

THE LIFE OF A WEBLIST MODERATOR

By Ana Kurland

The Talmud has a saying about how someone who saves a life saves the world. I feel the same way about the Jewish souls who were lost in the Iberian Peninsula to conversion and death. Those Jewish souls who were lost became lost Jewish worlds. I'm trying to bring some of them back. I want to give crypto Jews a chance to learn about their history and culture, while keeping their anonymity if they so desire. When someone decides to convert back to Judaism, it fills my heart with joy. Just helping them learn about their ancestry is wonderful. And it helps to let them know they are not alone.

But first, let me introduce myself. My name is Ana Kurland and I was born and raised in Puerto Rico, in a Catholic family. When very young, I was told that I had Jewish ancestry, just like a lot of families that came from Spain, but that they had converted "sincerely" and were now Catholics. At the time, I thought we were only "secular" Catholics, since we did not attend church unless there was a wedding or baptism; we weren't even like the "bad" Catholics, who attended only on Christmas and Easter. I noticed that if I went to a friend's house, they had crucifixes in their bedrooms, pictures of saints, the virgin or Jesus around and we did not, but I thought that was part of being secular. Christmas was a small family holiday, but the day that the whole family gathered for a celebration was on New Year's Day. When I asked my mother why we did it on New Year's, she answered that it was in honor of my grandfather's Saint's day. My grandfather's name was Manuel, Spanish for Emmanuel. Trying to be a good Catholic, I searched saint's day books in my school for St. Manuel or St. Emmanuel, but in vain. I then thought to ask my aunt why we celebrated on New Year's and she whispered, "Because it's the day of the circumcision of Jesus," and then, embarrassed, as if she had said too much, she walked away. To this day she denies saying it, but I was young and did not forget it. I even had to look up circumcision in the dictionary.

When I was twelve or so, I had what I called my crisis of faith. I could no longer be Catholic. However, because I really believed in G-d, I started reading about other religions, hoping to find one I was comfortable with.

Eventually I started studying Judaism and I knew I had found my religion. I converted after twelve years of studying. I've tried to be an active participant in Jewish causes. A few years ago I joined a group called Kulanu, which helps Jews in unusual places. I started helping them by doing some translations for them, but I became interested in crypto Judaism, and read all I could about it. About the same time, I started searching my family tree and discovered that I indeed

had Jewish roots. Things I had thought were weird family customs suddenly made sense... we really were conversos! I was delighted. I decided that the souls of my ancestors had cried out, not for revenge, but for renewal, return. I then made this my quest: to teach as many others like me. However, all I knew about Jews in Spain was they were expelled in 1492. I guess going to Catholic school they pass over (pun intended) the grimier aspects of the church. So I started studying about the Sephardim. I also started learning about crypto Jews. My great grandmother's name was Moreno, one that is common among Sephardim. It is also rumored that it was common for conversos, because it was close to *morenu* (our teacher in Hebrew.) I am currently trying to research my family history to see if I can prove to be B'nai Anusim.



Ana Kurland

I run several lists on the Internet geared toward people like us, who I call B'nai Anusim. I hope I can help find more crypto Jews and help them learn about their roots. It all started with one list, Anusim, with ten or so members. We are now up to 286 and growing. In addition, I started a list called conversos, which is a sister list but all in Spanish; a list about Torah, Anusim-Torah; two for genealogy, Anusim-Genealogy and Apellidos Sefarditas, and one for those who seek to return, Anusim-Tshuvah. The lists attract people from all over the world who think or know they may be descendants of Anusim. Along with the headaches involved in moderating a list (including weeding out both the proselytizing Christians and the Jewish fanatics who insist we have no place in Judaism), come the joys of someone discovering that what he or she thought was an odd family habit has a reason. I read about people who thought they were the only ones who heard the whisper from parents, "do not tell anyone, but we are Jewish."

I work in the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress.

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HIDDEN IN THE HILLS – BASQUE ATTORNEY DESCRIBES CRYPTO JUDAIC PRESENCE

Since it opened in the fall of 1997, the Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao, a gleaming curvilinear ship of titanium, limestone and glass, has drawn a steady flow of tourists to this Basque seaport on the northern coast of Spain. But among the throngs of visitors my husband and I encountered was an American whose journey had nothing to do with Frank Gehry's futuristic design. Joaquin Carlos Caragueguie had returned to his boyhood home to arrange the details of his late father's estate. We met Caragueguie by chance in a hotel coffee shop. A portly securities attorney in his mid-50s, he was the last of his family to be born in the Basque country. Official records stored in Madrid's archives document their presence in this region of Spain as far back as 1564, he told us.

"Through the centuries, we've worked as sheep herders, steel workers and pawn brokers," Caragueguie said. "Officially, there are no pawnshops in Spain. But there are, if you know where to go." His family's oral traditions, however, transmit something else: They are Jews. This comes as a surprise. Earlier that day, we had met with the public relations director of the Guggenheim, a fierce Basque patriot. She lost no time telling us that the Basque country is the cultural capital of Spain, that the Basque people are more educated than the rest of the population, and that the Basque country has the largest concentration of universities in all of Europe. She was equally as certain that the Basque country has no Jewish history or contemporary presence.

Her statement was confirmed by the owner of a dress shop in the Casco Viejo, the old town, whom we met later that day. His grandmother had opened the shop at the beginning of the century, he said, and as far as he knew, there were never any Jews in Bilbao or the rest of the Basque country.

"He was lying," Caragueguie said. "That man is old Spain." According to Caragueguie, there have been Jews in the Basque country all along. They never achieved the prominence Jews enjoyed in other parts of medieval Spain, he said, but they also suffered little direct anti-Semitism. The region was a refuge, a place the Inquisition never reached.

"At one time, I would say there were 60,000 Jews in the Basque country," he said. "Right now, there are about 10,000. They might not publicize the fact, but they know who they are. Plain-door synagogues have always been around, but you have to know where they are. No one is going to tell you."

"The Basque people are intensely Catholic," he added, "but they didn't agree with the Inquisition. There is a Basque saying: 'We know who the Jews are because we used to be Jews.' They know Christianity comes from Judaism."

Of his postwar childhood, Caragueguie said that his main memory of being Jewish was that it was something to be hidden. Still, he said, everyone knew.

"We went to the public schools, which were taught by the Jesuits. In order to register, you needed a certificate of baptism, and of course we didn't have one. That was the tip-off that we were Jewish. But here in the Basque country, they did nothing about it. The attitude was 'Okay, move on.' "It was my grandfather who kept it going," Caragueguie said. "We had no pictures of Jesus in the house, and we never wore a crucifix. My grandfather was very strict about that, no Christian symbols around. To this day, I will not enter a cathedral. That was also from my grandfather. He saw to it that my brother and I were circumcised even though he and my father

had to take us to Endorra to find a doctor to do it. He raised us to know that the Old Testament was our Bible and every so often had a traveling rabbi come around to instruct us in Jewish laws and get a free meal."

Still their connection to a Jewish life was limited.

"We'd do the Seders. If someone died, burial was immediate and we covered the mirrors. I my grandfather was buried in his tallit, an object we knew was sacred. But that was it. I didn't know kosher food existed until I hit New York."

When Caragueguie's aunt, who remained in Bilbao after the family emigrated, died several years ago, a Basque lineage that lasted nearly 500 years came to an end. There is no Jewish cemetery in Bilbao, but Caragueguie said there are Jewish tombstones in the Catholic cemetery near the airport and they have never been defiled.

