Zeitpfeil
Studienwerk Berlin/Brandenburg im
Politischen Arbeitskreis Schulen e.V.

Vereinsregister Potsdam
VR 2529 P

# Introduction to Jewish History

*Photo: An archaeological excavation at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem*

Note: It would be literally impossible to summarize three thousand years of Jewish history on just fifteen pages, not least because for the last 2,500 years, Jews have been dispersed all over the world.
This module illuminates just a few important events, periods, people, and issues in Jewish history and does not aim to be comprehensive. We have chosen to focus on a number of exemplary figures who played an important role in the development of Jewish intellectual life in various regions at different times. Unfortunately, no woman is among them, as up to the nineteenth century the role of Jewish women was confined to the household.

A note on the pronunciation of Hebrew terms: In general, this follows English pronunciation, with the exception of "ch", which is pronounced (χ).

**Diaspora/*Galut***

The Greek word *diaspora* means dispersal or scattering. Today it is used to describe people of all nationalities, who live outside their home countries. Yet originally the word was only applied to Jews living outside the Holy Land. The Hebrew term *Galut* (exile) was also long used. It was only in the twentieth century that a Hebrew equivalent to *diaspora* was coined, *Tfutzot*.

In examining the history of Jews and Judaism, one cannot fail to notice that Jews settled in various parts of the world and lived for a long time outside the Holy Land.
Amazingly, over a period of 2,000 years Jews continued to consider themselves one people and were also seen as such by others, although no Jewish state existed throughout this period.

The history of the Jewish people is characterised by the experience of exile from their homeland. In the Bible we find the important (yet undocumented) description of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt (Moses 2-5), on which the Pessach festival is based.

The first historically documented exile of the Jewish people was the Babylonian captivity (586-538 BC). This occurred after the capture of the Kingdom of Judah in 586 BC and the subsequent burning of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (the "First Temple"). While the majority of the Jewish population remained at this time, many priests, court servants, and the urban upper class were deported to Babylon. There they developed a theology according to which God was not only present in the Temple in Jerusalem, but also in exile. This marked the transition from the worship of one God among many (henotheism) to the belief in the existence of only one true God (monotheism). The fall of the Kingdom of Judah was attributed not to any weakness on God's part, but to the failure of the Jewish people to obey His commandments. The customs which gained importance during this time of exile were those which could be observed and practised away from the Temple and the Jewish homeland. They included in particular the Sabbath and circumcision – both of which continue to be central elements in all branches of the Jewish faith.

Following the victory of the Persians over the Babylonians in 539 BC, Jews were permitted to return to the Promised Land. While this return was slow at first, the Temple was rebuilt ("Second Temple"). In order to gain the status of a

minority under the Persians, the Jews were obliged to put their commandments and traditions on paper. Today this is seen as a key motivation for writing the Torah. This book was written based on the experiences of both those Jews who stayed at home and those who returned from Babylonian captivity and it describes ways of practising religion both at home and in exile.
Shortly after the return from Babylonian captivity, Palestine was captured by the Greeks. In 168 BC the Jews lost their status as an autonomous minority, the Temple was dedicated to Zeus, and the Torah was declared to be invalid as a legal document.
Subsequently, the revolt of the Maccabees took place and the Temple was re-dedicated. This event is remembered at Hanukah.
Once the first aim had been achieved (the re-dedication of the Temple and the reinstitution of the Torah as a legal source), numerous wars of conquest began, which extended well beyond the previous borders of the Kingdom of Judah.
They culminated in the Roman occupation of Palestine. In the year 70 AD Jerusalem finally fell following some major Jewish revolts, and the Temple was burned to the ground. After this event there would be no Jewish State in the Promised Land for almost 2,000 years. The Temple was never again rebuilt.

*Photo: The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem is the former western wall of the Temple and is thus the most sacred place for Jews. Today the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aksa Mosque, both important Islamic sanctuaries, are located on the site of the Temple.*

Yet, this did not put and end to Jewish life in Palestine and over the following centuries the foundations of Rabbinic Judaism were laid. And the Christianization of the Jewish Kingdom which began in the fourth century did not only have a negative impact on the Jews, but also encouraged a conscious return to their own traditions.
However, in the fifth century there was an increase in repressive measures against Jews and their partial autonomy was to all intents and purposes lost. But nevertheless, even at this time and right up to the Arab invasion in 634 AD, Jews continued to live in the Holy Land.

Jews also stayed in Babylon after the Babylonian captivity and in the fifth and sixth centuries at the latest this became the intellectual centre of Judaism and remained so for many centuries. Thus at a time when there was still a vibrant Jewish population in the Holy Land, a community of exiled Jews steered the

intellectual development of the religion. It was here that the Babylonian Talmud was written – for many scholars the most important Jewish document.

And at this time several Jewish communities already existed outside Israel and Babylon. This was due not only to large movements of population, but also to the fact that many people converted to Judaism towards the end of the Second Temple period. Following the destruction of the Temple, this trend increased. In the cultural centres of Antioch and Alexandria, but also in Palestine, individuals converted to Judaism, but also entire families, households, and communities.

It was at this time too that new Jewish diaspora communities arose in Europe, in particular in Spain, Germania, and Pannonia (comprising parts of Hungary, Austria, Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia).

At the turn of the first millennium the world's Jewish population numbered eight million, with a quarter in Judea, and one million each in Babylon, Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor.[1] Significant Jewish communities also existed at this time in central and southern Italy, and in European garrison cities including Corduba (Cordoba), Massilia (Marseilles), Londinium (London), Augusta Treverorum (Trier), and Colonia Agrippina (Cologne).

