The Contagion of Violence

1391 and the Jews of the Spanish Kingdoms

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London, UK

ISBN 978-3-031-77330-3 ISBN 978-3-031-77331-0 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-77331-0

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Sometime between Sunday the 4th and Tuesday the 6th of June 1391, major anti-Jewish riots broke out in the city of Seville, in the Kingdom of Castile. A mob led by Ferran Martínez, an archdeacon and preacher, long ostracised by both civic and religious authorities alike for his strident and unorthodox views, attacked the Jewish quarter with an unusual degree of violence and brutality, killing, robbing and forcibly converting many of the residents. Although the figures are notoriously unreliable, more than one later chronicler suggests as many as 4000 individuals were killed in this single incident alone (Fuensanta del Valle 1893, p. 105, reproducing the fifteenth-century *Cuarta Crónica General*; Ortiz de Zúñiga 1795, p. 237). Whilst certainly a gross exaggeration, there is no doubt that this was an extremely serious attack, one in which the mob and its leader intended to spare no one and in which the wholesale removal of the Jewish community, through murder or conversion, was a genuine intent. Amongst the numerous attacks on Jewish communities across Europe, these events were extraordinary, not only for their ferocity and intent but also for what ensued, surely one of the most remarkable cases of human-induced contagion in the medieval world. Within ten weeks, by late August, similar attacks had been unleashed on perhaps fifty to one hundred Jewish communities the length and breadth of the Spanish kingdoms, as far as Perpinyà (Perpignan) in the north, a linear distance of well over 1200 km., all in the face of occasionally stern but often ineffective opposition from the royal

M. Schraer, *The Contagion of Violence*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-77331-0_1

and municipal authorities. The key dates and variety of possible routes followed are illustrated by Fig. 1.1.

Enumerating the total number of incidents, of varying degrees of seriousness, can only be approximate. Relying on royal and municipal records and Christian chronicles gives reasonable evidence for around fifteen to twenty attacks in Castile, eight to twelve in Valencia, between ten and twenty in Catalonia, perhaps between five and ten in the Kingdom of Aragon (albeit less serious), plus Mallorca and Perpinyà, making around forty to sixty in total. Hebrew chronicles and elegies identify many other cases, perhaps another twenty-five or more, let alone the report of the leading rabbi of Zaragoza at the time, Hasdai Crescas, claiming seventy attacks just in the area around central and southern Castile (Feliu 2004–2005, p. 178). Many more locations suffered prolonged periods of tension and fear, perhaps propelling large-scale conversion, even without explicit evidence of violent attacks.

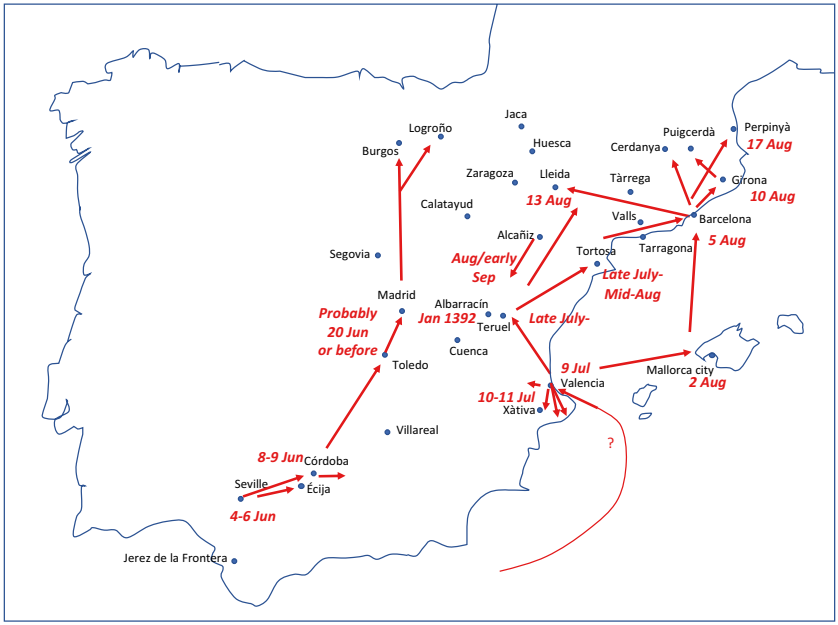

Fig. 1.1 The spread of anti-Jewish riots, June-August 1391. Main incidents and likely routes of transmission

Taking account of the possible modes of transmitting news and information, and the absence of an obvious overarching context, the riots of 1391 offer a rich case study in how inter-ethnic violence was able to develop and spread between towns and cities and even across separate territories. Although it is clear that different dynamics operated in different locations—by no means all Jewish communities suffered the same fate—there was a surprising degree of commonality in these attacks. Local social and political issues were clearly at play and other minority groups, notably Muslims, were occasionally targeted, yet all these attacks had the Jewish quarters as their main target, often with the result that a significant proportion of the populace converted and, in some cases, large numbers were murdered. As with other comparable incidents, many of the crowd were motivated by theft and the wholesale destruction of loan deeds, but the widespread outcome of mass conversion is less common. Previous anti-Jewish episodes had certainly led to many conversions and the destruction of entire communities, but never to irreversible, mass conversion. By 1391, Jews had also suffered communal expulsions from England (1290) and France (1306, re-admitted in 1315 but apparently expelled again in 1322), but in neither case had there been mass conversions, whether prior to, during or in the immediate wake of, the act of expulsion (Barkey and Katznelson 2011; Dorin 2023). Admittedly, conversion of individuals, families or small groups of Jews was by no means a new phenomenon, rather the result of many years of both officially sanctioned coercion and a high degree of voluntary conversion, for a wide variety of reasons. However, the sudden emergence of such a large group of New Christians or *conversos,* mostly unwilling, whose status within the Christian community would remain a matter of bitter contention, would have a profound effect on the fragile social, religious and economic balance in the fifteenth century in many cities, creating a massive breach in the normal boundaries between ethno-religious groups. The ensuing unrest and conflict were the direct precursor to the foundation of the Castilian Inquisition and the eventual expulsion of the Jews from Castile and the crown of Aragon in 1492. Paradoxically, although the Inquisition and expulsion are generally viewed as acts of deliberate royal and Church policy, their roots can be found in an outbreak of popular violence which was strongly opposed by those very authorities.

