

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

Mark D. Meyerson: A Jewish Renaissance in Fifteenth-Century Spain

is published by Princeton University Press and copyrighted, © 2004, by Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

For COURSE PACK and other PERMISSIONS, refer to entry on previous page. For more information, send e-mail to permissions@pupress.princeton.edu

Introduction

LOCAL HISTORY, SPANISH HISTORY, JEWISH HISTORY

This book focuses on the final century of the history of the Jewish community of Morvedre, a town located in the kingdom of Valencia, itself part of the federated Crown of Aragon. The story of the Jews of Morvedre begins in 1248, with Jewish settlers' convergence on the town in the wake of King Jaume I's conquest of the region from the Muslims. The story ends as do all histories of the Jews of medieval Spain: with the Jews abandoning their homes and departing for new lands in the summer of 1492, in compliance with the edict of expulsion.¹ Morvedre's old Jewish quarter still stands in mute testimony to the Jews' previous existence and exile. The town itself, however, is no longer called Morvedre but Sagunto. In 1868 it reverted to a form of its old Roman name, Saguntum, as if to draw attention to its Roman antiquity at the expense of its medieval past, when the town was peopled by Muslims and Jews. Indeed, while the stark and magnificent Roman arena readily brings the town's ancient glories to mind, the rather ordinary architecture of the former Jewish quarter can almost make one forget that Jews ever lived there at all.

Yet for a historian intent on recovering the Jews of medieval Morvedre from oblivion, the narrow streets of the Jewish quarter do resound with Jewish voices—or at least they can be made to do so through careful archival reconstruction and with a healthy dose of imagination. The Jewish voices and bodies must be, as it were, conjured, for in merely viewing the streets and houses of the Jewish quarter the visitor can hardly believe that in the century prior to 1492 it was the home and hub of a vital and flourishing Jewish community. The closed quarter with its narrow streets might suggest restriction and oppression, a harried and degrading Jewish existence for which the expulsion was the natural conclusion, the emphatic punctuation to decades of despair. Such an impression, however, would be far from the truth.

The architectural remains of present-day Sagunto belie the history of a Jewish community that runs against the grain of the master narrative of Sephardic history, a narrative mainly fashioned by Yitzhak Baer and perpetuated in more recent syntheses.² According to this narrative, the Jews of the Christian realms

¹ Hinojosa Montalvo 1983; Beinart 1994, 226–231.

² Baer 1961. Assis 1997 is, like Baer, a magisterial work that, despite its more limited chronological scope, nonetheless implies that the post-1327 era was one of universal decline. Gerber 1992, 110–144, is a more popular work that seems to regard the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as hardly worthy of consideration, except to explain the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion. Foa 2000, 74–107, offers the most recent summary of the master narrative. Beinart 1994, 13, argues,

of Castile and the Crown of Aragon experienced, from roughly the end of the twelfth century until the second quarter of the fourteenth, a kind of golden age, analogous to the one their ancestors had enjoyed in Muslim Spain prior to the Almohad persecutions. During this second golden age Christian monarchs were solicitous of their Jewish subjects, Jewish courtiers and officials were powerful and influential, Jewish communities were prosperous and contributed greatly to the economic development of the Christian kingdoms and to the treasuries of Christian kings, and Jewish intellectual and religious life remained vigorous and creative. The period following the golden age is presented as one of inexorable Jewish decline, right until the expulsion. Kings favored and protected the Jews less consistently, while the Christian masses, moved increasingly by religious zeal and agitated by plague, political upheaval, and economic dislocation, reacted with growing vehemence and violence against Jewish power, Jewish usury, and Jewish infidelity. Internally Jewish communities were racked by problems already evident in the golden age: social and political strife as well as ideological controversies between worldly, philosophically minded elites and upright pietists, conflicts that corroded the cohesion of the Jewish community and the commitment and identity of individual Jews. All this came to a head in the summer of 1391, when Christian mobs attacked Jewish communities throughout Castile and the Crown of Aragon, killing many Jews and forcibly baptizing thousands. The final century between 1391 and 1492 was, according to the master narrative, one of almost unmitigated Jewish despair; Jews, for the most part, simply endured.³ In this narrative the Jews themselves recede into the background, with the baptized Jews and their descendants — the *conversos* — taking center stage. The history of Spanish Jewry in the fifteenth century thus becomes largely a history of the conversos, the Spanish Inquisition, and the expulsion. The Jews return to center stage only when they are on their way out of Spain; for the entire previous

in line with Baer, that the Jews of the Crown of Aragon were unable to revive in the fifteenth century.

³ However, Gutwirth 1992, 52, points out that “paradoxical as it may seem, the period which begins with pogroms and ends with expulsions need not be seen as one of unmitigated decline.” Still, Gutwirth does not explain *why* a given community might have experienced something different — in the case of Morvedre, something dramatically different — from “decline.” Gampel, 1989 and 1998, paints a picture of Navarrese Jewry at the end of the fifteenth century that would seem to challenge the master narrative and suggest that the experience of Morvedre’s Jews was not an anomaly. Yet his work views the post-1391 period as an era of “decline for the Jews of Castile and Aragon,” with only Navarre, and perhaps Portugal, salvaging his notion of *convivencia*. In any case, Gampel treats only the final years of the fifteenth century, which makes it difficult to see how the situation of Navarrese Jewry might have changed over the later Middle Ages. He does demonstrate, though, that it was mainly the pressure exerted by Fernando and Isabel on Navarre’s rulers and cities that brought about the downfall of Navarre’s Jews. This accords with my discussion in chapter 7 of the transformation of Valencian Jewry after the Castilian-run Spanish Inquisition began to operate in the kingdom.

century they are merely preparing for—or being prepared for—that last, painful journey.

For the Jews of Morvedre, however, the century between 1391 and 1492 was not simply a gloom-filled parenthesis; it was instead an era of remarkable resurgence. Yet the community's early history does not easily fit the golden age paradigm. During this period the kingdom of Valencia underwent rapid social, religious, and institutional changes that were as problematic for the Jews of Morvedre as the calamities of the fifteenth century.⁴ Despite the impression lent by much historical scholarship, and by all the “Jew-free” Jewish quarters in contemporary Spain, the Jewish experience in medieval Spain was not uniform, neither in the fifteenth century nor earlier. This is not to say that the history of the Jews in Christian Spain defies generalization, but that any revised master narrative, if such is a desideratum, must take into account the variety of Jewish experience. My research on the history of the Jews of Morvedre has resulted in the writing of a counternarrative, a narrative that challenges the prevailing master narrative. There is no reason to think that the historical experience of the Jews of Morvedre was a complete anomaly; whether it was can be determined only through additional local studies.⁵ Even if it was anomalous, it is still crucial to know why. But if Morvedre was not unique—and it probably was not—then the master narrative of Sephardic history, as well as that of Christian-Muslim-Jewish relations in medieval Spain, requires serious rethinking.

