

**The Bonet-Kalonymos-Shem Tovs**  
**Direct Descendants of King David and the Princes of Septimania**  
*Andrés J. Bonet*

**1. The Beginnings of the ancient Royal Davidic lineage**

**T**he Jews had arrived in Spain and France via the Mediterranean from Judaea long before the fatal years of 66-70, when the Roman Emperor Titus took the city of Jerusalem. The Jewish communities they established had a leader and a council of elders. The leader acted as administrator or head of the community with regard to the payment of taxes or tribute to Rome or to the kings and emperors, thus serving as a “de facto” prince, with full rights as to the naming of religious representatives, judges and other community officials.

In the West, of all the Jewish communities existing in Sepharad [the area where Sephardic traditions were predominant] in the first ten centuries of our era, Narbonne was the most important. It established itself as the spokesman and administrator for the rest of the communities in communications with the king or emperor. The Jewish leader of this major community was called **Nasi** (Prince), which was his acknowledgement as supreme ruler of all communities and Jews of those areas. The Spanish March or Spanish Buffer Zone, and the communities of Jaca, Girona, Barcelona and Tarragon, were ruled by the Nasi in the same way as any other king, in collaboration with and under the jurisdiction of the Carolingian kings Calvus (Charles Martel), Pépin the Short and Charlemagne (Charles the Great).

The great expert of research into Sephardic subjects, Arthur J. Zuckerman, Professor of History of the City College of New York and disciple of Professor Yitzhak Baer of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, aided by Salo W. Baron, Professor Emeritus of History of Columbia University, carried out the now classic study, on the Jewish princes in the south of France (Septimania) in his book *A Jewish Princedom in Feudal France*.

**2. The great princes, Geonim, rabbis, Jewish kings of France and Spain during the Carolingian period and the 10th to the 14th centuries**

During the Carolingian reigns of 717 to 900, an important Jewish community existed in the south of France in the independent kingdom called Septimania and in its city of Narbonne. The Jewish community of Narbonne was presided over by a Nasi or Gaon who was one of the “reges socii” (associated kings). These Geonim from the different periods claimed to be direct descendants of King David. Since they acted as true princes, their functions were passed down within the same family. The Nesi'im (plural of Nasi) of Septimania administered the most prosperous and influential Jewish community of their time. The records are especially abundant during the reigns of the Carolingian rulers Charles Martel (717-741), Pépin (741-768), and Charlemagne (768-814). The Jewish communities were so well known that a number of sources cite them as “terra Hebraeorum” in 842, 950, 994, 1004 and 1032, as “terra Israhelis” in documents from Cluny, or as the “Villa Iudaica” in the case of Gerona in 982.

The Carolingian Pépin the Short conquered Narbonne from the Arabs in 759, after a seven-year siege. Charlemagne later retook Narbonne from the Arabs. A delegation of ten Jews negotiated with Charlemagne for the privilege of maintaining, once again and permanently, their own king in Narbonne. For this he was offered 70 marks of silver. Charlemagne accepted and granted them a third of the city to live in, a fact also recounted in the “Gesta Karoli Magni ad Carcassonam et Narbonam.” Charlemagne took the Jews under his jurisdiction and protection.

Abraham ibn Daud, author of the *Book of Tradition* or *Sefer Seder haKabbalah* (ShK), comments in his chronicle on Narbonne that the Frankish king Charles requested the king of Babylon (the Caliph) to send him a Jewish prince. He was sent Makhir, a magnate and scholar, descendant of the House of David. The king endowed him with extensive property and authority over the Jews in recognition of his noble rank. The ShK, in its appendix, refers to Makhir-Natronai as “bahur”

