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The first Jewish man to set foot in the Americas?

An interpreter.

Have you ever showed up for an interpreting assignment only to be disappointed to learn that, after traveling all that way, the person you were meant to interpret for speaks a different language, one you can't interpret?

It's happened to many an interpreter, but perhaps none had such a long journey as **Luis de Torres**, the interpreter for Christopher Columbus who accompanied him from Spain to the Americas. Fluent in Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Portuguese, and Spanish, de Torres was selected as an interpreter because Columbus thought he was headed to Asia, where de Torres could help him communicate with local Jewish traders. It was thanks in great part to his



Jewish heritage that he know some of his languages. However, Spain had issued an edict expelling all Jews from the country right around the time of Columbus's departure, leading de Torres to convert to Catholicism right before leaving.

Unfortunately, de Torres's languages were of little use to him in the Americas. He was not able to communicate with the native people any better than Columbus could. It is not known exactly what happened to him after he arrived, but Columbus did mention him -- and the fact that he was Jewish -- in his diaries. Traveling across the world in the 1400s in order to interpret, while fleeing religious persecution? That's certainly an inspiration.