Epilogue: History in the Eyes of the Beholder

When you are in Jerusalem you are in Tetuán, and when you are in Tetuán you are in Granada and when you are in Granada you are in Jerusalem

MICHAL HELD, "Puertas. Sheʾarim", Over the Face of the Waters (Jerusalem: Reshimu Poetry Series, 2009), 19 [Hebrew and Ladino].

The historiography of the Jewish people in the modern period began with the members of Wissenschaft des Judentums in nineteenth-century Germany: Leopold Yom Tov Lipman Zunz (1794–1886) and Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891). This endeavor was continued by Shimon Dubnow (1860–1941). In its day, the historiography of the Wissenschaft des Judentums served as an instrument to promote the vision of emancipation of the Jews in Europe. The history of the Jews in Muslim Spain and in Christian Spain, in the period parallel to the European Middle Ages, over the course of the seventh to the fifteenth centuries, was an excellent model for presentation and imitation: Jews were involved in their economic and social environment, engaged in all possible professions. That was how the German Jews wanted to see themselves.1 To be sure, there was idealization in such a description of the Golden Age in Spain: for the Jews, being non-Muslims and non-Christians, could not officially fill the roles of courtiers and their status was, on the whole, maintained on an individual basis, for example, as physicians to the ruler.

The Jews were a minority group that was permitted to live among the majority society – whether a Christian or Muslim majority – under limiting, humiliating conditions. Yet, under them, the Jews could integrate into most areas of life. The historical chapter of the Jewish chronicle on the Iberian Peninsula – that is Sepharad in Hebrew sources – was presented in Jewish historiography, from the close of the nineteenth century, as a glorious chapter in the history of the Jewish people. This epoch was characterized by a number of phenomena: Sepharad was the setting for the exceptional historical encounter of the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, in which the intensiveness of the political, social, and culture relationships was underscored. The historical uniqueness of Sepharad resides in the existence of Jewish,

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Christians, and Muslims side by side, during a long period of eight hundred years, in the course of which there was no single central government on the Iberian Peninsula. In the world of Islam, which consisted of a flourishing urban society, wealthy Jewish communities developed that fostered ramified links to non-Jewish society. Jewish court figures, foremost among them physicians, gained for themselves prestigious status in the courts of the Muslim rulers. This was the case of Rabbi Ḥisdai [Ḥasdai] Ibn Shaprut (918–970), who served at the court of Abd-al-Rahman III, the Caliph of Córdoba. At the latter’s command, Rabbi Ḥisdai went on various diplomatic missions and even created a firm connection with the yeshivot of Babylonia and The Land of Israel and corresponded with Joseph, king of the Khazars. The Jews were first-rate scientists: among them were mathematicians, astronomers, and philosophers; they also served as intercessors and erudite translators, who transmitted the sciences of philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy, which were based on the Greek-Arab cultural heritage and especially Aristotelian science, from the Muslim south to the Christian north, which was being built up by virtue of the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula. The Golden Age in Muslim Spain came to its end when the geopolitical achievements of the Christian Reconquista roused against the Peninsular Muslim rulers, from the end of the eleventh century, Muslim invasions from North Africa: the Almoravides first and the Almohades in their wake. From the close of the eleventh century, the important segment of Jewish existence in the Iberian Peninsula moved to the Christian kingdoms: this was the saga of Rabbi Yehudah Halevi (1075–1141), of also of Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1141). During the rule of Alfonso el Sabio, king of Castille (1221–1284), translators – including Jews – were at work in Toledo translating scientific works from Arabic to Romance, the language of the country, and to Latin. Ostensibly, the Jews and Christians peacefully lived together (convivencia). But as early as the second half of the thirteenth century, with the appearance of the mendicant orders (Mendicantes) throughout Europe and in the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula, and even more intensely in the following centuries – the fourteenth and the fifteenth – the situation of the Jews in the kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula deteriorated: in 1263, a religious polemical debate was held in Barcelona in which Nahmanides (Rabbi Moshe Ben Naḥman; Najmánides) vied against a Jewish convert to Christianity: Pablo Christiani. As known, Nahmanides was forced, as a result of this debate, to abandon his home in Girona [Gerona]. He immigrated to The Land of Israel and re-established the Jewish community in Jerusalem.² Against the backdrop of the pan-European crisis of the fourteenth century, riots burst forth in 1391, throughout the Iberian Peninsula. Convivencia did a complete

² Cf. chap. 1, n. 87.