**Sefarad Journeys I**

**An introduction:**

Yesterday I spent the day with some friends. We saw a crowd gathered at the city gate and were told by a bystander that they had gathered to watch an astronomer tell fortunes. We pushed through the crowd and found at the centre a garrulous old man taking astronomical measurements with an astrolabe and offering his services, advertising himself in elaborate and eloquent speeches.

People were coming forward one by one to consult with him about their troubles in their work and their private lives, and to learn their fortunes and those of their children. Each received his answer and paid the astrologers fee.

I suggested to my new friends that we test his powers by agreeing on a question among ourselves: Whe4n will all the3 Jews be redeemed from their exile, and when will the Jewish kingdom be restored? When our turn came, we offered him a good fee if he could tell us both the question and the answer. The astrologer performed certain rites with sand and lifted his astrolabe. He seemed ready to reply, but instead of launching into the customary eloquence he sank into a profound and ominous silence. At last, he turned a furious face on us and exclaimed: “I swear by the Creator of the radiant light , the sun and the moon, and every constellation that rises and sets, that you are neither Muslims nor Christians, but members of a despised and lowly people! Could you be Jews?’

“Rightly spoken”, we replied. He launched into a harangue accusing us of asking about the end of time and history, of wishing for the downfall of the Islamic kingdom and of rebelling against the state.

The crowd became so enraged that they would have stoned us to death, but someone persuaded them to take us to the judge. The qadi was a sensible man who saw that we were not revolutionaries but just young people out on the town enjoying ourselves. He kept us in prison overnight until the crowd dispersed and, in the morning, sent us on our way. A narrow escape thanks God!”

Judah Al-harizi, b. Toledo 1165, d. 1225 Aleppo

**Text 1.**

To Moses We (God) gave the Scriptures and after him, We sent other apostles. We gave Jesus the son of Mary veritable signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Will you then scorn each apostle whose message does not suit your fancies, charging some with imposture and slaying others? They [the Jews] say, ‘Our hearts are sealed’. But Allah has cursed them for their unbelief. They have but little faith. And now that a book confirming their Scriptures has been revealed to them by Allah, they deny it, although they know it to be the truth and have long prayed for help against the unbelievers. May Allah’s curse be upon the infidels! To deny Allah’s own revelation, grudging that He should reveal His bounty to whom He chooses from His servants! They have incurred Allah’s most inexorable wrath. When it is said to them, ‘Believe in what Allah has revealed’, they reply, ‘We believe in what was revealed to us.’ But they deny what has since been revealed although it is the truth, corroborating their own scriptures.

**Sura 2:87 - 91**

**Text 2.**

**Pact of Omar (9th C.)**

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

This is a writing to Omar from the Christians of such and such a city. When you Moslems marched against us Christians, we asked of you protection, for ourselves, our posterity, our possessions, and our co-religionists; and we made this stipulation with you, that we will not erect in our city or our suburbs and new monastery, church, cell or hermitage; that we will not repair any of such buildings that may fall into ruins, or renew those that may be situated in the Moslem quarters of the town; that we will not refuse the Moslems entry into our churches either by day or by night; that we will open the gates wide to passengers and travellers; that we will receive any Moslem traveller into our houses and give him food and lodging for three nights; that we will not harbour any spy in our churches or houses, or conceal any enemies of the Moslems.

That we will not teach our children the Koran; that we will not make a show of the Christian religion nor invite anyone to embrace it; that we will not prevent any of our kinsmen from embracing Islam if they so desire. That we will honour the Moslems and will rise up in our assemblies when they wish to take their seats; that we will not imitate them in our dress, either in the cap, turban, sandals or parting of the hair; that we will not make use of their expressions of speech, nor adopt their surnames; that we will not ride on saddles, or gird on swords, or take to ourselves arms or wear them, or engrave Arabic inscriptions on our rings; that we will not sell wine; that we will shave the front of our heads; that we will keep to our own style of dress, wherever we may be; that we will wear girdles round our waists.

That we will not display the cross upon our churches or display our crosses or our sacred books in the streets of the Moslems, or in the market places; that we will strike the clappers in our churches lightly; that we will not recite our services in a loud voice when a Moslem is present; that we will not carry palm branches or our images in procession in the streets; that at the burial of our dead we will not chant loudly or carry lighted candles in the streets of the Moslems or their market-places; that we will not take any slaves that have already been in the possessions of Moslems nor spy in their houses; and that we will not strike any Moslem.

All this we promise to observe on behalf of ourselves and our co-religionists, and receive protection from you in exchange; and if we violate any of the conditions of this agreement, then we forfeit your protection and you are at liberty to treat us enemies and rebels.