The very fact that the events of 1391 left a lasting legacy is itself highly unusual for a series of popular risings. Some of the most notorious attacks on medieval Jewish communities, notably during the first crusade in 1096,

were equally savage, but followed by a rapid re-generation of the communities, accompanied by effective measures on behalf of civil and Church authorities for their protection. Jewish communities of the Spanish kingdoms enjoyed mixed fortunes after 1391. Whilst some communities were re-generated, and some positively thrived in the fifteenth century, many of the most important, in cities such as Seville, Barcelona and Valencia, were permanently destroyed. Mass conversion weakened the surviving Jewish communities and created the foundations for the eventual end of Jewish Spain a century later. The events of 1391 are also distinguished by their complex confection of local, national and transnational elements. The unrest crossed the borders of five separate legal jurisdictions, the kingdoms of Castile, Valencia, Mallorca and Aragon and the Principality of Catalonia. The communities affected were not only in different polities, they spoke different languages and enjoyed different laws, customs, privileges and cultures. They had also been touched very differently by the long history of Muslim presence which, itself, is a key factor in moulding the relationship between the ethno-religious groups. Whilst the legal and social status of both the Jewish and Muslim communities had much in common across the different territories, local differences—especially the size, political importance and wealth of the various Jewish communities across Iberia—helped to shape the varying course of events.

This book sets out to examine the roots and mechanisms of these events, with the intention of offering a re-assessment of their causes and nature and how they fit into the broader history of the Jews of medieval Iberia. In it, I propose to shed new light on the much-studied phenomenon of 1391, both by offering a deep and comparative context and by applying the concept of 'social contagion', as employed in the social sciences, to explain the rapid spread of communal violence. I will argue that, whilst many factors can go some way to explaining the local origins of individual outbreaks, and the course that events followed, only by deploying the concept of social contagion can we begin to understand the speed and extent of spread of unrest and its far-reaching consequences. Although primarily aimed at scholars and students of medieval Iberia and its religious minorities, this work has the express objective of presenting the subject to new audiences. Given the unique nature and fundamental and enduring impacts of the riots of 1391, it is noteworthy that, outside the narrow academic community that is focused specifically on the Iberian Jews, and its readership, these events are relatively unfamiliar. Amongst those with a general interest in medieval Jewish history, attacks related to

the crusades, especially in 1096, are far better known. Whilst the general import of the Spanish Inquisition for the Jewish communities is well known, if commonly misunderstood, and the expulsion of 1492 is also generally recognised as a pivotal event in European Jewish history, their underlying root causes are less-widely appreciated. This book aims to make a modest contribution to the correction of these imbalances. It also sets out to appeal to those with an interest in the phenomenon of religious and social intolerance in medieval Europe and the mechanisms by which it was transmitted, as well as those with a particular interest in Iberian history of the period. It complements the existing literature on the ways in which some of the issues of power in the period—especially the balance between crown, nobility and municipalities—spilt over into wider social conflict. A central theme is that this power balance, more than the failure of specific entities or individuals, notably the two main ruling monarchs, explains the train of events during and after 1391.

Many fundamental questions must be addressed in order to explain this unique series of events. What contextual factors underlay the violence and what triggered the series of outbreaks? How and why did the violence spread within and between towns and cities, what were the mechanisms of contagion and how quickly did they operate? Had specific factors previously prevented the degree of contagion that would be experienced in 1391 or had attitudes simply hardened in the intervening years? Can a rapid succession of between fifty and one hundred separate attacks still be regarded primarily as a series of essentially local outbreaks, loosely connected, or do we need to regard them as part of a single phenomenon, with local variations? Could they have been prevented by more urgent or different official responses and can we divine a more effective official response to the earlier outbreaks? Who were the main perpetrators and catalysts and what really motivated them?

Understanding the flashpoints that catalyse physical attacks on a specific group, whether defined by its ethno-religious or any other identity, presents us with a methodological problem. On the one hand, it is often easy to identify the persistent markers of "otherness", be they legal, physical appearance, religious or other customs and beliefs or stereotypes propagated by either official or popular narratives. On the other hand, these groups invariably co-exist peaceably most of the time. They share public spaces and some public resources—in the medieval city, ovens and bathhouses provide a clear case in point—live alongside one another, trade, share certain fundamental attitudes and beliefs and, on occasions, socialise

and share celebrations. Quotidian tension and even conflict may suffuse these relationships but, with only occasional and spasmodic exceptions, these tensions are kept under wraps. At times, we can readily identify factors that have the potential to disturb this fragile equilibrium, although quite when and how violence erupts may still remain a mystery. At other times, the circumstances of social breakdown are more complex and harder to define. However far we attempt to nail down the specific causes of a particular episode, we also have to accept that some minor or even random events could provide the immediate spark. Nevertheless, when a broadly similar pattern of events repeats itself numerous times, it is natural to resort to some common explanatory framework. Appraising the breakdown in social relations also requires a clear idea of what holds those relations in check in normal times. Law codes, official documents and religious polemics often present ethno-religious differences in black-and-white terms, but, in reality, human relationships are often messy and ambiguous, defying simple categorisation. On Sunday morning, the Christian citizen may have heard their Jewish neighbours described as Christ-killers, wilfully blind deniers of the true faith, traitors and even ritual murderers of Christian children. The next day, the very same Jews may have appeared in their home or workplace, as physicians, midwives, wet nurses, cloth merchants, tanners or providers of essential loan finance. At best, this would have been a source of deep cognitive dissonance (Catlos 2014, pp. 515–531, see below).

Historiography of 1391

Many articles, chapters, and even a few complete books, have covered the events of 1391, in a variety of languages, but only a few consider events on a national or transnational scale. Emilio Mitre Fernández's short book (twenty-five years after his initial article) documents the development of events across Castile (Mitre Fernández 1994). It begins by describing the violence and its possible causal factors, noting the spread from Castile to the crown of Aragon and emphasising the role of Castilian agitators, picking up threads previously developed in more localised studies (for a comprehensive survey of sources identifying the role of Castilians and other outsiders in the various outbreaks across the crown of Aragon, see Riera 1980). Mitre goes on to consider the increase in anti-Judaism in the late fourteenth century, the attitude of royal and municipal authorities during and after the events and the hardening of religious attitudes between 1391

and 1412. The events are also placed in the wider European context. Although Mitre's work is broad in its analysis, its length (147 pages), and the limited sources for Castile, prevent real depth of analysis.

There has, to date, been only one full-length English-language monograph (Gampel 2016). Gampel's work, focusing on the crown of Aragon but with a brief chapter on the initial outbreaks in Castile, offers the most comprehensive and detailed description to date of the events. Indeed, the breadth of coverage of both primary and secondary sources makes his work an unparalleled resource for anyone studying this period of history. The focus of analysis is the failure of the Aragonese royal family to provide adequate protection to "their" Jews and a large part of the book addresses the personalities and preoccupations of the main characters: King Joan (r. 1387–1396), Queen Iolant, and the king's brother, *Infant* Martí, Duke of Montblanc and subsequently king between 1396 and 1410. Whilst the central importance of these players and their shortcomings are fully demonstrated, Gampel is less concerned with other causal factors or outcomes and offers no comparison between the actions of this king and his predecessors, faced with earlier anti-Jewish risings. The speed and ubiquity of the outbreaks is not explained, leaving open the question of whether the crown could, under these unique circumstances, have offered effective protection, even with the full support of municipal authorities. The motivations of municipal leaders and the fundamental role of rapidly evolving municipal governance require equal consideration and analysis.