[1] Ortag Peter: Jüdische Kultur und Geschichte, Bonn, 2007, p. 77

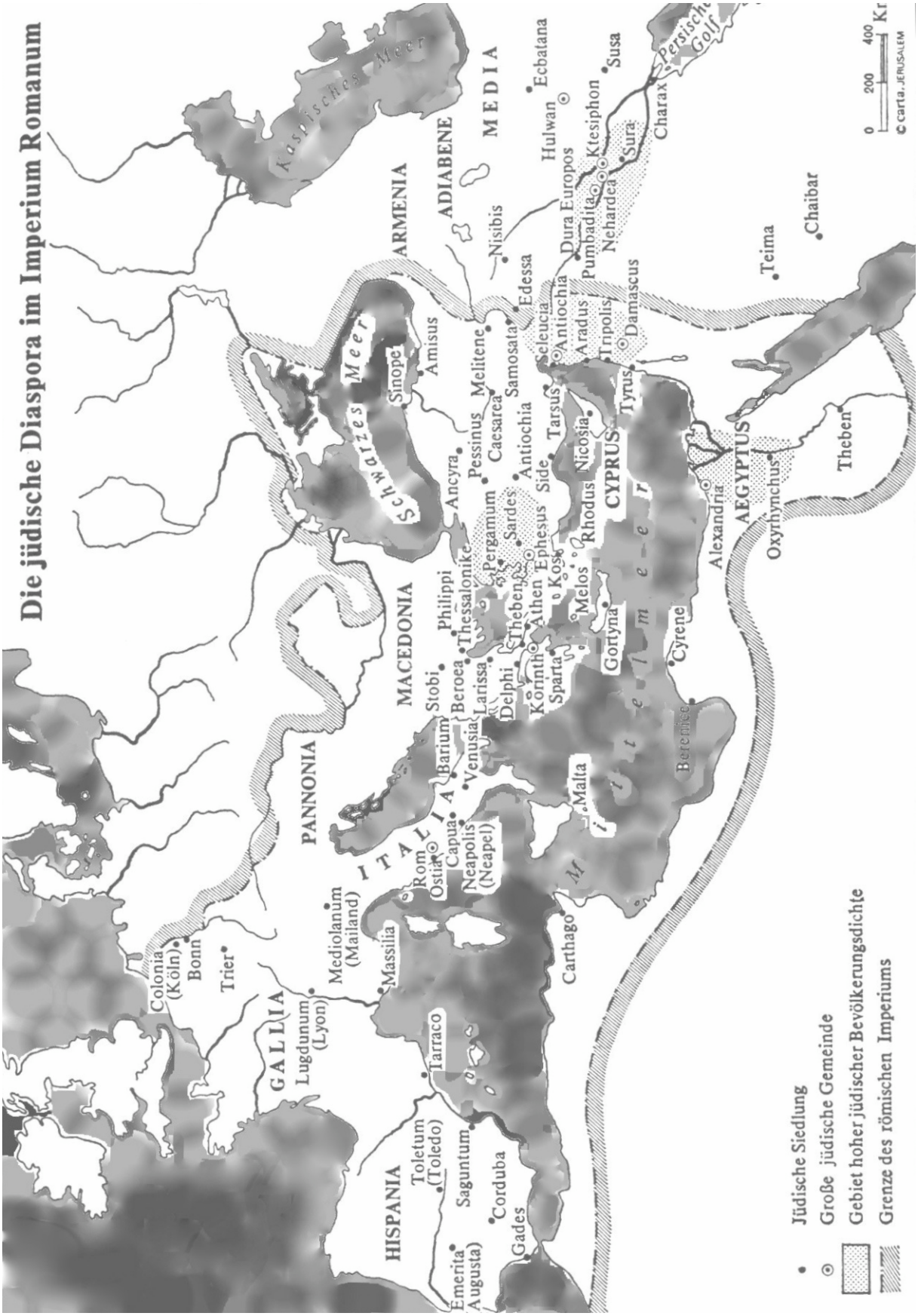

Die jüdische Diaspora im Imperium Romanum
Kaspisches Meer
Schwarzes Meer
Mittelmeer
Persischer Golf
ARMENIA
ADIABENE
MEDIA
MACEDONIA
PANNONIA
ITALIA
GALLIA
HISPANIA
CYPRUS
AEGYPTUS
Ecbatana
Susa
Hulwan
Ktesiphon
Charax
Sura
Nisibis
Dura Europos
Pumbadita
Nehardea
Edessa
Teima
Chaibar
Amisus
Sinope
Melitene
Samosata
Seleucia
Antiochia
Aradus
Tripolis
Damascus
Ancyra
Pessinus
Caesarea
Tarsus
Tyrus
Nicosia
Side
Antiochia
Pergamum
Sardes
Rhodus
Kos
Melos
Athen
Ephesus
Thessalonike
Philippi
Beroea
Stobi
Larissa
Delphi
Theben
Korinth
Sparta
Gortyna
Cyrene
Alexandria
Oxyrhynchus
Theben
Barium
Venusia
Capua
Neapolis (Neapel)
Rom
Ostia
Malta
Berenice
Carthago
Mediolanum (Mailand)
Massilia
Lugdunum (Lyon)
Colonia (Köln)
Bonn
Trier
Tarraco
Toletum (Toledo)
Saguntum
Corduba
Gades
Emerita Augusta)
0 200 400 Km
© carta, JERUSALEM
Jüdische Siedlung
Große jüdische Gemeinde
Gebiet hoher jüdischer Bevölkerungsdichte
Grenze des römischen Imperiums

*Image: The Jewish Diaspora in the Roman Empire*

**The Jewish Middle Ages**

The Jewish Middle Ages are generally seen to begin with the Muslim-Arab conquests (632 AD) and last until the second half of the seventeenth century. Depending on their geographic location, Jews typically lived under Christian or Islamic rule in this period and this is why it tends to be treated as a single epoch.

"The contacts and struggles between Judaism and Islam lacked the intimacy and bitterness that characterised early relations between Jews and Christians at the time when the latter were breaking away from the Jewish faith. The disputes between Jews and Christians revolved around the validity of the law, the question of whether the Messiah had come, the incarnation and ascension of Jesus, and the nature of the divine. By contrast, the disputes between Judaism and Islam were focussed on the question of whether the predictions of the Prophets had ceased before or with Mohammed and on the differences between Islamic and Jewish legal texts."[2]

This may explain the significant differences in the situations of Jews within Christian and Islamic societies during the Middle Ages. In the context of the Muslim wars of conquest under Umar ibn al-Chattab (592-644 AD) laws on the treatment of subject peoples were passed. Among them was a provision guaranteeing the protection of members of monotheistic religions (*ahl al-kitāb*, the people of the book). Thus Jews became *ḏimmis*, protected under the law. While it may have curbed their religious freedom and made them subject to high taxes, this status allowed them to keep and practise their faith without being confined to ghettos, as in Europe.

