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A View from 14th Century Toledo: Rabbi Asher, a German Émigré, Transforms the Legal Culture in Castile

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Abstract: In this study, I explore the way in which a German émigré rose to the status of a cultural hero in Castile, Spain, and how his work of law became one of the three “pillars” of Jewish law. A survey of the Jewish legal landscape in medieval Spain during the fourteenth century reveals a shift in the status of one of the centers of Talmudic and legal (*halakha*) studies there as compared with the previous century. The fortune of the center in Toledo changed dramatically, and this change is traceable to the impact of one German émigré, Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel. Many scholars have examined Asher’s life and work. However, none have seriously analyzed the change he brought to the legal culture in Castile or examined the mechanism of how this occurred. This study describes Asher’s impact and attempts to expose the processes that brought about this transformation.

Keywords: Jewish law; Toledo; medieval Spain; Joseph Karo; Maimonides; fourteenth century; codification; émigré; Ashkenaz



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1. Introduction

A survey of the intellectual landscape of Jews in medieval Spain, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, reveals a clear shift in the status of one of the centers of Talmudic and legal (*halakha*) studies there. This change is traceable to the impact of one German émigré, Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel (or Rosh), who settled in Toledo in the year 1305. In other words, this is an example of a broad cultural and societal shift interwoven with the personal fortunes of a learned immigrant, a scholar of Jewish law.

Though Asher was a very respected legal scholar in Germany, his lasting fame stems from the work he did in Castile (Emanuel 2021, p. 199). We learn this from the writings of the famed sixteenth-century legal scholar Joseph Karo, who describes Asher as one of the greatest legal authorities throughout the Jewish world. In his introduction to his legal commentary *Bet Yosef*, Joseph describes his own process of legal decision-making:

I concluded that since there are three pillars of adjudication (*amude ha-horaah*) on which the house of Israel relies when deciding the law, the Rif [Isaac Alfasi], Maimonides, and the Rosh [Asher], I said in my heart that when two of them agree to one opinion, we will decide according to them, besides certain cases where all or most of the Sages of Israel disagree, and therefore the custom has spread to the contrary.

There were numerous other important legal scholars active throughout the Middle Ages who wrote works of law, but it was only the work of Asher, together with that of the revered Moses Maimonides (active in the twelfth century) and the earlier Isaac Alfasi (active in the eleventh century), that was elevated to the realm of a “pillar of the law” upon whom the house of Israel relied (Fram 2022, pp. 53–63). These two themes, the personal and the societal, will be at the heart of this study.

Many historians have written about Asher’s life and work, such as: Alfred Freimann (1918, 1920, 1986), Yitzchak (Fritz) Baer (1961, vol. 1, pp. 316–25), Menachem Elon (1994,

vol. 3, pp. 1226–29, 1251–53), David [Zafrani \(1980\)](#), Mark E. [Washofsky \(1987\)](#) and others. However, none have focused their attention upon the change he brought to the legal culture of Toledo nor examined the mechanism of how this change occurred. In this study, I will describe Asher's impact on Spanish legal culture and attempt to expose the processes that brought about this transformation. This exploration will also help us to better understand how one German émigré rose to the status of a cultural hero in Castile and how his work of law became one of the three "pillars" of Jewish law.

2. Learning Centers in Toledo in the 13th and 14th Centuries

2.1. *The Decline of Toledo as a Center of Legal Studies in the 13th Century*

During the High Middle Ages, there were two important centers of Jewish law in Christian Spain: one in Toledo, Castile, and the other in Aragon-Catalonia, specifically in Barcelona and Gerona. At the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century, the center in Toledo was by far the more prominent of the two, thanks to the important scholars Meir Abulafia ([Septimus 1982](#), pp. 21–25; [Ta-Shma 2004b](#), pp. 11–19) and Abraham ben Natan ([Septimus 1982](#), pp. 32–35); while in Aragon-Catalonia, no scholars of distinction in the realm of Jewish law were to be found. In fact, the budding scholars at that time in Catalonia, Nahmanides and Jonah Gerondi, traveled to Southern or Northern France for their advanced talmudic education ([Ta-Shma 2004b](#), pp. 19–21, 29–31). Somewhat later, circa 1220–1230, these two students established themselves as scholars of note and legal authorities, and opened study halls in Gerona (Nahmanides) and in Barcelona (Jonah).

