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Connecting with the lives and lineages of Medieval Catalan Jews

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At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the consistent support accorded to my research by the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy in Jerusalem .

It is the Institute's aim to promote Jewish Genealogy at the University level. I would only observe that when Genealogy is done academically, it becomes an amazing way to provide new insights into a series of fields, including History, Economy, Demography, Migrations, Social, Religious and Family life, Jewish and local Law, Culture and Customs.

This paper is about a research of the medieval Jewish Community of Cervera that was conducted over a period of 18 months, primarily in the Archivo Comarcal de la Segarra in the town of Cervera, in Catalonia, Spain.

It can serve as an illustration of Catalan Jewish life in provincial towns of Medieval Spain.

Cervera is located 200 km from the French border, 100 km from Barcelona, on its way to Lleida, that is 40 km from Cervera, and to Zaragoza, that is 140 km from Lleida.

It is important in the study of Jewish Medieval life in Spain because of its location on one of the main travel routes between southern France and Zaragoza.

This brief presentation concentrates on :

1. The Jewish Community in Cervera
2. The Jewish Quarter
3. The Synagogues
4. The Jewish Cemetery
5. Jewish homes
6. Professions and activities of the Jews of Cervera
7. The Last Days of the Jews in Cervera.

1. The Jewish Community of Cervera

When Jews first settled in Cervera is not accurately known. We do find mention of Jews in the archives before the actual formation of Cervera's Jewish community.

Even the date of formation of the Jewish Community is not clear. In the Crown of Aragon Archive there are documents such one from 1277 C.E., concerning the payment of taxes to the Jewish Community of Barcelona, that mention the Jewish Community of Cervera along with others in Vilafranca del Panades, Montblanc and Tarragona ¹.. But similar documents were issued in previous dates, concerning same Communities, but “the Jews of...” Barcelona, Cervera, ... instead of “the Jewish Community...” of Barcelona, Cervera, ... were mentioned.

The 1391 riots resulted in the destruction of documents in the possession of the Jews of Cervera. Following the riots the Jews of Cervera, together with their Christian neighbors, had to reconstitute the documents to re-establish their mutual relationships (loans, credits, real estate, and the like).

The existing Notary registers were used and were helpful at the time to restore the destroyed mutual obligations, just as they are helpful to us today to learn about their lives.

Within the hundreds of Notary books housed in the archive of Cervera there are thousands of documents that mention Jews living there. They vary from the most complete documents that list Jewish properties at specific moments in time, lists of Jewish heads of family, last wills, wedding contracts and purchases and sales; to very brief mentions of Jews who were witnesses in Notary acts or who claimed various amounts of money.

Analyzing these documents permits the researcher to determine when certain families settled in Cervera, the reasons for their settlement there, where they came from, an approximate death date (when mentioned as “the deceased” or “the widow of...”), an approximate birth date (when mentioned as child, junior, senior, the oldest, the youngest)

Despite this, the recreation of birth, marriage and death registers remains a challenge.

2. The Jewish Quarters

By 1328 the Jews of Cervera were assigned their own Quarter. As the Community increased, a new Quarter was assigned for them to live, that was named *Call Sobirá*, being *Call Jussá* the first Quarter's name.

Despite the existence of the Jewish Quarters, the daily life and relations between Christians and Jews made it normal to the Jews to move their homes outside the Jewish Quarter, what made their relationships with the Christian population much closer. Because it was considered to be the cause of scandals and dangers, an order was issued on June 11, 1369, to make the Jews to go back to their Quarters.

This order, specially addressed to some Jews in particular, provides us information about their names:

Na Dolcich and Jucef Cabes

Na Bonafilla

Juceff Samarell

Bonjuha Bonafos, who was ordered to move to his brother Salamo Adret home.

Samuel Adret and his son in law Salamo Astruc Adret

Leo Frances

Abram

Mosse Cellem, who was ordered to move to Enoch ça Porta or to Bonanasc Alfaquim homes.

Mosse Dangor was assigned to live at his brother Saul Dangor home.

