

## SAUDADES: A JOURNEY FULL CIRCLE

Celebrating our Portuguese - Jewish heritage

By Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum



*Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum, from South Africa, spoke at our recent conference Pueblo, Colorado. This article parallels her persentation there.*

Although I was baptized in the Catholic Church, more than thirty years ago I converted to Orthodox Judaism, the religion of my forefathers and often still experience some of the frustration, humiliation and shame suffered by my family for centuries. Many families in Portugal maintained traditions and Jewish practices throughout the ages, some with no knowledge where it originated as with most of my family, who are Catholic but retain many Jewish traditions that have been passed down without explanation.

The Jews are believed to have been a part of the Iberian Peninsula for almost 3,000 years, having arrived there with the Phoenicians, living and trading within organized communities. Judaism flourished as the only monotheistic religion, before giving birth to Christianity and later to Islam. The pagans converted to Judaism readily as did the people of North Africa. The influence of Jewish religion, culture and language on the Mediterranean Basin was entrenched during the seven centuries 813 -146 BCE of Carthaginian rule.

Long after their defeat by the Romans, the Carthaginian language continued, as verified by Jewish, Muslim and Christian historians. An interesting theory is that Hebrew might well have become the language of the Mediterranean basin if the Romans had lost the war at Carthage!! <grin> As Max I. Dimont so aptly expressed *Jews, God and History*, "the furniture in the western world is Grecian, but the house in which western man dwells is Jewish."

Portugal is often described as having a rich and romantic past. For me, it is painful and tragic. My own origins, history and culture have been effectively obliterated and it is for me, a continuing and haunting loss. My grandmother, whose name I bear, was thought to be "odd" in the village where she found secrecy and anonymity. "Odd", because once a year (on the Day of Atonement) she used to disappear for a whole day and night. Her granddaughter, my cousin, who died recently was a devout Catholic, but had requested a

plain, not decorated box and a "simple" burial. There was to be no adornment, no jewelry or rosary.

A feeling of *deja vu* overcomes me whenever I visit Portugal, remnants of the past remain, of the period when Jews dominated life there. Saturday is still called *Sábado* (Sabbath), and the rest of the days of the week a translation from the Hebrew, except for Sunday, being the first day of the week. The word for Easter, (Pascão ) remains the same for Pesach (Passover). A town outside Lisbon sells pastries packed in blue and white paper decorated with a Magen David. In Madeira, arts and crafts shops also feature this emblem. This beautiful island knew fear and became a hiding place for many Jews. Unlike places in Portugal, the Madeiran Jews did not manage to sustain their religious identity. Today they are devout Catholics as once they were devout Jews, and the Jewish cemetery lies forgotten, neglected and in ruin. The irony is that the Jews as a people had been in Portugal (and Spain) long before those who expelled and persecuted them.

The miracle of Portuguese Judaism continues, especially in the community of Belmonte in the northeast. Previously known as Crypto (secret) Jews, they have recently, in December 1996, rejoined mainstream Orthodox Judaism after 500 years of secrecy and fear. Living and hiding in this charming town, high in the Serra Estrella, mountain of stars, they managed with faith and perseverance to maintain their religion all this time. As often stated, they were Jews in all but name and Christian in nothing but form. A prayer said by Crypto Jews on entering a church featured the secret words; "I come here to worship neither wood nor stone, I come only to worship you,

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Continued on page 11

### IN THIS ISSUE OF HALAPID

A Journey full Circle – Rufina Bernardetti Mausenbaum	p. 1
Reviews of Papers Given in Pueblo Conference	2
President's Message	3
Book Review Turkish-Jewish Encounters	3
Braganza Presentation to Abravanel	3
The Cross of Contexts – Father Michael Perko	8
Review of Minutes of Business Meeting	10
Rabbi Soloveichik-By Schulamith C. Halevy	11

\* Photo by Cary Hertz ‡ Photo by Art Benveniste

## REVIEW OF PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE SCJS 2001 CONFERENCE IN PUEBLO, COLORADO

*The 2001 Conference was held in Pueblo, Colorado August 19 -21. Some presentations are reviewed here by Michele Greene.  
The rest will be reviewed in the next issue of Halapid.*



Seth Ward<sup>†</sup>

### **Seth Ward, "Crypto-Judaic Research Holdings at Denver University"**

Dr. Ward presented an overview of Crypto-Judaic research holdings organized and conceptualized by volunteer Arlene Gachinsky.

The holdings are organized into six notebooks, comprising newspaper articles, professional and journal articles (including all issues of *Halapid*), internet articles, and manuscripts. Dr Ward emphasized that his intent when including an item is not to be interpretative or decisive about what is "correct," the truth of an issue," or "more valuable" than something else, but simply to provide as much resource material as possible.

Dr. Ward would like donations of videotaped oral histories, along with items of material culture which might have been displayed in museums in the form of photos of personal material culture. He said that outside of headstones and dreidls, not many items of material culture are well documented. Songs, poems, and recipes would also be welcomed. He stressed, however, that texts or photos of items should be accompanied by the story of their use within a given context. He stressed that symbols alone are not the whole story -- what we say about them, and their meaning and use in our lives reveals a great deal as well. Dr. Ward feels it is very important to document how people talk about their experiences.

### **"Self Affirmation" Key to Judaism**

This tied in with the last segment of his talk, which he referred to as his "bully pulpit." Dr. Ward agreed with speaker and anthropologist Seth Kunin that Judaism is not carried in the genes but is rather how one defines him/herself. Those from Crypto Judaic backgrounds who state "I am a Jew," have to be taken seriously; their assertion about being members of the Jewish community is what is real in their lives -- genetics are irrelevant. Dr. Ward then pointed out that most Hispanos probably have Jewish ancestry anyway, so that alone should not define them today as Jews; self affirmation should be the key.

Dr. Ward said he accesses the Hebrew University Library collection of Jewish studies for additional material, a database of all scholarly articles in Judaic studies. The web address is: ram1.huji.ac.il

### **Rabbi Leo Abrami "The Anusim of Portugal"**

Leo Abrami focused on three individuals from the exiled converso community, Uriel da Costa, Baruch Spinoza and Felipe da Luna Montalto.