(young man), and Zuckerman makes the point that he must have been “bahur” well before 1165. Makhir married Auda Martel (daughter of Charles Martel and grandmother of Charlemagne), his daughter Bertrada married Pépin I, king of Italy, and later descendants were to marry Otto I, king of Germany, and Hugo Capet, Robert II and Louis VI, all kings of France. Other descendants are Sancho III ‘el Mayor’ (the Elder), King of Navarre, Ramiro I, King of Aragon and Ferdinand I, King of León and Castile. Thus this Davidic-Carolingian lineage blended with the whole of European royalty creating what the diplomat J. Javaloy has called the chosen lineage of Western Europe. He states that all of the royal houses of Europe, as well as the Spanish kings of the Reconquest and their successors down to the current king of Spain, Juan Carlos I, are descendants of Charlemagne and as such descendants of the Jewish king of France and Spain, Nasi Makhir David, Teodoric I (730-796), also called Thierry de Autun, king “sociis” of Septimania. All are members of the chosen lineage, the Davidic-Carolingian, direct descendants of King David.

Makhir David led the Jewish community under the Hebrew title ‘Nasi,’ comparable to the Carolingian ‘rex.’ Thus did grandsire, father and son of the Carolingian line find yet another way of legitimizing their own dynasty and acquiring the authority to rule “by divine right” over all the peoples of Christianity through their supposed links to the direct descendants of King David. This “sang real,” or “royal blood,” was mythicized in their romance language or ‘langue d’Oc.’ Capets, Valois, Plantagenets, Spanish kings of the Reconquest, Savoys, Habsburgs and Bourbons are some of the royal houses claiming to be descendants of this royal lineage of the House of David.

In the 12th century, in a letter from the Abbot of Cluny, Peter “the Venerable,” to King Louis VII of France (before 1143), mention is made of another king of the Jews reigning outside of the Land of Israel in Narbonne. This fact is confirmed by Benjamin of Tudela, who writes that on his trip during the year 1165, on reaching Narbonne, he sees that prince R’Kalonymos, son of the great prince R’Todros who reigned in 1134, is the owner of extensive lands and is the Nasi or Davidic prince who rules aided by the savants R’Makhir, R’Judah and R’Abraham, director of the academy. R’Meir ben Simon also, in 1245 in his *Milhemet Mitzvah* warns that the privileges of the Jews of Narbonne granted by Charlemagne must be respected. Authors such as J. Régné, I. Lévi, J. Aronius and S. Katz, also refer to the Jewish king of Narbonne, as does the Jewish Encyclopedia.

### **3. From the Hebrew Shem Tov, to the Greek Kalonymos, to the Latin Bona and the Romance Bon into the diminutive Bonet. The other ‘good’ descendants, the branch of the Yom-Tov.**

According to family tradition, the **Shem-Tov** family is recognized from antiquity by the Jewish people as direct descendants of the House of David. This name, of Hebrew or even Aramaic origin, brought from Jerusalem to the Diaspora means ‘good’ or literally ‘good name.’ This line was also known as **Yom-Tov** or **Toviyah**. Yom-Tov is literally translated as “good day” or according to the opinion of Mathilde Tagger of Jerusalem as “holy” or “feast day” if interpreted from a rabbinical and literary viewpoint. Toviyah incorporates the meaning of “God is good.” In all three cases the “good” represents the keynote of this line.

The Bonet and Kalonymos families did not transcribe their name into other forms. These family names acquired the “yichus,” the prestige of an illustrious lineage. This gave an additional incentive not to change it again or to Hebraize it.

Benzion Kaganoff states that the kinnui of Yom-Tov is both **Bonet** and **Bonjorn**. Both surnames are thus a translation of the Hebrew names and expressions Shem-Tov and Yom-Tov. In order to understand all aspects of the translation, the expression “kinnui” must be analyzed. This term is not limited to a literally translated meaning, but should rather be understood as “name,” “surname,” “nickname,” “pseudonym” and “form of address,” keeping specially in mind the practice and custom of the Jews of Europe of using and holding simultaneously to a Hebrew name as well as a name in the vernacular tongues of the areas where they settled. For this reason the Shem Tov, on arriving in Europe, adopted other Greek, Roman and local names. Shem-Tov, Yom-Tov, Toviyah or simply Tov was the ‘good’ lineage, which the Hebrew family, on its arrival in Europe, translated first into Greek as **Kalonymos**.

