

# PORTUGAL JEWISH LEGACY

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# **PORTUGAL** JEWISH LEGACY

This leaflet presents a summary of part of Portugal's Sephardic Jewish heritage, comprising the historic and cultural heritage of a community that left deep and decisive marks on the development of the country over the ages.

During the foundation of Portugal, the Sephardi, or Iberian Peninsula Jews, helped populate the territory conquered from the Moors. For this reason they benefited from royal protection until 1496, the date of the Edict of Expulsion of the Jews. The businessmen, scientists, men of letters, philosophers, doctors and astronomers from those communities made great contributions to sea-faring and the Portuguese Discoveries, as well as to medicine and economics.

Take some time and visit the remains of the old neighbourhoods in which they lived. Street names and architectural features sometimes give clues to the style of Jewish houses, with two doors on the ground floor: a wide one for trade and a narrower one that would give access to the living quarters on the upper floor.

*"Shaaré Tikvá"  
 Synagogue, Lisbon*



It is also possible to see inscriptions related to Hebrew worship at the right-hand side of the door jamb. Many of them now show a cross, which symbolises the Christianisation of a former Jewish house.

It is important to recall that the Jews also spread Portuguese culture and language in their Diaspora. And during World War II, Portugal took in thousands of Jews fleeing from Nazi persecution.

The Jewish community has legally existed in Portugal since 1912.

The places and documents referred to in this leaflet are organised geographically from north to south of continental Portugal, and are also intended as an invitation to visit, and a contribution to the enrichment of the visitor whatever the intent or purpose of the visit.

## ★ OPORTO

In this city with its mercantile history, it is not difficult to locate the Jewish community that aided the development of the city and the region since the Middle Ages. The Monchique Jewry was in Rua do Monte dos Judeus, in Miragaia, where an inscription in Hebrew was found from the synagogue built between 1380 and 1386 (today it is in the Archaeological Museum of Carmo in Lisbon). The New Jewish Quarter of Olival was around the church of Nossa Sra. da Vitória, between S. Bento Monastery and Rua de Belmonte. One of its gates was at the entrance of Rua de S. Bento da Vitória and the other at the end of the Escadas da Vitória, or “Escadas da Esnoga” (a corruption of synagogue), which the street sign still shows. A Latin inscription in S. Bento Church proves that a Jewry once existed here.

Finally, in 1938, the **“Mekor Haim” Synagogue** (Fountain of Life) or Kadoorie, was inaugurated at 340 Rua Guerra Junqueiro.

*“Mekor Haim”  
Synagogue, Oporto*





### ★ LAMEGO

From the 15<sup>th</sup> century on, **Lamego** had two Jewries: the old Jewry near the Porta do Sol and the new Jewry next to the Church of Santa Maria de Almacave. They occupied Rua Nova, Rua da Seara, Rua da Cruz and Rua da Fonte Velha, amongst others. In Rua Nova, the inscription on the right-hand side of the pointed arch doorway indicates that it could have been a synagogue, despite the present day Christian symbols.

### ★ FREIXO DE ESPADA À CINTA

During the Middle Ages, like many places along the border whose population soared after 1492 when the Jews were expelled from neighbouring kingdoms, this town sheltered an important New Christian community. Many houses located in the historical centre with inscriptions by the door belonged to Jews who left to discover the world in the caravels of the Portuguese Discoveries.

### ★ VILA NOVA DE FOZ CÔA

Here, there was a Jewish quarter in the Castle district as well as the chapel of Santa Quitéria, which may have been the location of the synagogue. Also, in Freixo de Numão, a nearby village, the “Jewish House” bears marks attributed to the presence of Jews. But the cases filed by the Inquisition against Jews between 1541 and 1763 are the greatest evidence of their presence in these places. During the Napoleonic wars there were several attacks on the New Christians of Vila Nova de Foz Côa who, it was claimed, were allied to the invaders since, with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen in France, many Jews from this region who emigrated there had obtained equal rights for their people.

### ★ PENEDONO

The existence of Jews in Penedono since at least 1569 is proven by inquisition records and by the cross-shaped marks on the door jambs.