Contacts between Jews and Muslims in regions under Islamic rule were far closer than those between Jews and Christians in predominantly Christian regions. This was due not only to the fact that Jews were not forced to live in ghettos, but also to a common language. Arabic was one of the languages in which Islamic philosophers and theologians wrote. Jewish scholars could read Arabic and also used it in their own publications. Many important works emerged from the Jewish reception of Islamic theology at this time.

[2] Ben-Sasson, Haim Hillel: Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, Munich, 1978, p. 494

## The Iberian Peninsula

As shown on the above map, the oldest Jewish communities in present-day Portugal and Spain were already present in Roman times. Yet they enjoyed their so-called "golden age" in the period of Arab-Islamic rule from 711/713 when the Arabs succeeded in driving the Visigoths from the Iberian Peninsula. Under the Emirate of Cordoba from 755 many Jews ascended the ranks of the higher state administration to become ministers and military officials or made a name for themselves as doctors and scholars.

Educated Jews fluent in many languages also played an important role as mediators between the religions. It was mainly Jewish scholars in Spain, who translated Islamic academic writings into Castilian and Catalan. These texts were then translated by Christians into Latin. If it weren't for this mediation by Jews, high scholasticism would never have developed.

### The Achievements of Spanish Jewry[3]

| Subject | Author | Work | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hebrew grammar | Juda b. David Hayyuj (945-1000) | Fundamental works on the Hebrew verb (in Arabic) | First theory of the Hebrew verb inspired by Arabic grammars |
| Hebrew grammar and poetry | Samuel ha-Nagid (993-1055); Wesir and Halacha expert | Dictionary of biblical Hebrew (Arabic); Ben Tehellim; Ben Mischlé; Ben Qohelet | High point of Hebrew lexicology; unique example of Hebrew war poetry; also court and moral poetry |
| Hebrew grammar | Jona Ibn Janach (first half of the 11th century) | Grammar and dictionary (in Arabic) | Its two parts represent the first comprehensive description of biblical Hebrew. |
| Hebrew grammar and Bible commentaries | Abraham Ibn Esra (1089-1164)* Poet, grammar expert, astronomer, doctor, and philosopher | Wrote several grammars in Italy in the mid-12th century; commentaries on almost all books of the Bible | Transmitted Arabic-Jewish grammar to the Occident. His work is based on grammatical and rational principles. He was ahead of his time in his emphasis on semantics. |
| Bible commentaries | Mose b. Nachman; Ramba" n (1194-1270 | In particular Torah commentaries and commentaries on the Book of Job | intensive discussions of his main precursors |
| Halacha | Isaak Alfasi (Ri"f) (1013-1103) | Sefer ha-Halkhot | Integration of the Haggadah into halachic |

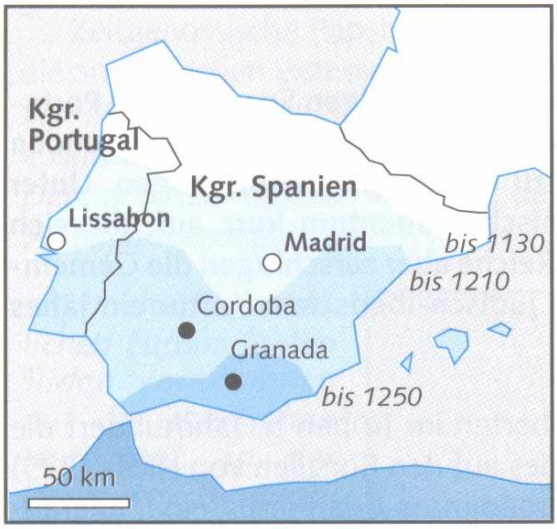
[3] Source: Galley, S.: Das Judentum, Frankfurt/Main, 1006, p. 82

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | argumentation |
| Halacha, philosophy | Mose b. Maimun; Maimonides, Ramba"m (1135-1204)* | Mishneh Torah (Jad ha-Chasaka); commentary on the Mishna; Sefer ha-Mizwot; Moreh Nevukhim (The Guide for the Perplexed) | Devised one of the most important codices for Talmudic law. He represents the pinnacle of Jweish philosophy in the Middle Ages. His work was standard for subsequent generations and influenced, among others, Thomas Aquinas. |
| Philosophy and poetry | Salomo Ibn Gebirol (ca. 1020-1057) | Mekor Chajim (Fons Vitae); the Arabic original is lost | Platonic system with no direct reference to Jewish sourdes. Had a huge influence on Christian scholastics. |
| Philosophy and poetry | Jehuda ha-Levi (ca. 1075-1141)* | Sefer ha-Kusari<br>Shireh Zijon (Songs of Zion); Shireh ha-Galut (Songs of Exile), Pijjut | Defence of Judaism against Islam and Christianity; discussion of Aristotle; philosophy and all kinds of poetry |
| Hebrew poetics, poetry | | Kitab al-Muhadara Wa al-Mudhakara<br>Sefer ha-Anak (Tarshish) | First Hebrew poetics; court poetry; homonymic rhyme served as a model for later poetry |

*had to leave Muslim Spain and found refuge in the Christian Occident or in other Muslim countries
**was forced to flee from Christian Spain
***had to flee from the Maghreb to Andalusia