Gerald Murray makes the same point when he says that the translation of Shem-Tov into Greek is Kalonymos, and that this name is etymologically of Greek origin: “kalon” signifying “nice” or “good,” and “onymos” meaning “name.” Catherine Garson agrees as well that the Greek Kalonymos is the transcription of Shem-Tov in Latin spelling.

Benjamin Nahman referred me to the publication in Girona of *Per Una Historia de La Girona Jueva* (On the History of the Jewish Girona), by David Romano, which presents another example of the relationship between the Yom-Tov and the Bonets. During the 14th century there appears the Hebrew name ‘Jacob ben David ben Yomtob,’ utilizing the version of the name in the vernacular tongue, i.e. Catalan, ‘Bonjorn Bonet,’ where in this case Bonjorn is the first name and Bonet the surname. His son would be called Bonet Bonjorn, thus following the custom of the time and inverting the order upon naming a son.

The “good” line was translated into Latin as Bono, Bona, or Bonitus. Latin was blended with the vernacular languages of the Celtiberians, Visigoths and Franks who occupied the areas where the Bonets lived: the Kingdom of Aragon, Catalonia, and the South of France: Septimania, Occitania or the Spanish March, later called Rousillon and Provence. The result of this blend would be Vulgar Latin. It appeared in each of the areas, giving rise to such romance languages as the ‘langue d’Oc’ or Provenzal, Catalan, Aranese, etc. The Latin Bono, Bona, and Bonitus were reduced in these tongues to Bon. All of these languages shared the understanding of this surname, with the sense of “good,” as Bon.

The diminutive of the romance Bon would finally become the name **Bonet**, a term or surname more frequent in local and everyday use, kept through the transformation of the romance languages into modern-day French, Catalan, Castilian, Valencian and Majorcan.

Centuries later, upon the Reconquest by the Aragonese King James I of Majorca, Valencia and Alicante, the Bonets took part, and would be among the first lineages to settle in these lands.

Upon their conversion to Christianity and blending into the rest of society, and even though they descended from the most ancient Sephardic families, they fail to appear centuries later among the “Xueta” (Chueta) Jewish community of Majorca. However, they are indeed recognized publicly as Jews for the last time at the date of their conversion and expulsion from the Kehillah, or community, of Majorca in 1391. From that time to the present, they have concealed themselves among and blended into the civil Christian society without being recognized as Jews but treasuring within their families the secret of their Sephardic descent.

Most commonly, the Hebrew name was used together with a translation to the local language, as for example in Hebrew and Latin or in Hebrew and Greek.

Catherine Garson also explains that there are different families descending from the Hebrew Yom-Tov. These are the Bonjournus (in Beaucaire in 1322), the Bonjorns (in Avignon in 1360) and the Boniorns (in Perpignan in 1337). Garson states that the translation of Yom-Tov would be transformed through other Latin languages into Bondia (in Narbonne in 1306), Boudia (in Marseille in 1350), Bonus Dias (in Manosque in 1326) or Bondie (in Salon-de-Provence in 1391) and the form Bondie and its variants Bondi, Bondy, and Bonidy. The expression “bonne fête” would, in the same way, give birth to the patronymics Bonfed, Bonfad and Bunefad which appear in the south of France and in Spain in the 12th century. Following Silvia Planas, the Bondia were to be found in the Jewish quarters in the area around Girona (around the 14th century).

The translation into Greek of those of the ‘good name,’ the Shem-Tovs, as **Kalonymos**, would change as they moved from place to place, being transformed into German as Kalonymus, Kalman, Kelman, Kalma, or Kalm, into Polish as Kalmanowicz, Kalmanski, Kielminski, and Kielmanson, or into Russian Kalmanson, Kalmanov, Kalmanovich, Kalmanok and Kelmanskij.