Rabbi Abrami has taught Jewish history in the Jewish Studies program of the University of Arizona and since retiring from the rabbinate, he volunteers for Kulanu. He has published various works on logotherapy and psychoanalysis.

He began with an introduction to the situation in Portugal following the expulsion of the Jews from adjoining Spain. Probably some 120,000 Spanish Jews entered Portugal in 1492, initially welcomed by King John who thought they

might be economically useful. By 1579, however, the Inquisition in Portugal was at full steam, resulting both in the exodus of many New Christians as well as the Jews to communities outside of the Iberian peninsula. In these safer environments, most exiles tended to return to Judaism, though not all. Some had great difficulties regarding social and religious beliefs and traditions unfamiliar to them, and found it too hard returning to Judaism after Catholicism.

Rabbi Abrami's first example of such an individual was Uriel da Costa, born in Oporto in 1585 and raised Catholic, although later he converted to Judaism. Leaving Portugal for Amsterdam, he was unhappy to discover a Judaism he did not recognize. He felt the rabbis were wrong to add their own interpretations to the text of law as written in the Bible, since he had no knowledge of the Talmudic tradition. He opposed the rabbis openly, as "Pharisees," and "obstinate," was eventually excommunicated, publicly humiliated, and left the Jewish community. In his autobiography, *"Exemplar Humana Vitae,"* he gives a moving account of his unsuccessful attempt to return to Judaism. He committed suicide soon after.

Rabbi Abrami then talked about the famous philosopher, Baruch Spinoza, 1632-1677, another descendant of conversos in conflict with the Jewish community of Amsterdam. Although he was influenced by the teachings of Maimonides and Rabbi Ibn Ezra, he also favored the Enlightenment philosophers, so was also eventually excommunicated and declared *"persona non grata,"* notably for his espousal of the philosophies of Rene Descartes.

### **Montalto, Physician to Queen**

The speaker then discussed the "amazing" Felipe da Luna Montalto, a Portuguese New Christian who returned to Judaism and was able to live openly as a Jew as personal physician to Maria de Medici, Queen of France and wife of Henri IV. In fact, before accepting the post of royal physician he made it a condition that he be allowed to practice Judaism openly. He was a zealous defender of the Jewish faith who encouraged others to return, and he openly interceded for a small colony of Parisian *conversos* accused of secretly observing Passover. He remained in service to the Queen until 1616 when, on a trip to southern France, he died apparently of bubonic plague. The Queen ordered his body to be embalmed and sent to the Jewish cemetery in Amsterdam.

Rabbi Abrami followed these biographies with the mention of several other important French historical figures with converso ties: France's greatest philosopher of the 16th century, Michel de Montaigne, a descendant of conversos whose relatives were among those who established the first synagogue in Newport, RI, an influential group known collectively as the Portuguese Merchants, Jacobo Rodriguez Pereira, inventor of the first forms of sign language for the deaf and mute and a casualty of the French Revolution; and his two nephews,



Rabbi Leo Abrami\*

## THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Arthur Benveniste

How do I follow a class act? I felt secure with Gloria Trujillo as president of the SCJS. It seemed natural for her to have the position. Somehow, the society has seen fit to give me the job and my only hope is that I can live up to the example set by Gloria. I am fortunate to have Gloria on the board and to have access to her needed advice. If my tenure is successful it will be because of the exceptional board that came in with me. Stan Hordes and Rabbi Stampfer are the experienced old hands of the society and how could I find better board members than Orfa Salinas, Dolly Sloan, Randy Baca and Flavio Montoya?

The new board will operate within the framework of revised bylaws. The SCJS was formed almost a decade ago as a small, almost informal organization with a set of bylaws that suited it at the time. As our organization grew, it was felt that the bylaws should be reformed to meet with the needs of our expanding society.

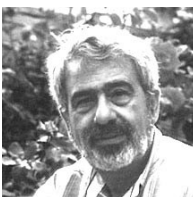
In May a few of us met in Flagstaff, Arizona. Gloria Trujillo, Stan Hordes, Flavio Montoya, Dolly Sloan, Randy Baca and I spent two days reviewing the bylaws, making amendments and additions as needed.

Randy, who has had the most experience with organizations, was especially helpful. We were proud of the result and pleased that the document was accepted by the conference in Pueblo with only a minor addition. The addition to the bylaws can be seen on page ten.

The new bylaws established a nominations committee, of Dolly Sloan, Stan Hordes and me, which recommended nominees, all of whom were elected by the membership at the conference. I am confident that the Society For Crypto-Judaic Studies, with its new board and bylaws, will continue with the momentum it inherited from Gloria's administration and grow to new heights.

We are very thankful to the local chair, Michael Atlas-Acuña and Temple Emanuel of Pueblo for hosting us at a reception and service and to Temple Shalom in Colorado Springs for a fine exhibit of Judaica and for a donation of \$120 to the society.

The positive feelings I have about the future of the SCJS are countered by the sadness I feel over the recent acts of terrorism. Crypto Jews exist because five hundred years ago there were men with medieval minds in control of the most advanced nations of their day, who thought that God sanctioned them to terrorize all who did not share their view of the world. Again today, at the beginning of the twenty first century, barbarians using modern technology in support of a medieval worldview, terrorize civilized humanity.



Book Review:

## **TURKISH – JEWISH ENCOUNTERS**, Studies in

Turkish-Jewish Relations through the Ages.

Editor: Mehmet Tütüncü,

Publisher: SOTA, Haarlem, Netherlands

Reviewed by Arthur Benveniste

Jewish-Turkish relations extend far back, much earlier than the arrival of Spanish exiles in the Ottoman Empire in 1492. This anthology contains a series of essays, some of which had been delivered at academic conferences, dealing with Turkish-Jewish relations through the ages. Among the more esoteric chapters is Khazar Myths and Realities, containing a fascinating review of the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism. Another chapter discusses the historical background of the Karaims of the Crimea, their history and culture. They ascertain that they are the rightful successors of the Khazarian. One chapter reviews pagan, Jewish and Ottoman Roots of the Sabbatean Lamb Festival. There are sections on Jews in the Ottoman Empire, Turco-Jewish Relations during the First World War and Turkey and the Jews of Europe during World War II.