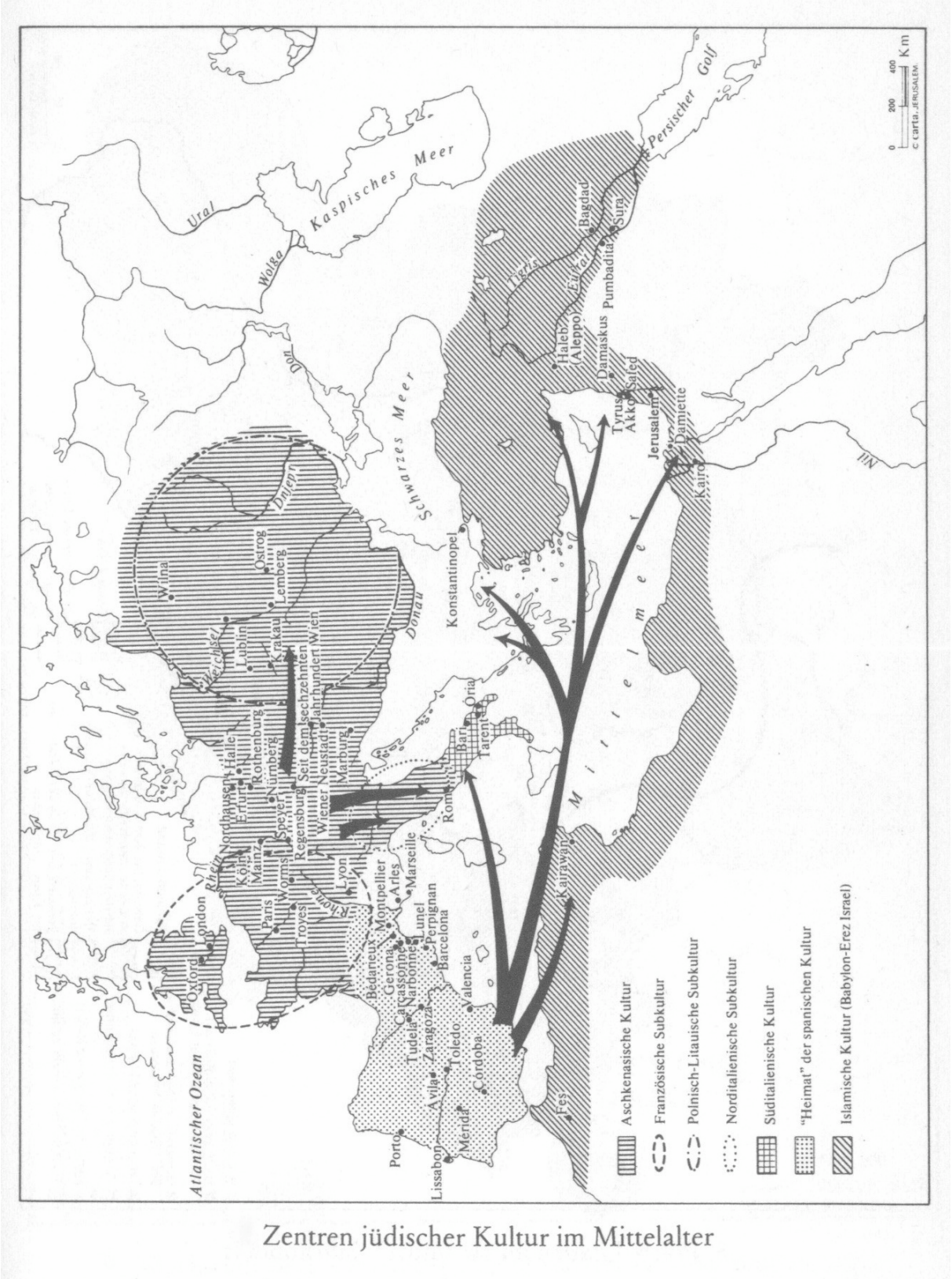
However, from the turn of the millennium the *Reconquistadores* began to encroach on the Iberian Peninsula from the north. The established social structure crumbled at this time and regional North African rulers assumed power and made life difficult for the Jews. Many of them now fled into Christian-ruled regions where they lived relatively well for the next few centuries. Yet with the progress of the Reconquista's invasion, laws against Jews became more restrictive. At the end of the fourteenth century anti-Jewish riots took place in many parts of the Christian-controlled region, forcing the Jews back into the area still under Muslim control, now limited to the city of Granada. From 1412 the Jews who remained were obliged to wear a badge identifying themselves as Jews and had to live in Ghettos. In the latter part of the fifteenth century the Inquisition began on the Iberian Peninsula with catastrophic consequences for the Jewish population. In 1492 Granada fell and the Jews were driven out together with the Moorish rulers. Many Jews converted to Christianity at this time. Yet the suspicion that their conversion was not genuine persisted for centuries afterwards. In the context of the Inquisition, this suspicion could mean death for people of Jewish origin.

Other Jews who had not converted found a new home in Morocco, the northern Italian trading republics, and the Ottoman Empire. There they often played a leading role in their communities and were instrumental in the cultural and religious renewal of oriental Judaism. Today North African and oriental Jews are commonly referred to as *Sephardim* (Spaniards), although this does not reflect historical reality. Sephardic Judaism is actually just one variety, albeit a very important one, of oriental, Babylonian Judaism.




*Die Iberische Halbinsel zur Zeit der Reconquista. Bis Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts hatten die christlichen Herrscher den muslimischen Einflußbereich auf den Bereich des Emirats Granada zurückgedrängt.*

*Image: The Iberian Peninsula at the time of the Reconquista. By the middle of the thirteenth century Christian rulers had pushed back the area under Muslim control to the Granada Emirate.*
*Source: Ortag Peter, Jüdische Kultur und Geschichte, Bonn, 2007, p. 86*




*7. Jewish Cultural Centres in the Middle Ages*
*Source: Bautz, Franz J, Geschichte der Juden, Munich, 1992*

**France**

As shown on the above map, the history of the Jews in France goes as far back as the Roman Empire. Jews had lived in Gaul since the time of Caesar and they were given extensive rights under the Franks. These rights were expanded under the rule of Charlemagne. Yet after his death they began to be eroded, and during the Crusades Jewish history in France was a turbulent mix of anti-Jewish excesses and their subsidence, repeated expulsions and returns of Jews, until they were finally expelled in the fourteenth century. Two centuries would pass before Jews (mainly converted Jews from Spain) were readmitted to France.