Nor has the Jewish burial ground in Vitoria-Gasteiz, an hour's drive south of Bilbao. This gleaming city is the capital and crown jewel of the Basque country, an orderly metropolis with more parks and gardens than any other city in Spain, broad promenades that are lined with handsome Gothic and neo-Classical buildings, and plazas adorned with fountains and statues. Strategically located along the routes to France, Castille and Navarre, Vitoria-Gasteiz has been a major commercial center since the Middle Ages, which perhaps explains why this city, unlike the rest of the Basque country, had a thriving Jewish community of merchants, traders, craftsmen and doctors up to the expulsion of 1492. Their

well-preserved homes still stand along the Calle Nueva, formerly the Calle Juderia, in the Old Quarter, a dark and narrow street where Gothic structures

huddle against each other. A kilometer away, the eastern edge of the city center is marked by a long, narrow stretch of parkland. This is the Parque de Judimendi - the center for the neighborhood's social life. On a typical day, it is filled with old people sitting on benches in the sun, children romping in the playground and mothers pushing babies in their prams. Every June, it is the site of the city's Summer Solstice Festival. Prior to the expulsion, it was Vitoria-Gasteiz's Jewish cemetery. When they left in 1492, the Jews extracted a promise from city leaders that their sacred burial ground would not be violated. Although tombstones deteriorated and disappeared over the years, the land was kept intact. All proposals for construction on the site, from houses to markets to stables to parking lots, were met with the same response: It is forbidden.

Four hundred and fifty years later, a delegation of descendants of the Vitoria-Gasteiz exiles came to the city from Bayonne, France, and presented officials with a formal release from the centuries-old vow. But their offer was declined. Instead city officials chose to commemorate the place in perpetuity by erecting the tall, narrow monument inscribed with a Star of David that stands in the park's center and informs passers-by of the special nature of the place. This was in 1952, sixteen years before the Edict of Expulsion was finally revoked, twenty-six years before freedom of religion was finally guaranteed to all Spaniards, forty years before the 500th anniversary of the expulsion was remembered with publicity showered on Jewish landmarks throughout Spain. The story of the burial ground in Vitoria-Gasteiz is little-known outside of the city. The story of a post-exile Jewish population in the Basque country is nearly a secret. Perhaps now that the new Guggen-

There is a Basque saying: 'We know who the Jews are because we used to be Jews.' They know Christianity comes from Juda-

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Gloria Trujillo

The year 2000 has been a most active one for the society and we are sure that the one to come will be the same. Please mark your calendars with next year's tentative conference date, August 19-21 at the Marriott Hotel in Pueblo, Colorado. Unfortunately, the hotel staff created a scheduling conflict and they advanced the conference several weeks. Michael Atlas-Acuña has been working on the 100th Anniversary of Temple Emmanuel in Pueblo and is planning to schedule several events to run concurrently.



We hope you will find the articles in this newsletter exciting and informative. Our authors are Ana Kurland, Library of Congress administrator who hosts *ansuim* lists on the Internet; Max Valerio, rebutting a recent *Atlantic Monthly* article questioning the backgrounds of crypto Jews; Judith Cohen, helping us understand key terms in Sephardic music; and Society member Arye Hazary, with a viewpoint on Doña Gracia's timing.

We would like to review the Society's statement of purpose, found on the last page of the newsletter. *The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies serves the following purposes: The fostering of research and networking of information and ideas into the contemporary development of Crypto-Jews of Iberian origins. Membership is open to anyone who is interested in this immensely fascinating and perplexing area.* The participants at the first conference carefully developed the statement in order to insure the inclusion of all crypto Jews. We wanted to make sure no one from the Jewish community was excluded from our conference program and newsletter.

The bylaws committee has been sidelined temporarily due to family emergencies and illness, but it is now back on track. Members hope to have everything ready before the upcoming conference.

Please note that membership is due beginning in January, so be sure to send your renewals as soon as possible in order to avoid cancellation of the newsletter.

Best wishes to all for a happy New Year.

Weblist Moderator

from page 1

I am lucky enough allowed to recommend books and serials dealing with Sephardim, Ladino and Jews in Latin America and Spain. This not only allows me to contact new authors and researchers, but also to be one of the first to read their writings and spread the word. My work and what was once my hobby, now the soul of my life, are my redemption for my ancestors.

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Basque Attorney

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heim has made not only Bilbao but all the Basque country is an international hot spot, this modest but more humane chapter of the Spanish-Jewish connection will at last emerge for all the world to see.

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PHOTO AND PAINTING EXHIBIT

The Descendants of Conversos

Photographs by Cary Herz and Paintings by Diana Bryer and Billie Hutt are on exhibit at the Jewish Community Center, 5520 Wyoming NE, Albuquerque January 1-30, 2001.

New work from an ongoing ten year photographic project, *The Descendants of the Conversos: The Legacy of the Sephardic Jews of the Southwest*, by Photographer Herz, will be seen for the first time at this exhibition. Cary Herz and Diana Bryer have been active with the SCJS

FIRST SPANISH SYNAGOGUE ON 600 YEARS

In December 1968 Generalissimo Francisco Franco, Caudillo of Spain, rescinded the Alhambra Decree of 1492, which had expelled all Jews from the soil their ancestors had inhabited for close to one and one-half millennia. That same day the first synagogue built in 600 years was dedicated.

Adapted from the *Sephardic House* website week of December 25, 2000

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY EXPOSE

Debbie Nathan is the co-author of Satan's Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt, which makes her a practiced writer of exposes. Apparently, one expose wasn't enough, and she needed another. She was able to convince Barbara Ferry to lend her investigative reporting a needed cachet with readers, since Barbara, a reporter for the local paper the New Mexican, is someone who is very nearly an insider. Sensing a story that would sell, and quite possibly, privately shocked at the notion that the region's dark skinned, Spanish accented "Latino peasants" might actually turn out to be of Jewish ancestry, the two set out to write a breathless, sexy piece for the normally selective Atlantic Monthly magazine. The expose appeared in the December issue, and has been causing a tiny but noticeable tempest. Debbie Nathan and Barbara Ferry have been pleased by this growing controversy, as graphed by full loads of mail, both over the web, and by ground (snail mail). They'll appear in a documentary rendition of the real and improbable truth behind the New Mexican crypto Judaic phenomenon soon. For this film, the nearly middle-aged Nathan will wear a broomstick skirt, red western-style blouse, and a pair of lizard-skin cowgirl boots. Barbara Ferry will ditch her normally sober dark pantsuit and pearl necklace for a large, cowboy hat, turquoise earrings, and a tight-fitting pair of western-style Levis.

What is wrong with the above paragraph? Well, I wrote it in a style crafted to make the authors of the recent *Atlantic Monthly* article "Mistaken Identity? The Case of New Mexico's Hidden Jews" sound slightly scandalous and suspicious. I cast subtle aspersion on their integrity and journalistic ethics simply by juxtaposing a description of their clothing (imagined of course, I actually have no idea what they look like), and their appearance in an upcoming documentary (also imagined). Just as in the article they write, "Meanwhile, Simcha Jacobovici, a Jewish documentary filmmaker from Canada, came to New Mexico to make a movie that was later released under the title *Expulsion and Memory*. For his film interview Stanley Hordes traded his usual professor's garb for a work shirt, open at the throat, and an Indiana Jones hat. Isabelle Sandoval donned a fuzzy vest with Santa Fe -- style Indian geometrics. Even as Hordes and the Sandovals were riding a wave of celebrity..." (pg. 93)

In my imaginary documentary, I describe the clothing of Nathan and Ferry, just as they've described the clothing of Stanley Hordes and Isabelle Medina Sandoval. Inserting these irrelevant details about Nathan's and Ferry's personal appearance creates an excitement in the reader, almost as though one is reading a "true crime" narrative, anticipating a scandal on E-Entertainment News, or entering the vivid world of clues that make mysteries so exciting.