There are other, briefer secondary sources describing the events in their entirety. Norman Roth has published two separate articles, covering Castile and the crown of Aragon, encompassing the immediate context of preceding events and the consequences (Roth 2011a, b). He also alludes to the mechanisms by which the riots spread. Yitzhak Baer's account in his seminal work on the Jews of Christian Spain draws heavily on Hebrew as well as royal sources (Baer 1961, especially pp. 95–117). Recognising the aftermath of the events as a key turning point in the fortune of the Jews, Baer notes (in relation to attempts to restore the smaller communities in Catalonia) that for the first time in Spain, the right of Jews to settle in a place required the consent of the municipalities (Baer 1961, p. 123). Not only does this highlight a central aspect of the events, namely the inability of the crown to assert its authority over reluctant local authorities in the efforts to defend Jews as part of the royal patrimony, it also shows that this power shift, at least in some locations, endured well beyond 1391.

The greatest weight of existing literature comprises localised studies, each covering the events in a single city, notably Valencia, Girona and Morvedre (modern Sagunt) but also with numerous journal articles summarising extant sources on the events in other locations (inter alia, Danvila 1886; Chabás y Llorens 1891; Hinojosa Montalvo 1993a, b; Piles Ros 1952; Quadrado 2008; Riera 1990; Sanz Artibucilla 1947; Secall i Güell 1980 and Vidal Beltrán 1974). These works cast light on both the specific underlying causes and context in each location, typically noting political and social divisions or reforms which contributed to local conflict and unrest; the immediate triggers and the differing chains of events, moderated by different responses of municipal and other authorities; and the comparative narratives on such issues as the social groups involved. Some of these suggest that the Jews were incidental to the conflict, yet became embroiled in them, ending up as the main targets. Some of the local studies also track the subsequent impact on the Jewish communities, including the effects of mass conversion in each town and city.

Two recent contributions are of particular importance. The work of Agresta on Valencia lays emphasis on the urban reform programme of the city council, whose objectives of creating a pure, Christian city were blocked by the physical presence of the Jewish quarter and who were consequently set on its removal (Agresta 2017). Her work shows how this physical barrier combined with the impediment to spiritual purity represented by the Jewish presence, underlined by the language of filth, ugliness and criminality associated with the unreformed urban landscape. Soifer Irish's emerging work on Seville (with a monograph forthcoming) provides equally important contextual colour (Soifer Irish 2018, 2022a, b). She shows how, in the years prior to 1391, the local Christian elites and municipal authorities exploited anti-Jewish feeling to their political ends, against the backdrop of the Trastámarist takeover of Castile and its profound impacts on the social hierarchy. Critically, her work positions the Sevillian preacher Ferran Martínez as a successful member of this urban oligarchy and, therefore, a central player in a wider movement which manipulated opposition to the Jewish presence. Although specific to Seville, this work has wider, systemic relevance.

Whilst these local studies are essential to the understanding of 1391, it is evident that the local causes and nature of the many conflicts and grievances need to be viewed alongside their common elements, the extraordinary contagion between locations, and the uniqueness of 1391 when viewed in comparison with previous or subsequent outbreaks. Some areas

were largely or entirely spared, not only the separate kingdoms of Portugal and Navarre, but also parts of Castile, such as Murcia, much of Old Castile, Galicia, Asturias and Cantabria and some parts of the Kingdom of Aragon, where persistent tensions did not explode into major riots. Seeking an understanding of why these areas escaped relatively lightly can also shed light on the wider context.

There is a further, substantial canon of work that addresses some or all of the outbreaks in a broader socio-political and economic context (notably Wolff 1971; Monsalvo Antón 1985; MacKay 1972; Valdeón Baruque 1975; Motis Dolader 1990, especially pp. 17 and 48–50; Suárez Fernández 1952; Riera i Sans 1977). Wolff's seminal article makes a clear distinction between the unrest in Seville and Valencia, whose causes he sees primarily as religious anti-Judaism, and those in the Catalan cities, where anti-Jewish feeling was inter-mixed with broader social conflicts. In Valencia, all social strata were involved, leading to a state of "religious exaltation" (Wolff 1971, p. 16).

Books and articles addressing the riots of 1391 fit into a broader literature concerning the development and mechanics of ethno-religious relations in medieval Iberia and beyond. Nirenberg's analysis is of particular import here (Nirenberg 1996; see also Nirenberg 2013, in particular pp. 217–245, dealing with 1391 and its aftermath, and 2014). In his seminal work "Communities of Violence", he argues that inter-religious violence was an ever-present phenomenon in medieval society, not the product of a change in temperament in the late Middle Ages nor a reflection of a growing level of intolerance, persecution or universalism of the dominant sect, an idea popularised by R. I. Moore (1987). Nirenberg rejects the ideas of writers such as Moore, Cohn and Ginzburg that attitudes towards minorities were a function of collective beliefs and psychology, an analytical framework that Cohn uses specifically to explain such phenomena as the persecution of heretics and witch-hunts (Cohn 1976, especially pp. 258–263). Nirenberg is especially dismissive of those whose teleological narrative implies a direct and inevitable chain of causation between these attitudes and the catastrophes of the twentieth century (Nirenberg 1996, pp. 3–4). By applying the standards and dynamics of the authors' own periods (post-Enlightenment, often post-Holocaust), such histories risk underplaying the local, national and temporal complexities.

Nirenberg's analysis offers an important counter to these "lachrymose" narratives of long-term, linear and inevitable decline of Western European Jewish communities. Instead, he contends that violence can be only

understood by reference to the particular dynamics in each location and at each time and, even more fundamentally, that tolerance and intolerance should be viewed as the two sides of the same coin, the processes by which different groupings co-existed in everyday society. In this context, he distinguishes two types of violence: regular, ritualised outbreaks, notably Holy Week violence against Jewish communities; and occasional, catastrophic outbreaks. He argues that the sporadic, major outbreaks, such as in 1348 and 1391, although different in scale and geographic scope, are part and parcel of the same phenomenon of the intertwining of coexistence and conflict. They were moments "when rituals of violence were transformed in meaning, manifestation and effect", that "indelibly altered the world in which they occurred" but, nevertheless, remain part of the same context (Nirenberg 1996, p. 249). Nirenberg's focus on localism is shared by Meyerson, whose books on the Jews of Morvedre in Valencia underline how the fortunes of different communities after 1391 were shaped by local religious, social and political contexts (inter alia, Meyerson 2004a, b). Finally, there is a significant literature on the *conversos* during the fifteenth century, a phenomenon whose origins can be firmly traced to 1391 and which had such fundamental, long-term consequences (inter alia, Roth 2002; Netanyahu 1998, 1999, 2002; Gitlitz 1996; Suárez Fernández 1964, 1991).