### ★ FORNOS DE ALGODRES

The characteristic cruciform can also be found in large numbers in Fornos de Algodres, particularly in Rua da Torre and Rua de S. Salvador, where there is also the chapel of S. Salvador, with its square layout, the possible location of the old synagogue.

### ★ TRANCOSO

Trancoso still preserves the walls and doors of the mediaeval castle. Many Jews coming from Aragon and Castile established themselves here from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Jewry was located in Corredoura, in Rua da Alegria, Rua dos Cavaleiros and Rua da Estrela, where it is possible to see about 300 cross signs on the façades and doors. At number 5 Praça D. Dinis, a parchment was found with the prayer of “Shema Yisrael”. Symbols on the façade of the Casa do Gato Preto (Black Cat’s House) , in Rua Frei João de Lucena, are

interpreted as the Lion of Judah and the Gates of Jerusalem. The Poço do Mestre (The Master’s Well) would most likely be the source that supported the “mikveh”, the sacred purification bath.

Nearby is the **Isaac Cardoso Jewish Interpretation Centre**, named after a Jewish doctor born here in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is a modern space of knowledge about the Hebrew presence in both Trancoso and the surrounding region. It houses the **Beit Mayim Hayim Synagogue** which in turn represents a Sephardi Synagogue.

*Jewry Street,  
Belmonte*







### ★ VISEU

The first evidence of a Jewish presence in **Viseu** dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. There was an old and a new Jewish Quarter near the Cathedral, which occupied the present day Rua da Senhora da Boa Morte, Rua Augusto Hilário, Rua Nossa Senhora da Piedade (New Jewry) and other neighbouring streets. In 1468, King Afonso V forced all Jews to close all doors and windows that communicated with Christian houses, a symptom of the controversies, common everywhere, among communities of different creeds.

<  
*“Shaaré Tikvá”  
 Synagogue, Lisbon*

>  
*Gate outside the  
 “Bet Eliahu” Synagogue,  
 Belmonte*

### ★ GUARDA

The old Jewish quarter near the ancient fortress wall in **Guarda** still exists. It was already known in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, located close to the Porta d’El Rei (King’s Gate), with houses for trading on the ground floor and living quarters on the upper floor. The new Jewry was located near the Church of S. Vicente, where Christians complained about the proximity to the Jews. Crosses can be seen on the thresholds of houses in many streets.

At 15 Rua de Dom Sancho, the carving on the “Casa do Barbadão” is visible. According to legend, this illustrious Jew from the 14<sup>th</sup> century vowed never to shave again as penance for the illicit love affair between his daughter, Inês Peres, and King João I. She gave birth to D. Afonso, who later married the daughter of Nuno Álvares Pereira - who as the Commander of the Portuguese armies had a decisive role in maintaining the country’s independence in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century – thus starting the House of Bragança, later to become the Portuguese Royal House, of which he became the first Duke.

### ★ BELMONTE

Belmonte was the main centre for the country’s community of marrano (New-Christian) Jews. By secretly preserving their religious worship, their faith and their customs, they survived from the Edict of Expulsion of the Jews in 1496 to the present day.

Officially recognised in 1989, seven years later the Belmonte Jewish community inaugurated the **“Beit Eliahu” Synagogue** (House of Elijah) located at Rua Fonte da Rosa and appointed a rabbi. In 2001 the Jewish cemetery was built, and the **Jewish Museum** opened its doors in 2005. This tells the Sephardi story in Portugal, especially about the opposition of the *marrano* Jews of Belmonte.

A tombstone found in Belmonte proves that a synagogue had already existed here in 1297. The Jewry was made up of the present day Rua Fonte Rosa and Rua Direita, just outside the fortress walls, where crosses etched in stone on the door jambs of the houses can still be seen.



## ★ SABUGAL

**Sabugal** had one of Portugal's oldest Jewish quarters. On some doors near the castle, there are countless marks of crosses and other symbols, and in two houses, two Jewish altars were found. They are known as “Hekhál” (Aron ha Kodesh) or “closet of the law” whose purpose was to protect the Torah, the book of the law or the sacred book of the Jews. Because of their location, it is believed that their purpose was to allow Hebrew worship after it was forbidden. In two nearby villages, **Vila do Touro** and **Vilar Maior**, the same type of inscriptions can be seen on the façade of the houses. There was probably also a synagogue here as the Hekhál was preserved as well as the separate entrances for men and women.