Earlier, the article described the reason why Stanley Hordes came to New Mexico with the following qualifier, "As he tells it, his main reasons for coming to the Southwest were the weather and the hiking." (pg. 87). The phrase, "As he tells it," plants a doubt in the reader's mind regarding the reasons for Dr. Hordes arrival in New Mexico, as though his straightforward statement is only his official version of events, and that there remain other darker reasons for Dr. Hordes' arrival that are yet to be revealed. This manipulative tone of writing continues throughout the entire article. Every detail, each nuance might have a sinister, deeper meaning, to be revealed in the "improbable" outcome waiting at the ending. Certainly, this is skilled writing and sexy journalism, but is it an accurate, fair reporting of the facts?

That tone is one of the main reasons why the article leaves such a negative, lingering aftertaste. When I read it, I immediately found myself upset and angry, as did many others with whom I have communicated with on the Anusim or Crypto Judaic listserves. Rereading the article, I realized that so much of what bothered me was in the actual telling, the language used and the structure of the narrative itself. Certainly, some of the facts that Nathan and Ferry have cited are true, but they are juxtaposed with other untrue, half-true or completely speculative assertions in a mad jumble. Because of this the entire subject is muddled, and everything and everyone connected to the crypto Jews of Northern New Mexico are soiled by association.

The authors take sides, although tentatively, with Judith Neulander's thesis that Crypto Judaic phenomena are actually recollections of the "faux" Jewish practices of Israelite Protestant sects. They announce this conclusion in the article's opening, "Imagine descendants of Jews pursued by the Spanish Inquisition still tending

the dying embers of their faith among Latino peasants in the American Southwest... The truth of the matter may turn out to be vastly different, and nearly as improbable." (pg. 85) This announcement is a tease, and the reader is entreated to read on in order to discover the even more improbable truth behind the strange, improbable emergence of Jews in the bodies of "Latino peasants."

The authors use the term "peasant" several times to describe the modern and colonial Hispanic inhabitants of New Mexico. I found the use of this term to be extremely offensive. By continuously describing us as "peasants," the authors betray their unconscious (I hope and assume) racism towards the Hispanos of New Mexico, and set a subliminal undertone of disbelief and condescension. Their indiscriminate use of this loaded term unfortunately directs me to conclude that its difficult for them to visual New Mexico Hispanos as anything but barefoot and begging in the doorways of shacks.

Possibly this racist stereotype is not an accurate reflection of the authors conception of Hispano people, but simply another verbal contrivance to manipulate the reader's own possible prejudices -- setting the stage for a growing disbelief in the assertions of Sephardic Jewish ancestry of the New Mexico Hispano population. After all, the image of ignorant, illiterate and poor peasants isn't in sync with the image most people have of Jews (although this is actually another stereotype -- as "peasants" or people similar to them, have historically been found in all cultural groups). What is left out is the fact that many of the families of Northern New Mexico were landholders, who in the context of Colonial New Spain were often among the upper or middle class. Also, most of the Northern New Mexicans were sheep-herders and not agriculturists, and therefore not technically peasants or tillers of the soil.

This word, peasant, is possibly the clue to the most pressing problem here. It hints at a deeper, nearly preverbal attitude: the "oohs" and "aahs" of outsiders peeping at what they regard to be a weird, although quaint, foreign culture. It reminds me of the judgments and exoticising observations of other outsiders in history who have peeked into the world of Northern New Mexico Hispanos and described what they saw with a tone of moral outrage or ethnocentric superiority. To the trapper Rufus Sage in 1842, the Hispanic people of Taos appeared to be "a mongrel race," and a "degenerate people... possessed of little moral restraint, and interested in nothing but the demands of present want, they abandon themselves to vice." Another Anglo American observer, Albert Pike in 1831, was amazed that New Mexican women would drink, smoke and gamble, and that both sexes might be observed drinking whiskey and dancing Spanish dances publicly. "It is a strange sight -- a Spanish fandango."

So in the narrative of Nathan and Ferry, it becomes strange, sad



Max Valerio

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and oddly exotic that the Hispanos of Northern New Mexico "yearn for their villages with imagery that evokes the lovely paintings and coffee-table books for sale in Santa Fe. Few remember in the haze of recollection that the villages also had a mean, dark side, typical of many peasant enclaves." (pg 86) While Nathan and Ferry rightfully point out that the culture of Hispanics has been commercialized and put up for sale, they fail to grasp the multi-dimensionality of that culture or to give the people who have inherited it much credit for understanding or cherishing its mystery, continuity or actual history.

Ferry and Nathan also paint a negative aura around the work of Dr. Stanley Hordes, who along with Rabbi Joshua Stampfer, is one of the founders of the Society for Crypto Judaic Studies. I cannot claim to be unbiased, as I have met Dr. Hordes and find him to be a man of integrity, intelligence and genuine warmth. However, I can note the fact that the authors chose to leave out the details of some of his most compelling research, the research concerning Oñate and the initial 1598 colonizing expedition by the Spanish. In 1596, Luis de Carvajal, the nephew of the Governor of the province of Nuevo Leon, was burned at the stake along with his mother and sisters for judaizing. His uncle was put into an Inquisition jail, and all 170 colonists of the capital of Neuvo Leon, Cerralvo, began an expedition north into what is now New Mexico. They were stopped and turned back. Their illegal departure into a dangerous and relatively uncharted area gives the appearance of flight. Later, many would try again in the 1598 legal expedition by Juan de Oñate. Dr. Hordes has been able to match names of many settlers on that expedition to Inquisition records of people in trouble for the crime of *judaizante*, or judaizing -- practicing Judaism in secret. Successive waves of settlers also included conversos, including the secretary to the leader of the 1694 De Vargas expedition, Alonso Rael de Aquilar. Leaving this information out, which is so central to Dr. Hordes research and the story of New Mexican Crypto Jews, is a serious omission. When Dr. Hordes genealogical research is mentioned, it is in a flip and dismissive manner, "Hordes is undaunted by the powers of two: when lineage is traced back to 1492, each person has ... as many as 131,072 to 1,048,576 direct ancestors. Given these numbers, every southwestern Latino is practically guaranteed Iberian Jewish ancestry..." (pg. 96) As anyone who has undertaken a careful and laborious researching of his or her family tree knows, it is indeed possible to trace family lines back extremely far, with a fair degree of accuracy. The authors are completely dismissive of this research, without citing its most powerful evidence.

In researching this article, I asked Dr. Hordes his response to some of the charges by Nathan and Ferry, and he brought to light other odd and harmful omissions, as well as apparent distortions.

The authors have cited Judith Neulander's criticism of Dr. Horde's interviewing style: "on that visit to Garcia Herrera that Neulander made with Hordes, she was shocked by how leading his questions were. When Garcia Herrera said that she didn't recognize the language her father used when he prayed, Hordes started reciting the Kaddish -- the Jewish mourners' prayer -- in Hebrew." (pg. 92) Neulander then went on to question why Garcia Herrera would confirm to Hordes (after he suggested the term), that her father used the term "Yahweh" for God, when "Yahweh" is a sacred name that can never be uttered by observant Jews. This passage was a maze of jumbled logic. After all, why wouldn't she use the term out loud, if Hordes himself, an Ashkenazi Jew, had suggested that it was alright that they would? And, although it is possible that Garcia Herrera would have recognized Chinese or Navajo as the language her father had prayed in, if Dr. Hordes had recited a prayer in one of those languages instead of in Hebrew, it is also possible that she recognized the Hebrew because it was exactly that. Again, we must refer to the work of other scholars, either ignored or passed over quickly by Nathan and Ferry. David Gitlitz, author of *Secrecy and Deceit, The Religion of the Crypto Jews*, is mentioned earlier in the article, and the authors (and Neulander) should recall his research here. As he points out, within many generations the religious practice of crypto Judaism became fragmentary as participants forgot the rules

of official observance in their isolation. Although the authors cite Gitlitz early on, they fail to make the connection here. Also, the fact that the grandfather of Nora Garcia Herrera prayed when slaughtering sheep, sounds more indicative of Jewish practice than anything else to me.

