

History of Judaism

Medieval European Judaism, and Ashkenazi and Sephardic Developments

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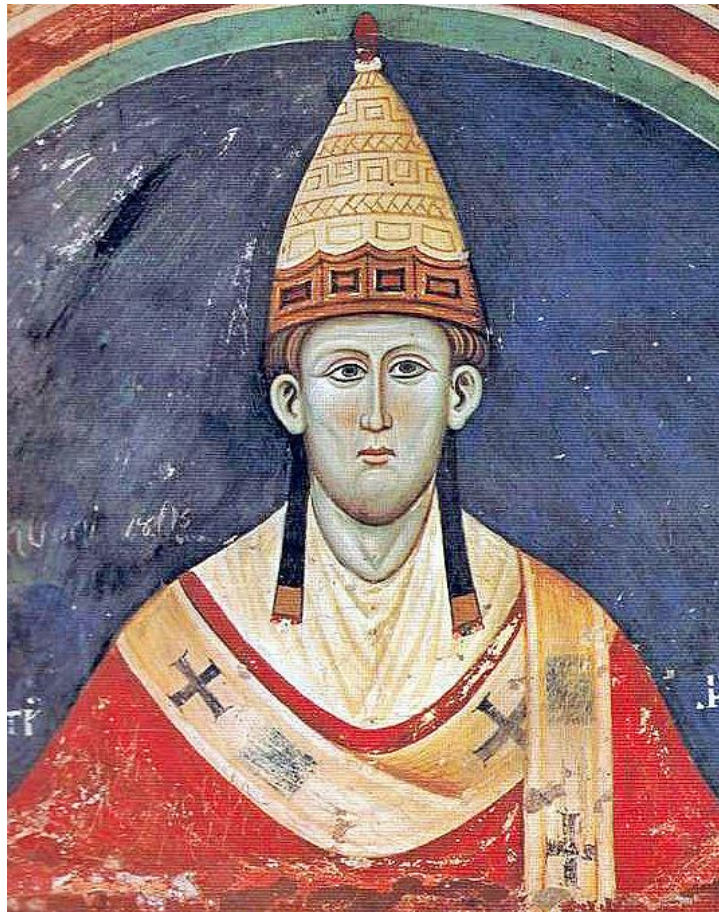
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Medieval European Judaism

- Christian and Jewish relations
 - Early Middle Ages – intermarriage and shared language and culture
 - From 11th century – reorganization of Christian society led to marginalization of minority groups including Jews
 - Violence and forced conversions
 - Massacres – Mainz (1096); England (1189-90); Franconia (1298); France (1320)
 - The blood libel – anti-Semitic allegation of Jews killing Christian boys and using their blood to make unleavened bread (*matzot*)
 - Pope Innocent III – Jews responsible for death of Christ
 - Fourth Lateran Council (1215) – series of discriminatory laws passed against Jews
 - Burning of Talmud (13th century)
 - Jews limited to occupation of money lending (12th-13th centuries)
 - Jews property of the king

Pope Innocent III (1160/61-1216)



Medieval European Judaism

- Christian and Jewish relations
 - Expulsions
 - England (1290)
 - France (1306)
 - Holy Roman Empire and Spain (1492)
 - 14th century anti-Jewish riots – ‘conversion’ of many Jews (i.e. conversos); followed by Inquisition and expulsions in 1480s; under Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492 Jews forced to choose between baptism and expulsion – between 40,000-800,000 left Spain
 - Portugal (1497)

Ferdinand and Isabella (r. 1474-1504)



Ashkenazi and Sephardic Judaism

- Ashkenazic Judaism – Franco-German
 - Origins in Italy and Palestine, and influences from Northern European culture
 - Hebrew the literary language; literature mostly religious
- Sephardic Judaism – Andalusian-Spanish
 - Origins in Babylonia, and influences from Iberian Peninsula culture
 - Arabic used in prose and Hebrew poetry; literature included secular poetry and scientific works influenced by Arabic literary culture