These study halls in Catalonia, which became known over time as the "school of Nahmanides," continued to flourish into the fourteenth century. Its primary scholar in the second half of the thirteenth century was Solomon ben Abraham ibn Adret (Rashba), who studied under both Nahmanides and Jonah ([Ta-Shma 2004b](#), pp. 55–66). This school became the most dominant in the Iberian Peninsula, since, from the passing of Meir Abulafia (in 1244) until the beginning of the fourteenth century, there were hardly any distinguished legal scholars in Toledo. In fact, all important scholars found in Toledo at that time were those who came from Catalonia to strengthen the legal culture there. For example, Jonah Gerondi, mentioned above, migrated to Toledo towards the end of his life, sometime after Meir's death ([Galinsky 2005](#), p. 401), and died in 1266. Somewhat later (1286), Aharon ha-Levi, an important student of Nahmanides ([Ta-Shma 2004b](#), pp. 66–69), visited Toledo and taught there for a short time before returning to Barcelona ([Galinsky 2005](#), p. 402). Other lesser-known scholars who are mentioned as teachers and legal authorities during the latter part of the thirteenth century, such as Solomon Amiel and David ha-Kohen, were almost exclusively students of the great Catalan scholar Solomon ibn Adret of Barcelona ([Galinsky 2005](#), pp. 401–2, 418–19).

The above description is based on the writings of Isaac Israeli, who surveyed Toledo's legal culture in the year 1310 ([Galinsky 2005](#), pp. 418–19). He first describes Meir Abulafia's literary contribution, writing that "he authored a commentary on many tractates of the Talmud, delving into their interpretations and intricate discussions with great accuracy. He also authored many works on the Pentateuch. He died during Passover in the year 5004 (1244)". In the next passage, he turns his attention to the scholars that he himself knew firsthand or had heard about from older contemporaries, and describes three distinct stages:

During our lifetime, other great rabbinic figures came to Toledo, among them R. Jonah of Gerondi and R. Meir ha-Kohen of Narbonne. They, too, taught Torah and had many students. Both died in the month of Heshvan 5024 (1264).

After their demise, the great R. Aharon ha-Levi came to Toledo from Barcelona in the year 5046 (1286) but remained only a short time and returned home.

At that time, the sage R. Solomon ben Aderet (Rashba) lived in Barcelona. His disciple, R. Solomon b. R. Josef ben Amiel, taught Torah in Toledo and had many students and so too did R. David ha-Kohen. ([Galinsky 2005](#), pp. 418–19)

In the first two stages, which occurred in the second half of the thirteenth century, he mentions Jonah Gerondi and Meir ha-Kohen of Narbonne and then, somewhat later, Aharon ha-Levi. All of these were important and known scholars, but ones who apparently did not stay in Toledo for an extended period of time. He then mentions two less-distinguished scholars, Solomon Amiel and David ha-Kohen, who were active in the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth centuries, and with whom he was most familiar. Of all these scholars, only Meir may not have been from the schools of Catalonia.

So far, the picture seems clear. While at the beginning of the thirteenth century Toledo was the more prestigious and more prominent center of Jewish legal culture, for most of the thirteenth century, especially the second half, it took a backseat to the thriving learned legal culture that had developed in Catalonia. This downturn in the fortunes of Toledo could not have been easy for the proud Jewish community which was located in the political, cultural and economic center of Castile (Pilar León Tello 1979; Melechen 1999).

Before describing the changes that occurred during the fourteenth century, it is worthwhile considering the possible reasons for Toledo's decline as a center of Jewish learning and scholarship during the thirteenth century. One such reason, I believe, relates to the different Talmudic curricula of these two centers of learning at the time.

