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Some Overlooked Realities of Jewish Life under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain

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It is widely accepted that under Islam the Jewish community of Spain briefly enjoyed a “Golden Age.” However, it is far less widely understood that Muslim, Christian, and Jewish legal and historical sources indicate that favorable treatment violated medieval Islamic law and also that even under the best circumstances, Jews remained subject to the vicissitudes of their condition as dhimmis (“protected” non-Muslims). If there was brief good treatment, it was because of tactical needs of particular Muslim rulers, not legal considerations.

Marginalized groups who side with a successful invader normally see their status rise with a change in the political fortunes. The Jewish community of Spain was no exception. Both Muslim and Christian medieval sources show that, reacting to the Visigoths’ anti-Jewish legislation, Spanish Jews supported the Muslim invaders and guarded major conquered cities left behind by Muslim troops during their rapid advance. They were then rewarded with an improvement in their condition. They continued to collaborate with the conquerors and function as a counterpoise to the large subject Catholic population. This alliance of convenience followed an Islamic practice dating back to the earliest Muslim conquests of the Christian lands of the Greek Roman Empire (“Byzantine”) in the Middle East and North Africa. It had an even earlier precedent in the wars between Persia and the Greek Roman Empire.

Therefore, favoring the Sephardic Jewish community continued at the discretion of Muslim rulers as long as it was politically and economically helpful. At the same time, they regarded the Jews as a “servant” group rather than as “allies,” and thus they circumvented the prohibition from the Quran 5: 51.

Practical considerations, then, explain rather simply the difference in medieval Islam’s treatment of Jewry at various times and places, or its better treatment when compared to the treatment of Jewry by Christians — differences which even seasoned scholars have found remarkable, and admirable. Practical considerations also trumped the theoretical greater regard in which Islam held Christians, as expressed in Quran 5: 82 (a particularly anti-Jewish section of the Quran). Under these circumstances, for some centuries Andalusian Jewry thrived, producing a brilliant literary output.

Nevertheless, Sephardic influence and visible material success as a largely urban and, when compared to the really poor and illiterate peasant masses, relatively educated and prosperous minority, elicited Muslim resentment, anti-Jewish riots, pogroms, assassinations, and expulsions, and eventually a precipitous decline in status during the
Almohad rule. By the late Middle Ages (13th–15th centuries), the Sephardic population in Spain had shifted from Islamic lands to the Catholic kingdoms in search of a better life, following a general migration pattern through which those living in Christian lands became a majority of the Jewish world community.9

Nonetheless, Jewish life in Islamic Spain continues to be idealized by many scholars, although it presented a number of cultural features that the majority of modern Jews probably would not find congenial, or in some cases even recognizable.10

The People of “Protection”

As the Maliki school of medieval Islamic law prescribed, Jews were forced to pay the Muslim rulers of al-Andalus the jizya, a yearly poll tax intended not only as the price of their being ahlu dhimma (people of “protection” or simply al dhimma or dhimmis), but also as a sign of their humiliation before Islam.11 As dhimmis, they were under the supervision and “protection” of an Islamic functionary from the office of the Kitabu-dh-dhimam, or “Office of Protection.”12 Jews were allowed to practice their religion and rule themselves according to their religious laws, but only within their neighborhoods and always under rules created and enforced by the hegemonic Muslim culture.

In order to prevent the expansion of the Jewish community, building new synagogues was seldom permitted. Jewish buildings were required to be lower than Muslim buildings. Jews were not allowed to carry weapons or ride horses, and they had to show deference to Muslims. They could not give evidence in court against a Muslim. No Muslim life could be taken for killing a Jew, but a Jewish life could be taken for killing a Muslim. Jews were not allowed to criticize Islam, Muhammad, or the Quran. They could not proselytize.

They were not allowed to have sexual relations with or marry a Muslim woman under penalty of death, although a Muslim man could marry a Jewish woman and their children had to be brought up as Muslims. Jews could not dress as Muslim chiefs, scholars, or nobility. They could not dress in such an ostentatious manner as to offend poorer Muslims. They could not hold Muslims as slaves or servants, but Muslims could hold Jews as slaves or servants.

