CHAPTER ONE

THE COUNCIL OF ELVIRA

The first text of a council which has been delivered to the present day is that which was held in the Spanish town of Elvira, a suburb of modern-day Granada. The council took place around 305 CE and was the first known gathering of bishops and church representatives from any one nation. The list of bishops attending indicates how far Christianity had spread in Spain at this time. The canons describe people of many different walks of life, thus painting a vivid picture of the inhabitants of the early fourth century Iberian peninsula: from landowners (c. 49), charioteers and actors (c. 62), freedmen (c. 80), to slaves (c. 41). Other canons show that Christians still found solace in ‘magical practices’, but were also converts from the pagan priesthood (‘flamines’). The council brought forth eighty-one canons, several of which refer to contacts between Christians and Jews, and ‘judaizing’ activities by the Christian faithful.

1 Pre-Fourth Century Archeological and Literary Evidence for Jews and Christians in Spain

1.1 The Jewish Evidence

Jewish presence in Spain, in the period preceding the fourth century, is attested through material evidence. Even though the dating in several cases may be somewhat debated, at least some evidence shows a Jewish presence in Spain in early times.

An amphora was found in Ibiza with Hebrew inscription and probably dates to the first century. Two letters are indicated on the

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1 Most relevant publications on the council are: Dale (1882), Laeuchli (1972), Reichert (1990), and more recently Sotomayor/Ubiña (2005).
2 Magic: for example sorcery and idolatry c. 6, 20, 29, 34 etc.; pagan practices: e.g. canon 2, 3, 39, 41 etc.
amphora: a *resh* and a *daleth*. These letters possibly indicate part of a name.\(^5\) The presence of this amphora is interesting due to its date, and as it is found in a maritime area (the island of Ibiza) trade links may also account for its presence.

Not much Jewish literary evidence exists for the period preceding the fourth century.

An interesting Latin funerary inscription dates to the third century and was found in Abdera.\(^6\) The place is the modern Adra, on the coast south of Granada. The inscription reads as follows:…NIA SALO…NVLA AN I MENS IIII DIE I IVDAEA: ‘[An]nia Salo[mo]nula one year 4 months one day, Jewess’. This Jewish child may have lived in this area, to have died at an early age.

Josephus, in his “Wars of the Jews”,\(^7\) claims that Herod Antipas was banished to Spain by the emperor Gaius. However, in the “Jewish Antiquities”\(^8\) he states that Herod Antipas was sent in perpetual banishment to Gaul, specifically to Lyon, by Gaius. A suggested solution to this apparent contradiction is that Herod might have been sent to a place named “Lugdunum Convenarum”, a town in the modern day border region of Spain and Gaul.\(^9\)

Other Jewish texts are more vague, and are mostly dated to a somewhat later period. In the Midrash Rabbah Leviticus (XXIX,2), R. Meir calls for the return of the Diaspora from, i.e., Gaul and Spain.\(^10\) This approximately fifth century text probably mentions these areas, amongst many others, as an example of (from) “everywhere”, rather than indicating a specific region. The Targum Jonathan on Obadiah verse 20 (probably dated after the fourth century\(^11\)) mentions exiles who are in “Spain”.\(^12\)

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\(^6\) CIJ n. 665; Cantera (1956) nr. 283. Noy (1993) n. 179; possibly also n. 188: an epitaph inscription followed by ‘iudeus’.
\(^7\) *Bellum Iudaicum* II, 183 (LCL 203).
\(^8\) *Antiq.* XVIII, 252 (LCL 433).
\(^9\) Hoehner (1972) p. 262 n. 1. See for further discussion on this town, chapter IV on Gaul, section 1.2 Christian evidence.
\(^10\) “From Gaul and Spain, and from her neighbors, and Babylon, Media, Greece, Edom…and of all the nations I have scattered thee”. Translation in English by Israelstam and Slotki (1971) p. 371.
\(^11\) The earlier rabbis tend to see “Sepharad”, the place mentioned in the text as Sardis in Asia Minor. Later rabbis prefer Spain. Cf. ‘Sepharad’ in: *EJ* vol. 18, p. 292.
\(^12\) “Exiles of this people of the Israelites (shall possess) what is in the land of Canaan as far as Zarephath, while the exiles of Jerusalem who are in *Spain* (my italics) shall possess the cities of the land of the south”. English translation by Cathcart (1989) p. 102.