A mid-fourteenth-century source, Menahem ben Zerah, teaches us about the curriculum in Toledo from the late twelfth- through the thirteenth centuries. The central text for legal studies was a secondary work, a sort of abridged Talmud, authored by Isaac Alfasi (ben Zerah 1880, p. 6). Although the teacher who taught Alfasi's work was probably fluent in the Talmudic material, since the students learned from the secondary work, they emerged from their studies lacking close familiarity with the Talmud itself. According to Menahem, even during the time of Meir Abulafia, the great Talmudic scholar from Toledo who wrote his own works on the Talmud, the Talmud was not actually studied in the study-hall in Castile. Menahem described the state of legal studies during Meir's time, writing: "And during his day, and before that, they studied nothing in this land but the *Halakhot* of R. Alfasi" (ben Zerah 1880, p. 6). This practice was common among students of Jewish law in many Arab lands, and apparently began in late eleventh-century Andalusia, in the study hall of Alfasi himself (Ta-Shma 2004a, pp. 239–60). From the end of the eleventh century Toledo was part of Christian Spain, however, its Jewish community, during the twelfth- and thirteenth centuries, was still very much part of the Judeo-Arabic culture. In fact, its Talmudic study hall was founded by émigrés from Andalusia in the second half of the twelfth century (Septimus 1982, pp. 2, 10). It is therefore plausible that its Talmudic culture was similar, in this regard, to that in other Islamic lands.

The lack of exposure to the primary sources of the law presumably seriously handicapped the students' development. These schools could produce competent scholars who were knowledgeable, but not experts, in the law. The school graduates could capably serve as judges in monetary cases and as rabbinic leaders of their communities, but even the talented ones could not easily have become legal authorities, able to write learned legal responsa (or to use the Islamic equivalent, "*fatwa*"), or to be qualified to teach the next generation of students (Ta-Shma 2004a, pp. 239–60). For such specialized tasks, one needed a more direct and intimate understanding of Talmudic law.

In contrast to these study-halls, the situation in thirteenth-century Catalonia was different. To the best of our knowledge, both Nahmanides and Jonah taught the Talmud itself in their schools. This emerges clearly from the evidence of the Talmudic literature produced by this school, from the thirteenth century until the second decade of the fourteenth century. The scholars associated with this school wrote their works exclusively as novella (*hiddushim*) to the Talmud (Ta-Shma 2004b, pp. 19–74). They did not ignore Alfasi's abridgment, as his standing as a legal authority in Spain reigned supreme, but it was the Talmud, and not his work, that served as the primary text of the curriculum. In this, they followed the lead of their Northern French teachers, as well as some of those from Southern France, where the Talmud was also being studied. It is noteworthy that the same source that informs us about the curriculum in the school of Toledo also emphasizes that when Jonah moved to

Toledo, he taught Alfasi's abridged version and not the Talmud (ben Zerah 1880, p. 6). It is from this period in his life that collections of his teachings were penned by his students to various tractates of Alfasi's work (Ta-Shma 2004b, pp. 27–29; 2004a, pp. 125–30).

2.2. The Rise of Toledo as a Center of Legal Studies in the 14th Century

During the first half of the fourteenth century, we find evidence of positive change in the fortunes of the Jewish community of Toledo as it gained the prestige in the area of Talmudic law that it previously lacked. This was no longer a second-rate center of learning, a mere satellite within the orbit of Catalan legal teachings. It had become the primary center, attracting students from afar. This center boasted legal authorities that influenced the practice of the law both near and far, whether through the writing of legal responsa or through the composition of widely disseminated legal codes. In fact, between 1310 and 1350 it seems that Toledo and its environs had actually replaced Catalonia as the primary center of learning. But how did this occur? What brought about this shift in the Toledo's fortune? There seems to be three reasons for the change. First, an émigré scholar of stature, who was a recognized legal authority in Germany, settled in Toledo; second, the educational reform that he implemented in the Talmudic study hall there; and third, the works of law that he, and later his students, produced.