They had to wear a distinctive sign on their clothes, usually a yellow band, badge, or cap, so that they could not “pass” as Muslims (standard practice towards Jews in the Middle East, eventually imitated by Christians—an origin often overlooked by scholarship on Jewish-Christian relations: see my note 12). Eating implements used by Jews could not be used by Muslims because they were polluted. The sum of these and other conditions, under which Jews in Islamic Spain were allowed to live and prosper, were part of the Muslim dhimma, or “writ of protection.”
Of course, these were merely the official caveats on Jewish behavior, intended to keep the infidels in their place and aware of their subordinate status. As in other societies, including the Christian ones, such legal injunctions were not always enforced by the rulers. But the point is that they both reflected and shaped the attitudes of the Muslim masses towards Jewry. Certainly, Islamic scholars were unanimous in the assertion that dhimmis (Jews and Christians under Islamic rule) must not be placed in positions of authority over Muslims.

In a multicultural Islamic realm beset by ethnic conflicts (even among Arabs themselves, Berbers, freed white slaves raised as Muslims, Hispano-Visigoth Islamic converts or muladis of the first and later generations, various family clans within these divisions, and class, religious, and political rivalries), Muslim functionaries often selected Jews for their administrative skill, financial support, and a loyalty which, unlike that of Muslim functionaries, was undivided by allegiance to the ulama or to other Muslim clans and families. The precariousness of Jewish well-being ultimately depended on the good will of the rulers.

The violations of Islamic law increased as Islam’s energy and power declined and legal barriers against Jewish ascendancy sometimes went unobserved, especially after the disintegration of the Caliphate of Cordoba in the early years of the 11th century, and the subsequent rise of the weak Taifa kingdoms, when the Sephardic community in general, and its leaders in particular, achieved positions of power unheard of before in al-Andalus. Periods of weak Islamic faith coincided with periods of Jewish flourishing. Even then, however, circumstances could adversely affect the Jewish condition, always insecure because ultimately dependent on a given Muslim ruler’s favor.

This insecurity of Sephardic life, even when most successful, or perhaps because of this very success, is shown by several expulsions and pogroms in al-Andalus. Jews were expelled from Cordoba in 1013 and their wealth confiscated, as punishment for their having taken the side of a defeated Muslim leader in one of the frequent internecine struggles of the Taifa kingdoms. As a result, the Sephardic community from Cordoba, which included the then young rabbi Samuel Ibn Naghrela, fled to Granada, Toledo, Zaragoza, and even to Catholic lands. Muslim sources tell of later anti-Jewish Muslim riots in other Taifa kingdoms, one of them again in Cordoba in 1135.

In 1039 the Jewish vizier of the Taifa kingdom of Zaragoza, Rabbi Yekutiel Aben-Hassan, was killed by a Muslim mob in his palace after the assassination of the ruler, Al-Mondhir. The precariousness of Jewish life in Muslim Spain was confirmed when Rabbi Joseph Ibn Naghrela, the son of the most powerful of Jewish leaders, Rabbi Samuel Ibn Naghrela, “The Prince,” and like him a vizier at the service of the Muslim ruler of the Taifa kingdom of Granada, was killed by the rioting Muslim populace in 1066, along with four thousand other Jews, in a pogrom that destroyed the city of Granada’s Sephardic community, only a few years after the death of “The Prince.”
The alim Abu Ibn Ishaq (d. 1067) criticized the Taifa ruler of Granada for favoring the Jewish community, but his satiric poem, which brings up both religious and political issues, is representative of Andalusian popular views regarding the “power of the Jews.”