Although I didn't discuss this particular incident with Dr. Hordes, his response to the issue of "Jewish symbols" (a six-pointed star) on gravestones leads me to question the efficacy and reliability of Judith Neulander's interviewing methods. She claims that she found a gravestone in a cemetery by chance, one that she had seen in a slide show by Dr. Hordes and unnamed "others." (pg. 92) Nathan and Ferry describe how she called on the relatives of the deceased, questioned them about the stone, and found that the person who died had died only recently, and that an Irish Catholic priest had chosen the odd design. Dr. Hordes pointed out to me that Dr. Neulander apparently cold called on the family at their home, arriving in person uninvited and out of nowhere, and inquired out of the blue the intimate facts about the origins of this symbol and those surrounding their deceased loved one. It is possible that this form of "research," which is disruptive and invasive, would not necessarily lead to accurate results. Dr. Hordes tells me that the privacy of the people involved is of paramount importance to him, and that "I do not make cold calls on people, even if the visit might yield helpful information. Rather, I prefer to respect the privacy of the families involved, and would not want to put them in the uncomfortable position of having to confirm or deny any of my unwelcome hypotheses." Additionally, he says, "And so, when I show the slide, I make no pronouncement about having reached any conclusions about

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the meaning of the Star -- only that it was there, and what it MAY have represented." (email from Stanley Hordes to Max Valerio, Dec. 11, 2000). The fact that Neulander would make cold calls in this manner, leads me to wonder about *her* investigative techniques, and their ultimate integrity. Also, I question her attitude towards the people interviewed, if their privacy is of so little consideration or concern to her.

The authors repeat Neulander's claim that "When she asked where the grave was, she was given inaccurate information." (pg. 92) Dr. Hordes has told me that "This is not correct -- I didn't give her inaccurate information, I gave her no information with regard to the location of this, or any other headstone. As a matter of fact, at the time we had this conversation, I, myself, didn't know where the cemetery was located (the photograph had been taken by another party, and given to me)." (email op. sit.). The assertion that she was given "inaccurate information" as to the location of the headstone, might seem trivial, but it helps to create the overall suspicion that possibly, Dr. Hordes is setting up a sinister plot to create a fantasy Crypto Judaic ancestry for New Mexican Hispanos.

Why would he want to do this? Nathan and Ferry claim that "in 1994 he was a member of the faculty for a package tour that advertised a chance to meet "descendants of the 'Hidden Jews' of the Southwest." (pg. 91). Again, we have the implication of a possible exploitation occurring for personal gain. Dr. Hordes has told me that "this was a week-long tour organized by the American Jewish Historical Society, to include sites in Arizona and New Mexico. My part of the trip involved about a day and a half, lecturing on the overall history of the Jews of New Mexico, and leading tours of Ashkenazi Santa Fe and Las Vegas. If the AJHS advertised the tour as meeting crypto Jews, I certainly was not aware of it, and had nothing to do with the promotion, a fact that I clearly shared with the editors of AM prior to publication, during the fact-checking phase. They chose to ignore this." (email) Dr. Hordes also included in his correspondence to me a list of the itinerary that he devised for the New Mexican phase of the tour. I can testify that I didn't find anywhere on it a lurid advertisement to "meet the crypto Jews of New Mexico" or even, to discuss them as such. He does have a lecture titled "The History of Jewish Settlement of New Mexico", but this is not described by Nathan and Ferry.

Dr. Hordes also told me that he gave the authors the names of other "specialists in Jewish folklore who have views radically different

Clearing up Ladino, Judeo-Spanish, Sephardic Music By Judith Cohen

Over the past couple of decades, this music has enjoyed a timely and much-deserved renaissance. But there is a good deal of confusion about what it is called, how old it is, who sings it and how it should be sung. For *Halapid* readers, here is a general outline to try to clear this up.

The three terms in the title can be taken in order. Ladino is one aspect of Judeo-Spanish, which is one linguistic component of Sephardic culture. If we take all the terms literally, Sephardic, as most of you know, refers to the Jewish culture of the Iberian Peninsula, Sefarad, but over time has come to mean, basically non-Ashkenazi. This is, of course, inaccurate, but has become so widespread one has to accept it. Judeo-Spanish is a term coined as an umbrella term for all varieties of the spoken language of the descendants of the Jews of Sefarad, whether written, liturgical, or vernacular. Technically, the written, literal translation word-for-word from Hebrew, variant is the one called Ladino (e.g. “the night the this,” “*la noche la esta*” for “*ha-laila ha-zeh*,” as in the Haggadah, instead of “*esta noche*”). The spoken languages have different names: in Morocco, Khaketia and in the former Ottoman lands, Spaniol, Dzhidio, Dzhudezmo or Spaniol Muestro. Many people in their sixties and over will tell you that when they were young their families didn’t say they spoke Ladino, but rather Spaniol or one of the other terms. Like Sephardic, Ladino has become so popular and widespread that it’s probably the most common and most widely understood term for the language which is a lively and unique amalgam of early Castilian, Galician, Catalan, Portuguese, and variants from all over the Peninsula, with elements of Hebrew, Greek, Turkish, South Slavic languages, Moroccan Arabic, and more recently Italian, French, and even English and Yiddish. Please note that it’s not used for the vernacular language among Moroccan Sephardim and most scholars agree it’s incorrect. Also it has entirely different connotations in Central America.

Judeo-Spanish (as I will refer to it) has no one correct pronunciation. It’s pronounced differently, and has variants. The same goes for the songs, which can be heard with different tunes and different performance styles, depending where they’re sung and what generation is singing them.

How old are the songs? Well, it’s always a disappointment when people ask me about medieval Sephardic songs and I have to say, “Sorry, we don’t have any.” But that’s the way it is. The Jews and the Muslims chose not to write down their music for various reasons in the Middle Ages, so we simply do not have any medieval manuscript music notation of either Jewish or Arabic music (with the exception of a piyyut and a couple of fragments notated in the early twelfth century by a Norman priest who converted to Judaism; my daughter and I sing it on our new album, due out soon). Many of the songs in the Judeo-Spanish repertoire were composed after – often long after – the expulsions from Andalusia, Leon-Castile, Portugal, Aragón and Navarra. And for those which did exist before the expulsion – we just don’t know what tunes they were sung to. With music of oral tradition, one simply cannot make assumptions about dating melodies. So, this is not medieval music, it has a few traces here and there of Renaissance tunes, but for the most part one can’t say much about dating the melodies until the eighteenth century and for more certain dating not until the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Jews have always been skilled at adapting the melodies and musical styles of their cultural surroundings, and Judeo-Spanish songs are no exception, whether the melody is from an eighteenth century Turkish tune, a nineteenth century Spanish ballad emigrating to Morocco, an Argentinian tango or a melody composed for the specific song. Presenting Judeo-Spanish songs as early music is by and large anachronistic.