This reviewer, being descended from Turkish Jews, found much of interest throughout the book. I remember my parents speaking of Haim Efendi, the last Ottoman Grand Rabbi (Hahambaşı). I wanted to learn more about him, so I rushed to the chapter on him. Unfortunately, it was written in Turkish and not translated.

There are chapters of interest to those who follow Crypto-Jewish history and culture; Three short items on the Sabbatean Experience help in understanding the Dönme, who followed the false Messiah, Sabbatai Sevi, into Islam while they retained some Jewish practices. Another chapter that should find wider interest is on the arrival of Sephardic exiles into the Ottoman Empire and the Ladino language and how it has evolved and, eventually, faded in modern Turkey.

I learned much from the book and others who share my interests will also benefit from reading it.

## DUKE AND DUCHESS OF BRAGANÇA PRESENT COAT OF ARMS TO ABARBANEL FAMILY

On October 4, the Portuguese Duke and Duchess of Bragança presented Abarbanel family representatives, descendants of Don Isaac Abravanel, with a replica of the original family coat of arms. Professor Maria Antonieta Garcia, of Universidade da Beira Interior, spoke on "The Jews of Portugal, Unexplored Archives." Yeshiva University Museum's exhibit "Testemunhos do Judaísmo em Portugal," Signs of Judaism in Portugal is now open for viewing.

The event took place at the Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16 Street, New York.

### CARY HERZ PHOTOS ON EXHIBIT IN NEW YORK

An ongoing project on the Descendants of the Crypto-Jews: The Sephardic Legacy in the Southwest, will be shown at YESHIVA UNIVERSITY, 15 WEST 16TH ST. Opening: Wed. Nov. 7. Call 212/294-8330 or <http://www.caryherz.com>

### A PORTION OF THE PEOPLE:

#### 300 YEARS OF SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE

An exhibition featuring the Jews of South Carolina will open January 13, 2002, at the McKissick Museum in Columbia.

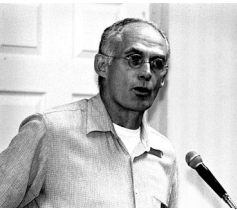
Jacob-Emile and Isaac Pereira (who later converted to Catholicism), credited with being the major developers of capitalism under Napoleon III. Among more modern figures, Abrami noted Nobel Peace Prize Winner Rene Cassant, who authored the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights; and former Prime Minister of France Pierre Mendes-France, 1907-1982, who was most likely a descendant of the illustrious Mendes family who faced the problems of the end of France's colonial era in places such as Indochina and Tunisia.

### Dr. Robert Ferry, "Prison, Resistance, Defeat; The Inquisition, Women, and the Crypto-Jewish Community in Seventeenth-Century Mexico"

Robert Ferry University of Colorado, reported on a family of several women collectively known as *Las Blancas*. The group consisted of the mother, Blanca Mendes de Rivera and her five daughters, Maria, Margarita, Catarina, Clara and Isabel.

They were arrested in 1642 and their trial is useful as a window into the larger community of crypto Jews.

They were charged as heretics. Maria, Catarina and Clara died in their cells. Blanca, Margarita and Isabel were eventually released. Known as *Las Blancas*, the women were referred to in almost all of the Inquisition documents of the day. They earned meager livings as seamstresses at the margins of the cloth trade, but they supplemented their income by collecting alms for Jewish prayers and other religious services. Many came to them for *ayunos ordinarios* or special prayers. How did *Las Blancas* come to know virtually the entire crypto-Jewish community? They were at its hub. Testimony from the trial record reveals a woman, about to move with her new husband, who gave the Blancas four pesos for *ayunos* for safe travel. Another person gave ten pesos so that Blanca could commend to God the arrangement for her daughter's marriage. They were paid to pray for hope for marriages and also to



Robert Ferry \*

act as a go-between in arranging them.

Another set of clients was the rich family Enriquez-Baez. There were many connections between Blanca Mendes and Señora Enriquez-Baez. They knew each other in Seville. Both came to Mexico at about the same time. They shared participation at rituals such as Yom Kippur and festival of Queen Esther. *Las Blancas* officiated at funerals and performed *ayunos* for the souls of the deceased. Ties with the Enriquez-Baez brought extra prestige to Blancas. New arrivals would contact them in order to get entry to the Enriquez-Baez family for commercial reasons.

*Las Blancas* were arrested as traitors to their Catholic faith and their trial record lists the names of many people denounced by them. The lists are very long. They testified about everybody and everybody testifies about them.

The women were kept in adjoining cells and unknown to them, spies were outside their cells at night listening to and recording their conversations. The spy records are in the transcript of the trials.

Blanca was overheard saying to her daughters "I realize that now we are without honor. Oh what a stab of the dagger, we are lost and will have to flee to the ends of the earth." Blanca calls out to them. "I don't know what to tell them. If I were to talk they would have to burn all of Mexico and I don't know what to say in order to do no harm, daughters

what can I do?"

Did they name names? At first they did, but were unaware of it. Two sisters had remained free for two days. When arrested they were overheard telling Blanca who they had contacted. Blanca told her daughters how she had defied the Inquisitors, how she had been a Jew since the time of Adam.

The mother was taken to solitary confinement and the torture chamber and after two months, she began to talk. Clara, a simple-minded daughter, also named names.

### Characterized as Deceitful

Many of the people implicated by *Las Blancas* used an *enimigos mortales* defense. By claiming that their accusers were mortal enemies they could hold that the testimony against them was false. These *enimigos mortales* defenses are full of hate and anger for *Las Blancas*. They were characterized as lying, deceitful women. Members of the community turned quickly against them as liars falsely accusing others.

Why did they give up and talk? Maybe because of the ostracism, embarrassment and alienation from their community, which had exiled them.

At their trial, the Enriquez-Baez family constructed an *enimigos mortales* story. They insisted that María de Rivera, one of Blanca's daughters, had spent time in the Enriquez house after the death of Señora Enriquez and tried to initiate an affair with Gaspar Baez, her son.