A number of rabbis and “paytanim” [those who composed liturgical poetry some of which is still used in the synagogue service] belonged to the Kalonymos family (the Kalonymids). The best known settled in Lombardy and Tuscany, in the city of Lucca (Italy) in the 8th and 9th centuries. In the 9th century, they founded a Torah academy in Lucca, and they are still well remembered for their beautiful liturgical poetry. About the year 970, a descendant of this family was the great

prince of Le Mans, a recognized descendant of the House of David called Rabbi Abún who directed the Yeshiva of the city of Narbona (Narbonne) in the south of France, according to Daniel E. Loeb. His son Kalonymos moved to the Jewish community of Magenza (Mainz am Main) and Speyer, both in Germany. According to tradition, the Kalonymos were invited to settle by Kaiser Charles The Large in 887, and they founded a Yeshiva for the study of the Talmud. Thus the Kalonymos are among the most ancient and important of the Jewish families of Mainz, where they were to remain until at least the year 1091. Mainz developed into one of the most important Jewish communities of Europe. Another son is the rabbi Moshe de Narbonne, and his son was the Rabbi Jacob.

Meshullam ben Kalonymos “the Great” lived at the end of the 10th century in Mainz, where his tombstone is preserved. He is known for his liturgical poetry in Ashkenaz, the “Piyutim,” of which there are extant over 60 compositions written between 960 and 985. A collection of these was preserved and discovered in the Cairo Geniza (Fustat). Kalonymos of Mainz accompanied the King and Kaiser, Otto II, serving as his translator, and saving the king’s life at the battle of Cotrone. He gave the king his own horse to use in fleeing from the Saracens at whose hands he himself died. Kaiser Otto II married a descendant of the Nesi’im of Narbonne, thus fulfilling one of the most fervent wishes of medieval rulers, that of introducing into their lineage a factor which would legitimize their reign in supernatural form in the eyes of conquered peoples by marrying those who were considered the direct descendants of King David. These relationships arose as well from the simple cooperation and collaboration, which the Jewish princes lent to Christian kings in carrying out directly with them the government of their communities or in facilitating financing for the military activities of the Christian rulers.

Elisabeth Hollender identifies that Meshullam ben Kalonymos was one of the most important of Talmudic scholars as well as a liturgical poet of the first order. Some of his works remain part of the Ashkenazi ritual to this very day. He and Rabbi Moshe “the Elder” brought the poetic liturgical tradition of Eretz Yisrael and Italy to Germany and France. Meshullam ben Kalonymos was teacher to Simon ben Isaak ben Abun. Meshulam’s son was the rabbi Kalonymos ben Meshullam who died a violent death in 1096 as Parnas (administrator) of the community of Mainz after it was attacked by French and German Crusaders on their way to Jerusalem. The protection offered by a letter from King Henry IV could not save him, but Kalonymos led the resistance to the end, dying a martyr. His successor at the Mainz school was Rabbi Gershom ben Jehuda.

In 1165, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela started his journey and traveled to Narbonne where he spent the year 1166. In his chronicles, he relates that living there were scholars, magnates and princes, at the head of whom was the Rabbi Kalonymos, son of the great prince Rabbi Todros, of the seed of David, as certified by his genealogical tree. These Princes were de facto Jewish kings of this territory, called Septimania. But as this community was principal among all those in Frankish territory, they were considered princes of France (Nessiim). This distinction was accompanied by favors, and property was received from Carolingian kings and emperors, vast ‘hereditaments’ (palaces, homes and lands), under the direct protection of the Frankish king. The enjoyment of ‘hereditates et honor’ meant not only possession of lands and honor, but also carried the Carolingian sense of the word, a public post or office of State at the highest level granted by the king. Benjamin counts 300 Jews in this community.

### **The Kalonymos**

Rabbi Moses “the Elder” Kalonimos, Jewish king of France (Nasi), 917-?

