

Roger L. Martínez-Dávila Biography

Roger L. Martínez-Dávila is a Mexican American and native of San Antonio, Texas, a city his ancestors found in 1718 as members of the Spanish Alarcón expedition. A Texan by birth, he lived his formative years in Caracas, Venezuela, and La Paz, Bolivia, and like many itinerant academics, during his adult life has resided in many places, including the West and East coasts of the United States, as well as in Spain. A descendant of Roman Catholic and Sephardic Jewish families, namely the Carvajal and Santa Maria (or ha-Levi), his focus on inter-religious history is driven by a commitment to his deceased father – that is – to attempt to understand the family's irreconcilable blended cultural identity, and that of other LatinX families of Sephardic ancestry.

Presently, he is an Associate Professor of History and Chair of Department of History at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs and serves as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Fellow for the university's Graduate School. He holds a Ph.D. in medieval European history from the University of Texas at Austin in 2008, and as a part of his prior professional life in government service, earned a Master of Public Policy from the University of California-Berkeley in 1994. At Cal, he prepared a master's report for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund. His report pragmatically argued that the State of California should educate undocumented immigrant children, now known as "Dreamers", to secure economic benefits for the state in the form of increased public revenues, greater economic activity, and enhanced family welfare.

His first monograph, *Creating Conversos: The Carvajal-Santa María Family in Early Modern Spain*, was published by the University of Notre Dame Press in 2018. In *Creating Conversos*, he unravels the complex story of Jews who converted to Catholicism in Spain between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, migrated to colonial Mexico and Bolivia during the conquest of the Americas, and assumed prominent church and government positions. The history culminates with the Mexican Inquisition in the 1590s, when one arm of the converso family exercised the levers of trials and torture to execute a crypto-Jewish arm of the clan to preserve their power and hide their identities.

From 2014 to 2017, he served as a Guest Curator for the New Mexico History Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and its exhibition, *Fractured Faiths: Spanish Judaism, The Inquisition, and New World Identities* (2016). The exhibition and its artifacts generously loaned by Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. institutions and individuals, such as El Tránsito Museum in Toledo (Spain) and the Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico), told the journey of the Sephardim from their origins in Iberia, through their medieval Golden Age under the Islamic Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba, and their subsequent trials under the anti-Jewish pogroms in Christian Spain. The exhibition culminated with an exploration of the divergent paths of Sephardic Jews after the Edict of Expulsion of 1492 – especially Jews and their descendants who converted to Christianity and pursued opportunity in the Americas as colonial elites and others who sought survival as crypto-Jews.

During 2015 through 2018, he served as a European Commission Marie Curie Fellow (2015-2018) at the Universidad de Carlos III de Madrid where initiated his Deciphering Secrets project -- a global research, educational, and citizen science endeavor. It employs Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to teach medieval Spanish history as well as trained over 40,000 students in 140 nations to perform original transcription of medieval manuscripts pertaining to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interrelations. The culmination of the Deciphering Secrets project is the creation of a scholarly-curated digital manuscript and transcription collection. It is a developing digital compilation of over 4,700 individual ecclesiastical, royal, municipal, and familial folios and transcriptions that focus exclusively on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim relations. Among the principal contributions of the collection is that it offers digital access to manuscripts that are otherwise inaccessible unless a researcher travels to view these physical manuscripts on site in Spain.

His latest scholarships centers around the regeneration of medieval worlds using immersive reality technologies. Theoretically, he is defining a new field of research – *L'école des Annales Électronique* – which revitalizes the early 20th century French Annales School of History by employing digital tools and processes to better understand the "totality" of communities. Efforts to develop this field are materializing with the awarding of 2021-2023 *National Endowment for the Humanities* grant. Specifically, he and a colleague, Dr. Lynn Ramey of Vanderbilt University, developed an *Institute for Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities* titled, the *Immersive Global Middle Ages*, which empowers traditional faculty, museum specialists, and cultural creators to create their own digital virtual reality worlds that reveal the Middle Ages through different religious and cultural lenses. Martinez-Davila is now using this approach to re-create long-lost and destroyed Spanish synagogues and Jewish quarters to evaluate and better understand medieval Jewish communal life.