This book grows out of my ongoing concern to contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of Christian-Muslim-Jewish coexistence in medieval Christian Spain and of the social, religious, and political processes resulting in its breakdown. These are not minor, esoteric issues. The ethnic conflicts and “cleansings” plaguing the modern world compel one to try to make sense of how a country like Spain could have been transformed from a land of three religions into one wholly Catholic, at least superficially, by 1526, and to determine the impact of this transformation on individuals, families, communities, and kingdoms. In some regions, I am convinced, the transformation was not internally generated; it did not result from popular Christian pressure and local intergroup conflict. External movements, ideologies, and institutions were far more important for effecting dramatic socioreligious change.⁶

In the case of the Jews, comprehension of the causes behind the violence of 1391 or the expulsion of 1492, especially the relation of these critical events to

⁴ I treat the pre-1391 period in a separate volume, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom* (Meyerson 2004a).

⁵ The Jews of the kingdom of Aragon, for instance, warrant further consideration in this regard, but the relevant scholarship, such as that of the prolific Motis Dolader (e.g., 1996 and 1997a), does not even broach, much less answer, the sorts of questions I pose in this book, particularly those concerning the evolution of Jewish-Christian relations.

⁶ Meyerson 1991, for the case of the Muslim population.

the previous decades of Jewish-Christian interaction in particular locales, can be achieved only through highly contextualized local or regional studies over the *longue durée*. Yet for the history of Spanish Jewry such studies have still not been undertaken. I propose to fill this historiographical lacuna with my work on the Jews of Morvedre. In this book and in a separate volume on the earlier period,⁷ I treat the entire history of the community from the time of its establishment, after the Christian conquest of the Valencian region from the Muslims, until the final expulsion. By taking the long view of the history of a particular Jewish community, one can trace with far greater clarity the changing position of the Jews within the shifting constellation of religious and social groups, and identify the factors — social, religious, economic, and political — shaping or sometimes distorting intergroup as well as intragroup relations. In such a history events become as important as social and economic structures, individual personalities and families at least as crucial as social classes or essentialized “Jews,” “Christians,” and “Muslims.” The world thus recreated is particular to Morvedre and environs between 1248 and 1492 and yet is in certain respects more representative of Jewish life in medieval Iberia than any pan-community study.

The result of such a focus is, as suggested above, utterly at odds with the master narrative of Sephardic history. In the volume that deals with the 1248–1391 period, I locate the decisive downturn in the fortunes of the Jews of Morvedre between, roughly, 1280 and 1325, and so take much of the luster off the golden age. The Jews’ difficulties resulted in part from the very success of a colonization process in which they themselves had played a vital role. The Christian rulers and subjects of the new kingdom relegated the Jews to a markedly inferior position. The Jews’ seemingly inescapable dual function as royal fiscal serfs and primary purveyors of credit produced conflict within the Jewish community while poisoning relations with Christians. This early downturn, however, was not the beginning of an inexorable decline for the Jews. They effectively adapted to the changed conditions, weathered the violent upheavals of the mid–fourteenth century, and entered the 1390s with considerable vigor and optimism.

This book takes as its point of departure the horrific summer of 1391, when Christian violence irrevocably transformed the world of Spanish Jews. The ensuing century of Jewish life thus warrants serious consideration in itself. Instead of viewing it as simply a long prelude to the expulsion, I treat it as a period of adjustment, reorganization, and creativity for Jews, conversos, and Old Christians. I demonstrate why the Jews of Morvedre enjoyed a renaissance after a difficult period of transition (1391–1416). Favorable royal policies were, of course, crucial, as was the welcome extended to the Jews by the town fathers of Morvedre. But what emerges most strikingly, especially in light of the Jews’

⁷ Meyerson 2004a.

circumstances prior to 1391, is how the combination of a new royal fiscal regime and new credit mechanisms brought about a restructuring of the kingdom's credit markets; a significant modification, if not a complete reversal, of the credit relationship between Jews and Christians; a marked amelioration of Christian attitudes toward Jews; new investment strategies and greater economic diversification on the part of the Jews; and a reorientation of class relations and politics within the Jewish community. Besides these political and economic factors, and just as critical, was the Jews' sense of identity and commitment to the wider Jewish community, as evinced, perhaps surprisingly, in their spiritually rewarding relationship with the Judaizing conversos of Valencia.

The counternarrative I have fashioned is also at variance with a newer and largely uncontested narrative propounded by Spanish and non-Spanish scholars working outside the area of Jewish studies that emphasizes the persecution and exclusion of the religious minorities and firmly links the religious homogenization of Castile and the Crown of Aragon to the rise of the early modern state.⁸ For the non-Spanish scholars especially, the forced baptisms, inquisitorial persecutions, and expulsions appear as a kind of prelude to the evils perpetrated by Spaniards and other Europeans on the colonized peoples of America, Africa, and Asia. For the Spanish scholars, who are products of—and perhaps victims of—this very history of religious homogenization, it is difficult to imagine a medieval world in which the conquest, subordination, persecution, and elimination of Muslims and Jews were not, for good or ill, almost destined steps leading to the Spain they presently inhabit. Hence, they too, also with the best liberal intentions, have seized on this narrative of religious hatred, persecution, and colonialism.⁹

The teleology inherent in this narrative has been cogently challenged by David Nirenberg.¹⁰ Nirenberg's work, however, stops in 1348 and therefore leaves unanswered many key questions concerning Spain's dramatic socioreligious transformation in subsequent decades. It obviously cannot contribute to any understanding of the complex converso issue, nor does it address the implications of the emergence of new state institutions and ideologies for the religious minorities. Yet, as this study will show, grappling with both questions is integral to a full comprehension of the somewhat paradoxical history of the Jews of Morvedre in the fifteenth century. On one hand, the institutions and officialdom of a stronger monarchical state protected Jews (and Muslims) more effectively and, as suggested above, helped create a context for improved Jewish-Christian relations—at least in the lands of the Crown of Aragon. On

⁸ E.g., Motis Dolader 1997b.

⁹ The subtitle of Hinojosa Montalvo's documentary collection (1993a), *From Persecution to Expulsion*, is typical of this perspective.

