

ATTACHMENT #27

ASHKENAZI JEWS

Discussion in conversations of Barney B. Radov, Wendy Davaris, Bobbie Bass, Marci Rogers, Paul Rogers, and Westy Radov.

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The Radovs were, without question, Ashkenazi Jews. That subset of religious followers, though, involves some complicated further discussion. It is typically thought that Jews are either Ashkenazi (German and Eastern European) or Sephardic (originally from Spain and Portugal, now disbursed throughout North Africa and the Middle East). This is simply false.

After the fall of the Second Temple in the 6th Century B.C.E., many Jews, but not all, were forced from Israel to outlying lands to what was then Babylonia, now a number of countries throughout the Middle East. However, some never left Israel, and thus cannot properly be called either Sephardic or Ashkenazi. Following this diaspora (dispersion, *golus* in Yiddish), a number left the Middle East and found their way to Spain and Portugal, the so-called Sephardim. Whether they did so originally under the conquering Nebuchadnezzar II's army or later because some of their countrymen had settled there and they went to join them is not clear for any individual case. Sephardic Jews were in Spain and Portugal (and to some extent southern France) for the next 2,000 years, although periodically were sufficiently mistreated or subject to expulsion that they ended elsewhere in Europe or the Mediterranean.



The Alhambra Decree

Finally with the Alhambra Decree, (leave Spain within four months, convert or die), there was a complete expulsion in 1492 from Spain and then 40 years later again from Portugal. These Jews, the so-called Sephardic Jews, became geographically and then socially divided between the Western Sephardim, a smaller group that went to Western Europe and eventually elsewhere, and most of the expelled, the so-called Eastern Sephardim, who went to the lands of the Ottoman Empire: then all of North Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Eastern Europe, including Serbia, Albania and Bulgaria.

Some of the Sephardim who had left, perhaps as many of a quarter of those chased out in smaller expulsions in the centuries before Alhambra, went to Eastern Europe and blended in with the Ashkenazis. Thus, the purity of that classification collapses under scrutiny. Also, many of the Eastern Sephardim who immigrated to the Ottoman Empire joined those who were never in Spain, but over the centuries had migrated to Algeria, Iraq, Persia, Tunisia, Egypt and Kuwait and thus, never had an ancestor set foot in the Iberian Peninsula. They are neither Sephardic nor Ashkenazi.

The picture is, of course, much more complicated than that. When the Greek city states and then the Roman Empire ruled, Jews found opportunities in Greek and Roman cities, and further, throughout the Black Sea region in Russia, and as far away as western India, and south to Ethiopia, Sudan and perhaps Kenya. Moreover, some went to places like Italy, including the D'Israeli family (at least on the father's side, as the mother's side was Sephardic), again making them neither were Ashkenazi nor Sephardic.



Ethiopian Synagogue

That said, travel was not always voluntary to Italy. Many Jews originally came to Rome as slaves.



In Rome, the Arch of Titus shows enslaved Jews with objects from the Temple being brought to Rome.

Finally, to complicate things even more, Ashkenazis were never a unified whole. Those in the German speaking Austro-Hungarian Empire were more acculturated, liberal, well-educated, prosperous, secular, and urban, while those in Poland and Russia often struggled in small communities, reminiscent of Anatevka in *Fiddler on the Roof*, and were widely disbursed throughout Poland and the Russian Empire.



W.W.I. Yiddish fund-raising poster in America

The Jews usually spoke in their every day discourse in the local language and more often one of three Jewish languages: Yiddish for the Ashkenazis, Ladino for the Sephardim, and Aramaic for those in the Middle East who had never left. Hebrew was a solely religious language, largely, like Latin, dead to ordinary speech, and only revived when a Jewish Israel was revived in the late 19th Century.



Issac Bashevis Singer's Magician of Lublin

The language of much Jewish literature, then, was not particularly Hebrew, and not always in any of the languages spoken by ordinary people. There are certainly notable exceptions, including the Yiddish literature that produced Sholem Aleichem and Issac Bashevis Singer, the Aramaic that produced both the *Kaddish* and the *Kol Nidre*, and Ladino famous for its music, including *La Rosa Enflorase*. However, many Jewish writers wrote in the secular languages spoken in the country where they lived, including Maimonides writing in Arabic, Freud in German, and Pasternak in Russian.



