

In 2015, Spain passed a historical law granting the descendants of expelled Sephardic Jews the right to petition for citizenship. Kiku Adatto of *The Atlantic* magazine, in 2019, wrote, "...The law declared that after 'centuries of estrangement,' Spain now welcomed 'Sephardic communities to reencounter their origins, opening forever the doors of their homeland of old.'" By 2021, the narrative changed, and the welcome was withdrawn. On July 24, 2021, the *New York Times* article, "Spain Pledged Citizenship to Sephardic Jews. Now They Feel Betrayed," reported that tens of thousands of applications were rejected under the pretense of universal fraud. Since 2018, I have assisted over 100 Sephardic Jews and converso descendants identify and document their ancestral origins via intensive investigations of medieval and early modern manuscripts held by ecclesiastical, municipal, royal, and notarial archives. Through these and prior paleographic studies, across almost every Spanish region and a 20-year scholarly career dedicated to understanding the Sephardic experience, I came to a stark conclusion – Spain's right of return was premised on a faulty and cynical understanding of its own its mixed religious ancestry. In this paper, I reveal the courageous and sophisticated efforts of 15th and 16th century Spanish Jews and conversos to conceal and obfuscate their identities from the prying eyes of the Spanish Crown and Roman Catholic Church. Through their active agency, they molded new identities and artfully managed the shaping of a Sephardic future predicated on the belief that the historical record could be transformed. So that their families – many of them elites – could continue to prosper in Iberia and immigrate to the forbidden Spanish Americas, they destroyed and manipulated personal and official records that revealed their Jewish ancestries and fabricated and crafted new documents that portrayed them as Old Christians. The success of their endeavors is what is important – the survival of the Sephardim. The perpetual tragedy – Spain's flagrant 500-years of rejection of the Sephardim.