**Text 3. (i)**

Letter Hasdai Ibn Shaprut to Joseph, King of Khazars

I, Hasdai, son of Isaac, son of Ezra, belonging to the exiled Jews of Jerusalem in Sepharad, a servant of my lord the King, bow to the earth before him and prostrate myself towards the abode of your Majesty from a distant land. I rejoice in your tranquillity and magnificence and stretch forth my hands to God in heaven that He may prolong your reign in Israel.

Praise be to the beneficent God for His mercy towards me! Kings of the earth, to whom Abd-ar-Rahman's magnificence and power are known, bring gifts to him, conciliating his favour by costly presents, such as the King of the Franks, the King of the Gebalim, who are Germans, the King of Constantinople, and others. All their gifts pass through my hands, and I am charged with making gifts in return.

Let my lips express praise to the God of Heaven, who so far extends His loving kindness towards me, without any merit of my own, but in the fullness of His mercies!

I always ask the ambassadors of these monarchs who bring gifts about our brethren the Israelites, the remnant of the captivity, whether they have heard anything concerning the deliverance of those who have languished in bondage and have found no rest.

At length mercantile emissaries of Khorasan told me that there is a kingdom of Judah which is called al-Khazar.

But I did not believe these words for I thought that they told me such things to procure my goodwill and favour. I was therefore wondering, till the ambassadors of Constantinople came with presents and a letter from their king to our king, and I interrogated them concerning this matter.

They answered me: "It is quite true, and the name of that kingdom is al-Khazar. It is a fifteen days' journey by sea from Constantinople, but by land many nations intervene between us; the name of the king now reigning is Joseph; ships sometimes come from their country to ours bringing fish, skins, and wares of every The men are our confederates and are honoured by us; there is communication between us by embassies and mutual gifts; they are very powerful; they maintain numerous armies with which they occasionally engage in expeditions."

When I heard this report I was encouraged, my hands were strengthened, and my hope was confirmed. Thereupon I bowed down and adored the God of heaven.

I pray for the health of my lord the King, of his family, and of his house, and that his throne may be established for ever. Let his days and his sons' days be prolonged in the midst of Israel!

**3. (ii) King Joseph's reply**

***The letter of Joseph, the King, son of Aaron the King, the Turk, May His Creator preserve him to the head of the Assembly, Hasdai, the son of Isaac, the son of Ezra*.**

**....I wish to inform you that your beautifully phrased letter was given us by Isaac, son of Eliezer, a Jew of the land of**[**Germany**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_Germany)**. You made us happy and we are delighted with your understanding and wisdom.... Let us, therefore, renew the diplomatic relations that once obtained between our fathers, and let us transmit this heritage to our children. \***

You ask us also in your epistle: "Of what people, of what family, and of what tribe are you?" Know that we are descended from [Japheth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japheth), through his son [Togarmah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Togarmah" \o "Togarmah). [In Jewish literature Togarmah is the father of all the [Turks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkic_peoples).] I have found in the genealogical books of my ancestors that Togarmah had ten sons. These are their names: the eldest was [Ujur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uyghur_people" \o "Uyghur people), the second [Tauris](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tauri), the third [Avar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caucasian_Avars), the fourth [Uauz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oghuz_Turks" \o "Oghuz Turks), the fifth Bizal, the sixth Tarna, the seventh [Khazar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kozar" \o "Kozar), the eighth Janur, the ninth [Bulgar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgars), the tenth [Sawir](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabirs" \o "Sabirs). I am a descendant of Khazar, the seventh son.

I have a record that although our fathers were few in number, the Holy One blessed be He, gave them strength, power, and might so that they were able to carry on war after war with many nations who were more powerful and numerous than they. By the help of God, they drove them out and took possession of their country. Upon some of them they have imposed forced labour even to this very day. The land in which I now live was formerly occupied by the [Bulgarians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volga_Bulgars). Our ancestors, the Khazars, came and fought with them, and, although these [Bulgarians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volga_Bulgars) were as numerous as the sand on the shores of the sea, they could not withstand the Khazars. So they left their country and fled while the Khazars pursued them as far as the [Danube](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danube) River. Up to this very day the Bulgars camp along the Danube and are close to [Constantinople](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantinople). The Khazars have occupied their land up till now.

After this, several generations passed until a certain King arose whose name was [Bulan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulan_(Khazar)" \o "Bulan (Khazar)). He was a wise and God-fearing man, trusting in his Creator with all his heart. He expelled the wizards and idolaters from the land and took refuge in the shadow of his wings ... After this his fame was spread broadcast. The king of the [Byzantines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Empire) and the [Arabs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabs) who had heard of him sent their envoys and ambassadors with great riches and many great presents to the King as well as some of their wise men with the object of converting him to their own religion.