He has chosen an infidel as his secretary/ when he could, had he wished, have chosen a Believer./ Through him, the Jews have become great and proud/ and arrogant; they, who were among the most abject./ And have gained their desires and attained the utmost/ and this happened suddenly, before they even realized it./ And how many a worthy Muslim humbly obeys/ the vilest ape among these miscreants./ And this did not happen through their own efforts/ but through one of our own people who rose as their accomplice./ Oh why did he not deal with them, following/ the example set by worthy and pious leaders?/ Put them back where they belong/ and reduce them to the lowest of the low,/ Roaming among us, with their little bags,/ with contempt, degradation and scorn as their lot,/ Scrabbling in the dunghills for colored rags/ to shroud their dead for burial.../Those low-born people would not be seated in society/ or paraded along with the intimates of the ruler..../ God has vouchsafed in His revelations/ a warning against the society of the wicked./ Do not choose a servant from among them/ but leave them to the curse of the accurst!/

…I came to live in Granada/ and I saw them frolicking there./ They divided up the city and the provinces/ with one of their accursed men everywhere./ They collect all the revenues,/ they munch and they crunch./ They dress in the finest clothes/ while you wear the meanest./ They are the trustees of your secrets,/ yet how can traitors be trusted?/ Others eat a dirham’s worth, afar,/ while they are near and dine well..../ Their chief ape has marbled his house/ and led the finest spring water to it./ Our affairs are now in his hands/ and we stand at his door./ He laughs at our God and our religion..../ Hasten to slaughter him as an offering,/ sacrifice him, for he is a fat ram!/ And do not spare his people/ for they have amassed every precious thing..../ Do not consider it a breach of faith to kill them,/ the breach of faith would be to let them carry on./ They have violated our covenant with them..../ God watches His own people/ and the people of God will prevail.19

These views were not uncommon. Ibn Hazm’s references to “the Jews” as corrupters of religion not only had an Islamic theological basis but also political implications in the context of his lamenting the disintegration of the Caliphate of Cordoba and the rise of the Taifa kingdoms.20 Ibn Hazm was part of literary circles where these anti-Jewish polemics were not unheard of, and he probably drew on Jewish Karaite anti-rabbinical writings.21

Ibn Abbas, the Arab vizier of the ruler of the Taifa kingdom of Almeria, hated Berbers and despised Jews.22 Arab poets in the Taifa kingdom of Seville accused the Granadan
rulers of “believing in Judaism even though they called themselves Berbers.”23 The last Ziri king of Granada, Abd Allah Ibn Buluggin (r. 1073-1090), virulently attacked in his memoirs rabbi Joseph Ibn Naghrela, insisting on the vizier’s Jewish treacherousness and favoritism towards coreligionists, all of which presumably justified the murder of the vizier in the pogrom of 1066.24

All Muslim sources that mention this pogrom agree with king Abd Allah’s assessment of “the Jews.”25 Jewish documents from Islamic lands in the Middle Ages even show the existence of a word not found in the Torah, but coined to designate such Jew-haters: sone (“a hater”).26 Medieval Islamic anti-Judaism had both a religious and a political origin fueled by Muslim narratives and traditions.27

In spite of such generalized anti-Jewish attitudes, the Sephardic community managed to prosper, as long as rulers in the Taifa kingdoms continued their practice of using the services of capable Jewish functionaries, bankers, and tax collectors. Thus Rabbi Isaac Ibn Albalia, after escaping the Granada pogrom of 1066, served as astrologer of the Abbasid prince of the Taifa kingdom of Seville, al-Mutamid (also known as Albukassim Muhammad; he was deposed by the Almoravids in 1091). Ibn Albalia became leader and protector (“Nagid” or “Prince”) of all the Jewish communities of the kingdom and a Maecenas (cultural advisor) to a number of Jewish luminaries.28

Nevertheless, such favor went against the feelings of the Muslim masses and the judgment of the ulama class. In al-Andalus, the religious and, therefore, civil authorities (in the Islamic world there was no distinction between civil and religious law in everyday life) were a class of educated people in charge of developing and interpreting fiqih, that is, of interpreting the body of applications of divine law—sharia, unlike the separation of these powers in the Catholic West. These educated people were the ulama-(sing. alim), meaning “wise” or “learned.” In short, the ulama were Islamic clerics, from among whom were drawn the legal experts, men, and only men,29 learned in the eternal Holy Book, the Quran, and in the variously authoritative traditional narratives of the Prophet’s sayings and deeds—sunnah.