## ★ PENAMACOR

Markings carved into the stone are still visible in some streets, such as Rua de S. Pedro, Rua de D. Sancho I and Rua de Carros, where the Jewry is believed to have been. The architectural characteristic of the houses (trade and

living areas on separate floors) is further evidence of the Jewish presence in the historical centre of the village. Ribeiro Sanches (1699-1783), a well-known doctor and intellectual Jew, was born in Penamacor. He was a true Man of the Enlightenment and attained great prestige in the Netherlands and Russia, where he became court physician.

## ★ COIMBRA

There were three Jewries in **Coimbra**: Santiago, Santa Justa and Pedreira. The oldest, the Santiago Jewry or the Old Jewry, was located in Rua Corpo de Deus, where the Synagogue was situated. The Santa Justa Jewry or the New Jewry occupied the present day Rua Direita and Rua Nova; while the Fonte Nova or Fonte dos Judeus (New Fountain or Jews Fountain), so called because of the neighbourhood in which it was built in 1725, was in Rua Olímpio Nicolau Fernandes.

In the famous Joanina Library, there are many important studies by the great mathematicians Pedro Nunes (inventor

of the nonius) and André de Avelar, both New Christians who taught at Coimbra University in the 16th and 17th centuries respectively. This library also has an ancient Hebrew Bible, a manuscript in parchment from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, known as the Abravanel Bible.

The Court of the Inquisition operated from the Pátio da Inquisição (Inquisition Square), which is now home to the Visual Arts Centre. The *autos de fé* took place in present day Praça 8 de Maio and Praça do Comércio.

## ★ LEIRIA

The Jewish presence is documented since the 13<sup>th</sup> century and it is known that in the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Jewish quarter stretched from the current Rua Afonso Henriques to Praça S. Martinho and Largo da Sé. Rua da Judiaria was what is now Rua da Misericórdia. It was in Leiria, in 1496, that Samuel d’Ortas printed the *Almanach Perpetuum* by Abraham Zacuto, an important treatise on astronomy kept in the National Library in Lisbon.



Carving on a doorway, Guarda





## ★ TOMAR

The **Abraham Zacuto Portuguese-Jewish Museum** is at 73 Rua Dr. Joaquim Jacinto, in the old Rua da Judiaria. Its collection includes a funeral stele from Faro, alluding to the death, in 1315, of Rab Joseph, a Jew from Tomar, as well as the engraved stone that marks the establishment of the Great Synagogue of Lisbon in 1307.

The Museum occupies the Synagogue that was ordered to be built between 1430 and 1460 by Henry the Navigator. It is the only remaining 15<sup>th</sup> century synagogue in Portugal. After the Edict of Expulsion of the Jews in 1496, the building served other functions until 1923 when Samuel Schwarz, a Polish Jew, restored it and donated it to the Portuguese State in order to establish the Museum. Later archaeological excavations discovered the “mikveh”, the sacred purification bath.

*Abraham Zacuto  
Portuguese-Hebrew  
Museum, Tomar*

## ★ CASTELO BRANCO

The limits and location of the mediaeval Jewry gate were recently discovered in the city. Adjacent to the castle, it occupied Rua d'Ega, Rua dos Oleiros, Rua do Sobreiro, among others, and it followed along the city wall to Jardim do Paço. The typical Jewish architecture and the inscriptions on the thresholds are still visible in these streets that carry the names of their inhabitants' professions.

**Castelo Branco** was the birthplace in 1511 of the Jew João Rodrigues, also known as Amato Lusitano, who later became one of the 16<sup>th</sup> century's most notable doctors. He had to flee from the Inquisition and died in Thessaloniki in 1568.

## ★ CASTELO DE VIDE

The narrow streets around the castle were occupied by a large Jewish community. This is today one of the most visited in the whole town. The Jewish Quarter occupied the eastern slope of the castle and came all the way down from the Porta da Vila (Town Gate) to the Fonte da Vila

(Fountain). It extended from the market square and Rua do Mercado to Rua Nova and other streets whose names reflect its heritage. The building believed to have been the synagogue is at the corner of Rua da Judiaria and Rua da Fonte. A present day museum, it contains the worship room, where the Tabernacle was located, the designated room for women and, on the lower floor, there are three silos dug into the ground to store cereal. Many of the typical Jewish buildings have doors with pointed archways with the alcove for the mezuzah (scroll with Biblical texts, which in the Jewish religion was placed on the right-hand side of the door jamb). This is the case with the door to the upper storey leading to the school, and there are also many other doors with symbols connected to various professions.