¹⁰ Nirenberg 1996.

the other hand, the fate of the Jews of Morvedre was tied to that of the conversos of Valencia, for, in the end, the perceived necessity of resolving the religious and social problems surrounding the conversos determined the policies of Fernando and Isabel toward the Jews, and even the Muslims. The state, then, did ultimately intervene to effect the religious homogenization of both Castile and the Crown of Aragon, but for religious purposes that contradicted its concurrent political and economic objectives.¹¹

In constructing a narrative that runs against the grain of these two other dominant narratives I do not mean to imply that all other Jewish communities in the Crown of Aragon and Castile had the same experience in the fifteenth century as the Jews of Morvedre, or that those communities that also enjoyed stability and prosperity did so for the same reasons. By explaining why the Jews of Morvedre flourished after 1391 and by pinpointing the factors crucial for this community's success, I hope to move other scholars to raise similar questions with regard to other Jewish communities, to explore why they did or did not prosper in the fifteenth or earlier centuries. The historiographical problem, as I see it, is that such questions are rarely asked, much less answered, about the Jews of Spain in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Studies of Jewish communities, whether individually or in the aggregate, tend to be written from the perspective of 1492, as so many postmortems or as collections of data about what the Jews owned, where they lived, and so on before their expulsion. Furthermore, the chronological scope of such studies is often too limited to allow for any sense of how Jewish-Christian relations, Jewish economic strategies, or Jewish communal politics evolved. I am, in other words, making a strong methodological argument for reconstructing and rethinking the history of Christian-Jewish relations in medieval Spain on the basis of contextualized local and regional studies, through which patterns of interaction can be compared and analyzed and the direction of fundamental changes charted. Morvedre was not the only town, the kingdom of Valencia not the only region where Jews and Christians experienced the mob violence of 1391, the actions of the Castilian-run Spanish Inquisition, and the proclamation of the edict of expulsion as unexpected and unwanted disruptions of decades of fruitful interaction. The Valencian region clearly was not the same as New Castile or Andalucía, whence so much religious violence and momentous change seem to have originated, but it was not so different either. The distinctions are fine; they must be located and analyzed. Only then will it be possible to comprehend the meaning of the Jewish expulsion for local societies and for all of Spain.

My work on the Jews of Morvedre stands at the confluence of three overlapping historiographical traditions: the Jewish, the Spanish, and the local. It benefits greatly from all three — indeed it would have been impossible without them — but also departs from each to some degree. For the social historian aim-

¹¹ Meyerson 1991 and 1995a.

ing to produce a contextualized local study, the Jewish historiographical tradition has certain shortcomings in terms of both perspective and sources utilized. With regard to the latter, a history that privileges philosophical, theosophical, and polemical texts often overlooks crucial details of Jewish socioeconomic life and the complexities of Jewish coexistence and conflict with non-Jews. Non-Jews appear for the most part as essentialized “others” and the encounters between them and Jews often as the discussions or debates of clergymen, of so many talking heads. Even when scholars like Baer and Assis, drawing on archival as well as Hebrew literary sources, have striven for a “well-grounded historical perspective” and a contextualized treatment of Spanish Jews,¹² they have not gone much beyond indicating the parallels between Jewish and Christian social and institutional structures while tracing the evolution of royal Jewish policy. Lacking in such work is a deep familiarity with Christian society and politics and attention to the social, economic, political, and religious changes affecting Christians in their daily lives and therefore sometimes shaping their interaction with the Jewish population.

There is, moreover, a tendency in this historiographical tradition to regard Spanish Jews as a homogeneous unity. This position has considerable cogency if one considers, for instance, that Aragonese and Castilian monarchs usually made policy decisions with all their Jewish communities in mind, that Jewish communal authorities throughout Iberia grappled with similar sets of problems, or that Jews wherever they were parried the arguments of Christian missionaries in a relatively consistent manner. Still, this assumption of a unity of experience at the expense of local context can limit our understanding of precisely how changes in royal policy affected Jewish communities and families, or why the social and intellectual conflicts upsetting some Jewish communities did not disturb others. Even within the Crown of Aragon alone Valencian Jews had a history distinct from that of Catalan and Aragonese Jews.¹³ The beginnings of the Valencian communities were different, as were the Jews’ memories of these beginnings, which continued to inform their views of the present and hopes for the future until the expulsion. Valencian Jews, especially the Jews of Morvedre, were as much affected by the vagaries of Valencian (Christian) politics, whether the revolt of the Union (1347–48), the Castilian invasion of the kingdom and occupation of Morvedre (1363–66), or the long-standing conflict between Valencia, the capital city, and Morvedre.¹⁴ The crisis of Morvedre’s Jews in the fourteenth century and their remarkable revival in the fifteenth are incomprehensible without a thorough grasp of regional society and politics.

If an essential Jewish trait emerges from the study of the Jews of Morvedre,

¹² Myers 1995, 100, and 109–128 for his treatment of Baer.

¹³ This is not clear in Assis 1997, which, in any case, gives minimal coverage to Valencian Jewry.

¹⁴ See Meyerson 2002 and 2004a, and further in this volume.

it is the Jews' ability to adapt to new and at times trying conditions to survive or even prosper. Here too, with regard to this nearly stereotypical Jewish mutability and knack for survival, a detailed knowledge of the regional context is crucial. Without it I could not have reconstructed the Jews' social, political, and economic strategies and thereby achieved one of the aims of this study: to give the Jews greater historical agency and to make them the subjects of their own history.¹⁵

A work that evaluates the success and revival of a Jewish community on the bases of its demographic expansion, prosperity, social stability, and mutually beneficial relations with non-Jews will not be convincing to everyone in the field of Jewish studies, especially as far as the fifteenth century is concerned. In a field where the well-being and achievement of a Jewish community are often correlated to the productivity and brilliance of religious scholars, philosophers, and poets, Valencian Jews in general and the Jews of Morvedre in particular are bound to be found wanting.¹⁶ Throughout their history the Jews of the kingdom of Valencia could boast of very few intellectual lights and noteworthy religious leaders, and none came from the Jewish quarter in Morvedre.¹⁷ There were nonetheless rabbis and judges in Morvedre who struggled to uphold Jewish legal autonomy and to see to it that the community lived in conformity to halakhic standards, even if they tended, rather unimaginatively, to make their decisions in accordance with the *Mishneh Torah* of Maimonides. For this community, philosophy and mysticism do not seem to have been pressing concerns. Given the sources available on the Jews of Morvedre — almost all documents generated by the royal bureaucracy or, toward the end of their history, by the Spanish Inquisition — it is practically impossible to determine whether the dichotomy posited by Baer between a worldly, “Averroistic,” courtier class and the mass of poor, pious Jews led by scholars with a mystical bent is applicable to the Morvedre community. Although there were, before

¹⁵ In this sense my work can perhaps be read as a subtle rejoinder to the Zionist critique of diaspora Jews, who were deemed passive objects of persecution living outside history as long as they lived outside their national homeland (Myers 1995, 4). Yet in underlining Jewish agency my intention was actually to remedy certain deficiencies in the treatment of Jews in the scholarship on medieval Spanish society (see below).