### Elizabeth Hirschman, The Melungeons: The Last Lost Tribe in America

Elizabeth Hirschman of Rutgers University, reported that, when she was young, many people mistook her for being Hispanic and spoke to her in Spanish, a language that she had never heard before. Her people are olive skinned and dark eyed. They had been discriminated against since the 1600s because of their dark skin and religious practices. They were white, but darker than the surrounding Scotch Irish. At one time they were classified as FPC or Free Persons of Color, barred from testifying at trials. They could not vote, in some places could not go to school with "whites" and were subject to anti miscegenation laws.

The Melungeons lived in remote parts of Appalachia, in West Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky. No roads or railroads existed there until 1890 and no interstate highway until about 1970.

Many myths existed about the origin of the Melungeons: some held that they were the lost colony of Roanoke or a lost tribe of Israel. Others held that they were Sephardic Jews, Moors or Portuguese. Many Melungeons claimed that they were "Portogee."

### Melungeons: "Lost" or "Mixture"

The name Melungeon may come from one of two roots: *melan djin*, an Arabic/Turkish term meaning lost or abandoned soul, or the French word, *melange* meaning mixture.

Recent research into the origin of these people has turned up some remarkable information:

In the 1585 it was believed that the Spanish Armada was going to invade England within a year, so many desperate people left for the new colony of Roanoke. In 1588 Francis Drake led the British Navy to a great victory over the Spanish, leaving Britain free to expand its colonization of America. But when British ships returned to Roanoke, they found that the colony had been abandoned. It is believed that the survivors of the colony were taken in by Indians. Recent DNA studies have found that some Melungeons have Lumbe Indian DNA.

In 1587 Francis Drake dropped off approximately 500

If I were to talk they would have to burn all of Mexico

Turkish and Moorish prisoners that he had rescued from Cartagena off the coast of Columbia. They had been allied against the Spanish. He left the freed prisoners in Roanoke intending to return for them later. He came back one year later but they had gone inland.

A large, active Spanish colony called Santa Elena existed at the same time as Roanoke off the coast of South Carolina on Parris Island. Drake raided the Spanish colonies of St. Augustine and Havana and he intended to raid Santa Elena, but he could not find it. So the colony was spared. It lasted 20 years and was probably occupied by Sephardic and Moorish conversos. It operated a trade pattern that followed de Soto's route from Tennessee to North Georgia. Juan Pardo (a converso) set up five forts in the area. The Santa Elena Colony disappeared at about the same time that Roanoke was abandoned. Recent excavations of Santa Elena reveal that it traded with Cuba and even China. This argues for a Morisco and Sephardic presence. Patterns of tableware and pottery from Spain, Italy, Mexico and China were found there. One kiln manufactured a *mudejar* (Moorish) pattern of ceramics.

In 1990, blood samples from 1969 of 177 Tennessee Melungeons were analyzed. Blood typing showed a consistency with specific Mediterranean populations: Libya (specifically the area around Tripoli), the Canary Islands, Malta, Venice, Trentino, Cyprus and Galicia, Spain. All were areas consistent with Sephardic and Moorish ancestry. In that sample there was no match with DNA of Native Americans, Africans or British. The Melungeons had been told that they were mongrels, but blood samples showed otherwise. They have now been labeled as "tri-racial isolates"

More recent DNA samples for Melungeons, for whom ancestry is accurate, have shown that they are primarily Sephardic Jews. One line is from Sardinia, another from a particular group in Morocco and Atlas Mountain Berber (those who conquered Spain with the Moors). There is more limited ancestry from Ottoman Turks. There will be tests to see if the male lines go back to Turks and the female to native Americans. Some DNA from Northwest India has been found, probably from gypsies. A colony of gypsies were settled next to Jamestown in 1610. Those people also disappeared.

The population contains very little northern European or sub-Saharan African ancestry. It is a very homogeneous (inbred) population. Many cousins marry and niece/uncle marriages are common. As a result many genetic diseases including Bacett's Syndrome and Familial Mediterranean Fever are found. These diseases are only found among Mediterranean people and among Melungeons. They each require two recessive genes. Polydactylism (extra fingers and toes) is also found.

They call themselves Baptist, but meet on Saturday mornings and practice minimal Christianity. Men and women are separated in church and females are excluded from church leadership. They have a communion very much like Passover, in which they drink sweet wine and have bathing rituals in which men would wash each other's feet, women do likewise. They cover their heads and go to the river, where they practice full body immersion dressed completely in white. The deceased are buried on an East/West axis and there is a year-



Elizabeth Hirshman<sup>†</sup>

In 1965 one grandmother said to her grandson, "Brent, I have something to tell you,

long mourning period.

In 1965 one grandmother said to her grandson, "Brent, I have something to tell you, we are Jewish." He asked his parents if this was true but they denied it.

### "Koshered" the Pig

Dr. Hirschman said that her family never allowed pork in the house. Some Melungeons would eat pork but would "kosher" the pig by slitting the neck and draining the blood. They would then take the hide off and salt it in for weeks, then smoke it. They would not consume the blood. This is not a Scotch/Irish way of slaughtering pigs.

Melungeon names show a of mixture of Spanish, Hebrew and Atlas Mountain Berber roots. Examples are: Javes, Nunes, Xavier (which became Severe), Jacobs, Caraco, Lopes, Gomes, Taliaferro (pronounced, Tolliver), Alee, Moses, Angel and Yocum (Joachim or Joaquin). Many had anglicized names such as, Charles Cromwell Addington. Some indentured servants took the names of their employers.

First names were often perpetuated for generations. Some were unusual: Mahala, Alafer, or sometimes the last name of parent or grandparent would become the first name of an offspring.

Daniel Boone was of Melungeon descent. So was the father of Abraham Lincoln who was with the party that followed Boone to Kentucky. The Lincolns and Boones intermarried.

### Stanley Hordes, "Between Toleration and Persecution: The Relationship of the Inquisition and Crypto Jews on the Northern Frontier of New Spain, 1589-1663"

Stanley Hordes is adjunct research professor, Latin American and Iberian Institute of University on New Mexico, and is working under a grant received from the estate of Eva Feld to write a history of the crypto Jews of New Mexico.