Garcia da Orta was born of Jewish descent in Castelo de Vide in 1501. He was the author of “Colloquium of the Simple and Drugs of India”, an important book on medicine and botany.

*Museum-Synagogue,  
Castelo de Vide*





### ★ TORRES VEDRAS

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this was home to the most important Jewish community to settle northwest of the capital. During the reign of King Dinis, the Jewry occupied the present day Rua dos Celeiros de Santa Maria (formerly Rua da Judiaria), in the mediaeval quarter just outside the castle. The two Chief Rabbis of King Dinis, Judah Guedelha and his son Guedelha ben Judah, were both born in Torres Vedras. The community grew significantly in 1469. It was dedicated to trade and had a surgeon and 21 craftsmen or artisans. Local documents with records of the amount of tithe requested from the Jews because of their high business profits prove that it was a very prosperous community.

### ★ ALENQUER

The local street names are evidence of the existence of Jews during the Middle Ages in **Alenquer**. Rua da Judiaria, Travessa da Judiaria and Beco da Judiaria still exist. Also, the Alenquer Jews paid high taxes due to their economic power.

Their professions were common to other Jewish communities: artisans, tailors, blacksmiths, cobblers, etc. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the present day Real Fábrica do Papel (paper factory) in the Adro dos Judeus near the Church of Santa Maria da Várzea used to be a Jewish Cemetery.

Although not a Jew, Damião de Góis, a great Portuguese scholar born in Alenquer, was persecuted by the Inquisition. He died in 1574, and his tomb is still in the Church of S. Pedro.

### ★ LISBON

The **“Shaaré Tikvá Synagogue”** (Doors of Hope) was inaugurated in Lisbon in 1904. Designed by Ventura Terra, it is at 59 Rua Alexandre Herculano.

From 1942, the World War II Jewish refugees who sought exile in Lisbon were made welcome in 16 Rua do Monte Olivete.

It is known that until 1496 there were three Jewish Quarters in Lisbon: the Great or Old Jewry, in Rua de S. Nicolau and Rua da Madalena, with a synagogue in Rua dos Fanqueiros; the Small Jewry,

created in the reign of King Dinis, possibly in Rua do Comércio; and the Alfama Jewry, in the old Arabic quarter that still exists today. Rua da Judiaria still exists there. There was once a synagogue at 8 Beco das Barrelas, built between 1373 and 1374; and due to an engraved stone preserved in the Synagogue Museum in Tomar, it is known that a synagogue was built in the Great Jewry in 1307. A Jewish quarter also existed in Bairro Alto, which was granted to the Grand Rabbi Judas Navarro by King Dinis.

The Court of the Inquisition was in the Estaus Palace in Rossio, today the Dona Maria II Theatre. Next to it, in Largo de S. Domingos, is a plaque commemorating the Jewish Massacre of Lisbon in 1506, when over 2,000 Jews were burnt at the stake.

Some evidence of the Jewish presence in Portugal can be found in certain Lisbon Museums: the Monchique Stone, with a Hebrew inscription about the Monchique Jewry in Porto, is in the Archaeological Museum in Largo do Carmo; the City Museum has a collection of engravings

referring to the Inquisition and the *autos de fé* practised up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century; in the National Museum of Ancient Art there is a painting by the painter Grão Vasco, which portrays a 16<sup>th</sup> century Jew.

Abraham Zacuto was not only a rabbi but also one of the most renowned astronomers and mathematicians of his time. Expelled from Castille, he served in the court of King João II, as had his disciple, the doctor José Vizinho. There is a copy in the National Library of Abraham Zacuto's *Almanach Perpetuum* (printed in Leiria in 1496 and translated from Hebrew to Latin by José Vizinho or Vecinho). This is an astronomical work which had great importance for the Portuguese maritime voyages, especially those that were to discover India and Brazil.