There are different ways to classify the songs, depending on whether one goes by poetic structure, music, or function and context. The first classification systems usually gave the romance (narrative ballad) a category of its own, and then organized the rest according to context and function: calendar cycle, life cycle, love, recreation/topical songs. Lately, it is more common to see a very general classification

by poetic structure: romances, coplas and canticas, with a small additional category of Ladino prayers. If we follow this system, each poetic structure can still be divided into function/context groups. The romance is usually sung, or at least was usually sung, in domestic contexts: lulling a child to sleep, embroidering, preparing meals, or in Morocco, sung by young girls on the swing (*matesha*) set up in the courtyard around Passover. But certain romances are also specific to weddings, and still others to mourning (*endechas*). The coplas are largely, but not exclusively, a para-liturgical genre – for example the *Coplas de Purim*, but they can also be on more general themes. Canticas can be all kinds of songs – wedding songs, more modern love and courtship or recreational/topical songs.



Judith Cohen

So, how do you know which is which? First, there is considerable confusion about romances and romanzas. And about romanceros. A romancero is not a song, it’s a collection of romances, just as a cancionero is a collection of canciones (songs). It can be a specific anthology, or refer to the corpus of romances in general, for example the Sephardic romancero as distinct from the Portuguese romancero. Not every love song is a romanza (the Ottoman-area term for romance) – most are in fact canticas, not romanzas (see my article “Romancing the Romance” in James Porter’s *Ballads and Boundaries*, for more on this question – I could only get that title in once in a publishing lifetime, along with one subsection in the article I called *Stalking the Wild Romance*.) The classic romance, and there are exceptions, of course, has a very specific structure: an indefinite number of assonant lines, each composed of two groups of eight syllables. This means that at least in theory, any given romance tune can be used for any romance. And, in some cases, this is exactly what happens: the same tune is used for several different ballad texts. But some have their own tunes, and it’s never really clear why some do and some don’t share their melodies. (Count the syllables! *El rey que mucho madruga, ande la reina se iba; Arboleras, arboleras, arboleras tan gentil* – hint: “til” of gentil counts as two syllables).

So, let’s take some favourite songs and see where they go. How about *Cuando el Rey Nimrod*? Well, that takes us into another question – what are the titles of these songs? In classifying traditional songs, scholars try to go by agreed-upon titles, rather than incipits (first lines), because not everybody starts a song with the same incipit. So this song is officially called *El Nacimiento y Vocación de Avraham* (Abraham’s birth and vocation). Because it’s narrative, it’s often been classified as a romance, but actually it’s in the coplas form. Many, possibly most, of the songs made popular by Yehoram Gaon and other singers in the 1970’s and early 1980’s, the first wave of popularity for Judeo-Spanish songs, are canticas, and modern canticas at that – *Adio Querida, Arvoles Lloran por Luvias, Hija Mia Mi Querida* and so on. (I’m a medievalist as well as an ethnomusicologist, so when I say modern it basically means nineteenth century and on). If one also classifies wedding songs as canticas, then there are two quite different types of songs in the same broad category, for many of the wedding songs are much older, especially the words, than the canticas about love, courtship, topical or recreational themes. And, like the romances, the old wedding songs are rarely heard these days – more often among Moroccan (again, like the romances) than among eastern Mediterranean Sephardim. *Dize la muestra novia, Poco le dash, la mi consuegra, La novia destrenza el pelo* and *Ya salió de la mar la galana* are a few. So which are the romances? Many recording artists have few or no romances on their albums. Among those which do make it onto familiar recordings, *Tres hermanicas eran* is a more modern tune for an older romance – which also has an older, more Middle-eastern tune than the one commonly heard. *El rey que mucho madruga* (Flory Jagoda’s *Andarleto*,

Judeo-Spanish ...has no one correct pronunciation. It’s pronounced diffe-

formal title Landarico) is another; this is a very old story, going back to Merovingian times. Gerineldo, still popular among Moroccan Sephardim, and the name of my old performing ensemble, is another (I'll never forget receiving an envelope addressed to Mr. Jerry Neldo one year.)

How are they sung? Big question for a small space. Some of this is, of course, personal taste. But by and large, it is NOT an art song, a concert stage repertoire. Except for the very serious romances or coplas, especially those reserved for serious or even lamenting occasions, recalling tragic events, they're also not sung all that seriously – on many recordings they sound so solemn and portentous that their own mothers wouldn't recognize them! They are people's songs, like other folk repertoires, sung by people, for themselves and for other people, with other people. If they're for weddings, they're joyous and rhythmic – one has to make the bride and groom happy, and ready to, ah, multiply. And, people expect to dance to the songs. Last week, my daughter and I had the good luck to be called upon to sing Moroccan Judeo-Spanish wedding songs for a henna night, exactly so people could dance, while the bride's hands were being painted with henna. This is not concert style – this is keep singing so people can keep dancing – and we did, one song after another, with the same driving tambourine and derbukka rhythms throughout. Often I've recorded elderly Sephardic women singing romances with endings involving heads cut off, tongues slashed out, or similarly gory dénouements with a relishing chuckle at the end – they know these are stories, and they sing them as such, not as solemn concertized arrangements. I've recorded them singing at Senior Citizens Bingo games – and often they'll stop, when one sings a romance, leaning over toward her, commenting as she sings (I'm telling you, if MY daughter did such a thing...) – as if these were stories from modern soap operas instead of stories distilled from medieval chronicles. In the former Ottoman areas, the romances are – were – often sung in the old *maqam* modes, not duplicable on pianos or guitars or other instruments with fixed pitches, and some of their tunes were full of complex vocal ornaments. Few people can sing these today (see my discography on the web for specific names). Mostly, whether the tune is complex or simple, whether it's a story or advice to the bride, they were sung in a comfortable vocal range, if anything, more typically on the low side than the high side, and in a style meant to *communicate*.

And instruments? Well, mostly the women sang Judeo-Spanish songs, and mostly they didn't play instruments, except percussion for weddings. That's largely because for the most part, their hands were too busy to play instruments, especially instruments which required hours of practicing. As always, there were exceptions. And, of course, this doesn't mean they wouldn't have LIKED to play instruments and it doesn't mean they don't enjoy hearing them with their songs when other people play them. Whether one uses Middle Eastern instruments, probably the most appropriate for most of the repertoire, or guitar (really only musically appropriate for the relatively recent songs), or Early Music replicas (not musically very relevant but people like the atmosphere) is inevitably a matter of taste. In practical concert terms, there's a limit to how many songs an audience will enjoy a capella, especially in these busy technological days – but actually, I find myself singing more and more either a capella or with traditional hand percussion only.



Judy and daughter Tamera

One last note before leaving some space for other contributors to this issue. What about the Crypto-Jews? I won't discuss those of the Americas at all, because I don't know their cultures first-hand. But I do know many in Portugal, and have spent a good deal of time living with them, in different villages (including the famous and beleaguered Belmonte), in different areas of the country while conducting an ongoing ethnomusicology project over the past several years. They have very, very few songs which are not common to everyone else in the areas they live in. They do have a lot of prayers, and they RECITE (but don't sing) these, as well as recite certain Old Testament ballads as prayers (Jonah and the Whale, The Sacrifice of Isaac, Daniel in the Lion's Den), always in Portuguese. In fact, they really have only two specific songs, besides a Portuguese translation made for them of Hattikvah. One is sung at Passover, and is the Crossing of the Red Sea – an old theme, an old text, but with a melody no older than the late nineteenth century. The other is also relatively new, probably about the same vintage, and is a narrative song about an imagined impoverished Jewish troubadour and his beloved, with a happy ending. As well, they

have learned a number of songs over the years, since their discovery in the first decades of the twentieth century – from visiting rabbis and other Jews (including myself), from tapes left for them, lately from CD's, and so on. Finally, they do sing some songs from the regional culture, occasionally, especially during Passover, giving certain ones their own meaning. When they do sing romances found in the Sephardic repertoire it doesn't mean these romances are Sephardic in origin; it just means they've been preserved over the centuries both on the Peninsula and in the Sephardic diaspora. Clearly, they must have sung many of the items they now recite at some point, but even women in their nineties whom I interviewed recited rather than sang these specific prayers and Biblical ballads, and not because of their age, as they did sing other, local melodies. Perhaps it's simply that during the centuries when secrecy was paramount to survival, it would have been folly to use different melodies from everyone else's, whereas reciting was easier to conceal, and softly changing the words to known tunes, or simply sharing a different meaning, also easier to hide than melodies which would set them apart.