**But the King-may his soul be bound up in the bundle of life. With the Lord his God-being wise, sent for a learned Israelite. The King searched, inquired, and investigated carefully and brought the sages together that they might argue about their respective religions. Each of them refuted, however, the arguments of his opponent so that they could not agree. When the King saw this, he said to them: "Go home, but return to me on the third day…"**

**On the third day he called all the sages together and said to them. "Speak and argue with one another and make clear to me which is the best religion." They began to dispute with one another without arriving at any results until the King said to the**[**Christian**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christians)**priest "What do you think? Of the religion of the Jews and the**[**Muslims**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim)**, which is to be preferred?" The priest answered: "The religion of the Israelites is better than that of the Muslims."**

**The King then asked the**[**qadi**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qadi)**: "What do you say? Is the religion of the Israelites, or that of the Christians preferable?" The qadi answered: "The religion of the Israelites is preferable."**

**Upon this the King said: "If this is so, you both have admitted with your own mouths that the religion of the Israelites is better Wherefore, trusting in the mercies of**[**God**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God)**and the power of the Almighty, I choose the religion of Israel, that is, the religion of**[**Abraham**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham)**. If that God in whom I trust, and in the shadow of whose wings I find refuge, will aid me, He can give me without labour the money, the gold, and the silver which you have promised me. As for you all, go now in peace to your land."**

From that time on the Almighty helped Bulan, fortified him, and strengthened him. He circumcised himself, his servants, attendants, and all his people. Then Bulan sent for and brought from all places wise men of Israel who interpreted the [Torah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah) for him and arranged the precepts in order, and up to this very day we have been subject to this religion. May God's name be blessed and may His remembrance be exalted for ever!

Since that day, when my fathers entered into this religion, the God of Israel has humbled all of their enemies, subjecting every folk and tongue round about them, whether Christian, Muslim, or [pagan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pagan). No one has been able to stand before them to this day [about 960]. All of them are tributary. \*

After the days of Bulan there arose one of his descendants, a king Obadiah by name who reorganized the kingdom and established the [Jewish religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism) properly and correctly. He built [synagogues](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synagogues) and study houses, brought in Jewish scholars, and rewarded them with gold and silver.

They explained to him the [Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible), [Mishnah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mishnah), [Talmud](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmud) and the order of divine services. The King was a man who revered and loved the Torah. He was one of the true servants of God. May the Divine Spirit give him rest!

He was succeeded by Hezekiah, his son; next to him was Manasseh, his son; next to him was Hanukkah, the brother of Obadiah; next Isaac, his son; afterwards, his son Zebulun; then his son Moses; then his son Nissi; then his son Aaron; then his son Menahem; then his son Benjamin; then his son Aaron II; and I, Joseph, the son of Aaron the King, am King, the son of a King, and the descendant of kings. No stranger can occupy the throne of my ancestors: the son succeeds the father. This has been our custom and the custom of our forefathers since they have come into existence. May it be the gracious will of Him who appoints all kings that the throne of my kingdom shall endure to all eternity.

You have also asked me about the affairs of my country and the extent of my empire. I wish to inform you that I dwell by the banks of the river known as the Itil [Volga]. At the mouth of the river lies the Caspian Sea. The headwaters of the river turn eastward, a journey of four months distance.

Alongside the river dwell many tribes in cities and towns, in open as well as fortified places.... Bear in mind that I dwell at the [delta of the Itil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volga_Delta) and, by God's help, I guard the mouth of the river and do not permit the Rus who come in ships to enter into the Caspian so as to get at the Muslims. Nor do I allow any of their enemies [Muslims] who come by land to penetrate as far as [Derbend](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derbent" \o "Derbent). I have to wage war with them, for if I would give them any chance at all they would lay waste the whole land of the Muslims as far as Baghdad...

You have also asked me about the [place where I live](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atil). I wish to inform you that, by the grace of God, I dwell alongside this river on which there are situated three capital cities. The queen dwells in one of them; it is my birthplace. It is quite large, built round like a circle, the diameter of which is fifty [parasangs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parasang).

Jews, Christians, and Moslems live in the second city. Besides these there are many slaves of all nations in it. It is of medium size, eight square parasangs in length and breadth.

