

Vidal and His Family: From Salonica to Paris: The Story of a Sephardic Family in the Twentieth Century

By Edgar Morin

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Vidal and His Family: From Salonica to Paris: The Story of a Sephardic Family in the Twentieth Century By Edgar Morin

Edgar Morin, one of France's greatest living intellectuals, tells the story of his father, Vidal Nahoum, but also the story of Sephardic Jews, and of Europe. In this "holographic history," Vidal's story, and that of his family, carries within it the flowering, decline, and death of Jewish culture in Spain; the passage from Empires to Nation States; the complex relations between Jews and Gentiles, between East and West; and, ultimately, the history of the 20th century itself. Morin's work ranges from the great sweep of global historical events to the everyday details of individual lives, letters, feelings, reflections, and experiences. Vidal was born in 1894 in the Ottoman Empire's great Macedonian port. His great-grandfather came from Tuscany and spoke Italian. His mother tongue was 15th-century Spanish. He learned French and German as a child. When he was an adolescent, he dreamed of living in France. He was deported there as a prisoner, and then liberated by the French Prime Minister. He lived through the Balkan wars, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and both World Wars. Vidal cannot be isolated from his family. And as Edgar Morin explains, "this book also tells the stories of the men and women in his immediate family.... When, as his son, I inevitably come into his story.... I describe him as objectively as possible. The reverence that inspired me did not call for a work of edification; it implied that I should attempt to write a truthful book. For this reason, the book is not in the least respectful, or at least not in the usual sense of the word. Vidal felt that loving someone meant being able to tease him. The author of these lines, who has inherited something of this trait, does not think it disrespectful to tease or make fun of the people he loves."

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Editorial Review

Review

“Edgar Morin, a renowned French intellectual, has written a testament to his father, a biography of a very complex and interesting person, and much more. Vidal Nahum’s life spanned most of the twentieth century and this book includes many excerpts from his own memoir, interwoven appropriately, and italicized so that the reader can easily distinguish his voice from that of his son. . . . Vidal Nahum was born in 1894, the youngest son of a large, well-established Sephardic family from Salonica. The book describes a many-branched family and the intertwining lives of a very big clan whose members wandered throughout the Middle East, Europe, and beyond, in search of livelihood, peace, and a place to grow roots. In that sense, the book is not only about Morin’s father and his extended family, but about Sephardic Jewry and its almost-millennium-long history, dating back to prior to the expulsion from Spain all the way to the present. . . . The book is well written. It is truly a saga worth reading for the light it sheds on a subject not often described in readable, compelling publications. It is recommended for libraries with extensive Jewish history collections, including specifically Sephardic history.” —Michlean Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC

About the Author

Edgar Morin is a French philosopher and sociologist, and emeritus director at the French National Center of Scientific Research (CNRS). **Deborah Cowell** is also the translator of Morin’s *California Journal*. **Alfonso Montuori** is a professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies, formerly a distinguished professor in the School of Fine Arts at Miami University of Ohio, and a coauthor of *Evolutionary Competence; From Power to Partnership.*

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