

CONVIVENCIA, CONFLICT AND CREATIVITY: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE SEPHARDIM

Ronnie Perelis

Medieval Spain, with its vibrant Muslim and Jewish populations, was one of the most complex and culturally rich European societies of its time. It served as a bridge for intellectual, artistic and scientific imports from the east to the European north. Its experiment with *convivencia* –“the living together” of three different religions within the same society – was unheard of in pre-modern Europe. With *convivencia* as our lens, we will examine the possibilities and limitations of multi-cultural tolerance by studying the socio-political and cultural trajectory of the Sephardim (Iberian Jews) and their Christian and Muslim neighbors.

The course’s early focus on medieval Iberia opens the path to the exploration of Sephardic cultural life after the expulsion from Spain in 1492. The final section of the course studies the vitality and variety of the Sephardic experience throughout its global diaspora.

We will read a wide range of Sephardic writing: the poets of the Andalusian Golden age, the neo-Aristotelian philosophers and scientists, New World travelers, *converso* dramatists, Ladino ballads and echoes of the Sephardic experience represented in modern Spanish and Latin American movies, music and novels.

The course is open to students with no previous background in Spanish or Jewish studies. All texts will be read in English translation. However, knowledge of Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic or Hebrew is welcome.

The class will meet twice a week and consist of interactive lectures, student presentations and group discussions of the texts and historical issues under consideration.

Performance will be judged on the basis of participation in class discussions, reaction papers, oral presentations and one mid-term exam.

Participation (10%): Attendance, knowledge of assigned readings and active participation in class discussions.

Oral presentations (15%): Each student will briefly introduce at least two of the texts to the class throughout the semester.

Reaction Papers (20%): One to two page essays analyzing one aspect of the assigned reading for class. The essays must be e-mailed to the professor by noon on the day before class meets. (Perelis@sas.upenn.edu)

Exam (25%): A midterm exam will be given. The exam will have a quantitative section comprised of historical identification questions and an analytical section made up of short essays.

Final Project (30%): Each student will present a final oral-presentation and written essay (5-7 pages) based on an aspect of Sephardic culture and/or medieval Spanish “multi-culturalism” that they have independently researched. Students are encouraged to use audio/visual multi-media in these presentations where relevant.

Readings: All readings [enclosed in brackets] will be found in the course pack. You will be responsible for the primary texts and secondary readings assigned for each week. The reading will enable you to participate in the discussions of both the literary texts and the larger historical issues covered each week.

SYLLABUS

Week 1.a:

Introduction to the course

*Beginning at the End: “Adio Querida” (romance sefaradí)

Al-Andalus: Cultural Exchange and Confrontation in Muslim Spain

Week 1.b:

Introduction to Spanish Jewish history

The Muslim period:

* Muslim religious tolerance in theory and in practice

[Jane Gerber, “The Birth of Sepharad”, *The Jews of Spain*; Ammiel Alcalay, "A garden enclosed" in *After Jews and Arabs*. (optional) Bernard Lewis, Chpt. 1, *Jews of Islam*]

Week 2.a:

Poetry in Al-Andalus: Between the synagogue and the Caliph’s court

[María Rosa Menocal, “Visions of Al-Andalus” in *Cambridge Literature of Al-Andalus*; Jane Gerber, “The Golden Era”; Selections from Shmuel haNagid, Ibn Gabirol, Moses Ibn Ezra, Yehuda haLevi in T. Carmi, The Penguin book of Hebrew verse; A selection of *Jarchas*.]

Week 2.b:

Andalusian Poetry continued

[Section 2 of poetry, Amiel Alcalay on “Dunash” and “Shmuel Hanaguid”]

Week 3.a:

Philosophy and Religion: Reason and revelation in the context of dialogue and polemic

[Yehuda haLevi, *The Kuzari* (selections).]

Week 3.b:

Maimonides: “lightening illuminating the night”

[Selections from Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, *Mishneh Torah* and *Epistles*.]

Part II: Cristian Reconquest and the Shifting Sands of Spain's Multicultural Reality

Week 4.a:

Alonso X the Wise (1221-1284) and the "Toledo School of Translation": Cultural exchange at the Christian king's court

[Alfonso X, Selections from *Las Siete Partidas*; Jane Gerber, "The Reconquista"; Thomas F. Glick, "Science in Medieval Spain: The Jewish Contribution in the Context of *Convivencia*" in *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims and Christians in Medieval Spain*; Transcription of the quadra-lingual tombstone of Fernando III, *el Santo* in the Cathedral of Seville (1290).]