A number of previous works allude to the contagious nature of the events of 1391. Riera, for example, speaks of the mode of propagation "through contagion and imitation in each city or town of what had happened in the neighbouring city or town and, ultimately, of what happened in Seville on the 4th of June in the wake of the preaching of the archdeacon of Écija (Martínez)" (Riera 1977, pp. 217–218). This phenomenon was fully appreciated by contemporaries; King Joan, writing to his brother, Martí, on the 3rd of July, stated that "the disaster and riot which occurred and still persists against the Jews of Castile" provides the rationale for "some uncontrolled and incorrigible people in places in our lordship to speak ill of and insult" the Jews, noting the raised level of unrest in both the city of Valencia and other towns across the Kingdom of Valencia against Jewish communities.[1] Riera further discusses the role of gossip and rumour in the spread of unrest in the city and environs of Girona (Riera 1990, p. 119). By the time riots broke out in Girona, on the 10th of August, there were many, similar precedents for the complete removal of the Jewish presence, in towns and cities, small and large, and Riera argues that this had created a prevailing, eschatological sentiment that the removal

of the Jews, by violent and coercive means, was now achievable, ushering a new age of peace and harmony (Riera 1990, p. 115). Riera, citing Nicolau Eimeric who was present in Girona at the time, attributes these apocalyptic sentiments to the belief of the more radical preachers that the "end-times" had already arrived or were close at hand. Both Eimeric and Francesc Eiximenis published tracts denying that the world would end in the following years, or that forced conversion would bring this about, but it is evident that these intellectual, theological disputes held no sway with the crowds.

In his analysis of the events in Castile, Mitre refers to an "anti-Jewish shockwave" spreading across the kingdom, a term apparently borrowed from Monsalvo Antón (Mitre Fernández 1994, p. 19; Monsalvo Antón 1985, p. 260). He marvels at the extent of the contagion, although his analysis is less concerned with the precise mode of diffusion of unrest than the reasons why areas to the south were generally worse affected than those to the north, dismissing the idea that the physical barrier of the central mountain ranges acted as a deterrent, as proposed by Monsalvo. He also notes the specific causal link to the events in Valencia and beyond. Finally, the term "contagion" is also used by Wolff; although his analysis emphasises local factors, with a particular focus on Barcelona, he also notes the role of the dissemination of information in the contagion of violence (Wolff 1971, p. 10 and pp. 16–17).

The principal aim of this book is to offer a far deeper analysis of the phenomenon of contagion than previous works. Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 will focus on the roots of the violence. Chapter 2 offers a methodological framework for understanding contagion and the dynamics of crowd behaviour. It assesses the development of anti-Jewish ideas, and their role in shaping shared mentalities, in the context of the modes of coexistence and conflict between ethno-religious groups. The discussion encompasses both the intellectual sphere, ideas developed by clerics and expressed in polemical form, and the various mechanisms through which these ideas became embedded in public consciousness via art, literature, music and stories of supposed ritual abominations. Chapter 3 assesses precedent examples of anti-Jewish violence from Iberia and beyond, in order to understand causal dynamics and the extent of contagion in each case and to lay the basis for understanding the uniqueness of the events of 1391. Chapter 4 considers the immediate socio-political context of the violence in fourteenth-century Castile, as climate change, epidemic plague, rebellion and warfare progressively degraded the political and economic

environment. It also addresses the role of the Church and the preaching of Ferran Martínez. Chapter 5 extends this contextual analysis to the crown of Aragon, focusing on the growing fiscal marginalisation of Jewish communities, social unrest and the intellectual atmosphere. Both Chaps. 4 and 5 also assess moves towards physical segregation. The next three chapters focus on the immediate triggers for, and the course of, the riots of 1391, first in Castile (Chap. 6), then spreading across the Kingdom of Valencia (Chap. 7) and, finally, affecting most areas of Mallorca, Catalonia and the Kingdom of Aragon (Chap. 8), in each case illustrating both the manner of the contagion and reasons for substantial local variations in outcomes. Chapter 9 offers a re-assessment of the true nature, causes and significance of the events of 1391, emphasising not only their contagious nature but their enduring legacy.

The main primary sources for this work are royal letters, edicts and charters, correspondence from municipal authorities and notarial records relating to the economic activities of Jewish communities, written either in Latin or in a variety of vernacular languages. There are also important Hebrew sources including letters, elegies and martyrologies (see Hershman 1943, pp. 194–196; Nirenberg 2013, p. 219, who makes some adjustments to the place names cited; Feliu 2004–2005 reproducing a letter written by Zaragoza rabbi, Hasdai Crescas; Feldman 2001, Chap. 2; Valle Rodríguez 2000, pp. 351–54, 2011; Roth 1948; Pagis 1968; Ibn Verga 1991; a number of the Castilian Hebrew sources are reproduced by Mitre Fernández 1994, including, inter alia, the Latin account of Solomon Ha-Levi (Pablo de Santa María, after conversion) (docs. 7 and 23, pp. 107 and 132–133); the account of Solomon Ibn Verga (doc. 12, p. 112) and the account of Joseph Hacohen (doc. 13, p. 113). Although of less direct historical value, there is also a selection of treatments in Hebrew dirges and elegies (Valle Rodríguez 2011).

Study of a social phenomenon in the medieval period is inevitably coloured by the biases of the sources. As we will see, reports issued by members of municipal councils (and by the king's brother) often possess a strong exculpatory element, as well as telling the king what he wants to hear. In many cases, they resort to divine providence as the key driver, in some cases employing miracle narratives and even blaming the Jews themselves. Contemporary reports also tend to blame the "lower orders" and foreigners; this was, at least in part, a convenient way of shifting the blame away from the local nobility and burghers who, if found guilty, might face not only the wrath of the crown but also substantial fines for their

misdeeds. We will see that there is evidence of the involvement of all social orders but that "mob behaviour", variously whipped up by local clerics, foreigners and people bringing messages from surrounding areas, played a key role.

These outbreaks were neither a sudden or isolated turning point in attitudes towards Jewish communities, official or popular. It is evident that Jewish communities neither fared uniformly well in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries nor uniformly badly in the fifteenth. Nevertheless, the events of 1391—uniquely for a "catastrophic" outbreak of violence—set in motion a chain of causation, from which the Inquisition and the expulsion were direct consequences, albeit intermediated and shaped by many social and political developments during the following century. For many communities, and ultimately (in 1492), for them all, the new reality gradually and progressively undermined Jewish communal life. This process operated in different ways and at varying paces in different locations but was informed by common trends, between towns and cities and even at a national and supra-national level, in particular by the fundamental and enduring impact of mass conversion.

