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Villa Rabelais 116 boulevard Béranger 37000 Tours

Tél. 02 47 05 90 30 – Fax. 02 47 60 90 75 – courriel : contact@iehca.eu

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courriel : foodandhistory@iehca.eu

Correspondant IEHCA

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courriel : kilien.stengel@iehca.eu

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Tel. +33 (0)2 47 05 90 30 – Fax (0)2 47 60 90 75 – e-mail: contact@iehca.eu

Series Editor

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Production Editors

Lucinda BYATT, University of Edinburgh

Olivier DE MARET, Syracuse University Florence & The Umbra Institute

e-mail: foodandhistory@iehca.eu

Correspondent IEHCA

Kilien STENGEL, Université François-Rabelais de Tours

e-mail: kilien.stengel@iehca.eu

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e-mail: david.gentilcore@unive.it

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What did Sephardic Jews Eat?

*Myth, Memory and Reality**

▼ **Keywords** Sephardi, Cookbooks, Iberian Peninsula, Diego Velázquez, Jews from Algeria, Colonialism, Orientalism, Olive oil, Fish and chips, Couscous, Tajine

▼ **Abstract** This article questions whether “Sephardic” is a useful category of analysis for Food Studies, and whether the best-known literature about Sephardic food is historically reliable. The authors look to two bookends in so-called Sephardic history – the Iberian persecutions and exiles of Jewish communities in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, and the postcolonial exile of Jews from Algeria in the second half of the twentieth century. The authors consider the legacy of olive oil and fish and chips as presumed Jewish foods and the cuisine of Algerian Jews both before and after their exile to France. Instead of assuming natural correlations between ingredients or recipes and Sephardic cultural groups, they argue, historians should examine historically contingent “associations” between various groups and their cuisine – associations that change over time, overlap with other populations, and vary according to class and region.

▼ **Mots-clés** Sépharades, Livres de cuisine, Péninsule ibérique, Diego Velázquez, Juifs d'Algérie, Colonialisme, Orientalisme, Huile d'olive, *Fish and chips*, Couscous, Tajine

▼ **Résumé** Cet article tente de définir ce qu'on appelle “la cuisine sépharade”. Il s'interroge également sur le fait de savoir si “sépharade” est une catégorie utile pour les études culinaires et si la littérature la plus connue sur la cuisine sépharade est historiquement fiable.

* This article derives from a panel titled “‘Sephardi’ Food and Foodways: Challenging Scholarly and Popular Assumptions”, co-organized by the authors for the 2019 Association for Jewish Studies conference. We thank our co-panellists Ari Ariel, Max Modiano Daniel, and Harry Eli Kashdan, the panel’s Chair Adriana Brodsky, and the audience for their stimulating questions and remarks. Finally, we are grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their discerning remarks.

Aviva Ben-Ur • University of Massachusetts Amherst

Jessica Hammerman • Central Oregon Community College