During the period extending from 1413–1414 (date of the Disputation of Tortosa) to the expulsions of 1492 (Castile and Aragon) and 1498 (Navarre), the situation of the Jewish communities in the territories of what is present-day Spain was unpredictable: in some places, the conditions of life were very difficult; in others, there was a kind of renaissance. The communities had to fight on two fronts. Internally, they were struggling against the proliferation of conversions to Christianity and against what the talmudists called the Averroists’s lack of faith. Outside the community, Jews confronted the hatred of the Christians and attacks by the Inquisition.

Baer dedicates only a few sentences to the more-favorable aspects of the period: they describe the bonds of friendship between Jews and Christians in the courts of the kings and princes and the high offices held by some Jews, for example by the philosopher Joseph ibn Shem Tov.

Indeed, very little explicit information prepares us for what we learn from the Hebrew manuscripts read and written during this period in the Iberian Peninsula: the intellectual and cultural life of Jews of all tendencies, whether

* My sincere thanks to the reviewers of this book for their valuable remarks.
2 Contrary to the affirmations of Baer and other historians, when one compares the number of philosophers who converted to Christianity to the number of those who did not, it is clear that philosophers, whether Averroists or not, were no more likely to become apostates than non-philosophers.
4 Although the fact that “his high standing aroused the hatred of the Christians and he was murdered under circumstances of which very little is known” does cast doubt upon the benefits of enjoying the favor of the court. See Baer, A History, 1: 250–51.
talmudists, kabbalists, averroists, etc., was flourishing. Inventories show that many books existed;\textsuperscript{5} we know of at least 26 private libraries containing 615 books, mostly on religious topics.\textsuperscript{6} Of these many books, only a few have been preserved, many having perished during the expulsion. Added to this tragic event, there are the various natural causes of book destruction: humidity, worms, negligence, intense use, and recycling of the parchment or paper. In addition to natural causes, the invention of printing also collaborated to the oblivion of medieval manuscripts, as the sixteenth century saw the growing success of printed books (beginning between 1460 and 1480). Medieval Hebrew manuscripts in general were almost forgotten by Jews in Italy and in the Ottoman Empire, and they sold them in great quantity to Christian princes and colleges. As a result, the wealth and diversity of Hebrew philosophical manuscripts in particular was also forgotten until the nineteenth century and the emergence of the \textit{Wissenschaft des Judenthums}.\textsuperscript{7}

1 Schools and Education

The first section of the communal statutes for Castile deals with the obligation for the communities to collect taxes to pay for teachers of the Torah.\textsuperscript{8} Although only the Torah is mentioned, this text is a noteworthy indication of the importance accorded by Jewish communities to teaching and the intellectual life in general during the century preceding the expulsion.

In fifteenth-century Spain, primary education (reading and copying the Bible and daily prayers, learning the commandments) was the same for all Jewish children. Secondary education began when the child was about thirteen years old. For families that could afford further education, there were two options: the traditional study of the Talmud, which was provided in the


\textsuperscript{7} The foundation of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts as well as the study of dated manuscripts and the preparation of new catalogues testify to a renewed awareness of the number, value, and greatness of Hebrew manuscripts.