The Spanish Kingdoms in 1391

As illustrated by Fig. 1.2, there was no single Spanish territorial entity in the fourteenth century, nor did the borders of the main kingdoms coincide precisely with those of modern Spain. The dominant kingdom in terms of both land mass and population was Castile, an agglomeration of territories that had evolved gradually from the ninth and tenth centuries to encompass lands that had previously been part of Muslim al-Andalus, including parts of Andalucía (the key cities of Córdoba and Seville being conquered in 1236 and 1248 respectively); Extremadura, Murcia and "New Castile", centred around old Visigothic capital of Toledo, which returned to Christian control in 1085 (O'Callaghan 1975, especially pp. 194–207). These conquests were added to northern heartlands that had either never been under Muslim rule, or had been relatively early conquests in the eighth to tenth centuries, including Asturias, Galicia, the Basque country, the Kingdom of León and "Old Castile", incorporating such cities as Burgos, Valladolid and Segovia, as well as the region of Cantabria, centred on Santander. The other major set of polities is known to historians as the crown of Aragon, a series of territories which were ruled by a single dynasty but remained politically separate. The genesis of

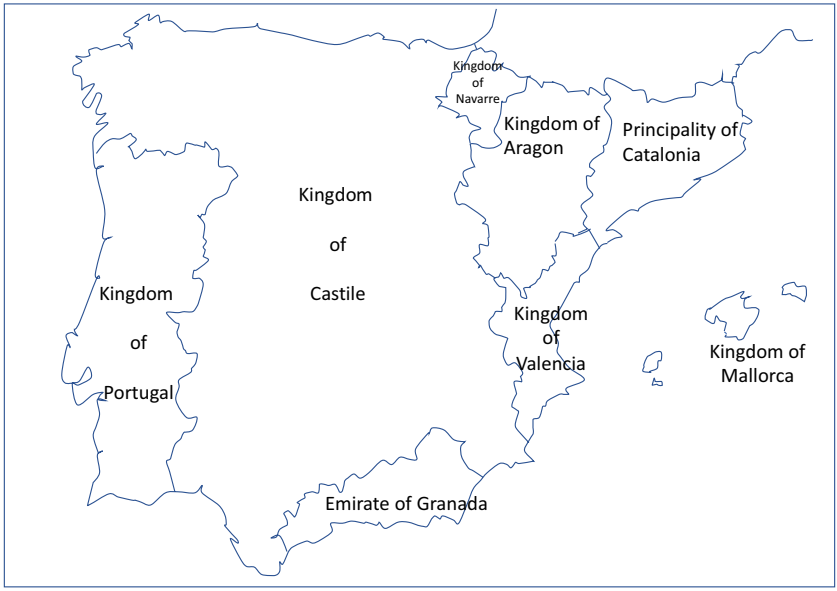

Fig. 1.2 Rough Outline of the Spanish Kingdoms, c. 1250–1492

the crown of Aragon was the dynastic union in 1137 of the Kingdom of Aragon, itself an earlier offshoot from the Kingdom of Pamplona, and the strategically important County of Barcelona (Sabaté 2017, pp. 70–91; Bisson 1986, pp. 10–30; O'Callaghan 1975, pp. 194–195, 225–227). By 1350, the crown of Aragon comprised four main Iberian groupings, the Kingdom of Aragon itself; the Principality of Catalonia, a set of partly independent counties dominated by Barcelona but gradually emerging as a single administrative unit; the Kingdom of Mallorca (conquered 1228–1232), which veered between a separate agnate monarchy and direct rule; and the Kingdom of Valencia (conquered around 1238). Amongst the traditional possessions of the Catalan counts was an important part of Rosselló (Roussillon), including the towns of Perpinyà (Perpignan) and (prior to 1349) Montpellier. In addition, the count-kings of Aragon and their families came to rule a series of Mediterranean possessions, including Sicily, Corsica and Sardinia (Sabaté 2017, pp. 172–200 on the union and expansion of territories; O'Callaghan 1975, pp. 382–406; Bisson 1986, pp. 63–67, 86–103). The picture of the Iberian mainland is

completed by three other kingdoms, Portugal, Navarre and the Emirate of Granada, the last being the only remaining territory under Muslim rule from the mid-thirteenth century until its final conquest in 1492. Since none of these kingdoms experienced the anti-Jewish riots of 1391, they remain peripheral to our story.

Long History of Jews in the Spanish Kingdoms

The Jews of Iberia, more so than those of almost any other part of Western Europe (Rome excepted), had enjoyed a long, unbroken period of residence which, despite inevitable fluctuations in fortunes, was largely one of integration and a degree of political and economic success. Although much myth and legend surround the origins of Jewish settlement in the Iberian peninsula, allegedly stretching as far back as the destruction of the first biblical temple and consequent exile in the sixth century BCE, a significant Jewish presence is historically verifiable as far back as the late Roman period, with surviving archaeological remains dating from the fifth and sixth centuries (Schraer 2019, pp. 6–7). During the sixth and seventh centuries, the old Roman province of Hispania was largely ruled as a single kingdom by Visigothic kings and, in the year 589, Catholicism was proclaimed as the official religion. Later Visigothic rulers of the seventh century, notably Sisebut (r. 612–621), Recceswinth (r. 649–672) and Egica (r. 687–c. 702) passed increasingly strong anti-Jewish laws, although the motivation for, and effectiveness of, these laws remain matters of some dispute (Bachrach 1973; Roth 1994). The rumour that, as Arab and Berber armies invaded from the south and overthrew the Visigothic kingdom in 711, the Jews actively supported the invaders, opening the gates of Toledo to them, was documented only much later (challenged by Roth 1976; Simon 1983; García Iglesias 1978, pp. 129–133, follows the more traditional interpretation, describing Egica's policy as the "final solution" and claiming that Jews welcomed the Islamic invaders with open arms).