In terms of religious rite, France was divided: Jews in the South of France followed the Sephardic tradition, while those in the north followed the Ashkenazy tradition.[4]

"The communities of the *Midi* benefitted […] from the unbroken urban culture of the Mediterranean region with its "Roman" influences; they were far better integrated than their brethren in Northern Europe."[5]

In 1791 full civil rights were extended to French Jews in the wake of the French Revolution.[6]

**Germany**

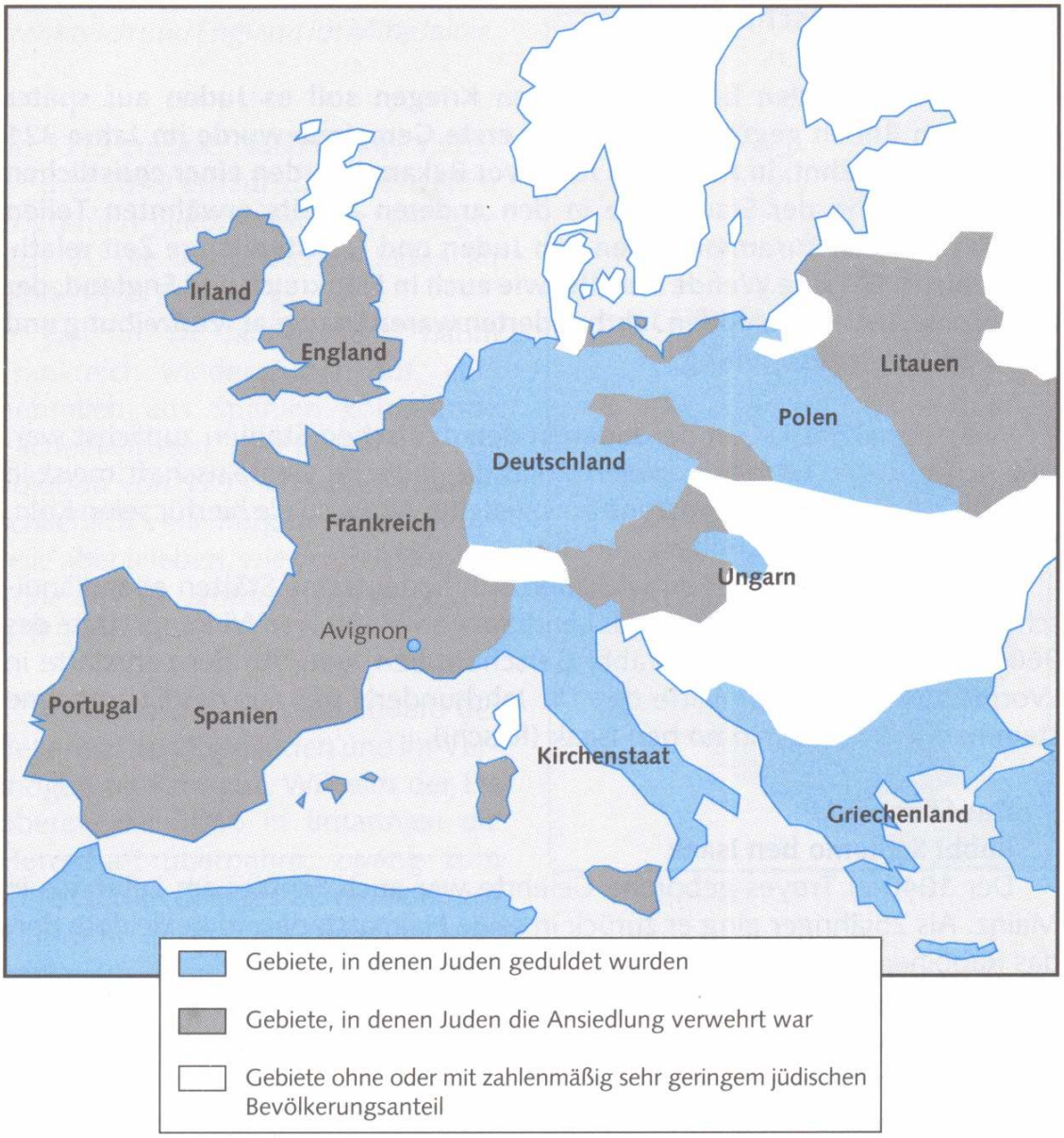
In Germany too there is evidence of very early Jewish communities. The first recorded Jewish settlement on German territory was in Cologne even before the first Christian community became established there. In Germany, Jews and Christians lived side by side for almost 1,000 years in relative harmony – this is seen in the settlement of Jews in town centres.

Yet in Germany the first Crusade also marked a watershed – in and around the year 1069 pogroms led by aggressive mobs, similar to those in many French cities, took place here.

After a period of relative calm, the thirteenth century witnessed a new wave of pogroms stirred up by rumours of ritual murders and host desecration. As in France, in Germany, periods of harmony alternated with outbursts of anti-Jewish persecution. This was the case well into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: "In 1510 burnings of Jews took place in Berlin, and Jews were expelled from Bavaria in 1551, from the Palatinate in 1555, from the March of Brandenburg in 1573, and from Austria in 1671."[7]

---

[4] Galley, p. 89
[5] Galley, p. 99
[6] Ortag, p. 87
[7] Ortag, p. 91




*Um 1500 hatte sich der Schwerpunkt jüdischen Lebens in Europa nach Osten verlagert. In weiten Teilen des Kontinents herrschte striktes Ansiedlungsverbot, Ausnahmen bildeten – zumindest teilweise – das Deutsche Reich, vor allem aber Polen und Italien.*

*Image: Areas where Jews were tolerated*
*Areas where Jews were prohibited from settling*
*Areas with a very small or non-existent Jewish population*

*Around 1500 the centre of Jewish life in Europe had shifted eastwards. A rigid settlement prohibition was in force in large parts of the continent. Exceptions were – to some extent – the German Empire, and in particular Poland and Italy. Source: Ortag, p. 90*

**Poland**

The persecution of Jews in Western Europe in the context of the crusades led Western European Jews to move eastwards. In Poland, they found a country that welcomed them. Like the Christian Germans arriving in Poland at the same time, the Jews were respected by the Poles as "pioneers in trade, industry, and finance".[8]

As early as the thirteenth century, Jews in Poland were placed under the protection of the Polish kings. A real mass migration of Jews to Poland took place in the sixteenth century. In Poland (and in Lithuania and Ukraine) there was a huge demand for skilled workers and experts at the same time as Jews were being persecuted in Central Europe and on the Iberian Peninsula.

It is interesting that those Jews who arrived from Spain and Portugal as well as the oriental Jews who had already been living for centuries in Ukraine quickly abandoned their Sephardic traditions and adopted the Ashkenazy rite. Thus the Jews who settled in Eastern European Jews comprised not only Western European Jews (*Ashkenasim*), but also oriental Jews (*Sephardim*), although the latter tradition would soon die out in Eastern Europe.