As with the Umayyads before, the Taifa kings may have been led to their practice of using Jewish functionaries in part because these functionaries would be more loyal to them than to the ulama, or even to Islam itself, since they did not share the faith; and also, and for the same reason, because they were not potential challengers to the Muslim rulers, who were always looking over their shoulder for potential enemies from their own people or from another Muslim group (Berber, Arabs, freed Muslim white slaves, etc.).30

Moreover, Taifa kings tried to compensate for their political and military weakness by attracting and subsidizing intellectuals, poets, and artists of all creeds, to enhance the
prestige of their courts. This search facilitated the presence of gifted Jewish leaders among the aristocracy of the Sephardic community.

In the Catholic kingdoms, monarchs such as Alfonso VI of Castile also made use of and protected the Jewish community; but upon this king’s death, there were riots against Jewish neighborhoods, as the masses’ pent up resentment erupted. In the medieval courts of the Catholic kingdoms, Jewish notables could occupy important positions and the Sephardic population at large benefitted from the rulers’ favor.

During the Almoravid invasion, Jewish contingents fought on the side of the Catholics of Alfonso VI at the battle of Zalaca (1086, North of Badajoz), as well as on the side of the victorious Berbers. In later centuries, Jews who had converted to Christianity (conversos) likewise enjoyed the favor of monarchs and the nobility, and some members of formerly Jewish families reached important positions within government, such as the wealthy Luis de Santangel, tax collector and financial officer to Ferdinand and Isabella, and Gabriel Sanchez, treasurer and counselor to the kingdom of Aragon.

Jewish converts to Christianity could also rise within the ranks of the Catholic church, such as bishop Pablo de Santa Maria, formerly known as Solomon Halevi, and also, to a lesser extent, Abner of Burgos, who became Abner of Valladolid, and Joshua Ha-Lorki, who adopted the name Jeronimo de Santa Fe upon being converted by the influence of Saint Vincent Ferrer. None of this, however, stopped members of the largely peasant Catholic masses from looking with suspicion and envy upon both Jews and conversos.

In Islamic Spain, the Taifa rulers’ generally favorable treatment of the Jewish community continued to elicit complaints from the ulama. One anonymous document from the 11th century complains that the “princes of the Believers” were giving themselves up to pleasure, while handing over their power to “the Jews.” An anthologist, Ibn Bassam (XII c.), complained that someone had told him of having seen the ruler of Granada, Badis, and his Jewish vizier, Rabbi Joseph Ibn Naghrela, together in Cordoba, and that one could not tell who was the ruler and who was the subject.

Later Arabic sources insistently lament the hegemonic status of the Jewish community in the administrative echelons of the Taifa kingdoms, and they offer this perceived Jewish control of things as the explanation and justification for the various anti-Jewish Muslim riots in the Middle Ages as well as the political decline of Islam. Thus historian Ibn al-Kardabus, complaining of the Sephardic influence in the Taifa kingdom of Seville, connected this presumed “Jewish power” to the increasing danger of the Christian Reconquest: “The affairs of the Muslims were given to the Jews; then they caused in these affairs the destruction of lions, as they became chamberlains, viziers, and secretaries. Meanwhile Christians every year went around al-Andalus, pillaging, burning, destroying, and taking away prisoners.”
This popular unhappiness with the Taifa monarchs’ favoritism towards Jewish leaders, combined with the inability of these monarchs to stand up to the growing power of the Catholic kingdoms, was a factor in the general support given by the *ulama* class and the Andalusian masses to the invasions of the Berber Almoravids and Almohads, which would eventually prompt the exodus of many Jews towards the Catholic kingdoms.