Muslim Al-Andalus comprised most of the Iberian land mass from 711 until the gradual Christian expansion accelerated in earnest in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The so-called Golden Age, particularly for the Jewish population, coincided with the period of Umayyad rule from 756 to 1031. At least three Jews attained senior political office, whilst the predominantly urban and trade-based economy seems to have provided a comfortable home for the main occupations amongst the Jewish populace, namely as artisans, merchants and traders, as well as highly educated

professionals, including physicians. Under the Umayyads, both Christians and Jews were afforded the legal status of *dhimmi*—'peoples of the book' (*ahl al-Kitab*)—a status which offered protection and the guarantee of freedom of worship and religion, but also a clear second-class status under the law, one that implicitly encompassed both inclusion and exclusion (Hallaq 2009, pp. 327–328; Akrani 2018). However, the concept of *convivencia*—tolerant coexistence—first introduced by Américo Castro, has stimulated a lively historical debate (Castro 1971). There is an extensive literature providing many individual case studies that point to co-operation and mutual respect but with a tendency to idealise inter-communal relations (for example, Menocal 2002; Lowney 2006). Other works present a far harsher and more pessimistic view (Fernández-Morera, 2016). Modern scholars tend to be highly critical of the concept at a fundamental level, as a description of the manner in which different religious groups coexisted and, specifically as an idea unique either to the Islamic world or to Iberia (see, in particular, Soifer 2009; Catlos 2014).

Al-Andalus also manifests at least some examples of anti-Jewish (as well as anti-Christian) polemic and inter-communal violence, much more commonly associated with medieval Christian Europe. Most notably, serious anti-Jewish riots broke out in Granada in 1066, spurred by the unpopular actions of a Jewish vizier, Yusuf Ibn Naghrila (Roth 1994, pp. 103–108). The essential dynamic was one of power but the manner in which the violence unfolded is indicative of a deep-seated, albeit normally latent, antipathy (Wasserstein 2015; Ashtor 1992, pp. 162–189). Yusuf's father, Samuel Naghrila (born in 993 in Córdoba), enjoyed an extraordinary career by any standards, not least for a Jew in an Islamic society. His early experience was one of political turmoil, as revolution broke out in the city in 1009 against the power of Sanchuelo, vizier to Caliph Hisham II. In the ensuing civil war (*fitna*), the city was sacked in 1013 by Berber troops, losing both its power and wealth. Samuel was forced to leave Córdoba and ended up in Málaga where his Arabic and writing skills gained him a senior administrative post to the vizier of the Zirid emir of Granada, whose illiteracy made him especially dependent on Samuel's skills. He combined these bureaucratic strengths with evident military prowess, allowing him to reach the position of grand vizier and army commander, even though this was strictly contrary to Islamic law. The appointment of a Jew as the main adviser to the emir may have been irregular but Samuel presented no threat and served loyally until his death in 1056. It was evident that,

despite being derided as a non-Muslim, his personal qualities were highly valued and praised in Granadan society (Roth 1994, pp. 96–97).

Yusuf succeeded his father as grand vizier in 1056. Some opposition to the power of this Jewish family was already evident before this, in the writings of Ibn Hazm, who accused Samuel of an attack on the Qur'an, probably in the 1030s. Yusuf receives a far worse press than his father, attacked most notably for a lack of humility. Sources accuse him of filling the posts of tax collector with Jews, seeking to overthrow the emir and even intending to establish a Jewish principality. He has also been attributed with the building of a grand palace on the site that later became the Alhambra. However far-fetched some of these suggestions may be, it is evident that Yusuf had serious political enemies. According to one rumour, he may have been responsible for the poisoning of the crown prince with whom he was in conflict (Ashtor 1992, p. 171). The fragility of Yusuf's position was exacerbated by the general state of hostility between the various entities into which the caliphate had split (*taifas*), most particularly the threat from the powerful *taifas* of Almería and Seville and the armies of the Sanhaja tribe, coupled with the advanced age of the Granadan emir, Badis. The emir was absent fighting to capture Málaga, leaving Yusuf in control, whilst rumours also suggested that he had betrayed the king, quite probably itself the repetition of an anti-Jewish trope (Roth 1994, p. 103).

A polemical poem was published by a Muslim religious ascetic (Abu Ishaq al-Ilbiri), attacking not only the idea of a Jew holding power over Muslims but also the wealth of Yusuf. He is characterised as an ape, his house paved with marble and his clothes magnificent, whilst Muslims are poor and clothed in rags (Ashtor 1992 p. 187; Fernández-Morera 2016, pp. 182–183). The poem decries Yusuf as "laughing at our God and our religion", calling for Jews in general to be restored to the inferior status decreed by Islamic law and for Yusuf to be murdered. This poem has been posited as the direct cause of the violent outbreak, although the general political atmosphere probably contributed in equal measure (Roth 1994, p. 107). Either way, a riot broke out on the 31st of December 1066, when Yusuf was drinking with some of the emir's slaves and his servant seems to have become embroiled in an argument. A slave ran into the street apparently shouting "The Jew is betraying our king". Despite apparent attempts to calm the mob, riots erupted, Yusuf was murdered and, over two days, the majority of the Jewish population was slaughtered (contemporaries suggest 4000 deaths, probably a significant exaggeration). Jewish life in

Granada was clearly interrupted, although it had revived by the early twelfth century.

Whilst anti-Jewish violence seems to have been far less common in Al-Andalus than Christian Spain, this incident does show that there were similarities: anti-Jewish polemics created an under-current of resentment, probably feeding on the suspicion of Jews as outsiders, especially when they wielded political and economic power over Muslims. An apparently small spark then exploded into an uncontrollable outbreak of violence that took many lives and destroyed a community. A central narrative positioned Jews as traitors, an idea that re-surfaces in Latin polemics. On the other hand, there was no contagion. Jews who escaped found refuge (some in Lucena, a city with the same ruler) and no other Jewish communities of Al-Andalus were attacked. Tolerance towards both the Christian and Jewish minorities would later become markedly less evident, under the successive Berber dynasties which ruled Al-Andalus from roughly 1090 to 1147 (*Almoravids*) and from 1147 to around 1228 (*Almohads*). The second of these groups, by far the more fundamentalist in their interpretation of Islam, dispensed with the principle of *dhimma,* resulting in the persecution, exile or forced conversion of Christians and Jews (Bennison 2016, pp. 171–175). As a result, in a reversal of the mythic Jewish disloyalty of 711, many Jews were found fleeing to the expanding Christian kingdoms during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, supplementing the existing communities in both established and newly conquered territories.

