

THE MARTYR: THE LIFE OF LUIS DE CARVAJAL THE YOUNGER, A CRYPTO/SECRET JEW IN COLONIAL MEXICO

Coordinator: Fran DeLott

The study group examines secret [crypto] Judaism in colonial Mexico through the life of Luis de Carvajal the Younger, as depicted in “The Martyr” by historian Martin A. Cohen. We begin with an analysis of the origins of crypto-Judaism in the Iberian Peninsula, where Carvajal was born, and a description of the crypto-Jewish world in Mexico to which he emigrated. In “The Martyr” Cohen paints a vivid picture of the young Carvajal’s conflicted identity as both a committed secret Jew and an adventurer with his conquistador uncle. Our discussions focus on Carvajal’s complex identity, his religious fervor, accomplishments, and charismatic leadership, and his startling interactions with the Inquisition, which led eventually to two imprisonments and early martyrdom.

Coordinator’s Biography: Fran De Lott had a diverse career in mental health and public health. She is a former president of the Lincoln Towers Tenants Association and an ESL teacher. She has been a member of the IRP for two and a half years.

Readings and Materials/Online Services:

Required text to purchase:

The Martyr, Luis de Carvajal, A Secret Jew in Sixteenth-Century Mexico by Martin A. Cohen, {University of New Mexico Press, 2001, ISBN 9780826323620}

Podcasts:

Benjamin Gampel, Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) You Tube Podcasts on “Sephardic History in the Iberian Peninsula”, parts 4-6b, 2009, www.jtsa.edu/podcasts .

Juan Bejarano-Gutierrez, You Tube Podcast “Crypto-Judaism, Rabbi Hasdai Crescas and the Riots of 1391”, 2016.

Articles to be distributed in class:

Jane Gerber, Jews of Spain, The Free Press, 1994, Appendix 1 “Edict of Expulsion” and Appendix 3 “Maps of the Iberian Peninsula”.

David Gitlitz, “Secrecy and Deceit”, University of New Mexico Press, 1996, pgs. 55-58, 73-76, 355-75.

Stanley M. Hordes, “To the End of the Earth; A History of the Jews of New Mexico”, Columbia University Press, 2005, “The crypto-Jewish experience in New Spain”, pgs. 30-34 , 38-39.

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WEEK 1

TOPIC: Introduction to crypto-Jews in the Iberian Peninsula

READINGS:

We will begin by examining the terminology and chronology of crypto-Jews, maps of the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslim period to the Expulsion, and The Edit of Expulsion. We will discuss the Gampel and Bejarano-Gutierrez You Tube podcasts on Sephardic history. We will examine the problem of quantifying the demography of the Sephardim at significant moments in their Iberian history, as discussed in Gitlitz, pp. 73-76.

QUESTIONS: 1. What conundrum did the Jews face in deciding whether to stay in their Muslim homes or move to Christian lands?
2. What variables in the 14th century led to the widespread riots against Jews in Castile and Aragon in 1391-92?
3. What were the immediate ramifications for the Jews resulting from these riots?
4. What were the long-term ramifications that led along the path to expulsion?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: The crypto-Jewish Experience in New Spain

READINGS: 1. Continued Discussion of Gampel’s You Tube Podcasts

2. Gitlitz, Conversos after 1492 in Mexico, pp. 55-58.

3. Hordes, “The crypto-Jews in New Spain”, pp. 30-34 and 38-39

Gitlitz and Hordes provide a religious and cultural framework for the study group’s main topic of the life of Luis Carvajal the Younger.

QUESTIONS: 1. How would you describe the crypto-Jewish community in Mexico in the 16th century?

2. What was the history of the Inquisition in Mexico during this period?

WEEK 3:

TOPIC: "The Martyr" by Martin A. Cohen

READINGS: Chapters 1-3

I will offer a brief Introduction to the primary text. The readings introduce us to Luis Carvajal the Younger as a fugitive in 1589, and as a twelve year old first learning of his Jewish descent. We also learn of the role of his uncle, the conquistador, in bringing his family to New Spain.

WEEK 4:

TOPIC: Carvajal's personal journey

READINGS: Cohen, Chapters 4-6. We hear conversations between family members who were Judaizers and those loyal to Christianity. We explore Carvajal's personal journey from ambivalence toward secret Judaism to full commitment. He follow Carvajal as a fervent Judaizer (servant of God) who searched for secret Jews and hosted them in his home

WEEK 5:

TOPIC: Inquisition and history

Cohen, Chapters 7 and 8. These chapters offer a lengthy description of Inquisition procedures and trials and the trial history of the Carvajal family. Carvajal transferred to the Colegio de Santa Cruz as Fray Pedro's secretary with unlimited access to an exceptional library. His mother and sisters went back to avid practice of Christianity, but returned forever to secret Judaism under his influence

WEEK 6:

TOPIC: The last years; Wrap up

Cohen, Chapters 9-11. Carvajal and his sisters were rearrested in 1595; he dreamed he was in paradise. His sister Leonore confessed to Judaizing by the whole family. He changed back and forth from denial of charges to confession under frustration and torture but denied charges on his deathbed. Carvajal died in the biggest auto-da-fé to date on 12/8/1596. The last chapter provides information on the fate of surviving relatives and friends.