Asher ben Jehiel hailed from the Rhineland in Germany, and was the premier student of the famous Meir of Rothenburg (Freimann 1986, pp. 22–26). When his teacher was imprisoned during the reign of Emperor Rudolph I in 1286, Asher became the most prominent rabbinic figure in Germany. He left Germany at the beginning of the fourteenth century, sojourned for a time in Savoy, and then stayed for a somewhat longer time in Southern France. Asher's motivation for leaving Germany, according to his son Judah, was directly linked to his teacher's imprisonment. In Judah's words:

The cause of my father departure from Germany was due to the Emperor's (*adon ha-moshel*) imprisonment of R. Meir of Rothenburg of blessed memory. . . The Ruler (*ha-moshel*) refused to accept as guarantor any other person than my lord, my father, of blessed memory. . . But before the collection of funds from the various communities were completed, R. Meir died in prison. The Ruler unjustly argued (literally, "slandered") my father, that since R. Meir died in prison before his release, he therefore was responsible as guarantor [for ensuring the payment]. . . My father left the city (meaning, the immediate area of the Ruler's jurisdiction) and then left Germany altogether due to of his fear of the authorities, and settled in the great city of Toledo (Abrahams 1926, vol. 2, p. 167.)

Asher arrived in Toledo with his family in 1305 after the elders of the community invited him to serve as their legal authority to resolve difficult legal cases and teacher of the law for the advanced students studying Jewish law (Abrahams 1926, vol. 2, p. 167). There he became the central legal scholar who had a direct personal impact upon the students in Toledo, but also had a broader influence due to his reputation and to the numerous responsa he authored. Quite quickly, his influence spread to distant communities throughout Spain, Portugal, and beyond (Freimann 1986, pp. 36–370). He was even asked by the Queen of Castile to decide a complex case within the Jewish community (Baer 1961, vol. 1, p. 317). Over time, due to his activity, Toledo's standing as a center of Jewish law was completely transformed.

A text written five years after Asher's arrival to Toledo, reveals some of the excitement that his arrival generated amongst the learned intelligentsia of the Jewish community. Isaac Israeli, cited earlier as describing the state of legal studies in Toledo during the second half the thirteenth century, then turned his attention to the change that occurred in the early fourteenth century. He writes:

And it was in the year five thousand and sixty five from creation (1305) and God aroused the spirit of R. Asher the son of the honorable Rabbi Jehiel to leave Ashkenaz, the land of his birth, and come here, he, his sons and his family, to Toledo. [And this] in order to enlighten our eyes and take us out of the darkness of

stupidity and naïveté [and bring us] into the light of wisdom and understanding. God should help him so that we shall learn from him and become wise in the principles of Torah, its secrets and its interpretations, and all of its generalities and specifics. (Galinsky 2005, pp. 418–19)

When Isaac describes the Ashkenazi émigré's ability "to enlighten," and his references to the "secrets of the Torah," he was not referring to the areas of philosophy or kabbalah (for in these Asher was not an expert) but rather to his expertise in deciding and teaching the law. Which brings us to the educational revolution that Asher implemented in the school of Toledo.

As described earlier, throughout the thirteenth century the curriculum in the study hall of Toledo was limited to the teaching of a secondary abridged legal text, without immersion in the Talmudic source of the law itself. As an émigré from Germany and a student of the teachings of the French school of Tosafot (Galinsky 2005, pp. 389–91, 396–400; Emanuel 2021, pp. 174–75), this must have shocked Asher, who came from a religious culture that focused almost exclusively upon Talmud study. At this time the works of Maimonides and of Alfasi were known in Ashkenaz, nevertheless they were not the focus of serious scholarly study. Although it should be noted that Asher's teacher Meir of Rothenburg was more receptive than other Franco-German scholars in his use of these Spanish works (Soloveitchik 2013, pp. 37–38).

Asher devoted much energy to rectifying the situation that he found in Toledo. In addition to offering the students an opportunity to study Talmud, he also edited his own version of the standard Tosafot (a dialectical gloss) that was studied by all advanced students in France and Germany (Soloveitchik 2013, pp. 3–10; Kanarfogel 2013, pp. 1–110). He may have not removed Alfasi's *halakhot* from the curriculum, but added and emphasized the importance of learning both the Talmud itself and its dialectical learned gloss (Galinsky 2005, pp. 396–400).