Socio-economic Status in Christian Iberia

The socio-economic status of the Jews in Christian Iberia has parallels with that in Al-Andalus. Leading families of the various Jewish communities are commonly found in royal service, as treasurers, tax collectors and other financial officials, often at the highest levels in the machinery of royal government (Baer 1992, pp. 120–136 on use of Jewish tax collectors). Jews served most monarchs of this period; in the crown of Aragon, the reign of Pere el Gran (1276–1285) is particularly noteworthy for the number and importance of Jewish courtiers, mostly as *bailes* (bailiffs, senior officials responsible for financial administration). They included Muça de Portella in Tarazona and Jaca; Aarón Abinafia, in Calatayud, Teruel, Daroca and other locations; Mossé Alconstantiní, in Zaragoza and, later, Valencia; Jucef Ravaya, *baile* for the entire patrimony and Mossé Ravaya, *baile general* for Catalonia (Romano 1983). When members of

the Aragonese nobility rebelled against Pere under the banner of the Union of Aragon, in defence of their traditional privileges, one of their key demands was the ending of this practice. Although Pere acceded to this demand and the right of Jews to fulfil these offices was formally rescinded in Aragon and Valencia in 1283, several remained active in official capacities until at least 1285. In the following century, numerous Jews are found in the service of the crown, religious orders and noble families (see, for example, Vernet Ginés 1952; Riera i Sans 1993a; Blasco Martínez 2009; Kagay 2007, pp. 30–43). In Castile, the most prominent Jewish courtier was Samuel Ha-Levi Abulafia, who served as royal treasurer under Pedro the Cruel through the 1350s, until his arrest, torture and murder in 1360 (Baer 1992, pp. 362–364).

Notwithstanding the high profile of the Jewish courtiers, the main occupation of the vast majority of the community was some type of artisanship, combined with trade and mercantile activity, often conducted through shops. Royal records include references to bakers, butchers, cloth merchants, jewellers, itinerant entertainers, lace-makers, physicians, tailors and tanners, as well as farmers of a wide variety of taxes on goods, including salt, ovens, mills, baths, oil, wine and saffron (Régné 1978). In mid fourteenth-century Barcelona, Jews are also recorded as being heavily involved as corallers, as well as weavers of silk veils, tailors, silversmiths, bookbinders and many other artisanal occupations (Rich Abad 1999, pp. 140–150 and 154–163). In 1385, for example, twenty-five Jews are named as artisans in Barcelona's lucrative and fashionable coral-fashioning industry. Similarly, twelve Jews are recorded as silk-workers between 1381 and 1390 (Carrère 1977–1978, vol. 1, pp. 431–439 and vol. 2, pp. 161–162). Jews are also found in such occupations as the captaincy of merchant ships.

Whilst there is plentiful evidence of Jews making loans, available records suggest that this was concentrated (by value, at least) amongst the elite, with some lesser members of the community lending smaller amounts, sometimes through pawnbroking or other forms of pledge, primarily to rural borrowers (Schraer 2019, p. 172; for Valencia, see García Marsilla (2002); for Girona, see Guilleré (1984)). Despite the stereotype of the medieval Jew in Christian Europe as a "usurer" and a hoarder of wealth, a trope strongly associated with the Jews of England, but also found liberally in the Iberian documentation, recent analysis indicates a pattern of professional lending only by a small minority of Jews, with much of the community having no recorded lending activity (Mell 2017, studying the

Jews of England and elsewhere). The trope nevertheless plays a prominent role both in Church doctrine and as a common perception amongst most social orders; thus, however true or untrue, it was one important factor in anti-Jewish sentiment. The common practice during violent outbreaks of robbing Jews and destroying loan deeds is partial evidence of this. On the other hand, as we will see, there is no reason to think that this was any more important in the late fourteenth century than any other period. The documentary evidence suggests that the peak share of credit markets held by Jewish lenders, at least in the crown of Aragon, occurred during the thirteenth century, when a significant elite of financiers emerged (Klein (2006) on the case of Barcelona). The main source of data on lending is notarial records but these over-state the share of Jewish lenders, since much Christian lending was in other forms, such as credit sales (Schraer 2018, pp. 153–154). By the late fourteenth century, Jews seem to have become less significant as suppliers of urban credit, as new financial markets developed rapidly. Conversely, it is possible that their share of rural credit markets may, at least in some locations, have been consolidated as their share of urban lending declined, but data on this are patchy.

Inter-ethnic Relations

The idea of *convivencia* re-appears to some extent in literature on Christian Spain (for example, Abate 2018; selected references to *convivencia* in Castile are found in Blumenkranz 1960; Lowney 2006; Moxó 1973; Piñero Saenz 1985; Boswell 1977, pp. 12, 398–400). The attitude of the monarchies to cohabitation was both ambivalent and highly variable, over time and by geography. For example, documents often speak of many aspects of Muslim life continuing as *en tiempo de moros,* including the operation of mosques, of *shari'a* law, bathhouses and other institutions (Constable 2018, p. 8). Yet, there were always discriminatory laws to ensure that the adherents of different faiths must be physically distinguishable by their appearance, should not socialise or enjoy carnal relations and should be segregated (Ferrer i Mallol 1987; Mutgé 1992, pp. 63–79), stipulations that were sometimes ignored and, at other times, strenuously enforced (see, for example, Boswell 1977, pp. 261–267, in relation to the right to the *çala* or call to prayer). Mutgé shows how segregation in Lleida, applied after the conquest in 1149, was relaxed, particularly after 1350, before pressure, notably from the Dominicans, leading the Inquisition, resulted in restrictive ordinances in the fifteenth century. As Constable

demonstrates, much official concern was focused on the cultural practices and customs of the minorities, more so than their true beliefs.

An alternative schema is offered by Catlos. In his analysis, the level of anxiety attached to inter-religious relations is in direct proportion to the ritual content and other markers of significance, such as place and time (Catlos 2014, pp. 509–512). Thus, quotidian interactions of an economic nature, such as farming (Muslim/Christian) and trading (Muslim/Jewish/Christian) could be undertaken with relative impunity, although additional tension might arise on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday or near to a festival. As the sensitivity of an activity increased—through such expressions of control as administering taxes to the ultimate example of miscegenation—anxiety would increase and the activity would be increasingly imbued with the need for separation and imposition of the dominance of the Christian majority. As Catlos points out, the prevalence of "low-risk" transactions across ethno-religious divides could not be taken as a sign of affinity, affection or even respect, but merely one of convenience (*convenience* more than *convivencia*, per Catlos 2014, p. 522).

For Catlos, the expression of these relations needs to be understood at three levels, reflecting the "physics of scale". Formal religious identity is defined at the macro (or ecumenian) level, which expresses itself in dogmatic and moralising terms. The middle level concerns institutions, such as religious orders, whose approach is, of necessity, pragmatic, reflecting their own particular interests and circumstances. Finally, the micro level concerns individual relations, typically expressed in emotional terms. This stratification is important to bear in mind when comparing the formality of law and religious polemic (macro- and meso-level expressions, discussed below) with actual behaviour. Only occasionally would the potential transgression of formally defined boundaries and prohibitions impinge on the quotidian but, when it did so, the impact could often be seismic, leading to a sudden breaking of relationships (Catlos 2014, pp. 525–528). The resolution of cognitive dissonance, individually and collectively, could require the expression of the formally "correct" inter-ethnic relationships, perceptions and attitudes in the strongest possible terms, including extreme physical violence.