[8] Bautz, Franz J, Geschichte der Juden, Munich, 1992, p. 115

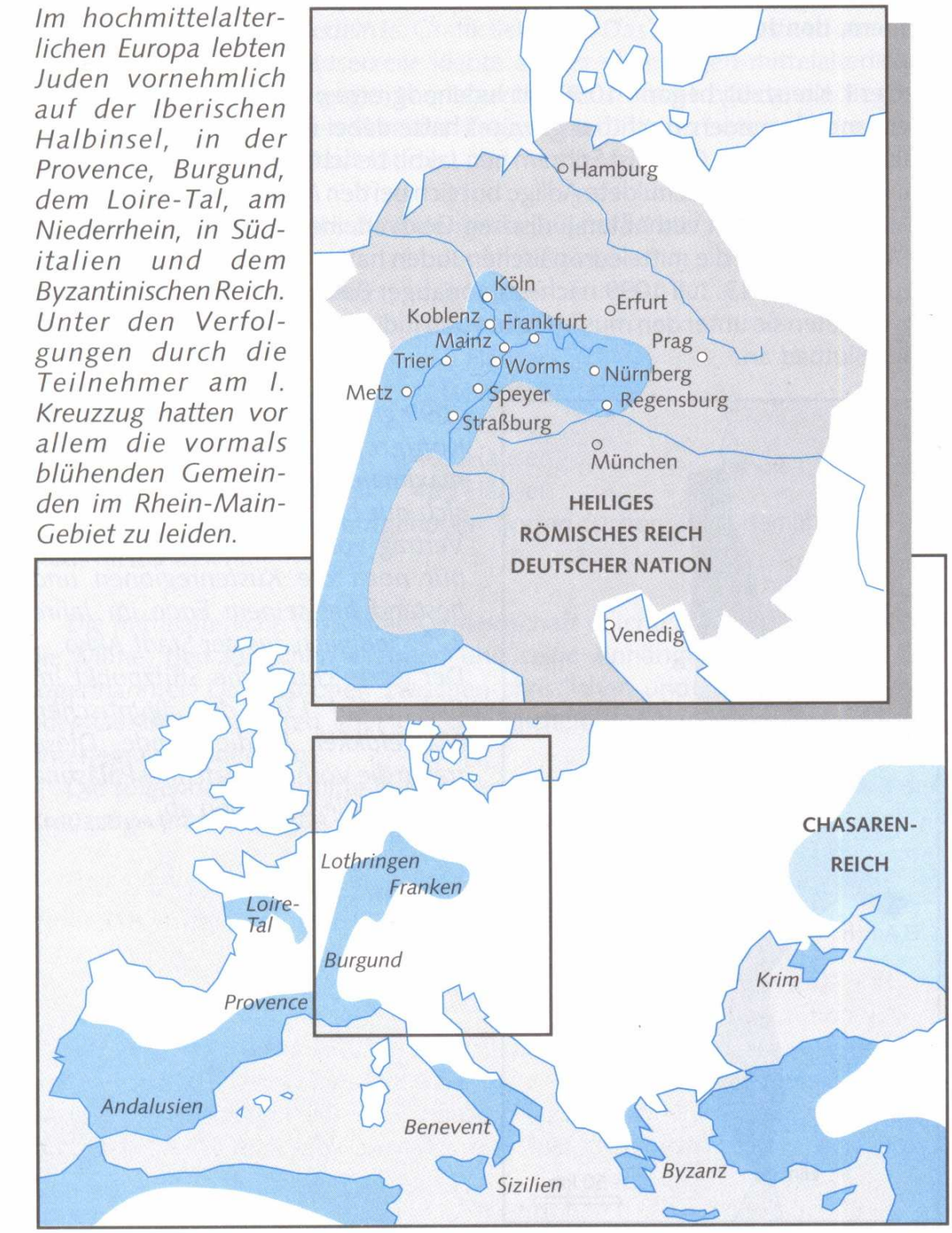
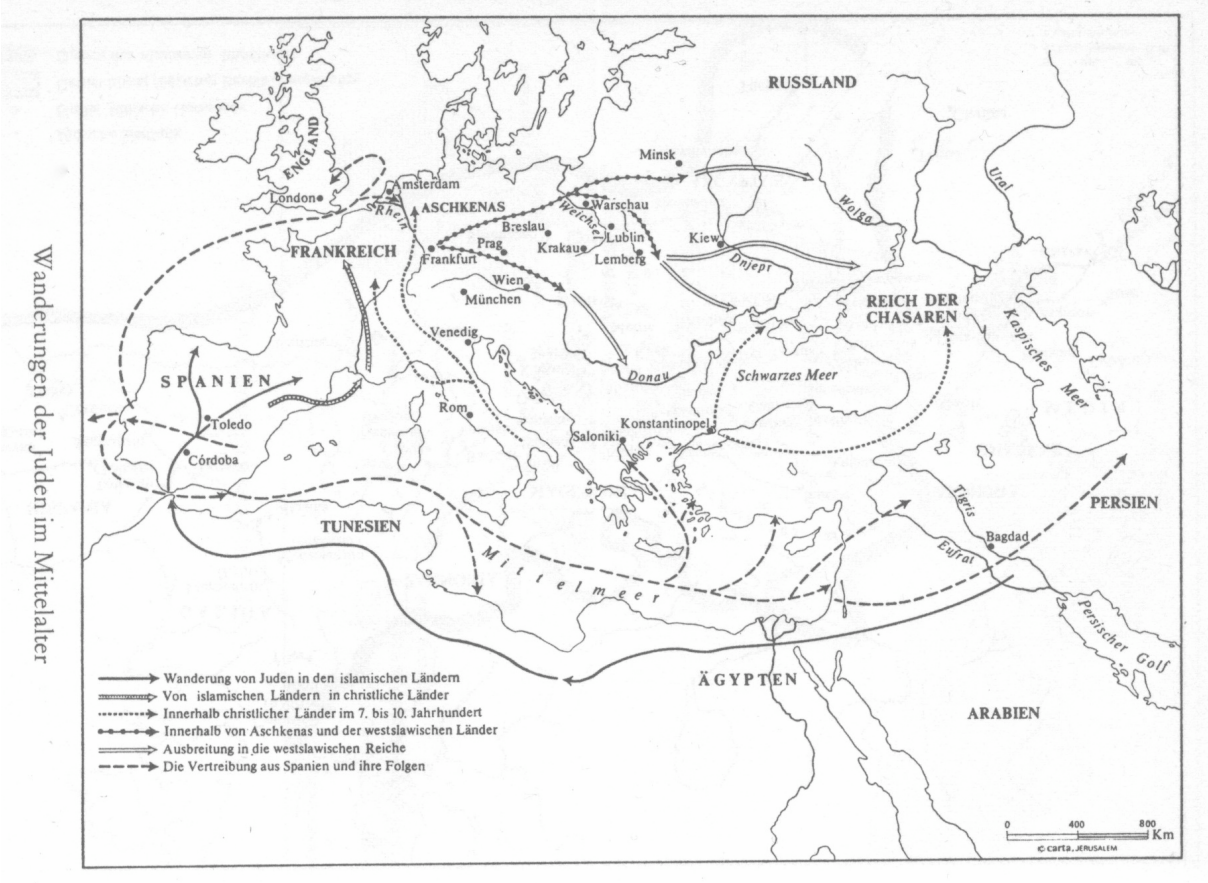