Menachem ben Zerah, the mid-fourteenth-century source cited earlier, highlights this aspect of Asher's activity. He writes: "It was through his [R. Asher's] efforts that study of the Talmud was strengthened (ben Zerah 1880, p. 6)". And, more explicitly:

And in particular in all the land of Sefarad [i.e., Andalusia and Castile], those who studied Talmud were few in number, from times past (*mikedem*) until God awakened the spirit of R. Asher, who came from Ashkenaz. And [here] he studied and taught and raised many students, he and his sons after him. (ben Zerah 1880, p. 82)

We also can learn from a personal letter, written by his son Jacob, that Asher successfully circulated his learned gloss. Jacob wrote to a close acquaintance in Germany, who was contemplating emigrating to Toledo, that he should bring with him all types of learned works, but that he should not bother to bring copies of the Tosafot studied in Germany, since only his father's edition of these texts was studied in Toledo. In his own words: "But *Tosafot* you do not have to bring, because we only study the commentary (*shita*) [of] my father (Assaf and Glick 2001, vol. 2, p. 137)". Another son, Judah, emphasized his father's teaching of the Talmud and the spread of his learned commentaries throughout Castile in his ethical will, as we shall see below.

In addition to preparing his own edition of the Tosafot gloss on the Talmud, Asher penned another project related to the curriculum in the schools of Castile that had a strong impact beyond the schools, and even outside of Spain. The second project was his *psakim*, his legal decisions or rulings. This work was patterned after Isaac Alfasi's classic abridged Talmud which was studied in the study halls. However, Asher's was far more expansive. He began each topic by citing Alfasi, but then almost always raised objections and other opinions based upon his or other scholars' understanding, mainly, but not exclusively, from the French school (Elon 1994, vol. 3, pp. 1251–53; Washofsky 1987). Oddly enough, despite being from Germany, he utilizes the teachings of German legal scholars far less than the French ones. It seems that he intended to either supplement Alfasi or to replace his work (Galinsky 2005, pp. 404–9). It should be noted that his level of engagement with Alfasi's text

is significantly greater than the Ashkenazi glosses penned by his German contemporaries to Alfasi's and Maimonides' works. It was Asher's work, even more than his *Tosafot*, that turned Toledo into an important center of Jewish law. With all its intellectual firepower, Catalonia did not produce a work equal in its scope and ambition during a period that spanned over a hundred years.

Finally, a word about Asher's *responsa*. Over a thousand of them have been preserved, mostly from his Spanish period, some from his German period (Ta-Shma 2000, pp. 179–82). This reflects both his influence in Spain and that he had fulfilled the other role he was hired for—being the supreme legal authority for the city of Toledo and the broader area of Castile. Asher himself did not circulate his *responsa* in book form during his lifetime, but his students did so after his death, although a small collection may have already circulated during his lifetime (Galinsky 2011, pp. 195–207). The large posthumous collection of *responsa* added another work to his name and contributed further to his influence.

Asher's son Judah nicely captures his father's overall influence throughout Castile, Spain. After his father's death, he wrote:

And it was from Lord [that my father left Germany], in order that he should instruct many students in the lands of Spain. "He executed the righteousness of the Lord, and His ordinances with Israel," for in these lands there were no accurate commentaries [on the Talmud]. He also wrote commentaries and legal rulings on the Talmud and wherever his commentaries, *responsa*, and rulings reached—the statutes of the Lord and His laws became known. (Abrahams 1926, vol. 2, p. 190)

Overall, it seems that Toledo's communal leaders' decision to appoint a German émigré as their "great Rabbi" was a success. Asher became the supreme legal authority who decided difficult legal questions and the scholar who headed the city's study hall. He does not seem to have functioned as a sitting judge, nor was he active as a communal rabbi (Galinsky 2011, pp. 177–80; Galinsky 2005, pp. 409–11). In a short time, Asher established himself as a leading legal authority and charismatic teacher. During his fifteen years (or so) in Toledo, he had completely transformed the legal culture of the city. Asher was able to restore the lost pride of a city that had become irrelevant in the important areas of Jewish law and its study. After his death (Emanuel 2021, pp. 172–201), the communal elders appointed his son, Judah, to replace him, a strong indication that they appreciated Asher's accomplishments.