Demographics

Whilst medieval demographics are highly imprecise, the most likely range for the total population in Castile at the beginning of the fourteenth century is somewhere between three and six million and for the crown of Aragon, around one million (at the lower end, the Castilian population has been estimated at just three million by Vicens Vives (1969, p. 242); other studies offer comparable figures, with population reaching four million at the end of the fifteenth century (Álvarez-Nogal et al. 2020, p.4)). Within these figures, the Jewish population is even more debatable, but probably amounting to around 200,000 to 250,000 in Castile and 30–60,000 in the crown of Aragon (Schraer 2019, p. 12; Wolff 1971, p. 6). Whilst Jews accounted for roughly 2–5% of the total population, this figure may well have been closer to 10% in the main cities. Total populations of both Christians and Jews were much reduced by the first wave of Black Death between 1348 and 1350. Many of the Jews lived in towns or cities with self-governing councils, known for both Jews and Muslims as an *aljama* (or *aliama*), a term also used to denote the community of a location in its entirety. Individually, or grouped into *collectas*, they were used by the crown to levy community-wide taxes and subsidies.

Across the crown of Aragon, a Jewish presence is recorded in around 120 separate locations during the thirteenth century (based on Régné 1978). There were significant Jewish populations in all of the major cities—perhaps between 1000 and 5000 individuals in each of Barcelona, Zaragoza, Girona and the cities of Valencia and Mallorca (Schraer 2019, pp. 12–14, fn. 25). At the lower end of the possible range, Riera records 27,000 Jews in the four main territories of the crown of Aragon in 1391, spread across 76 *aljamas* (Riera 1993b, p. 78). In Castile, the main concentrations of population prior to 1391 were also in the larger cities, including Toledo, Burgos, Seville and Córdoba, with significant numbers in many small and medium-sized towns, especially market towns on key trade routes.

Seville illustrates the range of uncertainty in population estimates. Contemporary accounts were certainly gross exaggerations; Hasdai Crescas suggests that Seville had 6–7000 Jewish heads of household, implying perhaps 30,000 or more individuals (Feliu 2004–2005, pp. 176–177; Gampel 2016, p. 13). Modern historians generally favour a much lower figure, 200–500 Jewish households (perhaps 1000–2500 individuals), out of a total populace of around 2600 households

(10–15,000 individuals), meaning that Jews accounted for around 10–20% of the total. Baer (1992, p. 191) estimates a Jewish population in Seville of 200 families in 1290, on the basis of tax rolls, and notes that special tax inducements were required to increase the size of the community; this may have grown to around 450–500 households at the end of the fourteenth century, prior to the events of 1391.[2]

A similarly wide range is found for the major Jewish presence in Toledo. Twelfth-century Hebrew chroniclers suggest a figure in excess of 12,000 Jewish residents, whilst a Franciscan writer of the late thirteenth century cites the impossibly high figure of 70,000 Jewish taxpayers (and, therefore, a much higher overall population). Baer, using tax rolls, suggests a much more modest figure of 350 families in the thirteenth century; by the time of the expulsion in 1492, he estimates that some 300 Jewish families (probably around 1500 individuals) resided in the city (Valdeón Baruque 1975, p. 112 and fns. 10–12; Baer 1992, p. 190 and pp. 418–419, fn. 2). The thirteenth century was a period of general demographic growth and increasing urbanisation across Western Europe and this is reflected in the emergence of new and rapidly growing Jewish communities in a number of market towns, such as Perpinyà, Morvedre and Santa Coloma de Queralt (Emery 1959; Assis 1988; Meyerson 2004a, b). By contrast, relatively few Jews seem to have resided in the more remote rural locations prior to 1391.

Legal Status

Law codes differed not only amongst the five main polities of Castile and the crown of Aragon but also locally, at city level, and over time. There were also many separate communal charters of privilege granted to Jewish communities.[3] These communal privileges included a limited right to self-government, with Jewish religious courts able to try intra-communal cases, subject both to the execution of any punishments being carried out by the civic authorities, and to frequent royal intervention (Schraer 2019, pp. 49–52). The evolution of canon and civil law served the purpose, inter alia, of erecting boundaries between different religious groups, although religion was only one of many legal markers of status, privilege and, in some cases, disqualification. Civil law often mirrored canon law, which was constructed on the Augustinian principle of Jews as a necessary part of the Christian world but one condemned to suffering through its error and rejection of Christ. It also served the establishment of a social hierarchy in

societies built around a dominant, officially sanctioned and accepted religion (Cohen 1998, pp. 78–92; Cohen 1999, pp. 19–71). The provisions of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 have an oft-repeated resonance in civil laws. For Castile, the most comprehensive legal formulation is the *Siete Partidas,* drafted in the reign of Alfonso X (r. 1252–1284) and formally enacted in the *Ordenamientos de Alcalá* in 1348 (see Burns 2001). In the Kingdom of Aragon, a variety of charters of laws and privileges, known as *fueros,* applied locally (a typical formulation, for the city of Huesca, is found in Pérez Martín 2010). The law code of the Kingdom of Valencia is the *Furs de València* (Colon and García 1970–2007). The Catalan legal system relied on customary law codes (see, for example, Kagay 1994 on the *Usatges de Barcelona*; also, *Constitucions i altres drets de Catalunya* 1973). Jews and Muslims both enjoyed separate legal status and were subject to specific stipulations within the general law codes, as well as being covered by the general provisions of the law.

Many of the legal stipulations concerning Jews were common to the different civil law codes, designed, first, to prevent social mixing between Christians and Jews, thus preserving the vital religious and social boundaries; secondly, to mark out Jews as having second-class status; thirdly, to place limits on "usury", the ability of Jews to charge interest on loans. In particular, the Fourth Lateran Council mandated special markings to be worn by Jews and a bar on cohabitation between Jews and Christians, a clause repeated in most civil law codes, but applied inconsistently. This clearly reflected a sense that Jews would "pollute" the Christian world and that miscegenation needed to be avoided at all costs, a principle shared by all three Abrahamic religions (Champagne and Resnick 2018).[4] Many examples can be found to indicate that, notwithstanding these edicts, a degree of social and sexual inter-mixing did take place, resulting either in punishment or the reiteration of the legal requirements (Nirenberg 1996, pp. 127–165, 2002). Second-class status was expressed in restrictions on the ability to hold office over Christians or to employ Christian servants, although, as already noted, this was frequently observed only in the breach. As a legally distinct group, Jews were also excluded from the full benefits of citizenship, marginalised both juridically and physically (Daileader 2000, especially pp. 118–154). Although Judaism occupied a particular position in Christian theology, psychology and canon law, given its symbiotic relationship to the origins of Christianity, the general symmetry of civil law as between Jews and Muslims suggests that the imposition of social and legal boundaries between ethno-religious groups was the