¹⁶ Indicative of the tendency in Jewish historiography to assess the relative well-being and achievement of Spanish Jews without any reference at all to economic and social criteria is Shmueli 1986, 169–171, who criticizes Baer for his tendency to “Ashkenize” Spanish Jews and to downgrade them for their philosophical pursuits, and then himself lauds “the special qualities of the extraordinarily gifted community that created the brilliant ‘Poetic-Philosophic’ culture.”

¹⁷ This is not to say that the Jews of the kingdom of Valencia were completely impoverished intellectually. The great rabbi Isaac ben Sheshet Perfet made Valencia his home between 1385 and 1391; see Hershman 1943. Fifteenth-century Xàtiva, moreover, could boast of the Kabbalist Yosef Alcastiel — see Scholem 1955 — and the chronicler Isaac ben Hayim Ha-Kohen. From the work of Idel 1999, it is clear that Valencian Jews could obtain an education in philosophy and Kabbalah as well as in biblical and talmudic studies.

and after 1391, Jews in Morvedre who had connections at the royal court, they were not philosophers.

Perhaps more importantly, with respect to the fifteenth century, there is a lack of sources that would enable one to establish whether the Jews of Morvedre experienced the sort of spiritual malaise or espoused the same neo-Platonic, antinomian philosophy as did the Jewish thinkers discussed by scholars like Joseph Hacker, Dov Schwartz, Frank Talmage, and Eric Lawee.¹⁸ Although I do not necessarily think that the actions of ordinary Jews speak more loudly than the written words of the intellectual elite, an examination of the regular interaction of the Jews of Morvedre with the conversos of Valencia over the course of the fifteenth century does shed a different light on the religious outlook of the Jews. Historians who have touched on Jewish-converso relations have treated the matter as subsidiary to the central question in a polemical historiography on the converso problem: were the conversos adherents of Judaism?¹⁹ For those like Benzion Netanyahu and Norman Roth who would answer in the negative, the very existence of so many conversos after 1391–1416 testifies to the spiritual apathy or crisis of the Jews prior to these decades of persecution; the steadfast Jews who clung to Judaism, they argue, wanted little to do with the conversos and regarded them with increasing disdain.²⁰ Those who have argued to the contrary, most notably Yitzhak Baer and Haim Beinart, have cited all known examples of Jewish contact with conversos as indications of the conversos' deep sense of affiliation to the Jewish people.²¹ Both schools have tended to argue in rather extreme terms: either practically all conversos were assimilating or almost all of them were Judaizing. Yet neither school has given sustained attention to the Jewish parties involved in the Jewish-converso relationship, except when considering the opinions of rabbis who were frequently far from the scene.²² In this book, rather than treating converso life per se, I

¹⁸ Hacker 1992, esp. 264–274; Schwartz 1991a, esp. 102–107; Talmage 1985; Lawee 1996. These authors, however, do not regard demoralization or nearly heretical philosophizing as universal among Sephardic Jewish intellectuals during the fifteenth century. Hacker, for instance, sees demoralization — insofar as it is reflected in interpretations of Psalm 44 — setting in only a decade or so before the expulsion. Schwartz (1991b) finds that as the fifteenth century progressed radical philosophy waned while the “moderate school” of philosophy predominated.

¹⁹ Gitlitz 1996 provides a useful overview of the debate.

²⁰ Netanyahu 1973 and 1995; N. Roth 1995. Their contention — the foundation on which their main argument about converso assimilation rests — that inquisition records are wholly unreliable sources, fabricated by the conversos' racist, political enemies, is untenable and has been countered elsewhere (e.g., Yerushalmi 1971, 21–31; Pullan 1983, 201–210; Gitlitz 1996, 76–82). It reflects their unfamiliarity with archival records, especially judicial records, and the *modus operandi* of the institutions that produced them.

²¹ Baer 1961, 2:244–443; Beinart 1981. I do lean more toward this school, particularly because these scholars regard inquisition records as valid historical sources. The principal problem with Baer and Beinart is that they tend not to take other records into account and thus ignore the existence of a substantial number of assimilating conversos.

²² Especially Netanyahu 1973; cf. G. D. Cohen 1967.

view the conversos from the perspective of one Jewish community. I undertake the first extended analysis of Jewish-converso relations at the local level between 1391 and 1492. The relationship changed in significant ways over the years, as will be seen, but evident throughout the fifteenth century is the endeavor of the Jews of Morvedre to provide the conversos of Valencia, at least the committed Judaizers and some of the vacillators, with religious instruction and inspiration as well as *kasher* foodstuffs. This consistent effort, which at times amounted to a proselytizing enterprise, reflects a level of spiritual vitality and commitment and belief in the redemption of the Jewish people (including Judaizing conversos) such as would lead one to think that the demographic and economic expansion of the Jews of Morvedre in the fifteenth century was linked to — though not the cause or the effect of — spiritual well-being and optimism. It was probably no mere coincidence that the Jewish community leader Salamó Çaporta, who was a very successful entrepreneur and royal favorite, also actively abetted Judaizing conversos. Toward the end of the fifteenth century, the Jews of Morvedre expressed their self-confidence and manifested their religious identity in various meaningful ways, even if no intellectual giants numbered among them.

The use of the term “renaissance” to describe Jewish revival in fifteenth-century Morvedre naturally draws one’s gaze across the Mediterranean to the Jews of Renaissance Italy and again raises questions about the criteria by which a Jewish renaissance in this period should be evaluated. Historians of the Jews in fifteenth-century Italy have focused on Jewish intellectual life, the degree to which it was influenced by (Christian) Renaissance humanism, and the interaction of Jewish and Christian scholars. An older school of historians, dazzled by evidence of the collaboration of Jewish and Christian intellectuals, espoused the idyllic view that the more open ambience of Renaissance Italy fostered an Italian Jewish Renaissance.²³ A newer, revisionist school has called this interpretation into question. Though not denying Jewish interest in humanism, these historians have emphasized the Jews’ selective adoption of humanist ideas and their adaptation of them for their own (Jewish) purposes. They have also pointed to the proselytizing agenda of Christian Hebraists and Kabbalists, and to the resultant apostasy of some Jewish intellectuals involved in their circles.²⁴ If the notion of a Jewish renaissance in fifteenth-century Italy is problematic from the perspective of intellectual and (high) cultural history, it is even more in socioeconomic terms. The often tiny Jewish communities of northern and central Italy were quite insecure. Italian municipalities granted them short-term residence permits (*condotte*) primarily for the purpose of giving Christians, especially poorer Christians, access to needed Jewish credit.