In the third I reside with my princes, officers, servants, cupbearers and those who are close to me. It is round and its diameter is three parasangs. The river flows within its walls. This is my residence during the winter. From the month of [Nisan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nisan) on we leave the city and each one goes forth to his vineyards, fields and to his work...

You mention in your letter that you yearn to see my face. I also would very much like to see your pleasant countenance and the rare beauty of your wisdom and greatness. Would that it was according to your word. If it were granted me to be associated with you and to behold your honoured, charming, and pleasant countenance then you would be as my father and I as your son. According to your command would all my people be ruled, and according to your order and discreet counsel would I conduct all my affairs. Farewell.

\* Evidently, Joseph believed the [Khazars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khazars" \o "Khazars) had once had diplomatic relations with the [Spanish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain) [Arabs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab).]

\*\* Ten years later Joseph was defeated by [Sviatoslav I of Kiev](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sviatoslav_I_of_Kiev" \o "Sviatoslav I of Kiev), 969

**Poetry**

**Text 4.**

דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא לְבֵן עִם בַּת, וְיִנְצָרְכֶם כְּמוֹ בָבַת,  
נְעִים שִׁמְכֶם וְלֹא יֻשְׁבַּת, שְׁבוּ וְנֽוּחוּ בְּיוֹם שַׁבָּת.  
  
דְּרוֹשׁ נָוִי וְאוּלָמִי, וְאוֹת יֶֽשַׁע עֲשֵׂה עִמִּי,  
נְטַע שׂוֹרֵק בְּתוֹךְ כַּרְמִי, שְׁעֵה שַׁוְעַת בְּנֵי עַמִּי.  
  
דְּרוֹךְ פּוּרָה בְּתוֹךְ בָּצְרָה, וְגַם בָּבֶל אֲשֶׁר גָּבְרָה,  
נְתוֹץ צָרַי בְּאַף וְעֶבְרָה, שְׁמַע קוֹלִי בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא.  
  
אֱלֹהִים תֵּן בַּמִּדְבָּר הַר, הֲדַס שִׁטָּה בְּרוֹשׁ תִּדְהָר,  
וְלַמַּזְהִיר וְלַנִּזְהָר, שְׁלוֹמִים תֵּן כְּמֵי נָהָר.  
  
הֲדוֹךְ קָמַי אֵל קַנָּא, בְּמוֹג לֵבָב וּבַמְּגִנָּה,  
וְנַרְחִיב פֶּה וּנְמַלֶּֽאנָה, לְשׁוֹנֵנוּ לְךָ רִנָּה.  
  
דְּעֵה חָכְמָה לְנַפְשֶֽׁךָ, וְהִיא כֶֽתֶר לְרֹאשֶֽׁךָ,  
נְצוֹר מִצְוַת קְדוֹשֶֽׁךָ, שְׁמוֹר שַׁבַּת קָדְשֶֽׁךָ.

God will proclaim freedom for all his children  
And will keep you as the apple of his eye  
Pleasant is your name and will not be destroyed  
Repose and rest on the Sabbath day.

Seek my sanctuary and my home.  
Give me a sign of deliverance.  
Plant a vine in my vineyard.  
Look to my people, hear their laments.

Tread the wine-press in Bozrah,  
And in Babylon that city of might  
Crush my enemies in anger and fury.  
On the day when I cry, hear my voice.

Plant, Oh God, in the mountain waste  
Fir and acacia, myrtle and elm  
Give those who teach and those who obey  
Abundance peace, like the flow of a river.

**Text 5.**

1. **Kasmunah, wife of Dunash Ibn Lubrat + Dunash**
2. **Kasmunah,** On his leaving

Will her love remember his graceful doe,  
her only son in her arms as he parted?  
On her left hand he placed a ring from his right,  
on his wrist she placed her bracelet.  
As a keepsake she took his mantle from him,  
and he in turn took hers from her.  
Would he settle, now, in the land of Spain,  
if its prince gave him half his kingdom?

בְּיום פֵּירוּד וּבִזְרו עָהּ יְחִידָהּ

וְשָׂם חותַם יְמִינוֹ עַל שְׂמאלָהּ

וּבִזְרועו הֲלא שָׂמָה צְמְידָהּ

בְּיוֹם לָקַחָה לְזִכָּרון רְדִידו

וְהוּא לָקֵח לְזִכָּרון רְדִידָהּ

הֲיִשָׁאֵר בְּכָל אֶרֶץ סְפָרַד

וְלוּ לָקַח חֲצִי מַלְכוּת נְגִידָהּ

1. **Reply of Dunash from Cordoba(10th C.)**

Were you seeking the day of my death when you wrote:

‘Have you betrayed and abandoned your vows?’