Dr. Hordes began by saying that most cases of torture and burning by the Inquisition were much less frequent than many authors would have us believe, and that, with the exception of two periods in New Spain, the focus of the Holy Office in Mexico City was in fact much less on Judaizers than those suspected of other breaches of orthodoxy such as bigamy, blasphemy, and the like. The perception of relentless violence against only Jews was in part perpetrated by the *Leyenda Negra* and anti-Spanish historiography of the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries by Protestant Northern European scholars. Dr Hordes' thesis is that in actuality, the attitude of the Holy Office in Mexico towards crypto Jews was more of tolerance than persecution, relative to what was happening in Spain. And, the more distant one was from the seat of power in Mexico, the less attention was paid by the Inquisition.

### A haven for escaping Jews

Mexico had been somewhat of a haven for escaping Iberian Jews since its inception as a ViceRoyalty, with a number of Jewish communities flourishing due to mercantile trades, such as Veracruz and Acapulco. However, peace was disturbed from 1589-1601, in response to the activities of Luis de Carvajal ("El Mozo"), who was the New Christian nephew of the governor of Nuevo Leon, also named Luis de Carvajal. The elder Luis had earlier requested permission to colonize Nuevo Leon, with the condition that the ethnic backgrounds of colonizers not be questioned. In effect, Nuevo Leon became a refuge for Jews, who were left alone as long as they kept their Judaism low key. But Luis the younger, upon

learning of his Jewish background, decided to live and practice publicly as a Jew as well as encourage others to return openly to Judaism. This was too much for the Holy Office, which cracked down on the community and ultimately burned the younger Luís and several family members at the stake in 1596.

Relative peace returned by 1604, and the Crypto Jewish communities continued to grow and prosper until another flexing of Inquisitorial might in the 1640s, after which things settled down again until the formal death of the Inquisition in 1821. Thus, many generations assimilated and acculturated into mainstream Catholic society, mostly losing all Judaism, although others retained outward vestiges of it or even passed along conscious knowledge.

The next part of Dr Hordes' talk he called "The Frontier as Refuge." Referring to the research of Solange Alberro, he explained that the far northern frontier of New Spain always served as a haven for conversos and other "undesirables" seeking to avoid the Holy Office, as it afforded remoteness from the seat of power as well as relative anonymity. Dr Hordes quoted Alberro's statement that in communities such as Zacatecas, "the practice of the law of Moses...was conscious, coherent, and deliberate." And what is present day New Mexico afforded a "zone of refuge from the zone of refuge" for those not satisfied even with the relative tolerance of areas such as Zacatecas.

#### **Castaño leads expedition**

The Carvajal incident of Nuevo Leon directly impacted the first explorations of northern New Mexico, one of them by the Lieutenant Governor of Carvajal the elder, Gaspar Castaño de Sosa, who upon the arrest of Carvajal rounded up an expedition of about 170 people for an uncharted journey north. They attempted to establish a permanent colony near Glorieta Pass, but permission was denied on the grounds of "illegal entry:" they had left without permission to do so. Interestingly enough, it was also the only expedition of its day not to have a priest along. Dr Hordes contends that this group was comprised of crypto Jews whom Castaño de Sosa, of possible Jewish background, was trying to get to safety. The expedition was forced to return to Mexico, where some of its members founded Monterrey. Castaño was convicted of treason and died in exile in the Philippines.

In 1595, the King realized advantages to exploring the north, so gave the task to Don Juan de Oñate, also of converso origin. Members of his expedition included some from Castaño de Sosa's party, who knew the route, as well as individuals later cited as "fugitives" and "true Judaizers" by the Holy Office and who were burned in effigy. It is probable that Oñate's supplier was a converso relative of Luís de Carvajal.

Once established in northern New Mexico, crypto Jews were apparently left alone. The Franciscans, who ran the Inquisition in New Mexico, were more focused on power struggles with civil authorities than with crypto Jews. Not until 1662, when the Governor, his wife, and the Sergeant Major were arrested for Judaizing, did the Inquisition display any interest in crypto Jews. However, as it unfolded, even these trials were far more politically motivated than not. In general, except when sparked by political motives, neither civil nor religious leaders were overly concerned about the obvious presence and practices of crypto Jews in the northern reaches of the frontier -- a true zone of refuge.

#### **Seth Kunin: *Issues in Relations to Ethics***

What are the issues of academic study and argumentation? Many things are interpreted as Jewish symbols. Can we say that they are necessarily Jewish symbols and can we say that they necessarily mean what we think that they mean. A symbol has no intrinsic meaning; it gains its meaning from the interpretation of the people who use it. We should not impose our meaning on other people's symbols we find. A symbol is specific to a community. There is a question of dialogue; often, different communities have difficulty understanding what others are saying, making it difficult to community. There are still a lot of issues between Jews and Catholics that have to be dealt with. Symbols are attractive to us and we can make a link with them, but we must be careful in assuming that the link may or may not be there.

One of the major "proofs" of crypto-Judaism and one that has been used by those who debunk us is headstones. Six pointed stars and other elements cause us to assume that the headstones imply a Jewish background. But, we do not know why the symbol was put there or what it meant to the people who put it there. How can we determine the significance of the symbol? We must do fieldwork such as genealogical research or talking to the people or descendants of the people who put that symbol there. He described an absolutely convincing

stone that he and Stanley Hordes had been studying. It turned out that it was put there by Mormons who believed that they were from the lost tribes of Israel and they wanted to use Jewish symbols. Another stone with a six-petaled flower was described by the family as a Jewish symbol.

Objects like this are suggestive of a Jewish background but we have to research it more before coming up with the conclusion that "in this particular case, this symbol has this particular meaning." It is very easy to jump to improper conclusions. We must look into what are the alternative hypothesis to explain this item then find a way to test these hypothesis. Sometime we will get a negative response and sometimes a positive. We must not take the crypto-Jewish argument in something that identifies them as being crypto-Jews.