²³ E.g., C. Roth 1959.

²⁴ Especially Bonfil 1984 and 1994, 1–15, 101–124, 145–177. Also Ruderman 1981, 43–56; Lesley 1988; Tirosh-Rothschild 1991.

The Jews' particular function not surprisingly earned them Christian resentment and made them the targets of vicious Franciscan preachers who complained about Jewish exploitation of the Christian poor and urged municipal authorities, sometimes successfully, to eject the Jews.²⁵ As stated above, the quality of the intellectual life of the Jews of Morvedre cannot be ascertained, but, as will be seen, there can be no doubt about the revival of this Jewish community in socioeconomic terms, including the amelioration of its relations with Christians.²⁶ The point here is not to engage in endless speculation about what does or does not constitute a Jewish renaissance but to suggest that just as one need not view Jewish life in Renaissance Italy as halcyon and splendid, one need not regard Jewish life in fifteenth-century Spain as bleak and painful. "Renaissance" and "expulsion," the two buzzwords that seem to define the histories of Italian and Spanish Jews, respectively, were by no means diametrically opposite aspects of Jewish experience in this period.

Although this book may well be regarded as a work of Jewish studies, or at least a work of Jewish studies of a particular kind, it is primarily, by virtue of the training, methodology, and intentions of its author, a work of medieval Spanish history, or, more specifically, a study of a plural society in Christian Spain from the perspective of one of its constituent communities. Just as the book has profited greatly from the labors of scholars in the field of Jewish studies and Jewish history per se, it also owes much to the work of Spanish and non-Spanish historians of medieval Spain. The highly contextualized history of a Jewish community I present here would scarcely have been possible were it not for the explosion, in recent decades, of local and regional studies. I am particularly indebted to historians of the medieval kingdom of Valencia who have been producing, especially since the late 1980s, first-rate studies of peasants, seigneurs, urban folk, and royal and municipal institutions—in other words, of the people and structures shaping the world within which the Jews of Morvedre lived.²⁷

The Jews have long had a place in the narratives of Spanish history, whether of the "national," regional, or local variety. At one time, their place in the master narrative of Spanish history, like that of the Muslims, was hotly debated, especially by Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, who viewed the Jews for the most part as usurious bloodsuckers responsible for many of the ills of later medieval Spain, and by Américo Castro, who emphasized the importance of Jews and Jewish influences for the development of Spanish literature, science, and in-

²⁵ Bonfil 1994, 19–59, 83–93; Toaff 1979, 39–71, and 1996, 234–253; Pullan 1971, 431–475.

²⁶ This is not to say that Jews elsewhere in fifteenth-century Iberia did not productively interact with Christian scholars or that they were not open to humanist influences. See, e.g., Lawee 1995; Fellous 1998.

²⁷ Indicative of the recent explosion in Valencian historiography is the publication, since 1989, of the excellent *Revista d'Història Medieval* by the Universitat de València.

stitutions.²⁸ As noted above, the Jews now, like the Muslims, occupy a secure place in the uncontested teleological narrative, or narratives, of persecution.

There are, however, methodological problems with the treatment of the Jews in these newer national, regional, and local narratives and studies. They deprive the Jews — and Muslims — of agency. Like the Muslims, the Jews are categorized as a minority or as a marginal group, and are often quite literally placed in the margins, or in small subchapters of historical works. Jews rarely appear as subjects of their own history. They do so only in monographs devoted specifically to such-and-such Jewish *aljama*. Yet such works treat the Jews in an oddly decontextualized, at times taxonomic fashion, as if the socioeconomic and institutional changes to which Christians were subject somehow did not affect them. The Jews are usually presented as industrious, moneylending objects of persecution and are scarcely given a role in local or regional histories; they somehow reside outside history. Insofar as their interaction with the Jews is concerned, Christians often come off as little better than hate-filled, persecuting automatons. As a result, Jews and Christians are both essentialized, and the histories of their relations acquire a uniformity and predictability that do justice to neither group.

Thus I have attempted in my work to treat the Jews as actors and to place them on the center stage of Valencian history along with Christian and Muslim actors. I have endeavored to show how the social origins, personality, and ambitions of individual Jews affected their relations, and their community's relations, with Christians and Muslims. The non-Jews are presented not as essentialized others but as individuals whose views and treatment of the Jews were shaped by their social class, political alliances, economic interests, and religious sentiments. I show how the attitudes of Christians and Muslims toward the Jews changed over time, though by no means in the expected direction. Rather than offering a neat and linear narrative of persecution, my work tells a story full of contradiction and ambiguity, a counternarrative that will make readers think differently about 1492 and the preceding centuries of Jewish life in Morvedre and elsewhere in Christian Spain. The story of the Jews of Morvedre ends where all histories of Spain's Jews must, but the road on which the Jews were traveling in the years preceding the expulsion seems to have been leading in another direction. We can only imagine where.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE MORVEDRE COMMUNITY

Jews dwelt in Morvedre from the beginning of the Valencian region's history as a medieval Christian kingdom and part of the Crown of Aragon.²⁹ Of late

²⁸ Glick 1979, 6–13; Hillgarth 1985.

²⁹ For a detailed treatment, with sources, of the 1248–1391 period, see Meyerson 2004a.

foundation by western European standards, the new kingdom of Valencia changed rapidly and dramatically in a relatively short time. King Jaume I of Aragon-Catalonia carved it out of Muslim al-Andalus between 1233 and 1245. Yet by the 1460s the kingdom had become the monarchy's most reliable source of financial support, and its capital, Valencia, the Crown of Aragon's most important port and one of Christian Spain's most populous cities. In these two and a half centuries of remarkable development, the Jews of Morvedre were no mere bystanders but full participants in the kingdom's history. Like other Jews in the kingdom, they soon became just as "Valencian" as the Christian settlers and the indigenous Muslims, contributing to and being shaped by the kingdom's peculiar history.

