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*The Memory Work of Jewish Spain* is a deeply analytical dive into the sources of the present state of the many interventions into Spain’s Jewish past in different sectors that have submerged themselves to recreate it. Central to the overall discussion in the dense text are the repeated themes of memory, as in the title, and identity: from family, to town, to national memories. Another theme or more recent historic period frequently recurring in the discussion of the re-creation of memory and identity is the complex, multifaceted Civil War/Franco years. Examples of how selective blindness and amnesia lead to creative responses, rediscovery, and filling in the gaps resulting from the centuries of the absence of Jews are also woven throughout the entire text.

The scene is set in the introduction with a discussion of the “rediscovery” of Spanish Jewish communities and their histories. Daniela Flesler and Adrián Pérez Melgosa analyze how Spain has grappled with its Jewish history and heritage for over a century. They provide a thorough review of the literature on several aspects of memory in the context of the political changes in Spain in the 1970s and as a result of the transitions at that time. The book is what the authors call “an intellectual voyage” (p. ix) comprised of over fifteen years of extensive travel in which their extensive research was applied to venues they review and comment about. Readers are taken along on their sometimes tangential journeys. Six chapters follow the introduction.

Chapter 1 is a literature review, especially of the sources and uses of the myth of Jewish economic superiority. Also explored in depth is another myth, that of the coexistence of Catholics, Muslims, and Jews in the medieval period, now referred to as *convivencia*. Both topics continue to be connected to the still-pervasive antisemitism found in Spain. Both have persisted together in part because Jewish history has been commercialized in late twentieth-century Spain as detailed elsewhere in the text. The historical review marries historical analysis with understanding how these and other stereotypical viewpoints are intensely related to the Jewish history of Spain.

The effects of tourism on the re-creation and perpetuation of the legacy of the Jews of Spain are addressed in chapter 2. Flesler and Pérez Melgosa point out the contradiction embedded in Spanish national identity, which is based on the long-ago removal of Muslims and Jews. They thoroughly review the literature that contradicts the *convivencia* construct and the steps taken to create
memory and point out how the notion of convivencia overlooked the concept of identity in the name of bolstering the country’s economy.

They discuss in detail strategies adopted by national and local agencies to develop heritage and cultural tourism. Organization in the Network of Jewish Quarters worked individually or together to “rescue the history and remains of a historic Jewish presence” (p. 100) in a number of communities, thus allowing them to become part of a larger Jewish tourism network. This multicity program seeks to make a cultural impact through reviving lost heritage while economically attracting the money brought by tourists, thus putting Spain on a larger European stage. Flesler and Pérez Melgosa analyze how these two strategies use absence to create a story in a four-hundred-year void and marketing to create or perpetuate the widespread myths and narratives of convivencia.

Visual representations in new Jewish museums are discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4. The former focuses on the Sephardi Museum in Toledo. In the latter, a number of Jewish-themed museums and interpretive centers across the country are addressed. The dilemma faced by museums in locations that lack the populations, especially considering the circumstances that led to the void, remains at the heart of these discussions. As a whole, the schemes of the various museums were to improve the image of Spain abroad, especially in the years following the Franco regime.

Central to the analysis of the museum in Toledo is the role of the building: museum buildings are often overlooked. The building itself may be as significant as the contents found in the museum. In this case, the building was a historic synagogue, one of only three preserved in the country. This particular building holds the peripatetic narrative of the social, cultural, and political changes of the preceding four hundred years, including converso identity. Thus, part of the museum's purpose was to restore and preserve the formerly Jewish communal building, removing Catholic alterations and references.