He then went on to the issue of genetic information. Even in populations that have a pattern of inbreeding, it is rare for an individual to have a pure line of heredity. Crypto-Judaism is not carried in the genes, it is cultural. What is important is the culture and identity that has been passed down to today. Crypto-Judaism does not depend on genes. We depend on the ethnographic context and the narratives that people put on themselves. The main thing that scholars need to be looking at is what people tell us about their past and how they understand their past. We do not have to look so much into what is true. What people believe to be true is more important. If someone says "My grandmother did this." We have to take it seriously. We don't have to assume that it is absolutely true. Whenever we retell something from the past we redo it based on what we are now.

There is a responsibility of people who go out and ask questions. They must interview people in such a way that the subjects can express their own understanding and not have a self understanding imposed on them by an overeager folklorist. Kunin added that he has worked with interviewers from this society for seven years and that the standards have always



Stanley Hordes\*

Luís the younger decided to live and practice publicly as a Jew as well as encourage others to return openly

# PICTURES FROM THE 2001 CONFERENCE IN PUEBLO



Omero Lopez de Cadena speaks on his family history in South Texas\*



Outgoing president, Gloria Trujillo, is honored by conference



Randy Baca conducting the discussion on bylaws at the business meeting. \*



David Kunin and Michelle Greene enjoying a break between presentations†



Our Local Host, Michael Atlas-Acuña welcomes conferees at a reception at Temple Emanuel†



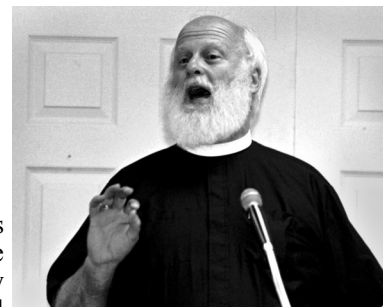
Flavio Montoya discusses DNA testing project†

\* Photo by Cary Hertz † Photo by Art Benveniste



# The Cross of Contexts: Theology, Culture and Geography in the Crypto-Jewish Experience

By Michael Perko, SJ



Father Perko addressing the Pueblo Conference\*

Why is it that crypto Judaism initially was able to root itself and later, to flourish, within the context of the Roman Catholic experience? The answer, I believe, is grounded not so much in the sorts of research that distinguished historians like Stan Hordes conduct, but rather in a reflection on particular aspects of the Sephardic and Catholic experiences that allowed them to interact in ways that mutually enriched them both.

Most important for the experience of crypto Judaism is the historical tradition of greater adaptability of Sephardic Judaism. This tradition surely played an important role in Jewish development and adaption in the terrible years following the *Reconquista*. As Jews were forced to convert or emigrate, many, schooled in a vibrant Jewish tradition that continually tried to preserve the Jewish community wherever it was to be found, reached accommodations in which they took on Catholic practices but maintained core elements of their Jewish belief.

Specific cultural elements within Roman Catholicism also indirectly promoted the kind of religious synthesis of which crypto Judaism is a model. Even a cursory examination reveals strong affinities between Jewish and Catholic culture. Within Judaism, right action (orthopraxy) has always had precedence over right belief (orthodoxy).

Moreover, Jewish religious belief always occurs in the context of a community. Frequently, this is the family. It is because of this rooting of observance in the family rather than some more centralized kind of community (e.g., the synagogue) that a tradition like crypto Judaism could come into being and flourish. If being a religious Jew required a central place of worship with others, the Inquisition could have stopped Iberian Judaism dead in its tracks simply by closing or destroying the houses of worship. How could even the most diligent searchers, however, have managed to monitor whether families continued to light candles on Friday night, or refrained from eating pork, or utilized traditional Jewish symbols like the menorah or star of David in the decoration of their homes or places of work? This corporate quality is also present in the Catholic tradition. The Catholic understanding is that someone is saved by being a member of the community. Like Jews, Catholics are drawn toward the area of practice as being critically important.

## Rooted in "Stuff of Life"

All this brings us to the second area of similarity. This lies in the realization that both Judaism and Catholicism are profoundly rooted in the "stuff" of daily life. When they go to Israel, for example, Jews and Catholics want to "touch stones," in contrast to Protestants who tend to seek more "otherworldly" experiences.

The same is true of daily ritual in both communities. For morning prayer, the observant Jew wears *tefillin*, as well as a *tallit*. At Friday supper, candles are lit. Similarly, in Catholicism ritual is deeply rooted in the material. Water is poured over babies in baptism, bread and wine are consumed at Mass, the sick are anointed with blessed oil. In all of

these, the priest wears special clothing. The same thing is true of more ordinary family rituals. Local customs like keeping blessed earth from the *Santuario* at Chimayo on hand to aid healing or the presence in churches and homes of *bultos* and *retablos* are other indications of the power of material objects.

## Catholicism Adopts to Cultures

In addition, Catholicism, too, has a long tradition of adapting to the cultures in which it finds itself. While it first grew up in the Semitic world, when it moved into the Greco-Roman world it took on some of the structures of Roman imperial government. Its official languages became Greek and Latin.

This latter bears directly on the crypto-Jewish experience. Popular Catholic culture appears to have been very flexible in its reaction to religious syntheses made by underground Jews. Despite disapproval by the "official Church," in individual families, clans, and villages, the melding of Jewish and Catholic beliefs, practices, symbols, and rituals seems to have occurred successfully, a testimony to the ability of the Catholic community to come to terms with new practices and ways of articulating religious faith.

A final reason why the crypto-Jewish community was able to remain intact for such a long time was the nature of the societies in which it flourished. As

Stan Hordes and others have shown, crypto Judaism was most successful on the margins of Spanish society. We read accounts, for example, of crypto Jews in parts of the Caribbean who were hardly "crypto:" on Yom Kippur, members of some of the most prominent families went openly to the synagogue "to preserve the tradition."

Frontier societies are organized somewhat differently and have different values than mainstream ones. Generally, relationships and activities are more functionally organized. Ideology tends to play less of a dominant role and pragmatism, a greater one. This is why frontier societies all over the world tend to attract at least some people who would ordinarily live at the margins of more established cultures. All of these reasons, arising from the natures of the Jewish and Catholic traditions, as well as the character of frontier society, help to account for the success of crypt-Jews on the frontier of New Spain in maintaining their unique religious and cultural identity.