In no period of the telescoped medieval history of the kingdom of Valencia were changes as fast and as consequential as in the first one hundred years. The kingdom's metamorphosis is most clearly evinced in the tumultuous political relationship and shifting demographic weight of its Muslim and Christian populations. A product of crusade and conquest, the kingdom began as a colonial regime, in which Christian kings and lords, aided by Christian and Jewish administrators, ruled over a restive Muslim population while fostering the settlement of Christians and Jews, and sometimes even of foreign Muslims. Comprising approximately 80 percent of the kingdom's population, the indigenous Muslims, or Mudejars, revolted unsuccessfully several times between 1247 and 1277. The upheaval and fluidity of the decades of colonization gave way to greater calm and the consolidation of Christian authority in the fourteenth century. As a result of Christian and Jewish immigration and Muslim emigration, by midcentury the Mudejars constituted only one-half of the realm's population. By this time the kingdom was no longer precariously colonial but securely part of the Crown of Aragon and unmistakably Christian in its public character, despite the still considerable Muslim presence. Indeed, serious threats to the kingdom's stability and survival came not from rebellious Mudejars or foreign Muslim princes, but first, in 1347–48, from local Christians who formed the Valencian Union and revolted against royal authority, and then, in the 1350s and 1360s, from invading Castilian armies.

By the time the Union raised the standard of rebellion, the Jews of the kingdom had already fallen from the lofty position they occupied in the thirteenth century. Streaming into the new kingdom along with Christian settlers in the wake of Jaume I's conquest, Jews from Catalonia and Aragon settled in key urban centers. The most important families among them became cogs in the Crown's colonial machinery. Jewish officials and administrators in the kingdom attained a level of power and privilege rivaled only by that of their counterparts in the regions the Castilian monarchs had wrested from the Muslims.

In Morvedre Jewish bailiffs played a key role in organizing the colonization of the town and its wider district (*terme*). Situated on rich alluvial lands near the mouth of the Palancia River and located less than twenty-five kilometers to

the north of the capital city, Morvedre offered Jewish and Christian immigrants great agricultural and commercial opportunities. Town walls and the formidable royal castle promised security in the event of Muslim uprisings. The Jewish settlers quickly diversified economically. Jewish proprietors, who sometimes owned sizable estates farmed by Muslim tenants, developed an important kasher wine industry paralleling the Christians' production of non-kasher wine. Ensnaring themselves in regional trade networks, Morvedre's mobile Jewish merchants dealt in agricultural products, including local wine, and manufactures, such as the silverware and shoes made by the town's Jewish artisans. Like Jews elsewhere in the new kingdom, the Jews of Morvedre were established as the main purveyors of credit in their area and thus were authorized by the Crown to lend money at the rate of interest already set for Catalan and Aragonese Jews — 20 percent of the principal. Often the members of leading Jewish families, Morvedre's lenders made loans to Christian and Muslim farmers and artisans as well as to Christian knights and nobles in a wide region extending from Valencia in the south to Castelló in the north. They also invested their capital in the farming of royal and seigneurial taxes. By around 1325, the end of the era of colonization, the Jews of Morvedre formed a medium-sized *aljama* of perhaps sixty families, approximately 250–300 individuals. It was dwarfed by the great *aljama* in Valencia, whose population was five times larger. The Christians of Morvedre numbered some six thousand souls; hence the Jews comprised roughly 3 percent of the town's population.

During this colonization period the existence of Jewish communities in Morvedre and other urban centers was never put in doubt; what Christians did question was the Jews' high status. The Jews of the kingdom were, after all, *Jews*, their power and influence incongruous with the vision of a Christian society articulated and promoted by reforming popes, monks, and friars, and shared increasingly by laypersons and princes in thirteenth-century Europe. Though new, the kingdom of Valencia did not develop in a vacuum, impervious to the currents of Christian reform and anti-Judaism then leaving their mark on societies north of the Pyrenees and even in the northern realms of Christian Spain. Its Jews could not be allowed to hold the reins of power too long. From the 1280s through the 1320s Valencian Christians managed, in various ways, to put the Jews in their proper, inferior place. Newly confident in their authority over the Muslims, whose last major revolt Pere II crushed in 1277, and resentful of the power of Jewish bailiffs, tax collectors, and proprietors, Christians pressured King Pere to remove Jews from office in 1283. In the ensuing years Jews wisely divested themselves of the ownership of large estates, which, to many Christians, smacked of Jewish lordship. Christians, moreover, were increasingly inspired by their identification with and sense of belonging to the *Corpus Christi* — a metaphorical socioreligious body that excluded the Jews and a physical body that the Jews had allegedly crucified — and they used religious rituals to humiliate and, occasionally, to terrorize Jews.

At the same time, the monarchs enserved Valencian Jewry to the royal treasury, a policy that complemented their licensing of Jewish usury. Kings expected that revenue, in the form of interest on loans, would flow steadily from Christian or Muslim borrowers, through the hands of taxpaying Jewish lenders, into the royal treasury. Power in the Jewish community, in Morvedre and other towns, therefore inhered to an unusual extent in the manipulation and amassing of monetary resources. The major taxpayers won social prestige and dominated aljama government. The wealthy oligarchs, however, walked a fine line between fulfilling their fiscal responsibilities to the community, thereby maintaining their elite and honored status, and prudently concealing enough assets to avoid a severe economic setback and consequent social demotion. This was no easy balancing act; fiscal politics were thus intense and bitter. On one hand, lower- and middle-class Jews frequently complained to the Crown that the oligarchs were not paying enough taxes. They channeled their discontent into demands for electoral reform that would give them some role in communal government and tax assessment. The oligarchs, on the other hand, engaged in vicious intraclass warfare, which was more threatening than the protests of the lower classes. The weapons they usually wielded against each other were fiscal. As annual elections kept them rotating in and out of communal government, they used their time in office to tax their enemies heavily and their allies lightly, knowing full well that their rivals would soon be wreaking fiscal vengeance on them.

The monarchy's incessant and exorbitant fiscal demands locked the Jews into a perpetual cycle of lending money and then dangerously squeezing Christian debtors in order to subsidize the king. The bishops of Valencia, who opposed usury of any kind, ably fanned the resultant ill will of the debtors, which sometimes manifested itself in particularly nasty Holy Week violence. Until the later fourteenth century this troubled triangular relationship among royal tax collector, Jewish creditor, and Christian debtor was inescapable. It was, however, not the only factor shaping relations between Jews and Christians, for many Jews had other forms of livelihood and did not lend money while many Christians did practice usury. Still, the perception of Jewish usury was often just as, if not more, important than the reality. With the right amount of clerical agitation, or in times of agrarian crisis, the phenomenon of Jewish usury could become the source of considerable tension.

