FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Autobiography & Memoir

The House of Jacob
Sylvie Courtine-Denamy
William Sayers, translator
Cornell University Press
978-0-8014-4065-6
(August 31, 2003)

In this memoir of her extended family of Sephardic Jews, the author asks her father, Jacob, "What is your mother tongue?" He replies: "At home, it was Judeo-Spanish; in the street with my buddies, Greek and Armenian; with the servants, Turkish; at school, French; with the governess, English; and at high school, German."

Although her own knowledge of languages is not extensive, Courtine-Denamy's journey tracing her family's exile after their expulsion from Spain in 1492 led her to France, Turkey, Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Israel, the United States, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp. The French version of this book won the 2002 Alberto Benveniste Prize for Sephardi Literature. The translator of the English version has previously translated Daniel Dubuisson's *Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, among other books.

Courtine-Denamy, the author of *Three Women in Dark Times: Edith Stein, Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil*, tells how her father was deported to a camp in Turkey in 1943, where he was forced to work building roads. Another relative was sent from Salonika to Auschwitz, one of almost 50,000 Salonikan Jews who were murdered by the Nazis there in 1943.

The author, who was born in Neuilly, France, writes of her parents' life in Turkey: "I imagined the sounds, colors, smells, bits of my parents' childhood; the cries of street merchants; the beaker of fresh water from the water carrier; the bathtub of my mother, the last-born and most spoiled, that you put on the balcony to warm in the sun."

She sometimes writes as if addressing family members in person, as when recounting the life and death of her second cousins who were deported to Auschwitz and later killed there, she asks: "Did you have time to regret not having been gassed on arrival?"

After her father's death, Courtine-Denamy found countless albums with family photographs, enabling her to describe some of the clothes they wore. She also writes of the

customs in the countries in which her family lived and how the customs changed from generation to generation. She chronicles the ways the Jews were tolerated or abused, leading up to the Holocaust, and how well they were integrated both socially and culturally.

The foreword is by Julia Kristeva, the author of *Black Sun*, in the form of a letter. The glossary translates various languages into English: expressions for food and the senses, feelings of tenderness and anger, and of rituals and kinship.

Unable to get over the death of her parents, the author writes that she had to go looking for them. “What do you do in front of a grave when you don’t know how to pray?” she asks. “You remember.”

George Cohen