

Iberian Diasporas and the Making of Italian and European Culture

During the Middle Ages, Spain had the richest and most flourishing Jewish community in Europe. The Jews were perfectly integrated, in dominant positions, with a high rate of dignitaries, merchants, and intellectuals who contributed to the economic and cultural enrichment of the country. Published on March 31, 1492, the expulsion edict gave Spanish Jews four months to decide whether to leave Spain or convert to Christianity. It is estimated that one-third of the 300,000 Jews in Spain left the Peninsula. They were joined by Portuguese Jews expelled from 1497 onwards. Initially, the preferred destinations of the Sephardic diaspora were the Italian Peninsula, the Ottoman Empire, and Morocco. This diaspora continued in various forms throughout the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century, but this time it consisted of Jews who had converted to Christianity, known as conversos or marranos in Italy.

Morisco Diaspora. Between 1609 and 1614, three hundred thousand Moriscos (Christian converts of Muslim origin), Spanish Christians baptized of distant Muslim ancestry, were expelled from the territories of the Iberian Peninsula. It was a massive exodus, three times that of the Sephardic diaspora. Their social, economic, but above all, cultural impact on the Italian Peninsula is still to be studied.