Jucef Marroqui

Vidal Ysay

Abram Perpunter.²

Notwithstanding this and similar orders, some people went on moving their residence to houses outside the Jewish Quarter. Notary deeds show the location of the homes they bought or rented there.³

3. The Synagogues

In 1384, because of the increased Jewish population in the town, the Jews of Cervera asked for permit to build up a new Synagogue, in the second Jewish Quarter, the *Call Sobirá*.

In August 1385 the new Synagogue's seats were sold. Physician Sullam Deuslogar, who was Secretary of the Jewish *aljama* at that time, was appointed to sell the seats.

The sale documents were drawn up by the notary of Cervera Antoni Agramuntell, and were registered in a separate book.

The detailed description of each seat and its buyer made it possible for Cervera Historian Duran i Sanpere to draw a map of the Synagogue, with its 52 seats and their owners.

In subsequent notary deeds we see further mention to the property documents that were given to the seats' owners, as when properties' inventories were done, when seats were sold or transferred to the owner's heirs.

4. The Jewish Cemetery

The Jewish cemetery of Cervera has not yet been located, no tombstones anywhere, no excavations, only some references to in the books.

Some years ago, in 2007, in the town of Tarrega, that is about 18 kilometers from Cervera, an excavation for construction purposes was done, and the Jewish cemetery was uncovered.

182 individual graves as well as six common graves, containing more than 69 bodies, were uncovered.

The common graves could correspond to the deaths from the attack of the Jewish Quarter of Tárrega in 1348. The bodies were not buried in the usual way, they seemed to have been buried in a hurry, and a violent cause of death is seen in some of them ⁴

The guilty parties in that attack were prosecuted and gallows were built to punish them. These gallows were still present as late as May 1353 at which time the King ordered the Tarrega bailiff to knock them down. ⁵

From the Council Books of Acts housed in the Municipal Archive of Tarrega, we know that in 1503 an inhabitant of Tarrega asked for permission to take a tombstone from the Jewish cemetery, and he received the permit. He used the stone to build a bridge over the river to get better access to his mill and lands. ⁶

Concerning the Jewish cemetery of Cervera, we can gather references concerning its existence from municipal registers of properties kept in its archive, as well as from Notary documents of real estate sales and the like. These references go back to dates prior

to 1340. The Jewish cemetery of Cervera was referred to as “Fossar dels Juheus”, its Catalan name.

Owners of properties close to the Jewish cemetery would refer to their properties as “close to the Jewish cemetery” or similar references. The area where the Jewish cemetery was situated was also called *Fossar dels Jueus* (Jewish cemetery) ^{7 8}

5. Jewish Homes

From the Notary books, last wills, inventories, wedding gifts, we can extract information on the home assets and cloths, as well as on the Jews and Jewesses clothes and jewelry.

When in 1487 the inventory of the properties of Regino, the widow of Davi Bendit, was done, it started by describing her house and its boundaries, so it could be exactly identified.

After that, the inventory went on by describing each one of the house's rooms and its contents: the hall, the cellar, the dining room and the bedroom. ⁹

We will now focus on the objects connected to Jews in the archival documents.

Jews and Jewesses wore clothes very similar to Christians. From time to time, the Christian authorities issued laws concerning their clothes, to render them easily identified as Jews. This is what happened with the obligation to wear a yellow or yellow and red badge sewn on their breast clothes. Jewish men were often obliged to wear a dark colored Jewish Cape.