In addition to all of the great scholar's activities, there were at least two other important factors that led to Asher's enduring influence in Castile. Since they were also spearheaded by émigrés, they are also worth considering. One was the appointment of Asher's son as his replacement, and the other was the composition of works of law by Asher's students that made his work accessible to a wider readership.

3. The Impact of the Second Generation—Asher's Sons and Students

The first factor that led to Asher's enduring influence in Castile was the appointment of his son Judah as his successor (Emanuel 2021, pp. 154–71). This appointment ensured the continuity of teaching and deciding the law in Asher's spirit. Judah, in contrast to two of his brothers, was not a prolific author, which he attributed to his sickly childhood and his impaired eyesight, but he knew his father's teachings thoroughly (Abrahams 1926, vol. 2, pp. 165–66; Galinsky 2011, pp. 187–90). Judah filled his father positions as both the legal authority and the head of the local Talmudic study hall for close to thirty years, which ensured his influence over the teaching of the law and its legal traditions. This factor of long-term stability is usually overlooked by scholars, but it contributed greatly to solidifying Asher's standing in Toledo, and throughout Castile as well. The rabbinic judges, local rabbis, and scholars who studied in Toledo's study hall later went out into the world and spread Asher's teachings even further (Galinsky 2011, pp. 177–86).

The second essential factor that led to Asher's influence throughout Castile and beyond were the codes of law written by his students. Previously, the various religious

functionaries in Castile who needed access to the law, including rabbis, judges, prayer leaders, and preachers, relied on two Andalusian works of Jewish law: Alfasi's legal summary from the mid-eleventh century (Elon 1994, vol. 3, pp. 1167–72) and Maimonides' well-organized code of law, the *Mishneh Torah*, which was composed in Egypt at the end of the twelfth century (Elon 1994, vol. 3, pp. 1184–215). These two works, and especially the latter, served as the primary sources of the law in Castile (Galinsky 2005, pp. 404–5). Despite all Asher's efforts to transform the Jewish legal culture in Castile, he could not have completely succeeded in doing so without offering the judges, rabbis, and others who consulted the law an alternate legal code, in line with his legal decisions. It is quite possible that Asher purposely did not compose such a work since, like other German scholars, he was ideologically opposed to the writing of accessible legal handbooks (Elon 1994, vol. 3, pp. 1226–29; Galinsky 2006, pp. 9–12; 2015, pp. 82–85). This task was left to the second generation of émigrés, Asher's students—his son Jacob and his student Jeruham.

Jacob ben Asher and Jeruham ben Meshullam understood, seemingly independent of each other, that Asher's legal revolution required an accessible law code, one that would allow both the judges in monetary issues and the rabbis in ritual ones to easily find the specific law they needed to decide the law. Each of these students composed comprehensive works, based upon Asher's teachings, that summarized practical Jewish law in its entirety, including topics of both Jewish monetary or civil law as well as ritual or religious law, and organized them in a fashion that made their content accessible. They framed their work as a response to the then-current use of Maimonides' work, with Jeruham stating so quite explicitly (Galinsky 2008, pp. 258–60) and Jacob somewhat more subtly (Galinsky 2006, pp. 16–18).

