WHY DID THEY HAVE TO LEAVE?

An Economic Approach to Jewish Expulsion from Spain

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Abstract

- Why were the Jews expelled from Spain? Was money an important factor in this decision? This questions constitute the main point of this research.
- This poster examines the hypothesis that tension derived from economic issues was a central element of the decision to expel the Jews from Spain. These economic tensions added to other factors, such as religious and social controversies.
- Sources include *A Convenient Hatred: The History of Antisemitism* by Phyllis Goldstein and *Los Judíos en la España Medieval* by José Ramón Hinojosa Montalvo.

1. Jews' Background: The Early Middle Ages in Spain:

- During the Middle Ages, while in northern Europe Jews faced hate and persecution, their communities prospered in Spain under Muslim law. At the time, both Jews and Christians were considered *dhimmíes*.
- This means that the Muslims respected them because their beliefs derived from ancient books. Christians and Jews could therefore practice their religion, and they were not forced to convert to Islam. In return, they had to obey Muslim laws, pay special taxes and suffer diverse grades of discrimination depending on who the monarch was.
- Christians were less satisfied with Muslim rule, and they fought from time to time to try to regain control of the peninsula. By the eleventh century, their fight had become a holy war. Jews participated in this war, primarily by supporting the Christians with money, but also by fighting on their side on many occasion

The advance of the Spanish warriors across the Iberian Peninsula during the Reconquista

2. Jewish Communities In The Spanish Kingdoms:

- Despite their help during the *Reconquista*, Jews were still seen as outsiders in Christian communities. Their presence was tolerated because they were guardians of the Book-Old Testament or Jewish Bible- and because there was a chance that they would become Christians.

Jews performing moneylending

- Since the mid-thirteenth century, the restrictions that Jews in the Spanish Kingdoms had to endured kept on growing. They were banned from public positions in many kingdoms, they had to live in their own parts of the cities-which were called *juderías*- and wear dresses that identified them. In order to travel, they needed special permission from the king, and they were not allowed to carry weapons in the streets.
- Jews tended to use their financial ability and connections with the crown and the nobility derived from money lending to try to secure their position.

3. The Beginning Of The Hate:

- In the fourteen century, with Black Death, the adverse weather conditions and the constant wars, Spanish citizens were increasingly furious. The rage and disappointment derived from these problems needed to find a target, and, in many cases, Jews became the ones to blame.

Destruction of the judería of Toledo

- The predications of the *arcediano* of Sevilla, Ferrán Martínez, led to the assault and destruction of several *juderías*. They were never rebuilt.
- Scared from this experiences, many Jews begun to convert to Christianism, but this was not a solution: Christians did not trust the *conversos* and the tensions proliferated.

4. The Expulsion:

- Spanish historians disagree about the reasons for the expulsion. One of the most common views is the one concerning Spanish unity. By 1492, the Catholic Kings had ended the *Reconquista* and expelled the Muslims from Granada. Their kingdom was, therefore, united from the territorial point of view. However, there was still no religious unity due to the presence of the Jews. The Catholic Kings always wanted a strong, united kingdom to rule. The Jews were an obstacle, and, furthermore, a factor of social tension. Why shouldn't they get rid of them?

The Catholic Kings with their confessor

The Jews after the expulsion

- Additionally, the Catholic Kings, as their name indicates, were very concerned about the maintenance of a strong, traditional, non-heretical practice of Catholicism.
- The Edict of Granada was approved on March 31, 1492. After it, Jews had to leave the country. In some cases, Jews had enough time to sell most of their possessions —even if, due to the situation, some Christians took advantages and offered far less money for the belongings than they were actually worth—and left the country unharmed. In other places, however, the expulsion was more violent and tragic.

5. Conclusion:

- There is not enough evidence to prove that money was in fact a crucial element for the Catholic Kings to decide to expel the Jews. Instead, they probably had in mind political and strategical reasons. However, it is clear that money did generated social controversy between Jews and Christians, and, therefore, was one of the elements that ultimately lead to the expulsion.