Among clothes, Jewels and special items belonging to Jews shown in the Cervera's documents we can mention:

A ragged blue Jewess mantle, with red silk lining. *Item un mantell blau de Juya forat de terzanell vermell esquinçat.* ¹⁰

A blue silken cap with golden braids. *Item un capell de seda blava ab trenes de or* ¹¹

A small bag containing a coral branch and a piece of crystal. *Item un saquet ab una branca de corall e un troç de crestell.* ¹²

A big pearl, an emerald, some small pearls and some small pieces of silver. *Item una perla grossa ab una pedra fina maragde e perles menudes e trocets de argent.* ¹³

A coral branch decorated with silver, and a small hand. *Item una branca de coral gornida de argent e una maneta.* ¹⁴

Some dolphin's teeth decorated with silver. *Item unes dens de dalfi gornides de argent.* ¹⁵

A stone that had some property (that we do not know) *Item una pedra que diuen fa certa propietat.* ¹⁶

A Shofar. *Item un corn que se apelle en ebraich çoffar* ¹⁷

Teflilin. *Item un stog en que ha dintre tefillyn.* ¹⁸

A title of property of a seat in the Synagogue . *Item una carta del loch de la scola.* ¹⁹

A brass made eight branches candelabrum. *Item unes lumeneres de lauto ab quatre poms e vuyt brochs* ²⁰

From the excavation performed in the Jewish cemetery of Tarrega we can see in the following picture a branch of coral, two small hands or Khamsa also known as the hand of Fatima, and some other pieces corresponding to what is supposed to be a child's collar with amulets. ²¹

6. Professions and activities of the Jews of Cervera

Documents concerning the Jews of Cervera allow us to identify their main activities.

Many of the Jews did share their own profession with the money lending.

Menahem de Querci, a Jew of Cervera, though originating from Barcelona, was a silversmith. In the Notary books he is often mentioned in his main activity as money lender.

There were Jewish tailors ²² , weavers, shopkeepers, farmers (the main harvests in that area were saffron, grapes, wheat, oats, and the like), merchants (they traded with the local agriculture products as well as with clothes and other items), brokers.

There is to mention a shoemaker, Mosse Algo, whom we find collecting the price of the shoes he had been selling during the early 15th century not only in Cervera and surrounding villages, but in towns situated kilometers away from Cervera. ²³

About the Medicine Art, there were well known Physicians as well as Jewish Physician's lineages.

David Abram received qualification as Physician in 1315 (he was qualified as *ydoneum sufficientem in medicine*)

Saltell Cabrit, Jew of Barcelona, surgeon, moved to Tarrega, where he lived until he died, around 1390. His daughter Belaire married Jacob de Querci, who belonged to a Physicians lineage of Cervera. The Querci who converted into Christianity, took the name of “de Pau”, and went on being Christian Physicians.

One of the Quercis, Mestre Içach Jacob de Querci, married Sobredona, the daughter of Samuel de Lunell, a Physician of the town of Ponts who had moved to Cervera.

Çara, the sister of Mestre Içach Jacob de Querci, married Mestre Juceff Cavaller, also belonging to a Physicians family. The Cavaller who converted into Christianity took the name of Cardona, and some of them also continued being Physicians.

Mestre Samuel Cavaller, who in July 1492 had already died, had married Bonafilla, the daughter of Davi Abenaçaya, a Physician of the close town of Tarrega. Her brother, Jucef Abenaçaya, was also a Physician of Tarrega.

Physician Juceff Cavaller, of Cervera (1483, 1485) was married with Bonadona, the daughter of the late Saltell de Piera, Jew of Agramunt.

Some other Physicians of Cervera were Mestre Sullam Deuslogar (1385), Abraham Astruc Zatorre (1367), Mestre Abram dez Cortal (1405), Mestre Bonafos Abram (1420) and Mestre Cresques Adret (1479, 1485)

Physician Mahir Alazar was the groom in a Ketuba that was signed in Cervera in July 29, 1442.

This ketuba corresponds to one of the three ketubot that are housed in the archive of Cervera. From this document we learn that Mahir, son of Salamo ben Alazar, married Bonosa, the daughter of Issac Horabona.

Mair was a Physician who when married moved to Santa Coloma de Queralt ²⁴, and after that he moved to the town of Balaguer.

In 1479 he is mentioned as a Rabbi in Cervera, which is unusual, because there Rabbies were named Magisters (Mestres). The reason of this naming might be due to the fact that Rabbi Mair Alazar was not originating from Cervera.

We have very few references about the way the physicians worked.