The decline of the Jews of Morvedre after 1283 was neither absolute nor endless. The Jews effectively compensated for their loss of public authority by cultivating mutually beneficial relations with Christian elites—the knights and lesser lords of Morvedre and its terme, and the great lords of domains farther afield. They adjusted to the difficulties of their fiscal servitude by devising new economic strategies. In order to evade at least some of the requirements of an insatiable royal treasury, they dispersed their assets and investments widely, in other royal towns and, most importantly, on the estates of their

knightly and noble patrons. Fourteenth-century monarchs — Jaume II (1291–1327), Alfons III (1327–36), and Pere III (1336–87) — nonetheless continued to regard the Jews as an asset, for their own purses and for the local and regional economy.

In fact, during the rebellion and warfare that rocked the kingdom in the middle decades of the fourteenth century, the Jews of Morvedre suffered violence and displacement precisely because of the firm bonds tying them to the monarchy and to Christian notables. When the hosts of the rebel Union of Valencia attacked Morvedre in November 1348, they made a point of looting the homes of royalist nobles and sacking the Jewish quarter. In 1365, two years after the invading army of Pedro I of Castile captured and occupied Morvedre, the local Castilian commander expelled from the town a number of Christians and the whole Jewish community, all deemed loyal to King Pere. Neither action resulted from popular Christian animosity in Morvedre toward local Jews; each one was a matter of political contingency. Hence after King Pere recaptured Morvedre in September 1365 and began to rebuild and repopulate the shattered town, the remaining and returning Christian inhabitants did not in any way resist the return of the Jews. They needed Jewish bodies and Jewish resources. But more important than the views of local Christians was the Jews' own stubborn will to endure as a community in a town and a region they had made their own.

The process of postbellum reconstruction was, in several respects, a new beginning for the Jews and Christians of Morvedre. Having lost some families during the war years, the Jewish *aljama* got some new blood and saw a changing of the guard in its oligarchy. Three families in particular emerged as the dominant force in *aljama* politics by the 1380s: the *el Raus*, in the person of David, who earned his fortune with investments in credit operations, tax farming, and maritime commerce; the *Legems*, headed by the tax farmer *Jahudà* and his son Samuel; and the *Façans*, a new family whose patriarch Jacob was a wealthy lender who had come to the kingdom of Valencia from Teruel (Aragon) in the service of King Pere and Prince Joan. These and other affluent families tightened their grip on the reins of *aljama* government throughout the reconstruction era, denying to the lower classes the role they had played, through their representatives, since the 1320s. In 1390, however, King Joan I (1387–96) altered the electoral regime in response to lower-class protests. Now a council of twelve, composed of four members from each class, would advise the executive officials (*adelantats*) and treasurer (*clavari*) and, along with the outgoing *adelantats* and *clavari*, choose the new executives. Government remained oligarchic but the lower classes again had a voice, and their leading members the possibility of climbing into the ranks of the ruling elite.

The *aljama's* relationship with the municipality of Morvedre was put on a new footing through the modification of the *aljama's* responsibilities in a mat-

ter of great import to both corporations: taxation. By virtue of an agreement reached between the two on 22 September 1370, the Jews would henceforth pay all sales taxes (*cises*), utility fees, and other levies the municipality collected from local Christians. Previously the Jews had paid all their taxes directly to the Crown; municipal officials had always resented the fiscal autonomy of “the king’s Jews.” With the Jews contributing to municipal revenue as a result of the 1370 accord, the repopulation of the Jewish quarter became essential to the reconstruction of Morvedre and, in the long term, to the solvency of the town’s government.

The new taxation plan in Morvedre was linked to the development, over the later fourteenth century, of a new fiscal regime for the kingdom in which the Corts (representative assembly) and its permanent administrative body, the Generalitat, new forms of taxation, and new credit mechanisms became central. In the changing configuration of royal finances the Jews assumed a different and progressively less significant position. The community in Morvedre consequently carried a lighter and more reasonable tax burden, a factor that facilitated its growth in the postwar years. The new regime, moreover, was beginning to reshape the triangular relationship among revenue-hungry kings, taxpaying Jewish creditors, and taxpaying Christian debtors.

At the Corts of Monzón in 1362–63 a new and more efficient system of royal finance was established. Previously, when the Corts conceded taxes — or “donations,” as they called them — to the Crown, the funds were collected in two ways: through the assignment of specific quantities to each estate, which were then divided up among and collected from the households within it, and through indirect taxes, mainly on foodstuffs. Now, in addition to these sources, a new series of general taxes was created — the *generalitats* — which were levied on textile production and on external commerce, the most dynamic sectors of the Valencian economy. The newly created delegation of the Corts, the Generalitat, administered and controlled these vast fiscal resources. It had more money under its control than the royal treasury.

At the same time, the kingdom’s cities and towns gained greater financial autonomy. Although since 1321 towns (and aljamas) had been granted the right to impose indirect taxes temporarily to meet the Crown’s fiscal demands, in 1363 King Pere made it a permanent right for all the towns.

These developments coincided with the widespread and increasing use of the new credit mechanisms, the *censal* and the *violari*. The censal was a loan that took the form of a contract of sale (*carregament*), in which the borrower, or vendor, sold to the lender, or buyer, the right to receive annually a pension (or *pension de censal*) for a certain price, that is, the capital loaned. The rate of interest on the capital borrowed through the censal was 7.69 percent in the latter half of the fourteenth century. With the debtor rendering annuities to the creditor, the censal contract could be maintained indefinitely until the debtor, or his or her heirs, reimbursed the creditor for the capital borrowed. A variant

of the censal, the violari was limited to a set period, usually one or two lifetimes, after which the pension was automatically extinguished. Because of its limited temporal scope, the loan contracted through the violari carried a rate of interest twice as high as that of the censal.

Since they need not liquidate the debts acquired through the sale of censals until they chose to do so, or could gradually repay the money borrowed through the sale of violaris over a long period, municipalities and aljamas found these credit mechanisms ideal for raising funds quickly to meet their immediate necessities, such as rendering subsidies to the king. Over the course of the 1340s the aljama of Morvedre had begun to use the censal, or the violari, as a means of financing its public debt. The aljama's adoption of this credit mechanism was roughly contemporaneous with its rapid and widespread diffusion among the municipalities of the kingdom. Municipalities and aljamas both required their *censalista* creditors with funds drawn from the cises they now had the right to levy.

The censalistas who invested their capital in the purchase of censals or violaris saw it as a fairly secure form of investment yielding moderate and regular returns. These *rentiers* were mainly affluent urban citizens — honored citizens, merchants, professionals, and some artisans — and members of the lesser nobility. While each town had its own local censalistas investing in the municipal debt, or in that of the local aljama, citizens and nobles from the capital constituted a significant portion, and frequently the majority, of the creditors of many municipalities in the kingdom. Through purchasing the censals sold by municipalities, and later by seigneuries, the moneyed classes in Valencia came to dominate the credit networks of the kingdom. They were among the censalistas who invested in the public debt of the aljama of Morvedre.