I may have ended up raising more questions than I've answered – but for millenia of Jewish history – what else is new?! Hope to meet those of you I don't know yet soon. *Sanos y buenos* (as the Moroccan Sephardim say).

See Judith Cohen p. 10

Society for Crypto Judaic Studies

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from Neulander, but they apparently chose not to contact them." They also interviewed Seth Kunin, professor of Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, who is an ordained rabbi. He has spent the last six summers interviewing descendants of the crypto Jews, and according to Dr. Hordes, has taken Judith Neulander's perspective "apart point by point" again, his research is noticeably absent.

Certainly, one needs to approach research into crypto Judaism with care and professionalism; however this subject by its very nature is slippery and not immediately subject to proof. It helps to attempt to understand the ways in which people organize and assume identities, and to examine the ways in which we determine "authentic identities." The idea of bricolage, as explained so well by Dr. Kunin, helps to clarify these processes. I had an opportunity to hear him speak at the 2000 conference of the Society for Crypto Judaic Studies and wrote about his lecture in my article on that event in the last newsletter. His remarks about context, and the dynamic, living process of identity, would have been illuminating and positive additions to this article. The fact that he was left out, is again indicative to me that Nathan and Ferry were intent on creating an atmosphere of scandal and doubt, instead of a well-rounded, and fully informed perspective.

Also impugned is Isabelle Medina Sandoval, a well-known poet, Crypto Judaic Society member, and contributor to these pages. Isabelle's lyrical, evocative and delicately beautiful poems about Sephardim, crypto Judaism, and New Mexico are reduced to "tortured, angry verses" with "confrontational titles." It is clear in the article and therefore to the authors that Isabelle has never hidden the fact that she grew up in Laramie, Wyoming, as they state clearly in this article that "she spent her childhood... in Laramie, Wyoming, but her parents, grandparents and cousins hailed from a village in the Mora Valley, between Taos and Santa Fe." (pg. 90) Nathan and Ferry nonetheless cannot resist their impulse to cast aspersion on Isabelle's motivations and authenticity, claiming that she, is a self-styled crypto-Jewess writer and teacher who has "reconstructed a happier past... Now her girlhood occurred not in a drab neighborhood in Laramie, Wyoming, but in a quaint New Mexico Village. Now her mother and grandmother enthusiastically venerated a saint -- Esther --- and clothed little Isabelle for Saint Esther's Day in a lovely pink dress..." (pg. 96). Again, Nathan and Ferry twist small details to create a nonexistent deceit. The reader is led to believe that Isabelle has nearly constructed her past whole cloth, and for somewhat amorphous professional gain. I don't think they understand that there isn't a great deal of money in poetry (believe me, I am a poet and there is hardly a penny in it, and unfortunately, most people would rather watch a sitcom than sit down with a book of poems). As for the business of professional crypto-Jewess, this negative article hardly inspires confidence in that as a career option. Instead, it leads me to believe that there is a great deal of personal and professional risk involved. Indeed, if Isabelle had chosen to present herself as the more common and politically correct "Chicana/Latina" poet rhapsodizing about Aztlan or "mestiza, border dweller, transgressive mixed blood roots," she wouldn't be getting impugned in an article in a national magazine like this. Although currently professor at a reputable higher institution in Santa Fe, she would probably be teaching at Stanford by now if she had taken that less controversial, more well-worn path!

Unfortunately, Nathan and Ferry feast on the deeds of an alleged con-man Juan Sandoval, and conflate his alleged misdeeds with Isabelle, Dr. Hordes, and crypto Judaism in general. From what I know of this situation, this is the one section of the article where Nathan and Ferry didn't have to work overtime to create an air of scandal. Suffice to say, the unfortunate presence of a person allegedly a con artist, does not mean that the vast majority of Hispano people purporting to have Sephardic Jewish ancestry are con artists themselves, nor does it weaken the historical credibility of that claim.

Ferry and Nathan continue in a jumbled heap of statements that strung together as they are, do not bring clarity to the historical situ-

ation but muddle the facts with strange and irrelevant half-truths, as well as falsities. For the sake of brevity, I will attempt to dispute these as they are written. "It is a history that includes both fundamentalist Protestants and other groups whose behavior could be wrongly construed as crypto-Judaism. Muslims, too, fled the Inquisition, settled in New Spain, eschewed pork, and ignored priests." (pg. 94) The authors fail to provide evidence for this statement, and settling in "New Spain" does not always mean settling in what was Northern New Spain, or New Mexico. There are specific records regarding settlement, as Dr. Hordes and others, including Fray Angelico Chavez, have researched. I have yet to see evidence of significant Muslim settlement in New Mexico. "Sephardic immigrants, also came to Mexico and the Southwest from countries such as Morocco and Turkey, where they had practiced Judaism openly for centuries." (pg. 94) What the authors fail to realize is that when Sephardic Jews went into areas such as Northern New Mexico, which were still under the auspices of the Inquisition, they would go underground with their religious practices by necessity since Judaism was outlawed, becoming crypto Jews! Apparently, there is evidence of Sephardim in other countries communicating with, or coming to join the Hispanos of Northern New Mexico. If anything, this adds weight to the claim for Sephardic identification. "Jews from Germany and Eastern Europe have been in Mexico and the Southwest for 150 years. They have intermarried with Latinos, and many have even embraced the Catholic Church. They might have kept dreidels in the house, but that is no sign of the Inquisition." (pg. 94) This is a particularly muddled series of assertions, and its inclusion in the article indicates that Nathan and Ferry have yet to understand the intricate ways in which people maintain and assert their identities. It is also historically inaccurate, to my knowledge, to assert that Ashkenazi Jews intermarried with New Mexican Hispanos with enough frequency to create the phenomenon of Crypto Judaic practice. Until quite recently, the last fifty years, New Mexican Hispanos have been culturally and geographically isolated. My grandmother, for example, never spoke English, and my father didn't until he was around seven years old. Although Hispano crypto Jews could have been influenced by what

Ferry and Nathan continue in a jumbled heap of statements that ...muddle the facts with strange and irrelevant half-truths, as well as falsities

they saw of Ashkenazic customs (like dreidels), this possibility does not disprove an authentic Sephardic ancestry. After all, imitation of Jewish customs imported from other cultures might actually occur in a group of people identified as Jews, even covertly.

