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**MORESHET SEPHARAD:  
THE SEPHARDI LEGACY**

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## Hebrew Script in Spain: Development, Offshoots and Vicissitudes

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### *The Findings*

The three modes of the type of Hebrew script that developed in the Iberian Peninsula, the square, the semi-cursive and the cursive, won a predominant and preferential position among the Hebrew scripts employed by Jews during and after the Middle Ages. This script was used not only by those who wrote in Hebrew characters in the Iberian Peninsula. It also was adopted by scribes and copyists in other regions under the influence of Spanish Jewry's culture, or under the political sway of the Spanish kingdoms, and was transferred to other areas around the Mediterranean basin by Spanish migrants prior to the Expulsion, and by the exiles after it. It also had a marked influence on the style of the script adopted in Hebrew printing presses everywhere. Its broad dissemination beyond the limits of the Iberian Peninsula, and the fact that it was the script most commonly employed, bears further testimony to the weight of Spanish Jewry's influence, its intellectual level and the degree to which it influenced other Jewish communities.

The extant examples of Hebrew script of Iberian origin are extremely sparse until the mid-11th century; they are more numerous, though still few in number from the mid-11th to the close of the 12th century; and they are very rich from the three centuries that preceded the Expulsion. From the pre-11th century period, a few carved and engraved tombstone inscriptions have come down to us.<sup>1</sup> Their

1 All the epigraphic inscriptions were collected by F. Cantera Burgos and J.M. Millás Vallicrosa, *Las Inscripciones hebraicas de España* (Madrid: 1956). Among the inscriptions found, only five predate the mid-11th century, two of them trilingual and very early, from the eastern coast of the peninsula: one, found in Tarragona, is short and engraved on an ossuary; the other is a tombstone inscription from Tortosa. Both of them were the object of a detailed study by H. Beinart, "Shetei Ketovot 'Shalom al Yisrael' mi-Sefarad," *Eretz Yisrael* 8 (1967): 298-304. Beinart dates the first to not later than the 2nd century C.E. and the second to not later than the 3rd-4th century. As against this, J.B. Frey and the palaeographer S.A. Birnbaum dated the Tortosa inscription to the 6th century. See J.B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*, 2 vols. (Città del Vaticano: 1936-1952), vol. 1, no. 661, p. 474; S.A. Birnbaum, *The Hebrew Scripts*, 2 vols. (Leiden and London: 1954-1970), vol. 1, no. 240, cols. 260-261. From León a tombstone inscription from 1026 has survived (See Cantera Burgos and Millás Vallicrosa, *Las Inscripciones hebraicas de España*, no. 1), as have the shard of a tombstone in Barcelona, apparently dating to 1043-1044 (*ibid.*, no. 106) and a tombstone from Calatayud in

