

## Jewish Culture n°82. By Gilberte Jacaret

Jews in Spain. Part VIII... Modern Times (1868-Present)... From the Virtual Jewish History Tour: Spain

After hundreds of years abroad, Jews were finally permitted to return to Spain after the abolition of the Inquisition in 1834 and the creation of a new constitutional monarchy that allowed for the practice of faiths other than Catholicism in 1868, though the edict of expulsion was not repealed until 1968. (

From 1868 until 1968, Jews were allowed to live in Spain as individuals, but not to practice Judaism as a community.) The Spanish Moroccan War of 1859-60 also brought many Jews to southern Spain who were fleeing Morocco.

Small numbers of Jews started to arrive in Spain in the 19th century, and synagogues were eventually opened in Madrid and Barcelona. Slowly things began to improve and Spanish historians even started to take an interest in the history of Spain's Jewish population and in the Sephardic language of Ladino (Judeo-Spanish).

The government of Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) even granted the right of Spanish citizenship to Sephardim who applied before December 31, 1931.

In 1917, the Jews of Madrid numbers around 1,000 people. Most were German, Austrian-Hungarian and Turkish citizens who fled to Spain at the beginning of World War I. They inaugurated their first synagogue in a small apartment. The world economic crisis of 1929 brought additional Jews to the country.

During this period, Jews slowly began to return to Spain and take part in national affairs. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), many Jews from all over Europe and America volunteered to fight in support of the Spanish Second Republic. Despite the easing of tensions between the Spanish government and the Jews, synagogues in Spain remained closed.

### The Holocaust

During World War II, Franco-led Spain aided the Jews by permitting 25,600 Jews to use the country as an escape route from the European theater of war, provided they "passed through leaving no trace." Paradoxically, though Spain later cultivated relations with Arab countries, it also assisted Moroccan and Egyptian Jews who survived pogroms.

Furthermore, Spanish diplomats such as Ángel Sanz Briz and Giorgio Perlasca protected some 4,000 Jews in France and the Balkans. In 1944, Spain accepted 2,750 Jewish refugees from Hungary. Later, as the Franco regime evolved, synagogues were opened and the communities were permitted to hold services discreetly.

### Modern Jewish Community

Today, there are approximately 40,000 Jews living in Spain, mainly of North African-Sephardic descent. The Jewish community is led by the central governing body of the Federación de Comunidades Judías de España (FCJE).

Like other religious communities in Spain, FCJE has established agreements with the Spanish government, regulating the status of Jewish clergy, places of worship, teaching, marriages, holidays, tax benefits and heritage conservation. Jewish day schools have also been established in Barcelona, Madrid, and Málaga.

In the 1970s, there was also an influx of Argentinian Jews, mainly Ashkenazim, escaping from the military Junta. Spain also grows kosher olives which they export to Jews around the world.

The Spanish Jewish community is one of the few Jewish communities in Western Europe that is growing in both numbers and activities. The Spanish government has made an increased effort to increase the awareness of the role that the Jews once played in Spanish life and to combat anti-Semitism.

Despite interest in Jewish culture, Jews are still not completely safe from anti-Semitism. Many Spanish-Jewish leaders note that the presence of the "new anti-Semitism" is growing. This new form uses anti-Zionism as a disguise for anti-Semitism.

A 2007 survey by the Anti-Defamation League revealed that Spain had the highest percentage of anti-Semitic views out of five European countries polled: Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland. Spain also has an estimated 70 neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic groups with nearly 10,000 members, according to The Movement Against Intolerance. Additionally, in 2008, Spain's constitutional court ruled that imprisonment for Holocaust denial is unconstitutional since it violates freedom of expression.

Until this ruling, Spain's criminal code had provided for one to two years in jail for anyone who disseminated theories or teachings that denied or justified genocide or other crimes against humanity. The new ruling makes only the justification of genocide punishable by prison. Jewish community leaders worry that the court's decision will

strengthen the activities of neo-Nazi groups.

The Jewish community is centered in Madrid with around 12,000 Jews. Barcelona also has a sizeable Jewish community of 5,000 members. In addition, Jewish congregations, including a handful of Conservative and Reform communities, can be found in cities such as Valencia, Malaga, and Marbella as well as the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

In 2007, a modern Orthodox synagogue was established in the city of Alicante on the Costa Blanca, where about 1,000 Jews reside. There are also Jewish day schools in Madrid, Barcelona and Melilla;  
Spain and Israel

Even with the gradual ease of tensions between the Spanish government and the Jews of Spain, Francoist Spain chose not to establish diplomatic relations with the new state of Israel. Israel, in turn, opposed the admission of Spain into the United Nations as a friend of Nazi Germany.

Despite not engaging in diplomatic relations with Israel, Spain maintained a consulate in Jerusalem and traded freely with Israel. After years of negotiations, the Spanish government of Felipe González established relations with Israel in 1986. Today, Spain tries to serve as a bridge between Israel and the Arabs as reflected by hosting the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991.

Casa Sefarad-Israel (The Israel-Spain House) was established in Madrid by the Spanish Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Ministry in June 2007. The cultural and educational center hopes to foster greater understanding of Jewish history and culture. It is completely financed by the Spanish government, and also promotes Sephardi culture as an integral and vibrant part of Spanish culture and aims to strengthen bonds between Spanish and Israeli societies.