A new credit market was gradually coming into existence; as a result, the alignment of money and power in the kingdom was beginning to change. The censalistas were in a position to displace the Jews as the principal purveyors of credit and to free them from their peculiar form of thralldom — to the royal treasury and to the necessity of practicing usury. The violence of 1391 would, as will be seen, temporarily interrupt these ameliorative developments but would not bring them to a halt.

Such continuity would be possible in Morvedre because between 1365 and 1391 the town had not seen a deterioration of Jewish-Christian relations. The wave of anti-Jewish violence that engulfed the kingdom of Valencia, and much of the Crown of Aragon, in 1391 originated outside Crown territories, in Castile. The Christian elites of Morvedre, moreover, did not allow it to swamp their town. The attacks on Jewish communities in the kingdom of Valencia and elsewhere in the Crown of Aragon were not, in other words, the product of years of escalating Christian animus toward the Jews. In the lands of the Crown of Aragon the violence of 1391 was unexpected and more of an anomaly, whereas in Castile the violence was the end result of years of vicious anti-Jew-

ish activity. This was not because Castilian Christians were inherently more anti-Jewish than their counterparts in the Crown of Aragon, but because the distinctive political traditions and institutions of Castile had made anti-Judaism a fixture in this realm's public discourse.

In Castile the nobility exercised a preponderant influence on political life, dominating both town and countryside. Since the realm's representative assembly, the Cortes, had proved unable to challenge the monarchy effectively on constitutional grounds, the nobles, through a combination of brute force and chicanery, became the main check on the monarchy's centralizing pretensions. The Jews were an obvious and easy target for the monarchy's noble opposition because some of them performed for the royal government administrative and fiscal functions deprecated by ambitious nobles as well as townspeople, whose views the nobility's knightly ethos had shaped. Thus when Enrique de Trastámara led the nobility in an ultimately successful revolt against Pedro I, he was able to provoke popular outrage against the king and the Jews, and to inspire attacks on the latter, by excoriating the king and his Jewish advisors for their alleged rapacity and cruelty.³⁰ Enrique had thereby created an expectation among Castilians that he would have no Jews in his government. Yet when he seized the crown in 1369, he too found that he needed Jewish advisors and financiers, as did his successors. This, and the perennial issue of Jewish usury, remained a sore point with Castilians, as the protests of the Cortes and sermons reveal. The incessant anti-Jewish preaching of Ferrant Martínez, the archdeacon of Ecija, from 1378 on caused the first explosion of violence in Seville in 1391. The politics of the previous years, which had fixed anti-Judaism in the public discourse, explains why the violence spread so rapidly throughout Castile.

In the Crown of Aragon high politics worked differently. There the rural nobility exercised minimal influence in cities and towns, which were dominated by oligarchies of bourgeois background. Urban and rural elites had joined with ecclesiastical notables to form assertive representative assemblies that demanded that kings respect regional laws and redress their subjects' grievances. Whatever the motives of the monarchy's domestic enemies, opposition to the monarchy was constitutional and couched in constitutionalist terms.

The urban elites, who did not view financial and administrative activity as incompatible with their status, were willing and able to serve in the royal government in positions once held by Jews. While the Jews had suffered some loss in political and economic status since 1283, they were also less open to attack by antimonarchical forces. This alone, however, does not explain why opponents of the Crown did not utilize anti-Jewish propaganda, for there were still enough influential Jews in royal circles, such as Jahudà Alatzar of Valencia, for

³⁰ Gutwirth 1999, 164–168, for a discussion of the account of the violence by the contemporary Jewish chronicler Samuel Çarça.

them to have pilloried the king for using Jewish servants.³¹ They did not do so because it was far more effective to beat the king over the head with their regional laws and liberties.

The revolt of the Aragonese and Valencian Unions against Pere III in 1347–48 is a case in point. The Unionists did not resort to anti-Jewish propaganda during their rebellion; they focused on constitutional issues. True, Unionists from the capital did sack the *jueria* of Morvedre, but this attack was due to the Jews' real alliances with royalist nobles. It was not caused by indiscriminate anti-Jewish propaganda, nor did the violence spread to other parts of the kingdom. After 1283 the Jews were not a subject of intense political discussion.

Politics too would determine the stance Morvedre's elite Christian families took when Christian pillagers from Valencia moved on their town's Jewish quarter in July 1391. Relations between Morvedre and the capital during the preceding quarter century had been hostile, as a consequence of the new authority Valencia exercised over its smaller neighbor. In 1365 a vindictive King Pere punished the people of Morvedre for having surrendered to the Castilians by depriving the town of its autonomy and placing it under the jurisdiction of Valencia. Although Morvedre still had its own government and officials, it now fell under Valencia's civil and criminal jurisdiction and paid certain taxes and extraordinary subventions along with the capital. The municipality naturally bristled at its loss of complete autonomy and often contested the legitimacy and size of the fiscal exactions made by Valencia's officials, who proved to be hard and aggressive taskmasters. At times mutual animosity brought city and town to the brink of armed confrontation. When another armed horde marched from the capital toward their town in the summer of 1391, Morvedre's political elites would almost instinctively leap to protect their Jews.

Despite this history of political conflict, and despite the fact that after 1391 Valencia would no longer house a Jewish community and professing Jews would be permitted only brief visits there, the city would continue to be a major factor in the lives of Morvedre's Jews and Christians throughout the fifteenth century. This century was Valencia's golden age both culturally and economically. Its industries, especially textiles, developed prodigiously; it became one of the great Mediterranean emporia, superseding Barcelona as the Crown of Aragon's main commercial and financial center. The economic engine of the kingdom, Valencia was also a magnet for immigrants; by the 1480s it had some seventy thousand intramural and extramural inhabitants. Holding nearly one-quarter of the kingdom's population, it dominated the kingdom in every way. Morvedre, in fact, remained unwillingly part of Valencia's fiscal "contribution" and was in other respects subject to it.

So, oddly enough, while Valencia, in 1397, would be granted the royal "privilege" of never again having to house a *jueria*, a town under its very jurisdic-

³¹ Romano 1991, 410–412; Riera i Sans 1993a.

tion and almost in its shadows would have a thriving Jewish community. The Jews of Morvedre could never become Jews of Valencia, but they could make the short trip to the capital, conduct business with its merchants and artisans, and, in one way or another, deal with its large converso population. By proximity and paradox, the history of the Jews of Morvedre would continue to be closely linked to the history of Valencia. In its Jew-free golden age the capital would help give the Jews of Morvedre a new lease on life.