There are too many jumbled and misleading statements throughout this article for me to take on in these pages. The following did jump out at me immediately, and demands clarification. The rare skin disease pemphigus vulgaris affects Jews disproportionately and has been found in New Mexican Hispanos with startling frequency. Nathan and Ferry cite this evidence of a genetic connection, and attempt to debunk it stating, "it predominantly affects Ashkenazic, not Sephardic, and in fact occurs in Mediterranean people of various ethnicities." (pg. 93) Although the authors cast aspersion on the claims of the Hispanos of Northern New Mexico to Spanish ancestry, in this instance they appear to believe. What is left out, is the intriguing fact that upon further testing, a protein sequence found in Ashkenazic Jews with pemphigus vulgaris was found in the Hispanos with the same disease. As new research shows that Sephardic and Ashkenazic populations are genetically very similar, although not identical, these results could point to a genetic connection.

The authors weave an involved narrative that culminates in a tentative, although confusing assertion that possibly the Church of God Israelite, a branch of the Church of God (Seventh Day), said to be common in New Mexico in the early twentieth century -- is the true source of the decidedly un-Catholic rituals and habits that have been cited as crypto Judaic. This is the hypothesis of the ethnographer Judith Neulander. Ferry and Nathan summarize "One would never know this if one read only the Santa Fe tourist-store books that depict non-Anglo New Mexicans as either Kachina dancers or carvers of wooden saints. One might not even know if one's own parents had once experimented with a fundamentalist sect and then abandoned it because Catholic neighbors were getting vicious or because the church leaders decided that Hispanos were not a lost tribe after all.... This seems to be what happened two generations ago, when the

Church of God (Seventh Day) pulled its ministers out of New Mexico. Fifty years later, Neulander believes, the children and grandchildren of former members are recalling their elders' Old Testament customs and misinterpreting their last words about being Jews. These recollections, Neulander says, have been skewed by Stanley Hordes and others who are ignorant of the Southwest's true recent history." (pg. 94) I immediately wondered upon reading this how a former State Historian of New Mexico, Stanley Hordes, could be so ignorant of recent, twentieth century New Mexico history? Dr. Neulander, as reported by the authors, is extremely overreaching in her negative assessment of the abilities and motivations of other people.

Nathan and Ferry have already admitted that Dr. Neulander's Hebraic Protestantism theory of Crypto Judaism is somewhat tortured by calling it "nearly as improbable" (as genuine Crypto Judaism) in their opening volley. Improbable as the notion is that Northern New Mexico Hispanos would forget a recent familial entanglement in a rather flamboyant Protestant sect, and ascribe all of their odd, non-Catholic religious or personal habits to an even more remote and stigmatized Jewish past, the theory is nonetheless more logical to Nathan and Ferry than the authenticity of the claims. Personally, I find it hard to believe that a grandmother saying on her deathbed that she is Jewish, or even Israelite or Hebrew, is anything other than what it appears to be -- a declaration of Jewish ancestry. It is beyond me why a dying grandparent would cry out that "We are Jews (or Israelites or Hebrews), as though revealing an anguished, long-kept family secret, and *really* mean a nonmainstream Protestant sect, that although slightly controversial, is not absolutely hidden from view. There may be some lingering anti-Protestant feeling in Northern New Mexico, but there is

no Inquisitional Tribunal prosecuting Protestants now, and there wasn't any in the early part of the twentieth century either. A Protestant identity is not that scandalous at this point, and unless there are herds of senile grandparents in Northern New Mexico confusing the Seventh Day Adventist idea of Israelites and Hebrews with Jews, in deathbed delirium, I don't see why this would be a suddenly cried out secret. It strains credulity actually, and adds another layer of improbability to the entire subject. Now, we have secret Protestants of the twentieth century pretending to be Jews, and their descendants can't even remember what church their families went to a generation back! The air in the mountains of New Mexico might be thinner than in other regions, but I doubt that all of the inhabitants are that high!

Dr. Neulander has decided, according to this article, that the reason that New Mexican Hispanos would invent a Jewish past is because we are in effect, racists. Colonial Spaniards were obsessed with proving that they had pure blood, untainted by that of what they regarded as inferior peoples. The same has been true for many New Mexicans, and Dr. Neulander believes that the concern for purity, *limpieza de sangre*, is intensifying, now that Hispanos are being boxed in by Anglo newcomers and Mexican immigrants... what better way to be a noble Spaniard than to be Sephardic, since Sephardim almost never marry outside their own narrow ethnic group--and would certainly not intermarry with Native Americans?" (pg. 94)

There are many things wrong with the above series of statements. First, what the authors fail to take into account, like Neulander apparently, is that for most of the Hispanos who uncover or suspect Sephardic ancestry, the discovery is not immediate cause for celebration. This aspect of the crypto-Judaic saga is entirely left out. Also that even if some of the informants that Dr. Neulander interviewed *were* racist (I am hypothesizing here for the sake of argument, and certainly anti-American Indian attitudes probably exist) that still doesn't prove that they are anything other than who they say they are. It is very condescending to second-guess a group's motivations or identity by stating that -- if you say you are *not* X (and possibly do not have good, positive feelings about X), that means that you *really* are X. Possibly the people in Northern New Mexico know exactly who they are, or at very least, who they are not. The impression I get from Dr. Neulander's conclusions, and the admitted bias of Nathan and Ferry (who state that "many His-

panos have the high cheekbones and dark complexions associated with Mestizos -- people of mixed Spanish and Native American ancestry") (pg. 86), is that they are not familiar with the complex history of social and legal separation, sporadic intermarriage (or sexual relations not always legitimized by the church), intense hostilities and strained alliances, between the Native American Indian tribes and the Spanish settlers. They reduce a complex fabric to a simple formula of "mestizo." In any case, Sephardic Jews (and Ashkenazi for that matter) can also have "high cheekbones and dark complexions".

The fact that the dialogue about Jewish ancestry has been literally tearing families apart and causing many people to endure painful crisis of identity is ignored. Seth Kunin stated at the most recent Crypto Judaic conference that the assertion that Hispanics who claim Sephardic ancestry are simply attempting to gain status reveals only that the person who made that assertion (Neulander most notoriously), believes that being Jewish is a raise in status for the Hispanic in question. Looking at the world through the lens of the Hispano community, being Jewish is a controversial identity that was hidden for a good reason, the same anti-Semitism that fueled the Inquisition for nearly four hundred years lives on, and the fear and pain that it caused has not entirely evaporated.

I also found the use of the term *limpieza de sangre* in this context to be inaccurate, and given its true historical meaning, an appalling choice of words. *Limpieza de sangre* was a term used to distinguish the "Old Christians" from the "New Christian" or converso population. It pointed toward a purity of Christian/Catholic lineage as the ideal. To use it as a delineator of pure Sephardic heritage, as opposed to mixed racial background, is inaccurate and nearly insulting to the Sephardic Jews who were persecuted because of this twisted ideal. I doubt that Nathan and Ferry meant to denigrate the real suffering of Sephardic Jews by using this term so inaccurately. However, this usage does reveal that they did not always complete their homework when researching this article.

It should also be noted that although most Sephardim were endogamous, and Stanley Hordes' careful research of the genealogies of a selected group of Northern New Mexico families is revealing the same, historically some Conversos in the New World did marry American Indians, Old Christians, or Africans. If they didn't always marry people of other races, they apparently sometimes had children with them, although these children might never be legitimized. The ones who were brought up as crypto Jews were also prosecuted by the Inquisition, regardless of their mixed race background. "The offspring of conversos' sexual liaisons with African or Indian women were occasionally introduced to crypto-Jewish practices. The New Christian Esperanza Rodrigues was born in Seville of a Portuguese merchant and a Guinean black. Esperanza married an old Christian German sculptor, emigrated with him to Mexico, and raised their three daughters as crypto Jews. The four women were punished by the Inquisition in 1646.