A Jewry also existed in the beautiful village of Sintra, near Lisbon, close to the Palácio da Vila (Royal Palace), evidence of which still is in Beco da Judiaria, which still exists today.

“Shaaré Tikvá”  
Synagogue, Lisbon







### ★ ELVAS

This border town had two Jewish quarters at least since 1386: the Old Jewry, outside the Alcazaba, occupying Rua Nova (or Alcamim), Rua da Porta de Olivenza and Rua da Porta de Évora; and the New Jewry, in the area around Praça Nova (now Praça da República), Rua da Feira and Rua Carreira dos Cavalos. But we also have love songs by Vidal, a Jew from Elvas, dating from 1320 to 1340, which are now in the National Library. In 1438, Master Rabbi Abraham was appointed by the king to be responsible for the city's Jews.

There was also a Jewish Quarter in nearby Vila Boim.

*Jewry Street, Évora*

### ★ ÉVORA

Until the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Évora was headquarters to one of the largest Jewish communities in Portugal. The Jewry was located inside the fortress walls, between the Raimundo and Alconchel Gates. It had two synagogues, a “mikveh” (place for ritual baths), a hospital and a leper colony. Some Jewish signs are still visible in the door jambs of houses in Rua do Raimundo, Rua dos Mercadores and Rua da Moeda. In the latter (formerly Rua do Tinhoso) there was a synagogue.

The Arc, the Table from the Court of the Inquisition, dating from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, and some Hebrew tombstones can be found in the Évora Museum. In front of the Museum, the coat of arms of the Inquisition can still be seen above the doors of the former Inquisition Court and Palace. The *autos da fé* took place in Praça do Giraldo.

Of the first four books printed in Portugal, there is a copy of Abraham Zacuto's *Almanach Perpetuum* (printed in Leiria in 1496) in Évora Library, as well as a copy of

the Évora Nautical Guide. The poet Diogo Pires (1517-1599) was a part of the Évora Jewish community.

### ★ FARO

The first book to be printed in Portugal was the Pentateuch, printed in Hebrew by the Jew Samuel Gacon, in Faro, in 1487. The influential Jewish community originating from Gibraltar and Morocco, who settled in Rua de Santo António in Faro in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, built two synagogues in 1830, and later a cemetery. The Cemetery is between Rua Leão Penedo and Estrada da Penha, and was restored in 1993. The entrance is through the **Isaac Bitton Museum**, which has an audio-visual presentation of a Wedding and a Bar Mitzvah (coming of age of a 13 year old boy) among other valuable objects.

The Manor House in Rua Filipe Alistão which currently houses the Colégio Algarve was formerly the residence of Abraham Amran, one of the Jews from this prosperous 19<sup>th</sup> century community.



*Coat of arms of the Inquisition, Évora*



FURTHER  
INFORMATION

Portuguese Network of Jewish Quarters:  
[www.redejudiariasportugal.com](http://www.redejudiariasportugal.com)

The Porto synagogue is open for tourist visits from  
Sunday to Friday, by prior arrangement.  
**Site:** [comunidade-israelita-porto.org](http://comunidade-israelita-porto.org)  
**Facebook:** [facebook.com/tourism.synagogue.porto](https://facebook.com/tourism.synagogue.porto)

Abraham Zacuto Portuguese-Hebrew  
Museum-Synagogue, in Tomar:  
[www.cm-tomar.pt](http://www.cm-tomar.pt)

Jewish Community of Lisbon:  
[www.cilisboa.org](http://www.cilisboa.org)

[www.visitportugal.com](http://www.visitportugal.com)

Castelo de Vide Museum-Synagogue:  
[www.castelodevide.pt/turismo/pt/](http://www.castelodevide.pt/turismo/pt/)

Aristides de Sousa Mendes Virtual Museum:  
<http://mvasm.sapo.pt>

Jewish Community of Algarve:  
[www.farojewishheritagecentre.org/](http://www.farojewishheritagecentre.org/)

Faro Isaac Bitton Museum:  
[www.cilisboa.org/tour\\_bitton.htm#museum](http://www.cilisboa.org/tour_bitton.htm#museum)

PHOTOS:  
AMATAR E ARQ. TURISMO DE PORTUGAL