From a document of the year 1362, we know that Astrugona, the wife of Abram Avizmell, performed fertility treatments. Guillem Zatorre promised he would pay for Astrugona’s services and medicines in case her wife Sibila got pregnant, whether a son or a daughter. ²⁵

On July 1399, Mestre Abram dez Portell, Physician and Surgeon of Cervera, was paid for his medical attention to Beatriz Porta, sick with the 1345 plague.

7. Last Days of the Jewish Community of Cervera

In December 1491, as usual, the taxation list corresponding the years 1492, 1493 and 1494, was prepared,

- Jucef Adret, 10.5 *sous*
- Mestre Içach de Querci, 15 *sous*
- Jafuda de Querci and his brother Mosse, 22 *sous*
- Na Priçosa, wife of the late Yçach Baruch, 3 *sous*
- Baruch Cofen and his son Samuel, 12 *sous*
- Mestre Jacob de Querci, 12 *sous*
- Samuel Sullam, 5 *sous*
- Mosse Sullam and his nephew Yçach, 15 *sous*
- Benvenist Sullam, 11 *sous*
- Bonafilla, the widow of Mestre Crescas, 4 *sous*
- Vidal Andali and his son Bondio, 7 *sous*
- Bonanasch Andali, 2.5 *sous*
- Yçach Comprat, lo sedacer, 2.5 *sous*
- Yçach Aruti and his son in law, Mose Faym, 4.5 *sous*
- Jucef Çaruch, 4 *sous*
- Yçach Taroch, 3 *sous*
- Salamo Aruti, *sabater*, 3 *sous*
- Mestre Jucef Cavaller and his son Estruch, 13.5 *sous*
- Bonjua Salom, 3.5 *sous*
- Jucef Baro, 6 *sous*
- Bonjua Juçef Adret, 5 *sous*
- Bonet Bellsom, 6.5 *sous*
- Samuel Adret, 14 *sous*
- Mose Bellsom and his son in law Saltell, 15 *sous*
- Mose, the son of Mose Sullam, 3.5 *sous*
- Abram Sullam, 2.5 *sous*
- Mose Andali, 6 *sous*
- Estruch Adret, 5.5 *sous*
- Yçach Mose Sullam, the father, 7.5 *sous*
- Bonjua Adret, the older, 9 *sous*
- Mestre Samuel Cavaller, 12 *sous*

When the Expulsion Edict was communicated to the Jews of Cervera, they might decide between converting into Christianity or leaving the country.

The municipal authorities of the town asked the Christian population to collaborate in the Jews' task of cancelling debts and selling properties, to get them to be the less prejudiced as possible.

The Notary documents that were drawn up since that moment are a most rich source of information about the Jewish Community of Cervera:

- Debts and credits that were cancelled, transferred or procurators that were appointed to do so.^{26 27}

- In every real estate sale deed, the name of the Jewish owners is given, and also all the details concerning boundaries, purchaser's names, price paid or due to be paid by the new owners, sometimes new Christians that were to go on residing in the town.^{28 29 30 31}

- Also the Jews who were not creditors nor debtors at that moment, and that had not any real estate to sell, may appear as witnesses in the Notary deeds.

In the documents following the Expulsion date, mentions to the Jews still appear. The new Christians used to be identified as conversos or neofitos, or by mentioning their former Jewish name together with their new Christian name. This double naming was necessary to link the new documents to previous agreements or contracts done under their former name.

If we look at the list of heads of family that was done for the whole Catalonia in 1497, no mention to the Jewish origin of the converts was done. Also, some of the converts who had taken a new name were sometimes listed with their old family name. So it happens with Physician Joan de Pau, who was registered with the name Joan de Querci; or Franci de Pau, who was registered with the name Franci de Querci.

Conclusion

Probably, the main conclusion we can get from this work is that an huge amount of documents are kept in the archives waiting to be read and analyzed.

Working on primary sources is the key to get the most accurated information, and to get new clues that lead to further ones.

