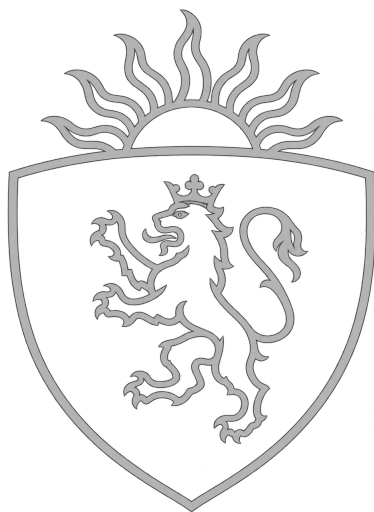


THE SEPHARDIC JEW

Lost and Forgotten

History, Culture, and the Rediscovery of a Heritage



Carlos Coronado Bonilla

The Sephardic Jew: Lost and Forgotten. History, Culture, and the Rediscovery of a Heritage

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*“And the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad,
shall possess the cities of the south.”*

Obadiah 1:20

Every claim in this book is weighed and labelled:

ESTABLISHED · PLAUSIBLE · POSSIBLE · LEGEND · FABRICATION

Carlos Coronado Bonilla

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INTRODUCTION

THE CAPTIVITY OF JERUSALEM WHICH IS IN SEPHARAD

A KEY IN A DRAWER

IN the old Jewish families of Istanbul, Salonika, Sarajevo and Tetouan, a story was told for many generations: that somewhere in the house there was a key, a heavy iron key to a door in Toledo, or Seville, or Zaragoza, carried out of Spain in the summer of 1492 and handed down from parent to child. The houses those keys had opened were long gone, sold for a pittance in the last weeks before the expulsion or simply abandoned. The doors had been given to strangers. And yet the keys were kept.

How many such keys truly survived is impossible to say. A few are shown in museums and in family homes today; most of the stories cannot be checked, and some are surely the kind of beautiful legend that a scattered people tells to hold itself together.¹ But whether or not a given key is genuine, the custom tells us something that no document can: that the Jews of Spain, five centuries after they were driven out, still thought of themselves as people with a home to which they held the key. They called that home **Sepharad**, and they called themselves **Sephardim**, the people of Sepharad.

This book is about them: who they were, where they came from, what they built, what was taken from them, where they went, and how much of their story was lost, destroyed, or deliberately hidden. It is also about the rediscovery of that heritage, which is happening now, in archives and in families, across the Americas and Europe and the Mediterranean, as descendants of people who were forced to forget begin, one name and one record at a time, to remember.



1. On the keys of Sepharad as family tradition and as symbol, see Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (1992), ch. 6; and the discussions of Sephardic collective memory in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982).

THE VERDICT OF 1492

The expulsion of 1492 was not an act of passion, like the massacres of 1391, but a considered act of state, signed by the sovereigns after long deliberation, prepared by the Inquisition, justified by the Church, and carried out by the officials of the crown. It was applauded by the pope, who in 1496 gave Ferdinand and Isabella the title of “**Catholic Monarchs**,” citing among their services the expulsion of the Jews.¹⁸

For my thesis, 1492 marks the moment when the history of the Jews of Spain was **cut off at the root**. The communities were dissolved. The synagogues were made into churches. The cemeteries were abandoned or ploughed. The archives of the Jewish communities, their registers of births and marriages and deaths, their books and their records, were scattered, lost or destroyed. The Jews who stayed, by baptism, were made to forget, and the Jews who left carried with them only what they could remember.

From 1492, the history of the Sephardim becomes the history of the **dispersion**, which Part Five will follow; and the history of those who remained becomes the history of the **hidden**, which Part Six will tell.



WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE

CLAIM	LABEL
Granada surrendered to Ferdinand and Isabella on 2 January 1492	ESTABLISHED
The edict of expulsion was signed at Granada on 31 March 1492	ESTABLISHED
The edict accused the Jews only of drawing the conversos back to Judaism	ESTABLISHED
The Jews were to leave by the end of July 1492, on pain of death and confiscation, without gold, silver or money	ESTABLISHED
Abraham Seneor accepted baptism and stayed	ESTABLISHED
Isaac Abravanel pleaded with the king and queen and offered money, in vain	ESTABLISHED (his own account)

18.Alexander VI, bull *Si convenit* (19 December 1496).

Source: Wikimedia Commons, File:Expulsión de los judíos.jpg.

Hagia Sophia. Print made by: Louis Haghe

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Interior of the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam. Emanuel de Witte, 1680. Licence: Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, File:Interieur van de Portugese synagoge te Amsterdam Rijksmuseum SK-A-3738.jpeg.

Baruch Spinoza. Unknown authorUnknown author, between circa 1665 and circa 1666. Licence: Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, File:Portret van Spinoza mogelijk rond 1665-1666.jpg.

Portrait of a Man. Sebastiano del Piombo, before 1519. Licence: Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, File:Portrait of a Man, Said to be Christopher Columbus.jpg.

A page of the Sarajevo Haggadah. Unknown authorUnknown author, circa 1350 ce. Licence: Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, File:Sarajevo Haggadah Ma Nishtana.jpg.