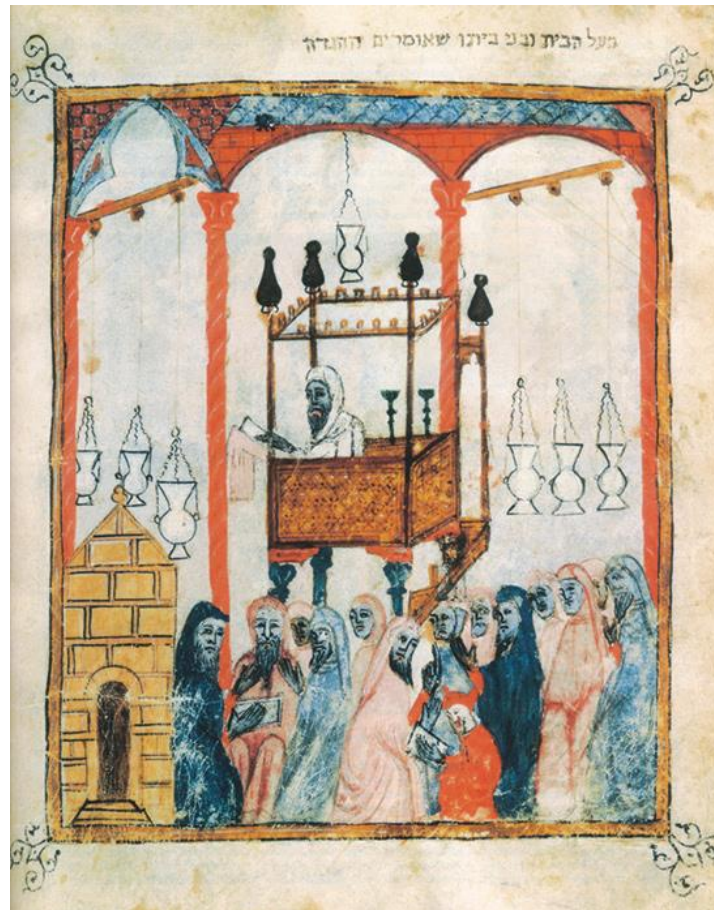
Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewish Communities



Sephardic Judaism

- Muslim Spain
 - Jews served in government
 - Jewish religious leaders became counselors of caliphs, viziers of Granada, and high officials
 - Adaptation of Jewish culture to Arabic scholarship
 - Arabic language, scripture, and poetry adapted to Hebrew writing in defense of Jewish scriptures
 - Rationalist study of Jewish classics and defense of rabbinic faith shaped within framework of Arabic philosophy and science (imbedded with Greek influences)
 - Gold age of Hebrew literature (c.1000-1148)
 - E.g. Judah ibn Hayyuj and Abu al-Walid Marwan ibn Janah – produced manuals on biblical grammar and applied Arabic philology to Hebrew; Hebrew grammatical study still of relevance in modern times

From the Sister Hagadah, Barcelona (1350)



Sephardic Judaism

- Muslim Spain
 - Biblical criticism – Judah ibn Bala'am and Moses ibn Gikatilla (11th century); popularized later by Abraham ibn Ezra
 - Exposition of faith in Neoplatonic terms – Solomon ibn Gabirol; defense of Rabbinism with Aristotelian categories – Abraham ibn Daud (c.1110-c.1180)
 - Aristotelian philosophical theology – Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) – philosophical inquiry a permanent feature of rabbinic study from this point on; Maimonides one of a new class of philosophers that brought Jewish thought into mainstream Western philosophy
 - Golden age of Sephardic Judaism ended with invasion of Spain in 1147-48 by the Almohad (Berber Muslim reformers) – wiped out Andalusian Jewish communities; many fled to northern Spain and Provence in France, North Africa and Egypt

Almohads in Andalusia, Spain (1145-1248)



