Supposedly, the name of Montpellier means "Closed Mountain". By allusion to a biblical name (Josué XXIV-30), they also indicate this city under the name "Har Gaash" ("Trembling Mountain"). This city is sometimes called "har Haniqra Pissulani" and often simply "Har" (mountain). From word HAR, formed the nickname HARRARI, carried by several inhabitants of Montpellier, such as Jacob Ben Makhir IBN TIBBON, Abraham Ben Salomon HARRARI de Bagnols, and others. The medieval community of Montpellier contained of numerous Talmudists and renowned doctors. In Montpellier the In the Middle Ages, Montpellier was divided into two distinct cities, one being the capital of the Guillems and the other the fief of the bishops of Maguelone. One of the most important communities of Languedoc from the second half of the eleventh century, through their relations with their coreligionists all abroad, the Jews of Montpellier helped enormously in building the commerce of the city. In 1287, James I permitted the Jews to establish their own slaughter-house. A police regulation of 1364 forbade the Christian butchers to sell or to permit the sale of meat to the Jews ("Petit Thalamus," p. 166). They also contributed largely to the development of the School of Medicine established there in the twelfth century. In 1180, Guillem VIII, Lord of Montpellier, granted them the right to practice medicine. The kings of Aragon and Majorca, James I and James II, merely added (in 1272 and 1281 respectively) the proviso that the Jewish physicians must pass regular examinations before exercising their profession. The progress made by these Jewish physicians was such that in 1300, according to Astruc ("Mémoires pour Servir à l'Histoire de la Faculté de Médecine de Montpellier," p. 168), Jacob ben Machir, called "Don Profiat" (Latin, "Profatius Judæus"), was appointed regent of the faculty of medicine. Astronomer of Marseilles, Makhir IBN TIBON (1240-1308), also known as DON PROFIAT, worked here and authored a calendar of which COPERNICUS and KLEPER sang its praises. James I. interested himself in the Jews on many occasions, especially in 1252, 1266, and 1268 when confirming all the privileges which they had enjoyed under his predecessors. These fortunate conditions changed in 1292, when Bérenger of Frédol, Bishop of Maguelone, ceded the Jews then living in his territory to King Philip the Fair of France. They were expelled in 1306, but returned to Montpellier in 1319, having been recalled by King Sancho, who protected them in 1320 against the fury of the Pastoureaux. On demand of the consuls, King John of France compelled the Jews in 1363 to wear the Jews' badge. In 1368, the same consuls forbade them to drink or to draw water from any well other than that which had been assigned to them ("Petit Thalamus," pp. 166-167). Finally, a royal edict issued on Sept. 17, 1394 put an end to the existence of the Jewish community of Montpellier for a while. In the sixteenth century, a number of Maranos from Spain fled to Montpellier. The physician Felix Platter of Basel, who resided in the city from 1552 to 1559, knew several of these Maranos, whom he mentions by name and whose customs he describes (autobiography of Felix Platter, ed. Fechter, Basel, 1840). In the seventeenth century, some Jews from the Comtat-Venaissin joined these Spanish refugees. At first, the parliament of Toulouse authorized them to remain at Montpellier for one month only in each of the four seasons; but thanks to the tolerance of the consuls, the assistance of the Marquis of Grave, proprietor of the markets of Pont-Juvénal, and, especially, the protection of Louis Basil of Bernage, commissary of Languedoc, the Jews, in spite of the most bitter complaints of the Christian merchants, established themselves definitely in the city. In 1680, at the request of the guild of dealers, Jews were expelled and their goods grabbed; but in 18th century, they acquired the right to set up shop in the city. The site of the Jewish quarter often changed. At first it was...
near the synagogue and Jewish baths (traces of which still exist in Rue Barralerie No. 1), extending northward as far as the tolerance of the Kings of Majorca permitted. The Jews acquired some houses near the square of Castel-Maton and spread themselves as far as the right side of Rue Vieille-Intendance. By order of the Duke of Anjou in 1365, they were restricted to the Rue de la Vacherie ("Vacaria"), near the gate of La Saunerie. In this street was the synagogue that the Bishop of Montpellier permitted the community on the representations of Hélias of Loan and Samuel Caylli to build in 1387, in consideration of the payment of 400 pounds Tours currency. Finally, in the beginning of the sixteenth century the Jews established themselves in the blind alley of the Vieux Consulat, called "Juiverie" or "Juzétarie," which has now disappeared. In the beginning of the nineteenth century the Jewish community numbered 105 persons. In 1902, from thirty to thirty-five Jewish families lived in Montpellier, subject to the authority of the consistory of Marseilles. The new community began developing in 1940. Today it numbers more than a thousand, mostly from North Africa. A new synagogue was constructed in 1981. Montpellier has with a radio station called the "Radio Juive Languedocienne". Montpellier is a sister city with Tiberias, the capital of Galilee. Of interest is the medieval mikvah from the 13th century at 1, rue de la Barralerie, which was the Jewish quarter in the Middle Ages. The medieval Jewish quarter was located around the present Rue de la Barralerie. Under the city walls at 1, rue de la Barralerie (the entrance to the ghetto) is a restored 13th-century mikvah (ritual bath). A series of vaulted rooms, staircase, disrobing room, and the bath are open to visitors. [January 2009]


The Jews owned two cemeteries successively:

Old Cemetery: One was situated between the gates of La Saunerie and St. Guillem. In 1263, James I. presented it to the Cistercians of Valmagne, who established a theological college there. [January 2008]

Old Cemetery: The other cemetery was in the suburb of Villefranche, between the present seminary and Boutonnet. It was sold in 1306 by Philip the Fair; but in 1319, by permission of King Sancho, the Jews of Montpellier repurchased it. [January 2008]