Given these factors, then, what can we say about contemporary crypto Judaism as well as its future? On the one hand, there are grounds for optimism about the future of the crypto-Jewish community, at least in the United States. In spite of a variety of forces, cultural, social, and ideological, that have threatened it, it manages to remain robust. On the other, certain phenomena arising from the wider contexts within which it is situated raise questions about its continuation into the future in the present form. These are related to elements in both secular and religious culture.

An interesting question to ask is, "Did crypto Judaism thrive precisely because it was a secret experience?" As

"Did crypto Judaism thrive precisely because it was a secret experience?"



Laurence Moore and others have shown, at least some religious groups (the Mormons, for example) have managed to maintain internal purpose and cohesion by casting themselves as “outsiders” in the face of dominant “insider” cultures.

But, if the crypto Jewish experience becomes more widely known, acceptable in the mainstream culture, and is less subject to persecution and discrimination, what effect will that have on it? And even if it wanted to, how likely is it that, say, rural New Mexico could ever be so isolated again as to allow such practices to establish themselves and grow when anyone on the planet who wants to find out what’s going on has only to input the term “crypto Judaism” into a search engine and surf to their hearts’ content? I did this some time ago and got forty-three “hits” for the term, as well as another twenty-nine for “*morano*.”

### Change in Church Attitude

Related to this new status for crypto Judaism is the change in the Catholic Church’s attitudes toward Judaism and Jews during the last 35 years. Many of us grew up with a Church that, if we’re honest about it, still had more than a few vestiges of anti-Semitism about it. The Church’s official position changed dramatically with the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council’s document *Nostra Aetate* in 1965. Here, the Church officially declared that the “blood libel” was not in effect, that it was the Roman and Jewish leaders, rather than Judaism *per se*, who were responsible for the suffering and dying of Jesus. This document has been filled out with several others over the years.

Certainly, this change in the Church’s teaching represents a real move forward. However, I wonder what the effect on crypto Judaism will be. If an important part of the crypto-Jewish experience has been its preservation in spite of persecution by the Catholic community, what effect will the absence of persecution have on it? Is “outsiderness” so integral a part of the crypto-Jewish experience that it will have to reinterpret and readjust? I wonder if we might not see some reconfiguration by which the experience will come to terms with the different way in which its principal persecutor now regards Judaism in general.

These reflections are designed not so much to provide definite answers about the dynamics of crypto-Judaism’s formation and self-preservation or about its future content or character. Rather, they are attempts to see the experience in the context of what those who study culture and ideology know about their formation and development, to help us to arrive at a greater understanding of this venerable tradition, and to understand its place in the ecology of American religion and culture, especially on the Southwestern frontier. *Father Perko, a specialist in the History of Education at Loyola University, Chicago, gave this talk at the 2000 SCJS conference in Albuquerque.*



Seth Ward and Seth Kunin\*

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Many contributions are memoirs or retelling of family stories and legends. They may or may not be historically accurate, although they are indeed valid, sacred memories that have been passed along through time. We do not attempt to change individual perceptions as long as they are reported as such, but we do change obvious misstatements or historical error.

We reserve the right to edit any material. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily of SCJS or *Halapid*. Articles from *Halapid* may not be reprinted without permission.

## A REVIEW OF THE MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS MEETING AT THE PUEBLO CONFERENCE.

By Gloria Trujillo

**BYLAWS:** Vice President Stanley Hordes introduced Randy Baca as chair of the bylaws committee and Ms Baca let a discussion of the new bylaws. Ms Baca reviewed the meeting of the committee in Flagstaff, Arizona on May 25 and 26, and the writing of the first draft. The committee was composed of SCJS members Randy Baca, Flavio Montoya, Stan Hordes, Dolores Sloan, Arthur Benveniste and Gloria Trujillo. Changes to the first draft were discussed and several changes were made at that time. Seth Kunin asked the chair to review the Mission Statement of the Society. Ms Baca asked Dr. Kunin to write and submit his suggestion. Michael Perko moved to approve the bylaws in their entirety, and was seconded by Joshua Stampfer. The bylaws were passed by show of hands. Dr. Kunin proposed an amendment to the Mission Statement and after discussion, members decided to leave statement as is, and add a proposed amendment as bullet item (see next column) Michael Perko made the motion. It was seconded by Michele Greene and passed.

**NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE:** Chair Dolores Sloan explained the new board positions and how candidates were nominated. Members of the nomination committee were Ms. Sloan, Stan Hordes, and Arthur Benveniste. Dr. Kunin was in charge of elections and read each position and candidate:

President- Arthur Benveniste (CA)  
 Vice President, Programs- Stanley Hordes (NM)  
 VP Membership- Randy Baca (AZ)  
 VP Communication- Dolores Sloan (CA)  
 Treasurer- Joshua Stampfer (OR)  
 Secretary- Flavio Montoya (CA)  
 Member at Large- Orfa Salinas (NM)  
 Immediate Past President- Gloria Trujillo (CA)

The Nominations Committee slate was elected by acclamation. Dr. Hordes thanked Randy Baca for her assistance in chairing the bylaws committee.

**TREASURER REPORT** by Rabbi Joshua Stampfer: The financial total has been traditionally higher before each conference, and then decreases due to expenses that are incurred. The finances from 1997-2001 were reported as:

1997 July- \$11,792; August- \$4,221  
 1998 July- 7,779; August- 2,554  
 1999 July- 9,770; August- 4,969  
 2000 July- 8,924; August- 2,588  
 2001 July- 9,997; August- 4,500

**GLORIA TRUJILLO:** A motion was made by Dolores Sloan to thank President Gloria Trujillo for her hard work and dedication to the Society, and Gloria was presented with a plaque by Art Benveniste and a Mogen David by Randy Baca on behalf of the members.

**DISCUSSION OF FUTURE CONFERENCE SITES** by Dr. Hordes: David Kunin volunteered to assist as the Local Chair for 2002, and agreed to host the conference in San Diego, California. Rabbi Kunin and Michele Greene have agreed to act as Local Chairs for the conference in Mexico slated for 2003. Orfa Salinas is moving to Texas later this year, and volunteered to act as Local Chair for the 2004 conference in San Antonio, Texas.



Orfa Salinas and Randy Baca on a panel discussion at the



Dolores Sloan, Laurette Hepple and Arthur Benveniste

Dr. Hordes led a discussion on the 2002 Conference and Rabbi Stampfer moved to hold the 2002 conference in San Diego. The dates of August 11-13 were chosen with the stipulation that the board has authority to change dates due to unforeseen problems. Flavio Montoya seconded the motion. It was approved by acclamation.

The following amendment to the Mission Statement was proposed by Dr. Kunin (see above.) The conference voted to add it as the second paragraph of Article Two. The amendment reads:

*The Society welcomes divergent ideas, approaches and views and recognizes the need for tolerance and mutual respect for those ideas, approaches and views. The Society also recognizes its responsibility to support and, if necessary, represent the needs of those individuals who are exploring and seeking to understand their crypto-Judaic identity while also recognizing that individuals will make different choices in how they may choose to express and develop that identity.*

Randy Baca noted that voting for new bylaws and election of officers at the same meeting is a bending of the bylaws, but otherwise we would have to wait until next year to vote on one or the other.

# Mourning Rabbi Soloveichik,

By Schulamith C. Halevy

On the eve of the recent *Simhat Tora*, the holiday when we conclude our reading of the Book of Deuteronomy and the yearlong cycle of Torah reading, Rabbi Aaron Soloveichik was buried in Israel, on the Mount of Olives, where his wife, Rabbanit Ella, was interned not long ago.

Rabbi Soloveichik was the man who opened the door for anusim to return. His letter on the subject was what generated everything that followed. He was a man who feared no man, only God alone. He spoke his mind clearly on any matter pertaining to *halakha*. And he had at his side a woman whose strength and love held him (and who educated and inspired many, many women in Chicago). She left us not long ago, and was buried on Har Hazeitim (the Mount of Olives) on the eve of Shabbat *Ele haDevarim*, the first Shabbat when the book of Deuteronomy was read.

I became close to the Rav and the Rabbanit as a result of my work with anusim. My father-in-law, who knew him from Yeshiva (they had lunch together for a year), went to visit him with Nachum (my husband), and my involvement on behalf of anusim came up. He said immediately that they must be encouraged and helped, and I received the letter you all know from my website when I returned from Portugal. The handwritten original is here, with me.

Since then I had the ear, the time and the appreciation of the rabbi and his wife. It was very confirming to me, and a privilege I treasured. Several anusim were personally helped by them. When a rabbinic court in Israel would not give a return paper to a young man who was promised it, it was Rabbi Soloveichik's letter from Chicago that solved matters. A couple of Casa Amistad members -- a group of anusim in Chicago -- actually went with me and met these wonderful people. On one occasion, Rabbi Soloveichik said that the Jewish people must think and feel toward the anusim as a husband who has been longing for his wife while she was gone. I called from Mexico when I needed his help; I came by with any question, and they always came through for us. They always made me feel at home. I shared poetry with the Rabbanit, a poet, and was able to give a copy of her poems to her son at the *shiva* (mourning period) for her. He knew about the poems, but had never seen any.

We just lost the greatest rabbinic mind in the US, the most courageous rabbinic mind of our time, and a man whose heroic effort kept his mind and spirit going despite his ailing frame, tormented by a severe stroke years ago. But it was his incredible wife, Ella, who held him anchored to this earth. When she left, he could hold no more.

Rabbi Soloveichik was our champion. He took the anusim and put them back at the center of rabbinic attention. May the memory remain as a great inspiration among us always. We must never forget what they have done for the anusim. In some years, I hope that children of anusim making their journey back will hear that there once was a rabbi in Chicago, who was more brave and more wise than any other, and who loved the anusim as a real part of him. And this rabbi broke the walls of ignorance and cowardice, and thus was the road paved for our return.

There are no eulogies (though exceptions can be made for great scholars) on *hol hamoed* (the intermediate days of Passover and Succoth), and so there was no mention of any of his greatness at his graveside. I had to get this out, though.

*Schulamith Halevy is an Israeli scholar and poet who*

*supports crypto Jews' efforts to research their heritage.*

Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum from page 1

Highest Lord, who it is that governs".<sup>1</sup>

The mystery and tragedy of history continues: Portuguese babies often sport a dark gray or blue birthmark on the lower or upper back or leg. These stains remain some months and often years before fading. They are common in Misrachi and Sephardi Jews to this day and if seen on a Portuguese baby, hint at a converso origin. The marks are called Mongolian spots<sup>2</sup> but are better labeled semitic or sacral marks and are often dismissed as "family" birthmarks.

It is with pride that I remember my grandmother, Rufina, who in spite of the danger to her life managed to keep her faith. How pleased she would have been had she known her humiliation had not been in vain. That today, many years later, her granddaughter (Rufina) observes the "Antepura" (Yom Kippur) openly as a Jewess of Portuguese heritage.

Often when listening to the Portuguese *Fado* (folk music), the haunting soulfulness reminds me of others like me, struggling to make sense of the secrets from a forgotten past, born out of a people who have almost disappeared, and my *saudades* (nostalgic longing) for the past continues...

<sup>1</sup>David A Canelo The Crypto Jews of Portugal , 2nd Ed. 1990

<sup>2</sup>Dr S. Levin, , The SA Medical Journal, 1989

Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum hosts Saudades, a listserve on portuguese crypto Jews  
<http://www.saudades.org> [rufina@saudades.org](mailto:rufina@saudades.org)

Rufina and her colleagues are planning a conference in Lisbon next June. It will be in conjunction with the 100 anniversary of the Lisbon synagogue. Look for more details in our next issue.

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## International Symposium to be held in Nanjing, May, 2002

Interested parties are invited to attend the May 5-9, 2002 International Symposium on "The History of Jewish Diaspora in China" sponsored by The Center for Jewish Studies at Nanjing University. Contact: Prof. Xu Xin, Center for Jewish Studies, School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University, Nanjing, 210093, China.

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