*Image: In the High Middle Ages in Europe Jews lived mainly on the Iberian Peninsula and in Provence, Burgundy, the Loire Valley, the Lower Rhine region, southern Italy, and Byzantium. In particular the flourishing Jewish communities in the Rhine and Main regions bore the brunt of persecution by participants in the first crusade.*




*Source: Bautz*

## People

**Rambam-Maimonides (1135-1204)**
Maimonides statue in Córdoba (Source: Galley, p.95)

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides in Latin, shortened to the acronym Rambam in Hebrew) was the most famous scholar to emerge from the Spanish Jewry. In his major work, *The Guide for the Perplexed* (in Arabic *Dalālat al-ḥā irīn*, in Hebrew *More nevuchim*), Maimonides examined the compatibility of the Jewish religion and the Greek philosophy of reason. The text was written in accordance with the strict rules of the Islamic Kalam literature and was circulated widely in thirteenth century Europe.
Maimonides' work is a prime example of the fruitful exchange of ideas between Islam and Judaism at the time it was written. The text's subsequent reception in Europe and its significant influence on Christian thinkers shows how Jews played a mediating role between Islam and Christianity. Among the thinkers influenced by Maimonides were Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart.
In the eighteenth century his work was re-discovered for the Haskalah by Moses Mendelssohn.
Maimonides was born in Cordoba, but left Spain in 1159 with his family, travelling first to Morocco and from there to Akko in the Holy Land before following the call of the Egyptian Sultan to become his personal physician. In accordance with his wishes, after his death Maimonides was buried in Tiberias in the Holy Land, where his grave can still be visited today.

Maimonides wrote his philosophical works in Judeo-Arabic, Arabic written in Hebrew characters. They were soon translated into Hebrew.

**Rashi**

Rabbi Schlomo Yitzchak, (generally shortened to the acronym Rashi in Hebrew) was born in 1040 in the French town of Troyes, where he died in 1105.
Unusual for that time, he studied in distant Mainz and Worms and was the most famous pupil of the important Yeshiva (Torah school) in Worms.
Even today Rashi is recognized as the most important Bible commentator as he developed a new method of biblical interpretation.
"He combined the associative-homiletic exegesis of the Midrash with the search for the "simple meaning" of the Bible. […] His short, precise commentaries reflect both the literal meaning of the biblical text and its ethical consequences." (Galley, p.113)
The so-called Rashi script in which his biblical commentaries are generally written on the margins of sacred books was probably developed centuries after his death. The first ever book to be published in Hebrew was a Bible with Rashi's commentaries.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| פ | ט/ | ט | ח/ | ח | ז/ | ז | ו/ | ו | ה/ | ה | ד/ | ד | ג/ | ג | ב/ | ב | א/ | א |
| ם | ס/ | ס | ן/ | ן | נ/ | נ | מ/ | מ | ל/ | ל | ך/ | ך | כ/ | כ | י/ | י | | |
| ת | ת/ | ת | ש/ | ש | ר/ | ר | ק/ | ק | ץ/ | ץ | צ/ | צ | ף/ | ף | פ/ | פ | ע/ | ע |

The Hebrew script generally used in contemporary publications is shown on the right, with the Rashi script on the left.
(Source: www.juedisches-recht.de)

**Moses Mendelssohn**

The Enlightenment in Germany resonated strongly with German Jewry – the Jewish Enlightenment or Haskalah was the Jewish response to the German Enlightenment and ushered in Jewish emancipation. Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) is generally recognized as the "father of the Jewish Enlightenment".
Mendelssohn was the first Jew to translate the Bible into High German. In a recent edition of his translation we learn that he:
"was born the son of a Torah scribe in Dessau. From his father and the Dessau Rabbi David Fränkel he received a solid education in traditional Jewish literature. It was an initiation into Jewish thought that was far from theoretical and bore fruit in practice. Moses led his life in accordance with Jewish tradition, which in his opinion was the very foundation of the Jewish people. In 1743 at the age of fourteen Moses followed Fränkel to Berlin where he received further general education. Mendelssohn's curiosity and thirst for knowledge paved the way for his entry into German intellectual life. In an extension of his rabbinical education, Mendelssohn undertook general philosophy studies. He thus embodied two antagonistic intellectual cultures at that time: the rabbinic tradition and modern philosophy. With this synthesis Mendelssohn sought to emulate the medieval philosopher of religion, Moses Maimonides. [...] In Mendelssohn's view, Jewish tradition had to be passed on to the next generation in an engaging and responsible manner and he saw his translation of the Torah into High German as a contribution to this goal. [...] Mendelssohn's ideal was the enlightened Jew whose religious practice was oriented on reason, but who still retained the virtues of tradition in daily life."