The authors seem to criticize exhibits in Toledo that use ritual objects to “show who Jews are and what Judaism is” (p. 168). They write that this practice serves to explain aspects of Judaism as a way to illustrate differences with other peoples, in this case, the Spanish. They argue that these exhibits, and the life-cycle exhibits, rather than “normalizing Jewish life ... exoticize[] it” (p. 169), placing the people on display in a distant past. These interpretive practices are actually embedded in Jewish museums worldwide. Elsewhere, the authors categorize objects found in Spain’s Jewish museums as ethnographic artifacts and testimonial objects. The focus of more than sixteen smaller institutions nationwide is on the significance of previous local Jewish communities along with the part they play in kick-starting local tourism efforts. While the majority are not Jewish-owned or operated, Flesler and Pérez Melgosa analyze that void even while noting that “Jewish perspectives and voices are slowly being incorporated into them” (p. 200). Many of these venues face interpretive struggles with convivencia.

Five regional/local Jewish museums are considered closely. The museum/center in Girona was established as an initiative to preserve the former Jewish quarter of the city; it is no longer a member of the Network of Jewish Quarters because of the tourism focus of the organization. Other institutions discussed are in Ribadivia in Galicia; the Melul in Bejar, sponsored by a Moroccan Jewish immigrant; the cultural programming of Casa de Sepharad in Cordoba; and an exhibit in a museum in Urgell. Clear examples of playing to tourists, such as Jewish-themed decorations and tiles in Toledo, are provided. Overall, Flesler and Pérez Melgosa find that historical details are frequently lacking in interpretive materials in the museums, especially in Toledo. The authors refer to work in consultation with Jewish individuals; this type of consultative work with representative groups is
not a new museum practice. Consultation has long been part of museum work, most notably with indigenous people in New Zealand, the United States, and Canada and with immigrant groups in the Netherlands and France.

In chapter 5, the authors look directly at issues of Spain’s Jewish past in association with the more recent past of the Franco years. They consider how memory has been used, reshaped, and reimagined. Memories exist hand in hand with a long-standing, historic love-hate relationship with Jews or the thought of Jews. The memories of distant Jews, along with those of life during the Franco period, have frequently led to the reinterpretation of historic facts. Again, the nature of the myth of convivencia, the so-called peaceful coexistence, is documented in detail. This recurrent theme is illustrated by a discussion of the annual pageant and festival of “Los Conversos” in Hervás, “in which town residents stage a play about the local Jewish past, re-create a medieval ‘Jewish market,’ and dress up ‘as Jews’” (p. 247). The stage for this discussion was set in chapter 1.

Different ways in which twentieth-century authors and painters have interpreted the Jewish presence in Spain in the past are examined in detail in chapter 6. The paintings of Spanish artist Daniel Quintero are dissected in great detail, comparing his compositions to those of Juan Sánchez Cotan and Francisco de Zurbarán. The size of the illustrations in the book, however, makes it difficult to discern the details they discuss.

Many of the efforts in Spain to reconnect with its Jewish past, especially focusing on the growing visibility of Jewish locations, associations, buildings, and activities, are documented and analyzed in The Memory Work of Jewish Spain. An underlying question throughout is the impact of, as the authors point out, the Jewish past which has not been forgotten on Spanish culture. Thus, the authors grapple with understanding the significance of spaces that were Jewish long ago. In addition, they illustrate how several intersecting facets, the Jewish history with the more recent and tangible impact of the Civil War/Franco years, impact the re-creation of memory. The rich text is complemented generously by the equally rich endnotes closing each chapter. Full of commentary, they also serve as a valuable source of additional information. Included is an extensive bibliography.

In closing a note about style, the authors make frequent reference to text from Spanish sources. Placing English translations before the original Spanish texts would have made for easier reading and made the text accessible and relevant to all scholars, whether they study Spain and Spanish or not.

Dr. Annette B. Fromm has worked for the past forty years as a folklorist and museum specialist as well as teaching anthropology and museum studies. Fromm’s book, We Are Few: Folklore and Ethnic Identity of the Jewish Community of Ioannina, Greece (2008), is drawn from in-depth research in northern Greece. Currently, she is associate editor and book review editor of the online journal Sephardic Horizons.
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