Week 4.b:

Jew as subject and author in Christian Spain

[Selections from *El Cid*; Gonzalo de Berceo, *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* (selected poems); Shem Tob de Carrión's *Proverbios Morales*, Benjamin of Tudela's *Travel Journal*; Selected poems of Judah Al-Harizi from his *Tachkemoni*; Dwayne E. Carpenter, "Social Perception and Literary Portrayal: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Spanish Literature", *Convivencia*]

Week 5.a &b:

"Daggers of Faith": Disputations, Conversions and Hispano-Jewish culture under pressure

[Jane Gerber, "The Reconquista"; Nachmanides, "Account of the Barcelona Disputation" in *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages*, Hyam Macoby ed. and ; Abner of Burgos (Alfonso de Valladolid) *El Mostrador de Justicia* (Introduction)]

*Discussion of Macoby's film, "The Disputation" (on reserve)

Week 6.a:

1391: Violence, Forced Conversion and its Aftermath

[Selected eyewitness accounts of the pogrom of 1391; Text of the Toledo Statute of "Blood Purity"; Y.H. Yerushalmi, *Assimilation and Racial Antisemitism: the Iberian and the German models*; Text of inquisitorial "Edict of Grace"; David Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, (Introd.).]

Week 6.b:

Midterm Exam

Week 7.a:

Conversion and Cultural Resistance

* Converted Space: study of synagogues and mosques converted into churches

[Images of “La Mezquita” of Cordoba, “La Sinagoga Santa María la Blanca” and “El Tránsito” in Toledo; Jerrilynn D. Dodds, “Mudejar Tradition and the Synagogues of Medieval Spain: Cultural Identity and Cultural Hegemony” in *Convivencia*; articles on Mudejar architecture from *Cambridge Literature of Al Andalus*]

Week 7.b:

Conversion and Cultural Resistance, (continued)

*Lost in the text: Converso authors and converso consciousness in 15th century Castilian literature

[Selections from the *Lazarillo de Tormes*, *Cancionero de Baena* and the *Celestina*; Selected critical essays of Américo Castro, and Paul Julian Smith.]

Week 8.a:

Converso authors (continued)

Week 8.b:

The Expulsion: Causes and Responses

[Edict of expulsion; anthology of various accounts of the expulsion; Don Isaac Abrabanel, Commentary on the Book of Kings; Yehuda Abrabanel (Leone Ebreo), “Lament for his kidnapped son”.]

Week 9.a & b:

The Birth of Marranism

[David Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit* pp 35-96, “Libro llamado el Alborayque”]

Week 10.a

The Fall of Granada and Spain's Muslims

[Selected testimonials from *Christians and Moors in Spain*, ed. Colin Smith, vol. II]

The Sephardic Diasporas: *Tierras ajenas y tierras prometidas*

Week 10.b:

Ladino/Judeo-Spanish Ballads: memory, exile and cultural re-creation in the Ottoman

Empire

[Selected secular and religious poetry from the *Romancero Judeo-Español* ; “From Toledo to Jerusalem” {video}; *Meam Loez* (introduction).]

Week 11.a:

New World Encounters

New Spain's Underground Marrano Network: the nexus of international trade, New World colonization and crypto-Judaism

[Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, “Los judeoconversos en la América española” (optional); Ronnie Perelis, “Los judíos en el nuevo mundo”; Luis de Carvajal, *el mozo* (Joseph Lumbroso), *Autobiografía*]

Week 11.b:

“Estos indios son hebreos”: Inidans and Jews in the Americas

[André Neher, “The myth of the New World in Jewish consciousness: the Ten Tribes lost and rediscovered” (119-135); Antonio de Montezinos (Aarón HaLevi) *Relación* (1644).]

Week 12.a & b:

The Jerusalem of the North: Amsterdam and the rebirth of Iberian Jewry

[Menasseh ben Israel, *Esperanza de Israel* (selections including portrait and etchings by Rembrandt), Selections of poems by João Pinto Delgado, Antonio Enríquez Gómez, and Miguel de Barrios from *Marrano Poets of the Seventeenth Century*, Timothy Oelman, editor and translator.]

Week 13.a & b:

Phantasmic Judaism: Post-expulsion Semitic presence in the Spanish Golden Age

[Selections from *Don Quixote de la Mancha*; Francisco de Quevedo, “To a nose” and “I will grease my verses with bacon”; Lope de Vega, *Niño Inocente de la Guardia*]

Week 14.a & b:

20th century Post-Script

[“Adio Kerida” Documentary film by Ruth Behar; Antonio Muñoz Molina *Sefarad* (selections); Fernando Trueba, “La niña de tus ojos” (video); Roberto Rodríguez, “El Danzón de Moises” (Mambo-klezmer fusion), Jorge Luis Borges, “I, a Jew.”]

Exam Week: Final Presentations and Papers due