Could I betray a woman so wise

given by God as the bride of my youth?

Had my heart ever thought to leave you

I would have torn it into pieces.

For those who betray their beloved companion,

God brings down with the trials of foes.

Lions soon will devour his flesh,

and vultures will consume his blood.

Who resembles the stars of dawn […]

**Text 6.**

***The Garden of Song***

All who are sick at heart and cry in bitterness,

Let not your soul complain in grief.

Enter the garden of my songs, and find balm

For your sorrow and sing there with open mouth.

Honey compared with them is bitter to the taste,

And before their scent, flowing myrrh is rank.

Through them the deaf hear, the stutterers speak,

The blind see, and the halting run.

The troubled and grief stricken rejoice in them,

All who are sick at heart, and cry in bitterness.

Moses ibn Ezra

[Rabbi Moses ben Jacob ibn Ezra, philosopher, linguist, and poet, b. 1055 Granada, d. 1138]

**Text 7.**

***In Praise of Wine***

Red in appearance, sweet to the taste,

Vintage of Spain, yet renowned in the East,

Feeble in the cup, but, once in the brain,

It rules overheads that cannot rise again.

The bereaved, whose blood is mixed with his tears –

The blood of the grape demolishes his fears.

Friends, passing the cup from hand to hand,

Seem to be gambling for a precious diamond.

Samuel ibn Nagrela / Shmuel Hanagid

[Samuel ibn Nagrela, soldier, courtier scholar, grammarian, and poet, b. Cordoba 993 d. 1056 Granada]

**Text 8.**

***A Secret Kept***

The girl brought me into the house of love.

She was as pure and perfect as Abigail.

When she took off her veil, she revealed a form

That put to shame the beauty of Esther.

Her light shone in the darkness, made everything tremble.

The hills started to dance like rams.

I thought: ‘Now our secrets are discovered.’

But she stretched out her hand like a woman of strength

And enveloped me with her jet-black hair.

So, the day was immediately turned into night.

Yehudah Al Harizi

[Yehuda Alharizi, rabbi, philosopher, poet and traveller b.1165 Toledo, d. 1225 Aleppo]

***Jerusalem***

Beautiful heights, joy of the world, city of a great king,

For you my soul yearns from the Land of the West.

My pity collects and is roused when I remember the past,

Your glory in exile, and your Temple destroyed.

Would that I were on the wings of an eagle,

So that I could water your dust with my mingling tears.

I have sought you, although your king is away,

And snakes and scorpions oust Gilead’s balm.

How I shall kiss and cherish your stones.

Your earth will be sweeter than honey to my taste.

**Text 9. Yehuda Halevi**

**לִבִּי בְמִזְרָח וְאָנֹכִי בְּסוֹף מַעֲרָב  
אֵיךְ אֶטְעֲמָה אֵת אֲשֶׁר אֹכַל וְאֵיךְ יֶעֱרָב**

**אֵיכָה אֲשַׁלֵּם נְדָרַי וֶאֱסָרַי, בְּעוֹד  
צִיּוֹן בְּחֶבֶל אֱדוֹם וַאֲנִי בְּכֶבֶל עֲרָב**

**יֵקַל בְּעֵינַי עֲזֹב כָּל טוּב סְפָרַד, כְּמוֹ  
יֵקַר בְּעֵינַי רְאוֹת עַפְרוֹת דְּבִיר נֶחֱרָב.**

**My Heart is in the East**

My heart is in the east and I am in the uttermost west –

How can I find savour in food? How shall it be sweet to me?

How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet,

Zion lieth beneath the fetter of Edom, and I in Arab chains?

A light thing would it seem to me to have all the good things of Spain

Seeing how precious in mine eyes to behold the dust of the desolate sanctuary.

***On Exile***

Like to Sodom think thou the Land of Eden,

The home of men that are but verminous things.

Let every sight seem briar and thorn to thee

Change every name, say dogs instead of men.

Rejoicing in the tears of thy tormented ones,

Upon the day of downfall and decay,

They slaughtered thy assailants, broke into

Thy homes, took every stick and stone away.

O may their perfumed incense now emit

A loathsome stench befouling it, and all

Their bread be adder like, their wine turn sour,

Their honey change to wormwood and to gall.

Abhor their food as on Passover,

Think their paradise a very Hell,

And choose the Arab zone to be thine own,

Whether there it shall go ill or well,

And thou shalt wear rich robes or rags. O, brother,

Rejoice, for heaven guideth thee. Shun servitude,

Not poverty. Let carobs and coarse bread

Suffice thee, and throw to dogs all richer food.