Ladino Music



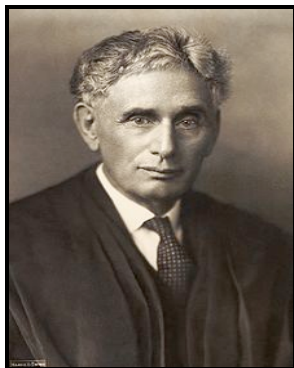
Maimonides *On Poisons and the Protection Against Lethal Druges* in original Arabic and in English

The origin of the Ashkenazis is, to say the least, obscure. Certainly, there were Jews living in Russia and Poland from Roman times, as well as expelled Sephardim who went to

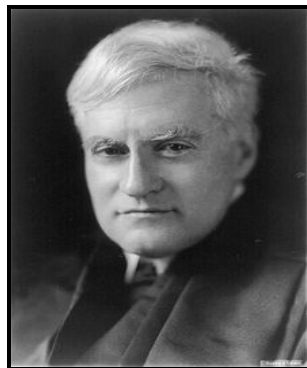
Eastern Europe, often Lithuania, at very times. The Khazars found Jews already in Kiev when they engaged in their mass conversion around the year 800. Given the trade routes that opened as a result of the stability of the Carolingian regimes after the Battle of Poitiers in the 8th Century, Jews would have migrated to Eastern Europe for purposes of trading, commerce or safety. The earliest Jewish merchants were likely the Radhanites of south Russia and Ukraine, who came from Mesopotamia or Persia, and were involved in commerce from the time of the late Roman Empire through the heyday of the Silk Road from India to Morocco. (They provide us a good family name). Migration accelerated with the expulsion from Spain, the Crusades causing devastation both in Europe and in the Middle East, and the rise of the Hanseatic League cities, which opened trade throughout Northern Europe, but also down the rivers of Eastern Europe, even to Volgrad.

Ashkenazi Jews have been the subject of a fair amount of study, both on the issues of achievement and intelligence on the positive end and, on the negative end, of inherited diseases. There seems to be no question but that Ashkenazi Jews for centuries consisted of a small, inbred group, with those marrying outsiders forced to leave the community. This, like any inbreeding, would lead to genetic anomalies, both positive and negative, as one sees with selective breeding of everything from crops and animals to laboratory results. Extremely controversial studies indicate Ashkenazi Jews have higher IQs, between one fifth to one full standard deviation above average (one full standard deviation would mean that they are, in general, in the upper 16% of the population in IQ, with the spread going from there, rather than in the middle 50%). Nobel Prize winners among Jews (and most all have been Ashkenazi) amount to about 21% of all Prize winners since 1901. As for genetic complications, they certainly include, at least, Tay-Sachs and a greater instance of breast cancer.

As for the distinction between Ashkenazi and non-Ashkenazi Jews, the differences tend to be fairly slight, centering about pronunciation of a few Hebrew letters, some dietary disparities (Sephardim eat grain and rice on Passover, but do not mix fish and dairy ever), the custom of the Sephardim (like the Bass') of naming their children for living relatives, and the fact that Ladino and Yiddish, while both use the Hebrew alphabet, are based on two very different languages: medieval Spanish verses medieval German. Before the Holocaust, about 92% of the Jews in the world were Ashkenazi, with about 80% the number today.



Justice Louis Brandeis



Justice Benjamin Cardozo

On the American immigrant side, the fundamental differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews – ones having to do with theory, temperament, loyalties, literature and religious sources – could not better be summarized than viewing the differences between the first two Jewish members of the United States Supreme Court, the offspring of refugees from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ashkenazi Louis Brandeis, and his colleague, the Western Sephardic Portuguese Jew, Benjamin Cardozo.

Cultural differences in temperament, belief, argument, confidence and entire ways of proceeding are hard to summarize in a single instance. That said, Brandeis once commented to one of Cardozo's law clerks that "The trouble with your judge [Cardozo] is that he thinks that he has to be one hundred percent right. He doesn't realize that it is enough to be fifty-one percent right." Cardozo replied to Justice Brandeis that "The trouble with that is that when you [think you] are fifty-one percent right, it may [really only] be forty-nine percent." Hence, Ashkenazi verses Sephardic. There can be absolutely no doubt about the allegiance, even purity, of the Radovs.



Sephardic Synagogue in Lesko (Yiddish *Linsk*) Poland, deep among the Ashkenazi.