



Maite Ojeda-Mata. *Modern Spain and the Sephardim: Legitimizing Identities.* Lexington Studies in Modern Jewish History, Historiography, and Memory Series. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017. 284 pp. \$100.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4985-5174-8.

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Modern Spain and the Sephardim presents a historical and anthropological study of the relationship and attitudes of modern Spain toward Sephardic Jews. This publication contributes greatly to the breadth of contemporary Sephardic scholarship by dedicating several chapters to relatively unknown subjects, such as the Jewish community in Barcelona and the treatment of Sephardic Freemasons in Spain. *Modern Spain and the Sephardim* is based on research completed as part of Maite Ojeda-Mata's doctoral studies at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. In 2012 she published a monograph, *Identidades ambivalentes: Sefardíes en la España contemporánea* (Ambivalent identities: Sephardim in contemporary Spain), whose content has been updated, expanded, and reorganized for the present publication. *Modern Spain and the Sephardim* is one of the first books to examine the historically discriminatory sociopolitical narratives that influenced Spanish relations with Sephardic Jews in light of the recent Re-Patriation Law 12/2015 that appears to offer Spanish citizenship to Sephardim.

Ojeda-Mata uses the phrase "legitimizing identities" as a point of departure (p. xviii). She proposes that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Spain, as a locus of political and economic control, used different propagandistic

narratives to control Sephardic Jews, either by emphasizing their Jewish identity or by highlighting the commonality of Spanish heritage. As the title of her 2012 monograph suggests, the cultural "ambivalence" of the projected identity of Sephardic Jews could work to their advantage or disadvantage. The six chapters of *Modern Spain and the Sephardim* present different case studies in which these legitimizing factors were in play, and the epilogue analyzes how the ideology of legitimization underpins the Re-Patriation Law 12/2015.

Chapter 1 discusses how Spain was influenced by the humanitarian ideals of Romanticism in its view and treatment of other races. This chapter provides a brief but accurate summary of Romanticism, Jewish Haskalah (Enlightenment), and Hannah Arendt's observations on pariah and parvenu. Ojeda-Mata contextualizes the Sephardic assimilation or lack thereof in terms of established thought regarding Jewish integration and emancipation in the rest of Europe. Spanish dogma tended to classify Sephardim as Jews who had an Iberian essence that improved their Jewish heritage. In the past, physical characteristics were used to determine race, but Romantic ideals added linguistic traits, religion, and cultural affinity in an attempt to determine what right

Sephardim had to be included as ethnically Iberian. Ojeda-Mata states that while Spanish qualities were generally seen to improve Jews, Jewishness was seen to harm Spanish essence. One excellent aspect of this chapter is that it provides a table with legal policies regarding Jews, starting in 1492 and continuing all the way to the present constitution.

Chapter 2 expands on the themes of the first chapter and looks at how they applied to the case of Morocco and the eastern Mediterranean. When Spain became anxious about the French influence pervading North Africa, intellectuals like Ángel Pullido advocated for the incorporation of “stateless Spaniards” (as he called the Sephardim) who were faithful to Spain and “civilized” (p. 53). His philo-Sephardic campaign had some success and found supporters in the cultural historian Americo Castro and even King Alfonso XIII. Ojeda-Mata believes that any perceived proximity found between the Spanish government and the Sephardim in North Africa was not due to a vision of their shared ancestry but rather the political maneuverings of colonialism.

Chapter 3 focuses on Sephardic life within Spanish borders, in particular, the cities of Melilla and Barcelona. Ojeda-Mata carried out an extensive anthropological study of the demographics of both regions. This chapter provides some of the only research available about the Jewish communities in Barcelona before 1939. A unique aspect of this chapter is that it includes some interview material with Jewish residents of Barcelona. Chapter 4 does not concentrate on a particular geographic region but rather on the different ways in which Jews obtained citizenship prior to the dissolution of the Spanish protectorate in Morocco in 1956. Interestingly, Jews were considered “foreigners” in Spain proper but in the protectorate, they were considered “natives.” Once again, Ojeda-Mata links the idea of ambivalence to the treatment of Jews in Melilla, because they were assigned the designation “Hebrew” or

“Spanish” depending on their nationality (p. 122). The demographic information provided here adds depth to the study as a whole.

Chapters 5 and 6 are replete with details about the treatment of Jews during the rule of Francisco Franco. Ojeda-Mata offers first-time research on the Sephardic Freemasons in Spain. Jewishness was associated with both capitalism and Freemasonry during the early years of Franco. These qualities were viewed as threats to the Catholic nationalism pervading Spain. Ojeda-Mata lists the numerous Jewish Freemasons who suffered prosecution (and in some cases death) because of their Masonic affiliations. Chapter 6 begins by linking the fear of a Marxist-Judeo-Masonic conspiracy with the political divides of the Spanish Civil War. Ojeda-Mata analyzes the incongruity of the treatment of Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews who were trying to escape Eastern Europe. While Franco initially allowed Ashkenazi Jews to pass through Spain, policies eventually became stricter due to Nazi German pressure. While Spain occasionally did protect Sephardic Jews, protection did not imply acceptance or assimilation.

Ojeda-Mata casts a critical eye on instances when Spain reportedly demonstrated benevolence toward Sephardic Jews. Although Spain declared neutrality during the war, Franco was far from munificent toward Jews. This publication presents evidence that Franco treated Jews in a haphazard way, sometimes allowing for Sephardim to receive citizenship, while at other times, such as during the genocide of Salonica, turning a blind eye. Ojeda-Mata points out that efforts were made to limit and/or deport Jews who resided within Spanish borders during World War II. In her epilogue, she points out the inconsistencies in Law 12/2015, showing that this legislation was not the giant step forward in Jewish-Spanish relations that some had hoped for. She hypothesizes that Spain may have pushed for the law to counterbalance the anti-Israeli and pro-Palestini-

an rhetoric that has pervaded recent Spanish politics and society. Ojeda-Mata's observations are helpful because the media has often presented Law 12/2015 as a quasi-birthright for Sephardim. Bringing to bear carefully researched data, Ojeda-Mata shows that Spanish citizenship still is offered on a limited-term basis with many contingencies.

The nuanced manner with which Ojeda-Mata treats the complicated subject of Spanish relations with the Sephardim within its borders, in the protectorate, and in Europe is valuable for the future of Sephardic studies. The chapters are at times quite dense, in keeping with the multifaceted nature of the subject matter and a heavy emphasis on historicity and interview material. Her sources are impeccably cited and amply explained in extensive notes at the end of each chapter and a long bibliography. The strength of this volume is the concrete nature of all of the data, which often comes directly from primary sources. Ojeda-Mata does not generalize the intricacies of the often-convoluted relationships between Spain and Sephardic Jews. *Modern Spain and the Sephardim* is sure to become a touchstone in Sephardic studies for years to come.

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