The arrival from Africa in 1086 of devout Muslim warriors from the Sahara desert, the Almoravids (al-murabitun, “those dwelling in frontier garrisons”) initially threatened the precarious well-being of Judaism in al-Andalus. However, skillful maneuvering by its leaders, and lavish contributions to the coffers of the Almoravid Emir, Yusuf Ibn Tashufin (whom only El Cid, among Catholic leaders, was able to defeat), turned the situation around—in spite of the enmity of the *ulama*. After the death of Ibn Tashufin, his son, Ali Ibn Yusuf (1108-1143), once again began to rely on Jewish functionaries as administrators, bankers, and tax collectors.

Less fortunate were the Catholics, already a minority, who under the Almoravids suffered persecutions and mass expulsions to Africa.

But the conquest of al-Andalus by the also fanatical Muslim warriors, the Almohads (al-Muwahhidun, or “Those who assert the unity of God”), under the military leadership of their formidable Caliph, Abu Yaqub Yusuf, endangered Judaism once again. Yusuf captured Seville from its Almoravid rulers in 1147, and soon afterwards the entire Almoravid Empire fell in the hands of these new Berber invaders from the Atlas Mountains of North Africa.

After 1148, in an effort to unify their quarrelsome multicultural domains, the Almohads gave both the Jewish and the Catholic communities the choice of either conversion to Islam or expulsion to Africa ---- as the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella would do with the Jewish community in 1492, in imitation of the Almohads. And again as would happen in 1492, many Sephardim chose false conversions, as the great Andalusian rabbi and philosopher Moses Maimonides had advised.

But some might not have given up without making an effort to resist: Muslim historian Ibn Sahibi-s-Salat accused the Sephardic community of Granada, led by Rabbi Sahr Ben Ruiz ibn Dahri, of having opened the doors of the then Almohad-controlled city to the rebel Andalusian chieftain Ibn Humushk around 1161. As for Catholics, what was left of their dhimmi population in Granada was exterminated in the aftermath of a revolt against the Almohads in 1164, and Yusuf boasted that he had left no church or synagogue standing in al-Andalus.

Those Sephardim who refused to convert escaped to the Catholic kingdoms, Africa, and the Middle East, while the remaining practicing Catholics fled to the Christian kingdoms in a movement that ended Catholic dhimmi (“mozarabic”) life in al-Andalus for all
practical purposes. Many Catholics and Jews would eventually return, however, during the rapid advance of the Reconquest, following the defeat of the Almohads at the decisive battle of Navas de Tolosa (July 16, 1212) by the joined armies of the Catholic kings of Castile, Navarra, and Aragon.

In 1492, Granada king Boabdil capitulated to the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella. Boabdil belonged to the Nasrid dynasty, of “Arabic” origin—the founder of the dynasty, Muhammad b. Nasr, was called al-Hamar, or “The Red,” because of his red beard, which betrayed the frequent Caucasian slave ancestry of the “Arab” rulers of al-Andalus. But this “Arabic” Boabdil made sure to include in the treatise of surrender to the Catholics a clause which reflected Islamic law and which stipulated that “Your Highnesses will not allow Jews to have any authority over Muslims nor collect any kind of taxes from them.”

All these Muslim perceptions of Jewry in medieval Islamic Spain, from Arabs and Berbers alike, do not seem different from those that some scholars, concentrating solely on medieval Catholic Europe, have identified as among the root causes of modern anti-Jewish prejudice and persecution. Moreover, Maribel Fierro has pointed out how the actions of the Almohads towards other religious groups were in fact consciously modeled upon the actions of Muhammad and early Islam towards other religious groups as recorded by the Muslim tradition.

It should be clear, then, that such assertions as “Jews lived happily and productively in Spain for hundreds of years before the Inquisition and the Expulsion of 1492,” are creations of Jewish lore, originating in wishful thinking and superficial scholarship. So are representative statements such as this one: “The generally harmonious relations that prevailed between the Muslims and Jews throughout the Muslim world in the early medieval period were brutally interrupted with the emergence of a fanatical sect in the 12th century in North Africa: the Almohads (al-Muwahhidun, “unifiers,” i.e. strict believers in the unity of God).”

Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in medieval Islamic Spain were certainly not “harmonious.” They could not have been otherwise, however, because as was the case also with the Christian dhimmis, these so-called “relations” were not among equals. Rather, they existed under rules created by a hegemonic religion and culture — medieval Islam — and were intended not only to keep the dhimmis in their proper place as a social class subordinate to the dominant one, but also to remind these infidels of their subaltern status. Violations of contemporary Islamic rules by opportunistic princes in need of service and support did not alter and could not alter the legal framework developed by a dominant and domineering medieval religion and its culture.
Notes

1 Variations on this tactic can be found from ancient times to the 20th century, used by the United States toward the Montagnard Hmong against the Marxist-Leninists, to the 21st century invasion of Iraq by the United States, where initially the invaders favored the majority Shiites against the Sunni, the Kurds against both, and then for a while the Sunni militias against the al-Qaeda organization and the Shiite militias. In the Congo, colonizing Belgians favored Tutsis against other groups. Hernan Cortes favored his Indian allies against the Mexica Empire. As a counterbalance to the Islamic Algerians, French authorities favored Jews, who “were given a superior status by the colonizing French from the start.” Peter Scholliers, *Food, Drink and Identity. Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages* (Brussels: Berg, 2001), 207-208.

2 As a result of these discriminatory laws, many Jews converted, some sincerely, but others only in order to remain in Spain rather than live elsewhere (made difficult anyway because of expulsions elsewhere as well), while practicing Judaism in secret. The reiteration of these Visigoth laws in each successive royal Council suggests that they were not being very effective. In fact, the Muslim invasion of 711 found a Jewish community strong enough to be of help in the conquest. Ben Zion Netanyahu’s “The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain” (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001) traces back to the 6th and 7th centuries in Spain the origins of the European anti-Jewish ethos, points out that it was mostly the lower classes who felt economically threatened by Jews and vented their animosity against them, and argues that many Jews had sincerely converted to Christianity. See also the best study of the Spanish Inquisition: Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); and Bernard Hamilton, *The Medieval Inquisition* (New York: Homes and Meier, 1981).


According to Salo Baron, Spanish mistrust of Jews and *conversos* in the Middle Ages and beyond was perhaps based on Jews having been a fifth column for the Muslim invasion of Spain: *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), vol. V, 135-36. According to Alan Harris Cutler, “the Christians of Franco-Germany also saw the Jews as a potential Islamic fifth column and at times persecuted the Jews very
severely for this precise reason:” *The Jew as Ally of the Muslim: Medieval Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 395 n. 17.


According to Arthur J. Zuckerman, there was a Judeo-Islamic conspiracy to seize Catholic Barcelona in 852: *Jewish Princedom in Feudal France*, 768-900 *Study in Jewish History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pages 316-318. A contingent of Jewish troops from Africa under the command of Kaula-al-Yehudi was part of the Muslim army that defeated the Visigoths at Guadalete (Jerez), and the Muslim conquerors favored Jewish immigration from many lands as part of their political design against the Spanish Catholics: Amador de los Rios, *Historia social, politica y religiosa de los judios de España y Portugal* (Madrid: Fontanet, 1875), vol. 1, 116-117, notes 1 and 2 and 118-119. None of this endeared the Jewish community to the Catholics in the North and to the Catholic *dhimmis* under Muslim rule (Amozarabs).

4 Sidney David Markman, *Jewish Remnants in Spain: Wanderings in a Lost World* (Mesa: Scribe Publishers, 2003), 7. In North Africa and the Middle East, Muslims soon realized that they could use the Jewish community, unhappy with its treatment in the Greek Roman Empire (Byzantine), to help keep the Christians under control. A. S. Tritton cites several Muslim sources on the matter: *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects. A Critical Study of the Covenant of Umar* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1930; rpt. 1970), 94-95. Alan Harris Cutler and Helen Elmquist cite Christian primary sources attributing the persecutions of Jews in Europe in 1010 and the 1060's to the widespread belief in the collusion of Jews with Islam and argue that the “association of Jew with Muslim was the crucial factor in the persecution of 1096" as well: Cutler, 400-402.