¹ RÉGNE, Jean. *History of the Jews in Aragon. Regesta and Documents 1213-1327*. Hispania Judaica 1. Jerusalem 1978. doc nr. 683. ACA Reg. 39, fol. 214 v.

² BAER, Fritz. *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien. Urkunden und Regesten. I. Aragonien und Navarra*. Akademie Verlag. Berlin 1929. pages 426-429.

“...atnents que com molts e diverses scandels e perils sien e estien aparellats de venir e seguir, axi com ja de fet si son estats seguits, per rahon dalscuns casats de juheus qui estaven e lur domicili tenien entre los crestians e crestianes dela dita vila, fore los calls lurs, emper amor daço lo dit senyor infant... ordone que los juheus davall scrits, los quals estaven fore los dits calls e entre los dits crestians e crestianes, daqui avant estien e abiten en les casas e alberchs davall scrits situats dins los calls dela vila sobredita...”
ACA. Reg 1709, f. 96 v- 97 v

³ Bonjua Adret and his wife bought a house in the *Carrer Major* in July 5, 1485
ACS. FN. Cervera. 53. Antoni Bonet. “*Manuale decimum...*” f. 69 v- 70 r

⁴ COLET MARCÉ, Anna, RUIZ VENTURA, Jordi, SAULA BRIANSÓ, Oriol, and SUBIRÀ de GALDÀCANO, Eulàlia. *Les Fosses Comunes de la Necròpolis Medieval Jueva de les Roquetes, Tàrrega*. URTX

⁵ ACA. Reg. 675, fol 56 r.
Cit. Josep Xavier Muntané i Santiveri, *Fonts per al estudi de l'Aljama Jueva de Tàrrega*. Catalonia Hebraica VIII, Barcelona 2006.

⁶ AHCT. *Llibre de Consells (1501-1510)*, fol 83 r. 1503, July 30.

⁷ ACSG. FM. *Llibre de Manifest 1340*.

⁸ Benet de Segalers, son of Benet, had a piece of stony ground in the *Fosar dels Juheus*, which had belonged to his father, Benet de Segalers.
ACSG. FM. *Llibre de Manifest 1340*.

⁹ ACSG. Colección Dalmases n° 3049 bis. Inventory of the properties of the deceased Regino, widow of Davi Bendit, performed in Cervera in 1487, January 25.

¹⁰ ACSG. Manuscripts 2.4 (AM – 17) Inventory of the properties of Na Bella, Jewess, the daughter of Içach Xetavi, Jew of Perpignan, that were kept by Mestre Cresques Adret, Jew of Cervera. 1484, January 27.

¹¹ ACSG. Colección Dalmases n° 3049 bis. Inventory of the properties of the deceased Regino, widow of Davi Bendit, performed in Cervera in 1487, January 25

¹² ACSG. Colección Dalmases n° 3049 bis. Inventory of the properties of the deceased Regino, widow of Davi Bendit, performed in Cervera in 1487, January 25