Asher's son Jacob divided his extensive book of practical Jewish law into four volumes (Elon 1994, vol. 3, pp. 1277–302). The first is *Orah Hayim* ("a way of life"), which deals with the laws pertinent to every Jew relating to the days, weeks, and months of the year. This volume includes the laws of prayers and blessings, and of Shabbat and the holidays. The second volume, *Yoreh Deah* ("instructing knowledge"), is primarily devoted to the laws pertaining to eating, drinking, and sexual relations (family purity laws). It also includes the laws of taking interest and those relating to idolatry and foreign worship, and was written primarily for rabbis. The third volume, *Even ha-Ezer* ("stone of support"), treats all laws (other than purity laws) that relate to marriage. In contrast to all the other volumes, this one did not have a clear target audience. Some of the laws, such as conducting a marriage ceremony, were relevant for the rabbi or anyone who wished to conduct it. However, this volume also includes laws that are more specialized, dealing with the monetary arrangements between the spouses during the marriage and after a divorce, that seem more relevant for a judge. The fourth and final volume, *Hoshen Mishpat* ("breastplate of justice"), treats all aspects of Jewish monetary and civil law, and was meant for the judge (Elon 1994, vol. 3, pp. 1289–92). The work's original structure, its division into four areas of law, had a lasting impact on the way Jews categorized and thought about the law, even long after the work itself was no longer used in deciding the law (Elon 1994, vol. 3, p. 1304).

Jeruham the son of Meshullam was exiled from Southern France in 1306. In contrast to Jacob, the first book he wrote was *Mesharim* (Justice), which surveys all the laws of monetary and civil law, and was designed for use by judges. This book included the monetary aspects related to marriage and divorce as well. His second work, *Toledot Adam ve-Hava* ("The Offspring of Adam and Eve") was divided into two parts. The first, and larger part ("Adam"), treats the majority of religious and ritual laws from birth onwards, while the second part ("Eve") deals mainly with laws relating to marriage and relations between man and his wife (Elon 1994, vol. 3, pp. 1269–72). Jeruham's primary contributions to the history of Jewish law, according to his own retelling, was from its table of contents, its organization and its references to Talmudic sources. Unlike earlier codes and compilations, this one attempted to be a user-friendly reference work. As he explains in his introduction to *Meisharim*, the way in which the work was organized enabled the reader to locate any individual law without studying the entire book, or even a section of laws. To facilitate the

use of his legal compilation, R. Jeruham prefaced his book with a dual table of contents (Elon 1994, vol. 3, pp. 1270–72; Galinsky and Robinson 2007, pp. 490–94). He also made an effort to refer the reader to the talmudic sources of the law, something that Maimonides purposely did not do and even Jacob, the Ashkenazi scholar, did not implement in a systematic fashion.

The contribution of these two scholars laid the groundwork that transformed the way that Jewish law was applied in Castile, offering those who had studied with Asher, or with his son Judah, a practical alternative to the Maimonidean code. Their work created a new paradigm that was influenced by Maimonidean teachings and by other scholars, but primarily by those of the Ashkenazi émigré Asher. It is likely that the burgeoning codification activity in Castile, initiated during the thirteenth century by Alfonso X and continued in the fourteenth by Alfonso XI, which took place in Toledo (Craddock 1990; O’Callaghan 2019, pp. 1–22), played a role in the creation of new Jewish codes of law and its reception within the Jewish community. This suggestion is especially appealing when considering that many of the influential members of the community were enmeshed within the King’s court.

In short, the combined efforts of the second-generation scholars, Judah in his role as legal authority and teacher of law and Jacob and Jeruham in their roles as codifiers, solidified Asher’s legal legacy in Toledo, in Castile, and beyond. Their work had a lasting impact on Spanish legal culture even after the expulsion from Spain in 1492 (Galinsky 2004, pp. 25–45; Galinsky and Robinson 2007, pp. 494–95).

4. Conclusions

In this fourteenth-century view from Toledo we have seen, through the multipronged efforts of one very talented émigré as well as those of his students, how the legal culture of one city was completely transformed. Toledo developed from a cultural backwater, a mere satellite of the Jewish learning centers in Aragon-Catalonia, into a leading center of Talmudic and legal knowledge. In addition, we have seen how an émigré who was forced to take flight from his hometown became a revered legal scholar in his new place of residence. His influence continued to grow over time, and he eventually came to be viewed, in Castile, as a scholar on par with the great ancients Alfasi and Maimonides. Joseph Karo, a native of Castile, concretized this legal reality by positing Asher’s legal teachings as one of the pillars of his codification project (Fram 2022, pp. 27, 61). This later development further solidified Asher’s reputation.

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