

International Workshop “Victims and bystanders: the Sephardi Jews and Spain during the Holocaust.”

28.01.2026 – University of Potsdam, Am Neuen Palais 10. Haus 8, Seminar rooms 056-058.

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Spain and the Sephardim fit the categories proposed by historian Raul Hilberg as quintessential bystanders and victims in the triangle of violence that was the Holocaust. Francisco Franco’s Spain was nominally neutral during WWII but had deep ideological, political and economic ties with Nazi Germany. Spanish territory was one of the few escape routes for Jews and other refugees, Spanish diplomats received requests from thousands of Sephardi Jews during the years of extermination, and Spanish Republicans shared concentration, and oftentimes annihilation, with fellow Jewish inmates. The Sephardim were from the first moment part of those targeted for destruction by the Nazi Final Solution. Out of hundreds of thousands of Sephardim in Europe, some 4,000 to 5,000 possessed Spanish citizenship. Their Spanish nationality saved many of them, but the attitude of Franco’s administration also led to the demise of many others.

In the last decades much scholarly work has been produced on the entanglements between Spain and the Holocaust, clarifying the attitudes of Spain toward the Jews, the behavior of Spanish diplomats vis à vis the Sephardim, debunking the myth of Franco as a friend of the Jews, and exploring the fascinating but difficult overlapping of Holocaust and Historical memory (*Memoria Histórica*). Similarly, the marginal role Sephardi Jews had traditionally played in the English-language historiography of the Holocaust has been recently remedied. Scholars in Sephardic and Holocaust Studies have turned the discipline’s focus to the fates of the Sephardim during the Holocaust, and their specific memories thereafter. Putting these two streams of research – the diplomatic, legal and political histories of Spain in relation to the Sephardim on the one hand, and the individual, family and oral histories of the Sephardim on the other – in contact is necessary to bridge the gap between the literatures on victims and bystanders.

The relations between Spain and the Sephardim during the Holocaust were a reality that cut across different geographies, actors and realms of life. The International Workshop intends to be a transnational and interdisciplinary forum bringing together scholarship focused on different countries, sources, methodologies and subjects. By offering an integrated picture of the historical conundrum involving Spain and the Sephardim during the Holocaust, it aims to rethink questions still unanswered and, hopefully, inspire new ones as well as provide a framework for future research cooperation.

Room 056

10:00-10:15 Opening remarks

10:15-11:40 Session I: Spain and Holocaust Studies

Bernd Rother (Willy-Brandt-Stiftung)

Franco, the savior of the Sephardic Jews—an indestructible myth?

Santiago López Rodríguez (Uppsala University)

Franco, Salazar, and the Holocaust: Historiographical Debates on Neutrality and Complicity

11:40-11:50 Coffee

11:50-13:15 Session II: The Sephardim, Spain and Empire

Olmo Masa de Lucas (University of Potsdam)

From la Torre Blanca to Alsyete: the Spanish Jews at the onset of the Holocaust in Salonica and Paris

Maite Ojeda-Mata (University of Valencia)

Distant Witnessing from the Colonial Periphery: The Sephardic Community of Tetouan (1929–1946)

13:15-14:15 Lunch

Room 058

14:15-14:30 Coffee

14:30-16:00 Session III: The memories of the Holocaust and Sepharad

Sara J. Brenneis (Amherst College)

Mauthausen and the Holocaust in Spanish Memory

Davide Aliberti (University of Messina)

Philosephardism in Spanish Right-Wing Political Discourse: Meanings and Uses (1978–2015)

16:00-16:15 Closing remarks