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- ¹³ ACSG. Colección Dalmases nº 3049 bis. Inventory of the properties of the deceased Regino, widow of Davi Bendit, performed in Cervera in 1487, January 25
- ¹⁴ ACSG. Colección Dalmases nº 3049 bis. Inventory of the properties of the deceased Regino, widow of Davi Bendit, performed in Cervera in 1487, January 25
- ¹⁵ ACSG. Colección Dalmases nº 3049 bis. Inventory of the properties of the deceased Regino, widow of Davi Bendit, performed in Cervera in 1487, January 25
- ¹⁶ ACSG. Colección Dalmases nº 3049 bis. Inventory of the properties of the deceased Regino, widow of Davi Bendit, performed in Cervera in 1487, January 25
- ¹⁷ ACSG. Colección Dalmases nº 3049 bis. Inventory of the properties of the deceased Regino, widow of Davi Bendit, performed in Cervera in 1487, January 25.
- ¹⁸ ACSG. Colección Dalmases nº 3049 bis. Inventory of the properties of the deceased Regino, widow of Davi Bendit, performed in Cervera in 1487, January 25.
- ¹⁹ ACSG. Colección Dalmases nº 3049 bis. Inventory of the properties of the deceased Regino, widow of Davi Bendit, performed in Cervera in 1487, January 25.
- ²⁰ ACSG. Manuscripts 2.4 (AM – 17) Inventory of the properties of Na Bella, Jewess, the daughter of Içach Xetavi, Jew of Perpignan, that were kept by Mestre Cresques Adret, Jew of Cervera. 1484, January 27.
- ²¹ Picture provided by the Director of the Museum of Tarrega. From COLET MARCÉ, Anna, RUIZ VENTURA, Jordi, SAULA BRIANSÓ, Oriol, and SUBIRÀ de GALDÀCANO, Eulàlia. *Les Fosses Comunes de la Necròpolis Medieval Jueva de les Roquetes, Tàrraga*. URTX
- ²² We can mention Maimo Cerç (tailor around 1345), Dolç Issac (1351), Jacob Satorra (1351), Sentou Jafuda (about 1379-1415), Bonjua Adret, Issac Arruti, Abram Sullam, Benvenist Sullam, Mosse Mosse Sullam, Bonet Bellsom, etc.
- ²³ Mosse Albo, 1414-1416. Also we can mention Salamo Arruti, 1416 and Mosse Abençanas, 1491.
- ²⁴ In August 1455 he was in Cervera acting as procurator for his wife Bonosa. Also as a creditor he is mentioned. In both documents the mention of him being a Physician inhabitant in Santa Coloma de Queralt appears.
ACS. FN I. 35. Joan d'Albalat. *Manual 1455, January – 1457, December* f. 73 r-v (1455, August 21), 73 v-74r (1455, August 28)
- ²⁵ ACS. FN. Cervera, 7, Pere Cortes, *Manual 1358-1362*. ff. 163 r-v

1362, September 29

²⁶ Mosse Sutllam, Jew *botigerio* of Cervera, was paid a debt that had been stated in 1491. Mosse Andali was the Jewish witness to this act.
ACS. FN. I. 55 Antoni Romeu. “*tertium manuale*” 1490, October 23–1493, February 1

²⁷ On July 10, Içach Samuel Sullam, Jew of Cervera, appointed Joan Cornellana as his procurator.
Joan Montaner, Christian, and Jaco Baruch, Jew, inhabitants in Cervera, were the witnesses to this act.
ACS. FN. Cervera. 53. Antoni Bonet. “...*quartum decimum manuale...*” 1490-1492. f. 27 r

²⁸ On July the 1st, Juceff Zarrench, *curritor auris*, Jew of Cervera, sold his house, that was situated in the Cap Corral Quarter, in the Na Mel street. One of this house boundaries was the house of Içach Tarros, Jew of the same town.
Two Christians and the Jew Vidal Andali, inhabitants in Cervera, were the witnesses to this act.
ACS. FN. Cervera. 53. Antoni Bonet. “...*quartum decimum manuale...*” 1490-1492. f. 26r

²⁹ On July 12, Juceff Zarrench sold his courtyard, situated in the same street. Içach Tarros was the Jewish witness to this act.
ACS. FN. Cervera. 53. Antoni Bonet. “...*quartum decimum manuale...*” 1490-1492. f. 28 r-v

³⁰ On July 12, Bonjua Adret, *calçaterius sive giponerius*, and his wife Bonadona, Jews of Cervera, sold their house, situated besides the Jewish inferior Call, and besides the house of Salamo Coffen. The import of the sale was paid them on July 20.
Mosse Bellsom was the Jewish witness to this act.
ACS. FN. Cervera. 53. Antoni Bonet. “...*quartum decimum manuale...*” 1490-1492. f. 30 v, 37 r

³¹ On July 11, Bonet Bellsom sold his rights on a piece of land to Bertomeu Coll.
Two Christians and the Jew Jafuda de Querci, the younger, were the witnesses to this act.
ACS. FN. I. 55 Antoni Romeu. “*tertium manuale*” 1490, October 23–1493, February 1