(Die Tora. Edited and with an introduction by Annette M. Böckler - Jüdische Verlagsanstalt Berlin, 2001)
(Source of image:
http://lang.rice.edu/CSLShowcase/GermanProject/Elizabeth_urban.htm)

**The Besht**

In the modern era a problematic "division of the community into learned elites and uneducated masses" (Galley, p. 138) emerged within Jewry. The Hasidic movement strove "to reintegrate religious practice into the daily lives of ordinary people" (Galley, p. 139).
The Ba al shem tov (possessor of a good name), or Israel ben Elieser (generally shortened to the acronym Besht in Hebrew) developed the mystical teachings behind Eastern European Hasidism.
The Besht was born around 1700 in Okop and died in 1760 in Miedzyborz (both in
Podolia, which at that time belonged to Poland and now lies in Ukraine).
Little is known about his life, but the opening of Soviet archives at least confirmed his existence as an historic figure.
"In so far as it may be reconstructed from the writings of his followers, his theological programme sought to reintegrate religious practice into the daily lives of ordinary people. It was based on the mystical belief that God was present in all things. Thus Jews were to penetrate the material surface of everyday life and tasks and attach themselves to the divine core immanent in these things. This attachment to God or *Devekut*, was just as possible in the daily prayer of a simple cattle trader as it was in readings of the Talmud by a scholar.

*Devekut* should extend to all areas of life; everybody had the task of accessing God in all situations." (Galley, p. 139)
After Besht's death Hasidism became an important mystic movement in Poland and Ukraine, but was bitterly opposed by traditional scholars.
Source of image: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_ben_Elieser

**Yiddish**
Even after their migration to Poland, German Jews retained their language, Yiddish, a dialect of Middle High German, which functioned as a lingua franca for Ashkenazy Jews over many centuries. There were several dialects of Yiddish – depending on the speaker's location his language was inflected with Polish or Ukrainian. A distinction is made between West and East Yiddish, i.e. the Yiddish spoken in Western and Eastern Europe. Yiddish exists as a literary language since the sixteenth century and is typically written using Hebrew characters. Hebrewisms are generally written as in Hebrew, but pronounced differently. The decline of West Yiddish began with the Haskalah, the enlightenment and emancipation of Western European Jewry. Soon Yiddish was only spoken by Jews in Eastern European, where it survived well into the nineteenth century when a rich Yiddish-language literature emerged.
However, the various Jewish catastrophes of the twentieth century furthered the decline of the language. An estimated 11 million Jews, 60% of the world's Jewish population, spoke Yiddish before World War II. Today there are approximately 3 million Yiddish speakers worldwide. Yet only a few Jews in ultra-orthodox communities in Israel and the USA speak Yiddish as their first language. Yiddish speakers in the USA speak an American Yiddish dialect. In both countries secular movements are promoting a revival of Yiddish.

The close proximity of Yiddish to German is still clearly felt, as in the following transliteration of the numbers one to ten:
*Ejns, zwej, draj, fir, finf, seks, sibn, acht, najn, zen*
For an impression of Yiddish, watch this news programme:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3X2d7cjahc&feature=fvst

An attempt to revive Yiddish: Google Yiddish


**Ladino**

Ladino or Judeo-Spanish, a language spoken by Jews of Spanish origin, developed only after the expulsion of Jews from Spain and was for them what Yiddish was for Ashkenazy Jews. Innumerable Ladino dialects existed, depending on particular communities and their geographic locations, which extended from England, Italy, and Amsterdam, to North Africa and the Ottoman Empire. In the past Ladino was spoken by many Jews and, like Yiddish, it had the status of a lingua franca. Yet today there are less than 200,000 Ladino speakers worldwide, with very few of these speaking it as their first language. However, in Israel and other countries there are associations that strive to preserve the Ladino heritage and projects aimed at documenting the language.

The numbers one to ten in Ladino:
*Uno, dos, trez, kuatro, sinko, sesh, syete, ocho, mueve, dyez*

*The Little Prince* in Ladino, in Hebrew and Latin script

When Ladino is written in Hebrew script, the Rashi script is generally used.


For an impression of Ladino watch this clip:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2EZFbGJzqA&feature=related

The speaker was born in Jerusalem. She's telling an anecdote about *Dshucha*, a figure central to both Arabic and Ladino Folklore. This anecdote recounts how *Dshucha*, who has never seen a mirror, buys one in the belief that it is a portrait of his father, as "the man in the picture" (his reflection) is so similar to his father. Later his wife has a secret peek at the mirror and is convinced that it is an image of *Dshucha's* beautiful lover. When she shows the alleged picture, the mirror, to her mother, the mother remarks "With a lover like that, you've nothing to be afraid of."

**Hebrew**

Hebrew is widely recognized as the language of the Bible. Yet, its contribution to the consolidation of a Jewish identity over millennia, and its role as a lingua franca for exiled Jews, are less well-known. The Hebrew used in the Bible was no longer spoken from the second century onwards, but it continued to be used in Jewish communities as a literary language. While the minutes of proceedings in religious courts were written in Yiddish, religious tracts were written in Hebrew, and Jewish men wrote to each other in Hebrew and generally read in this language. By contrast, books aimed at female audiences were usually written in the other Jewish languages, as Jewish women received no instruction in Hebrew.

In terms of the language in which they were composed, a distinction was often made between secular and religious texts. Thus the Rambam wrote his *Mishne Torah* in Hebrew, but his philosophical work, the *More Nevuchim*, was written in Judeo-Arabic, Arabic written in Hebrew characters. Nevertheless, many works that were not first written in Hebrew were translated into Hebrew immediately after their publication. Thus, they could be read by Jews all over the world. Books on medicine and other scientific works were often written in Hebrew. The status of Hebrew among Jews in the Middle Ages is comparable to that of Latin in the Christian world at the same time.
In the context of the Haskalah Hebrew was modernized. Moses Mendelssohn loathed Yiddish. He wrote essays and other works in Hebrew and in many cases he had to create new Hebrew terms.
In the development of the Zionist movement, Hebrew was increasingly promoted as a language for everyday spoken communication. This must be understood in the context of a backlash against Yiddish, which Zionists referred to derogatorily as “the language of the Ghettos”. In his *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State), Theodor Herzl expressed doubts that Hebrew would ever become an everyday language, but categorically rejected Yiddish as a language for any future Jewish state. He was more inclined to see German as a potential language for Israel.

The revival of Hebrew as a spoken language and its implementation and development as the national language of a country is unprecedented in history. The fact that five million Israelis speak this language as their mother tongue, and the existence of multiple registers and sociolects (e.g. youth slang, literature, and scientific language), attest to the success of this revival.

The following clip from a TV show gives an impression of modern Hebrew.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSTIe25jiiM&feature=related
Here the Comedians are making fun of secular *Aschkenasim*, thereby revealing how topical this theme is.


Author: Barbara Viehmann, M.A.
Translation: Dr. Anne Boden