Nathan and Ferry will grant that many Hispanos are uncomfortable with the "easy assertion that they are racists in search of a noble Spanish past"... since they are "politically liberal, involved in civil-rights work, and proud of their mestizo complexions and ancestry..." (pg. 94) However, they manage to twist what should be regarded as a positive attitude into a negative, speaking with cynicism, about the idea of "Raza Cosmica" (pg. 88). Here, the Hispanos of Northern New Mexico cannot win, if not racists, we are collectors. The authors write, "the currency that a Sephardic ancestor might add to the blend for the non-racist civil rights activist Hispanos -- They are eager to stir into their Raza Cosmica mixture what they see as the ultimate outsider blood --- that of Jews." (pg. 94-96) It is unfortunate that Ferry and Nathan have such a consistently cynical perspective on the motivations and longings of Hispanic New Mexicans. Might it also be possible that this supposed eagerness, if it is sometimes true, is not a negative trait, but a sign of openness, an attempt to make a genuine, and honest engagement with all of one's ancestry?

The authors fail to bring into focus the conflict, crisis, searching and confusion that the question of Jewish ancestry can bring up in those previously brought up to regard themselves as Catholic (or Hispanic Protestant with a Catholic past). Like any family secret, or

for most of the Hispanos who uncover or suspect Sephardic ancestry, the dis-

MAX VALERIO

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family skeleton that is suddenly exposed to light and exhumed, there is trauma as well as excitement, wonder, and sometimes -- just plain shock. In some respects, this is the very real and human aspect of the story that would have imbued this article with a depth and needed empathy for the Hispanos of New Mexico, an empathy that is entirely missing. The authors are correct to muse in conclusion about how in a time when many American Jews are intermarrying or losing sight of the value of their rich and powerful religious heritage, that it is ironic, and possibly oddly auspicious, that some of the most sincere converts or returnees to observant Judaism are arriving from unexpected places. Although this intriguing aspect of the story is touched upon briefly, other layers remain unexplored.

Instead, we are left with a bad taste in our mouths after reading what could have been an informative and inspiring article, one that could have told both sides of this controversy while not resorting to the tone of a negative, earth-scorching expose. It occurs to me that Nathan and Ferry can now add their own names to the list of people that they believe are exploiting and profiting professionally from the saga of the "Hidden Jews of New Mexico." Their cynicism and carelessness prevents them from doing otherwise.

JUDY FRANKEL CONCERTS

Sephardic Music Concerts (in Judeo-Spanish) **January 17** at A Traveling Jewish Theatre, San Francisco: (415)399-1809 ext.302

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(See Judy's website: www.google.com and type in: judy)

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For more detail, check Judith's web-page: <http://www.york.ca/judithc> and also links to her basic discographic guide to Judeo-Spanish recordings: www.klezmershack.com/articles/9903.cohen_j.sephardic.html and her Introduction to Sephardic Music (www.sephardichouse.org/cohen.html).

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Doña Gracia...With the Warts

By Arye Hazary

If we persist in presenting our heroes and heroines without their foibles, then those whose opinions differ from ours on these issues will present them for us, often happily so -- sometimes with a vengeance.

In 1507, after the massacre of thousands of new Christians in Lisbon when King Manoel lifted the prohibition on conversos to leave the country and removed for a time all social, political and economic discrimination between old and new Christians, the families of Doña Gracia and her husband chose not to emigrate to a country where they could practice Judaism freely. Instead, they chose to retain the facade of Christianity and successfully exploit the opportunities open to new Christians and their descendants for social upward mobility, political gain and commercial wealth. Only between 1536, with the royal decision to establish an Inquisition in Portugal on the Spanish model, and 1547, when the massive new Christian diplomatic and financial effort to dissuade the Papacy from acceding to the Portuguese monarchy's request failed, were contingency plans to move the family's fortune to a safer place initiated and gradually brought to fruition.

Their apologists explain that the family was planning to do just that, i.e. move their family and their fortune to the Ottoman Empire, from the very beginning. If this fabulously wealthy family hungered to return to Judaism, I submit that they could have done so at any time with the spare change in their pockets, and manage to live a modest but economically secure life elsewhere.

But the family had seen life from the top and would not be satisfied with less ever again. Had the jealous eyes of others on their wealth not been reinforced with the establishment of the converso-baiting Inquisition, they, like so many other conversos, might have put off leaving Christian Europe indefinitely. After all, they had either been born or brought into Christianity as babes. The oppressive religion was probably not quite the intolerable ogre that it had been for their forcibly converted parents. They could wear the Christian veneer more lightly and play the role more naturally.

Additionally, their delay was justified by the rescue efforts and financial aid they and their international agents provided to conversos who chose, or were compelled, to leave Portugal at once.

Maimonides, in his compassionate defense of the twelfth century Moroccan Jewish Community forcibly converted by Moslem fundamentalists, stipulates in his *Epistle of Apostasy* that a forced convert's covert Jewish observance has value only if he is willing and ready to escape at the first opportunity to a land where he can return to Judaism openly -- even in the extreme case of having to abandon his family and property. Later rabbis, in the wake of the 1391 massacres in Spain, ameliorated the harshness of this responsum out of sympathy for conversos who anguished over leaving their families behind and going to a strange land in penury. However, such was never even the worst case scenario for the Nasi family.

Whenever Doña Gracia or her husband were accused of Judaizing by commercial competitors or jealous family members, the only specific charge ever brought against them faint-

ly related to crypto Judaism was their assistance and rescue efforts on behalf of their converso sisters and brothers. No charges of covert Jewish ritual practices or clandestine services in their home were ever brought against them by family members, professional or domestic staff or other new Christian witnesses. They were spared the routine horrors of the Inquisition: filthy cells, torture, long periods between interrogations, etc. Their fortunes were never permanently confiscated. They never marched in an auto de fe, and they never wore a *sambenito*. A tap on the wrist, the distribution of generous bribes, and the pulling of some political and commercial strings always sufficed to absolve them of any guilt.*

The family's generosity to the Jewish people was lavish and legendary. But they never skimmed on their fabulous lifestyle for the sake of charity. Likewise, they insisted that neither they nor their retinue, staffs or agents be required to submit to the discrimination, restrictions and distinctive clothing required of other Jews in Italy or Istanbul.

When they finally returned to Judaism and moved to the Ottoman Empire, they established a synagogue and a rabbinical academy and contributed to the upkeep of many others. But when they required a favorable rabbinical judgment or total community support for ventures, they felt that, as Cecil Roth put it in his *Dona Gracia: Of The House of Nasi*, "if they paid the piper they expected to call the tune,"

In conclusion, I believe that what we have here is a very colorful, very human and essentially very Jewish element in the tapestry that is the crypto Jew. The Nasis were Jews in their hearts, what our contemporary age has indelicately termed "cardiac" Jews. Unlike Marcos Perez Bautista, the comparably wealthy leader of the crypto Jewish congregation in Lima, Peru in the seventeenth Century or the equally social-

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ly prominent Antonio Homem who led the crypto-Jewish conventicle in early seventeenth century Coimbra, the Nasis never took risks that would lead them to the stake. But in their hearts they unquestionably loved and identified with their

people, and unstintingly assisted in their rescue and welfare. Their legacy is the many eloquent testimonies to them expressing the gratitude of the Jewish people.

Arye Hazary is a frequent contributor to Halapid. Readers comments and replies are invited.

**Editor's note: Doña Gracia was imprisoned twice in Venice after being denounced as a Judaizer, planning to resettle in the Ottoman Empire and practice Judaism. Her brother-in-law, Diogo Mendes, was arrested twice in Antwerp.*