News of the alleged joint attack by Jews and Muslims against the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 966, and of the Muslim Fatimids’ actual destruction of the same Church in 1010, had reached Europe, and fostered animosity; it was a motivation for the eventual massacre of Jews during the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 during the First Crusade (Cutler, 403-405). The Christian Greeks had long accused Jews of being in collusion with Muslims, and when Jerusalem capitulated to Islam in 638, the Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronios, requested and obtained Muslim protection against Jews to avoid a repetition of the massacres of Greek Christians that took place in the city in 614: see my next note and Joshua Starr, *Jews in the Byzantine Empire* (Research and Source Works Series, No 386) (Farnborough: Gregg, 1969), 109.


See also Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1894), vol. 3, 18-22. The Jewish Encyclopedia states that the story of Jews buying Christians and then massacring them at the Mamilla Pool in Jerusalem is fiction (see http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com article “Chosroes (Khrosu) II. Parviz.”

Recent Israeli archeological excavations in Jerusalem have discovered thousands of remains of men, women, and children, with a majority of them of women, in the site of the Mamilla Pool, dating back to the times of the Persian conquest of the city: Yossi Nagar, “Human Skeletal Remains from the Mamilla Cave, Jerusalem,” Israeli Archeological Authority website, who attributes the massacre to the Persians http://www.antiquities.org.il/article_Item_eng.asp?sec_id=17&sub_subj_id=179

Israeli archeologist Ronny Reich does not exonerate the Jewish community and estimates the total dead at 60,000 before the Persians stopped the carnage: see Gil Zohar, “Massacre at Mamilla,” Jerusalem Post, March 2, 2006.


10 To this idealization, Jewish writings have contributed which, at least until recently, overlooked daily oppression and played up Jewish prosperity in order to contrast it to the situation under Christianity. For studies of this phenomenon, see Tudor Parfitt, ed. Israel and Ishmael: Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations (Richmond, England: Curzon, 2000), 207-225; Bernard Lewis, The Jews of Islam (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984); I thank Daniel Pipes for calling my attention to another excellent critique of Jewish scholarship’s favorable treatment of Islam: The Jewish Discovery of Islam; Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis, ed. Martin Kramer.
Malik, al-Muwatta, 21; Quran 9: 27. For the above and the following limitations see also other Maliki treatises as well as the “Pact” or “Covenant” of Umar I, and historian Al-Makkari, cited below. This covenant, attributed to the Caliph Umar I (ruled from 634 to 644) is extant in several forms, which may not date from the time of Umar, but which nevertheless indicate an actual cultural practice in medieval Islamic lands. It was bestowed on the defeated Greek Orthodox Christians of the Greek Roman Empire upon the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem and applied to Jews as well. One version can be read online at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pgc.asp?page=jewish/jews-umar.html


12 Al-Makkari, vol. 1, 103.


14 “Islamic law protected their life [of Christians and Jews], property, and freedom and, with certain restrictions, granted them also the right to exercise their religion. On the other hand, it demanded from them segregation and subservience, conditions that under a weak or wicked government could and did lead to situations bordering on lawlessness and even to outright persecutions.” S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), vol. 2, 289.

15 de los Ríos, vol. 1, 208-209.

16 García Sanjuan, 167, n. 3.

17 de los Ríos, vol. 1, 226.

19 Cit. Bernard Lewis, *Islam in History: Ideas, Men, and Events in the Middle East* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1973), 159-161.


22 Dozy, vol. iii, 23.

23 de los Rios, vol. 1, 229, n. 1.

24 *El siglo XI en primera persona: las memorias de Abd Allah, el último rey Ziri de Granada, destronado por los almorávides*, edited and trans. Emilio Garcia Gomez, (Madrid: Alianza, 2005). Abd Allah also complained that ruler Badis Ibn Habbus did not listen to any other views than those of “the Jew, because of the trust he had in him” (cit. Garcia Sanjuan, 175.

25 Garcia Sanjuan, 177.

26 Goitein, vol. 2, 278.


28 Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden* (Leipzig: Oskar Leiner, 1871), VI, 66. But Ibn Albalia’s protector, Al-Mutamid, was an equal opportunity ruler in every way, and so he had a Jewish ambassador sent to him by Alfonso VI crucified because of the demands carried by the man.