Kalonymos, son of Moses “the Elder”

Todros, about 1064

Kalonymos “the Great,” end of 11th to beginnings of 12th centuries

Todros, about 1130-1150

Kalonymos, from before 1160 to after 1199

Todros, from before 1216 to before 1246

Kalonymos Bonmancip, from before 1246 to after 1252  
 Astruc-Tauros, from before 1256 to end of 13th century  
 Momet-Tauros, from the end of the 13th century to 1306

The descendants of the Makhiri and the Kalonymos intermarried on multiple occasions with the reigning dynasties of Europe, the genealogical trees presented by Joaquín Javaloy being extremely clear and demonstrating the way in which this lineage blended with European royalty, bringing to it their wisdom and royal Davidic lineage.

#### **4. The transformations of 'Bon' and 'Bonet'**

With the passing of time, multiple variants appeared throughout a number of areas and territories, since the members of this lineage personalized their name or surname and adopted customs as to how they were to be called. The adaptations of 'Bon' appear in the following surnames, all used by Sephardim in Spain, which Harry Stein documents in several different sources. The closest to the lineage of the Bonet are:

Bon, Bona, Bonet, Bonet de Lunel, Boned, Boneti, Bonhom, Bonhome, Bonjorn, Bonnin, Bono, Bonom, Bonomo, Bonsenior, d'en Bonsenior, Bonsenior, and Bonus.

However, other surnames exist as well, deriving from the original **Bon** and all documented as Sephardic by Harry Stein:

De Bonaboya, Bonacosa, Bonafe, Bonafed, Bonafeu, Bonafill, Bonafilla, Bonafos, Bonafoux, Bonafus, Bonafux, Bonagua, Bonaloc, Bonan, Bonananch, Bonanasc, Bonanasch, Bonanat, Bonanet, Bonastre, Bonastruc, Bonastruch, Bonaventura, Bonavia, de Bonavida, Bondavin, Bondi, Bondia, d'en Bondieta, Bondoga, Bondogas, Bonfed, Bonfey, Bonfil, Bonfillet, Bonguha, Bonher, Bonhome, Bonhorn, Boni, Boniach, Boniel, Bonifant, Bonino, Bonirac, Bonisac, Bonisach, Bonist, Bonito, Bonitto, Bonjom, Bonjua, Bonjudio, Bonjuha, Bonmacib, Bonmacip, Bonnin, Bono, Bonom, Bonomo, Bononat, and Bonsuccesso.

Bonet and its variants are surnames found in the 11th century among the Jews of Provence, Rousillon and the kingdom of Aragon and Catalonia, and which later gradually moved into areas further to the north of France, modifying Bonet into Banet, Baneth, Panet or Paneth. In France, they also used the variant Bonnet and later Dubonnet appears on joining the French 'de' with 'Bonet.'

Bonete, Boned or Benet are the variants of Bonet used from antiquity in the kingdom of Aragon. The Italian surname Bennetton is also the Italian form of the Catalan-Aragonese Benet like d'Bonelli another Italian version of Bonet. Bennett would be the English version of Benet.

Beginning in 1306 and especially down to 1395, Jews were expelled from France and fled to Spain, Germany, Austria and later to Bohemia and the countries of the East where they again adapted their surname to the tongues of these countries.

In Germany the variant Bernet appears in the region of Bamberg in Bavaria. Michael Bernet states that the Yom-Tov names are prevalent in this family and traces their origin to the Bonets who fled there after the expulsion. They also coincide in being Levites, which was hereditary in the family as is also the case in the other families descending from the Yom-Tovs: the Jomtovs, Jondorfs, Jondephs, etc. This branch holds the appearance of Levites within it in common with the other two branches of Bonet and Bonjorn. As Levites, they are the guardians and protectors of Israel and defenders of the worship of the Torah, an eternal condition according to the tradition coming down from Jeremiah. A double condition thus exists, of being both of the house of Levi and of Judah.

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