Ashkenazic Judaism

- Mainly merchants
 - Under the Carolingian dynasty (8th-9th centuries) – relatively high degree of autonomy ; merchants and rabbis from Italy settled in France and the Rhineland, and strengthened communities there
 - Survived despite violence and restrictions during the First Crusade (1096-99) in the Rhineland
 - Study of Bible and Talmud – involved mystical pietism; German Jewish mystics (Hasidim) adapted Christian ideas of saintliness after Second Crusade (1147-49) with emphasis on asceticism, martyrdom, and penitence
 - Jewish masses – biblical tales and instruction interpreted by rabbinic Midrash; lives of scholars and saints; liturgical poetry concerning election of Israel and messianic redemption
 - Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (1040-1105) – popular rabbinic writings and commentaries on Scripture, and commentary on the Talmud for advanced students
 - Biblical and Talmudic interpretations adjusted to the times – e.g. Talmudic prohibitions against usury

Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (1040-1105)



Ashkenazic Judaism

- Kabbala
 - Mystical Judaism – gnostic doctrines
 - Reinterpretation of the Bible and rabbinic law in esoteric manner, as allegories of the ways in which God manifested in a spiritual universe; only initiates could discover this
 - The Zohar (The Book of Splendour) – mystical commentary on the Pentateuch by Moses de Leon (c. 1250-1305)
 - Despite unusual approach to Biblical and rabbinical doctrines and law, Kabbalists followed ritual orthodoxy and accepted biblical text as divine revelation in a nominal sense; joined other orthodox groups in condemning study of philosophy

Safed - home of Kabbala in Israel



Sephardic and Ashkenazic Conflicts

- Philosophers in northern Spain and anti-philosophers in Provence (France)
 - Both groups developed esoteric doctrines to transcend confines of normative Judaism; salvation possible for exceptional individuals – solved problem of messianic deliverance; yet each group accused the other of distortion
 - Anti-Jewish riots in Spain led to a reaffirmation of traditional Judaism there – e.g. Hasdai Crescas (1340-1410) launched attack on Aristotelian approaches to religion; his disciple Joseph Albo (c.1380-c.1444) issued compendium reaffirming traditional belief in creation, revelation, and retribution
 - Expulsions from Spain and Portugal led to divisions in doctrinal positions – conversos returning to Judaism; legalistic Kabbalism developed in Italy and the Ottoman Empire as principal rabbinic school

Sephardic and Ashkenazic Developments

- Messianic Revivalism
 - Solomon Molkho (c. 1500-32) and David Reubeni (died after 1532)
 - Establishment of community at Safed, Palestine – practice of saintliness and mystical contemplation; Jacob Berab reinstated ordination (semikha) in 1538 to reestablish the Sanhedrin
 - Kabbalism further developed under Isaac Luria (1534-72) and Hayyim Vital (1543-1620) – liturgical innovations and mystical theology developed to redeem captivated elements of divinity, to restore creation to harmony
 - The limited omnipotence of God similarly expounded upon by others: e.g. Solomon ibn Verga (1460-1554) – regarded Jewish problem as socio-political rather than theological; similar rationalist explanations explored during Renaissance: e.g. Azariah dei Rossi (c.1513-78) – critical textual study of rabbinical texts and exploration of Hellenized Jewish works from antiquity
 - Yet messianic fervor remained strong: dogmatic Kabbalism spread the idea of Shabbetai Tzevi (1626-76) as the messiah – accepted by both European and Ottoman Jewry until his conversion to Islam

Shabbetai Tzevi (1626-76) - pseudo messiah



Judaism up to c. 1750

- The ‘Dark Ages’ of Rabbinic Judaism
 - Decline in scholarship and nominalization of popular religion
 - Peasant revolts against Jews in Poland during war between Poland, Russia, and Sweden beginning 1648; Jews massacred by rebels and soldiers and sold into slavery in Turkey
 - Extreme Shabbetaians under leadership of self-proclaimed messiah Jacob Frank (1726-91) (later converted to Catholicism)

