

Andalus – Unlocking the Secrets of Moorish Spain by Jason Webster.
Doubleday 2004.

If, like me, the old cities, towns and villages of southern Spain, particularly its Moorish remnants, engender in you a feeling close to pure ecstasy and high spirituality, you will ADORE this book.

In a highly individual style, Jason Webster takes his reader on a tour of the cities of southern Spain and Portugal, searching for, and finding, not only the remains of the Muslim civilisation that raised Al Andalus to unparalleled heights of sophistication and culture before it was finally shut down, though not completely destroyed, by rampaging Christianity in 1492 but also the enduring influence it has had on subsequent Spanish history and culture.

Describing the places he visits in such a way as to transport the reader there, introducing key characters on the journey, not least Zine, an illegal immigrant from Morocco, Webster weaves a spell which lingers long after the book has been finished. In his narrative of Spain's encounter with Islam is also the key ingredient of Jews and Judaism, so powerful and potent in some of the places, such as Cordoba and Toledo. Jason Webster's Andalus is full of beauty, and also of information, not least about the secret Jews of Belmonte.

All those who love Spain, as well as anyone fascinated by the period of convivencia that Jews and Muslims still refer to as the 'Golden Age', should read this book.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh