it is

not known whether any attempt was ever made to enforce it." (1:362).

Here too, there were influential Jews attached to the court. A descendant of the famed Abulafia family was given permission to build a synagogue in Toledo (he was the Royal Treasurer) and Joseph Ecija was given permission to build one in Seville. Probably one of the more important figures from 1306 - 1328 was Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel.. As mentioned earlier he was controversial in the Jewish community.

When he arrived in Toledo the community had a long-standing population. Some families had been in Toledo and other town in the Kingdom of Castile since the 12th C. Some of them resented Asher's style and "arrogance." Among the rules he changed or attempted to change in Spain (Castile) were the granting of equal inheritance rights to the husband and the wife, compelling a husband to divorce a wife if she declared her unwillingness to live with him, and paying salaries to the 'shaliach tzibbur' and the one who blows the shofar. Also, he very much opposed the study of philosophy claiming to know nothing about it (2:196) and saying, "None who go unto her may return." (23:68). In spite of the controversy he became "the recognized authority all over Spain." (20:14). One of his sons wrote an important work on the Halacha, titled, Arbaah Turim (Four Rows).

There is not a doubt that as we approach the end of this period there is a diminishing power and diminishing freedom for the Jew of Castile but the rapid decline as seen in Aragon will wait until the very end of our time-frame. The changes are really more subtle: smaller, more insignificant places of worship; Jews taking consolation in the writings of the Rambam that "...even discrimination against the Jews...is valid as

long as it fell equally on all Jews" (Biale citing the Mishneh Torah, Gezeilah 5:14) (6:55); or saying to themselves 'dina de-malkhuta dina.'

The end of our study coincides with the devastation of the Plague. The influential court Jew was not immune nor were the kings. Hasdai ben Abraham Crescas is born in 1340 and his father, an influential merchant, dies when Hasdai is only 8 years of age...of the plague. Abraham Crescas was not to know that his son would be recognized as the "last of the great Spanish Jewish thinkers." (2:172). Alphonso XI died of the plague in 1350. While on the whole efforts by the rulers of both Castile and Aragon prevented large-scale massacres of the Jews "that took place elsewhere during the Black Death" (22:366) they were not able to hold off the masses indefinitely. Even statements by Pope Clement VI (1342-1353) that diseases which killed Jews "could hardly be the result of an anti-Christian Jewish plot" (24:132) the masses thought otherwise, and we see the first large scale anti-Jewish riots take place in Aragon in 1348 and in Toledo (Castile) 12,000 Jews are massacred by mobs in 1355.

Wurmbrand may be correct when he says that, "It took longer in Spain than elsewhere for anti-Jewish feeling to strike root" (25:178) but when it arrived (might it be better to say 'manifest itself?') it was with a viciousness unparalleled until recent times. Flannery quotes Poliakov in what perhaps sums up the experience of the once great people of the Golden Age: "Little by little...every step and every act of daily life of a Jew were subjected to payment of a tax. He Had to pay to come and go, buy and sell, to enjoy his rights, to pray in common, to marry, to beget children, indeed for the very cadaver he carried to the cemetery." (10:143). Already the Jews of Aragon were feeling these taxes at nearly

their worst, in Castile the process was just starting. The Jewish family who had lived here since the 12th century and the Jewish family which had fled poersecution in other countries just 50 years earlier were about to encounter the very persucution they thought that they had avoided.

The Jewish courtiers who had known a hundred years of roller-coaster existence were now going downhill; how they must have been puzzled not to see it go back up again. He probably held on tighter, closed his eyes and said to himself, "This must be a bad dream!" Closing his eyes tighter he might have thought of the Talmud: "A man sleeps...but sees Spain in his dreams."

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