29 No Muslim woman in al-Andalus achieved a status comparable to that of Catholic nun Santa Teresa of Avila, whose public activities had an enormous impact, and whose writings became quite influential upon her proclamation as a Saint 40 years after her death in 1582, and who was named a Doctor of the Catholic Church in 1969. Desperate efforts have been made to identify Muslim women like Shaikha Shuhda, who achieved recognition in the Muslim world as
“transmitters” of hadith, that is, as memorizers of Muslim tradition. But these few women remained confined to their homes, did not have a public life, and must be heard behind curtains by those few Muslim men who listened to them.

30 Thus a rebellion against the ruler of Granada, Badis, from the ranks of his Berbers, was aborted thanks to the quick action of Rabbi Samuel Ibn Naghrela: Garcia Sanjuan, 172-173.


32 Graetz, Geschichte der Juden, VI, 77-82.

33 Yitzhak Baer, A History of the Jews in Christian Spain, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), vol. 1, 65. In the Kingdom of Aragon, royal enactments between 1257 and 1340 show that Jews were exempted from a number of regulations. See Joseph Jacobs, An inquiry into the sources of the history of the Jews in Spain (London: D. Nutt, 1894): they could be exempted from wearing the “badge” that marked them as Jews (21), they were exempt from local taxation and from lodging the king (22), they could hold landed property, castles, and manors (23), they could be bailiffs and clerks of towns (24), and they could continue their practice of polygamy through the purchase of a “license” that would allow them to marry a second wife (25). These lists of royal enactments are more likely to reflect actual practice than the statutes of the fueros, which could be passed without being always observed.


35 Garcia Sanjuan, 174.


38 This is the standard interpretation. Vincent Lagardère, however, argues that al-murabitun meant “those who are like fortresses [against the polytheists]”: see his Les almoravides (Paris: L=Harmattan, 1989), 16.

39 Amador de los Ríos, Historia social, política y religiosa de los judíos de España y Portugal, vol. 1, pp. 293, 298 ff. It was Yacub who ordered the deportation of the entire Christian population of Granada to North Africa.

40 In 1099, the Almoravids sacked and demolished the great church of the city of Granada. In 1101 Catholics fled from the city of Valencia to the Catholic kingdoms. In 1106 the Almoravids deported the Catholics from Malaga to Africa. In 1126, a failed Catholic rebellion in the city of Granada was followed by the expulsion to Africa of the entire Catholic population on the same year. And in 1138, Ibn Tashufin took with him to Africa masses of Catholics from al-Andalus. See Vincent Lagardère, “Communautés mozarabes et pouvoir almoravide en 519 H/1125,” Andalus Studia Islamica, No. 67. (1988), 99-119; Delfina Serrano Ruano, “Dos fetvas sobre la
expulsión de los mozárabes al Magreb en 1126,” Anaquel de estudios árabes, no. 2 (1991), 163-182; Francisco Javier Simonet, Historia de los mozarabes de España (Madrid: Turner, 1983), vol. IV. See also online the classic article by Ramon Menendez Pidal at http://www.vallenajerilla.com/glosas/irradiacionlinguistica.htm


42 Al-Makkari, vol. 2, 520, n. 18; lv, n. 23.

43 Herbert Alan Davidson, Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 27-28 claims against most scholars that Almohad persecution has been exaggerated and that many Christians and Jews remained in al-Andalus practicing their religion, though under harassment.

44 Serafín Fanjul, Al-Andalus contra España (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2002), 248.


47 For this and the following example of such widely disseminated beliefs see Harold S. Kushner, To Life! A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking (Boston: Warner Books, 1993) [a High School textbook], 273; Norman Roth quoted in “My Jewish Learning,” at http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history/Ancient_and_Medieval_History/632-1650/Islamic_World/Jewish-Muslim_Relations/Almohads.shtml. See also “The Jewish Virtual Library” at http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Sephardim.html