

*Tudo se ilumina
para aquele que
busca a luz.
BEN-ROSH*

HALAPID

*All is illuminated for
one who seeks the
light
ARTUR CARLOS
BARROS BASTO*

The Journal of the Society for Crypto Judaic Studies

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Eighteenth Annual Conference Of the Society for Crypto Judaic Studies

August 3 to 5, Phoenix

by Seth Kunin, Program Chair



Seth Kunin

of crypto-Judaism in Spain, analyses of Halachic (rabbinic) responses to crypto-Judaism, discussions of the Dönme (see the Spring 2008 edition of HaLapid and page 10 of this issue), and further discussions of the use of genetic markers or DNA for better understanding crypto-Jewish past. They also touch on the cultural and religious diversity of descendants of crypto-Jews living in the United States and much further afield. These papers will bring together both old friends and many new friends as well.

As the society also seeks to be a place in which descendants of crypto-Jews can explore their identity we will also have a number of contributions from individuals exploring the ways in which Judaism and crypto-Judaism plays in their self-understanding today. These contributions will include a talk by Rabbi Garcia on his work in the crypto-Judaic synagogue in Phoenix as well as his work in Brazil. We will also have a number of contributions from members of his community. I am sure that the many descendants of crypto-Jews who participate in the conference will also have much to contribute to these and indeed all of the sessions.

In last year's conference we had a fascinating contribution from individuals who were exploring Messianic Judaism in relation to crypto-Jewish identity. The papers were both challenging on the day, and have continued to raise discussion in the subsequent months. We will have a panel this year, which explores Messianic Judaism from a mainstream Jewish perspective. I am sure that this panel will add a further fascinating and constructive element to our understanding of diversity within the crypto-Jewish community today.

Many individuals also contribute to our understanding of crypto-Judaism through the use of the creative arts. Thus, Cary Herz will be presenting 'Photography and New Mexico's Crypto Jews: a visual adventure'. We will also hear from Marcia Fine who will be discussing her use of factual material and the importance of authenticity in historical fiction. We are also very excited about the second year of cultural events funded by Sosin Foundation. We will be hosting two events: The Judy Frankel Concert performed by Vanessa Paloma on Sunday evening, and *Parted Waters*, a staged reading of a play by Robert Benjamin (Playwright), and Janet Arnold (Producing Director), with professional actors by Arizona Jewish Theatre Company on Monday evening. See story on page two.

I am delighted to announce **Jon Entine** as the keynote speaker for this year's conference. Jon Entine's work is familiar to many in the society. He is known as a challenging and entertaining speaker. Among the many books and publications his recent book (2008) *Abraham's Children: Race, Identity and the DNA of the Chosen People* directly and provocatively addresses issues of great significance to both academics and non-academics in the society. I am sure that his paper will be one of the highlights of the conference. The keynote will be on Monday evening.

In this brief notice I have only touched on a few of the papers that will be offered. The papers, however, are only a small part of the conference. Just as important, or even more important, is the role of the conference in providing a place to meet old and new friends – a chance to network and explore what crypto-Judaism means. I am convinced that this year's conference will live up to our tradition of providing a high quality place for safe communication, exploration and learning for both crypto-Jews and non-crypto-Jews. I look forwards to seeing you all in Phoenix.

SCJS ARTS PROGRAMS PRESENT PALOMA CONCERT, AJTC STAGED READING OF DRAMA ABOUT CRYPTO JEWS

Live Reading of *Parted Waters* Scheduled for Monday Night

The play *Parted Waters*, about the effects of the discovery of Jewish ancestors on a political campaign in New Mexico, will be presented after dinner on Monday night, August 4 at the Embassy Suites-Biltmore Hotel.

Professional actors will represent the characters in the drama by playwright and SCJS member Robert Benjamin. Janet Arnold will serve as Producing Director for the Arizona Jewish Theater Company. The play will be presented next year at Arizona venues in full staged format, Arnold reports.

Janet Arnold,
Producing Director of
the Arizona Jewish
Theatre Company



Concert Honoring Judy Frankel Follows Dinner Sunday Night

In honor of the work that Judy Frankel did for Sephardic song for many years, the Society has programmed a concert in her name for Sunday evening, August 3 at 8:00 pm.

The invited artist is **Vanessa Paloma**, an internationally known singer of Sephardic song and researcher of Sephardic cultural traditions. She is returning from the last year in Morocco (see <http://vanessapaloma.blogspot.com>) just in time to perform this concert. She has been studying traditional Sephardic songs preserved by the Jewish descendants of the people expelled from Spain in 1492. She has been giving concerts of Sephardic music in many venues throughout that country, as well as on French, Italian, and Spanish television.

Paloma will be a Scholar in Residence at the Haddasah-Brandeis Institute for women's studies at Brandeis University during the Fall semester, 2008. She has recently written a book entitled: *Mystic Siren: Woman's Voice in the Balance of Creation*.



Vanessa Paloma
inaugurates
Judy Frankel
Memorial Concerts

Judy Frankel
preserved
Sephardic
music



The Judy Frankel Memorial Concert and the presentation of *Parted Waters* are made possible by a grant to SCJS from the Sosin-Stratton-Petit Foundation.

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF OTHER MEETINGS

FIFTH ANNUAL SEPHARDIC ANOUSIM CONFERENCE

This year's conference is going to be beyond amazing! Just a heads up on the upcoming info. Aug. 1st-3rd, 2008. El Paso, Texas

Keynote speaker: **Rabbi Nissan Ben-Avraham**, born in Palma Majorca, as a Catholic, now residing in Shelo Israel, with his wife and twelve children, made aliyah thirty years ago. He converted, and is now an Orthodox rabbi/scribe. He was of the group called, *Xueta's*, a derogatory term such as, *marrano*, like those of us who have bourn those terms, he reclaimed his right to be a Jew.

Andree Aelion Brooks: Researcher-writer of "The Woman Who Defied King's, Doña Gracia Nasi". Rabbinic Student **Moshe Ortero**: Brings hope & encouragement with his Jewish birth, lack of Jewish education and *Tshuva* from the Christian pastoral pulpit back to Judaism. His experience and work with Anousim is an amazing story and hope for the Jewish and Anousim world today!



Jack Zeller, with Kulanu, brings desert to the table with his experience, knowledge and willingness to help bring B'ani Anousim home! **Vanessa Paloma** will perform Sephardic songs and discuss the traditions she researched over the last year in Morocco.

For information contact: **Rabbi Stephen A. Leon**, 805 Cherry Hill Ln. El Paso, Tx. 79912 or call Annalie or Becca at 915-833-2222.

JEWS ALONG THE CAMINO REAL

By Noel Pugach

Mark the following date on your calendar to head down the Camino Real to El Paso for a joint conference with the Texas Jewish Historical Society: October 24—26, 2008. A real treat is in store for participants, starting with the lovely and historical Camino Real Hotel in downtown El Paso, which will host the conference.

So far the plans include Friday evening services at Temple Mount Sinai, followed by a dinner and an exchange of ideas and experience by members of both the Texas and New Mexico historical societies.

The Saturday morning session will have panels on Merchants and Immigrants in Texas and New

Mexico. A box lunch will be served at the refurbished Plaza Theater while several immigrants to Texas and New Mexico discuss briefly their experiences and how they wound up where they did. Saturday afternoon will have sessions on crypto-Jews at the El Paso History Museum and "Saving Jews from the Holocaust" at the rebuilt Holocaust Museum.



Noel Pugach

Saturday evening, conference participants will gather for a banquet at the hotel and talks on Jewish organizations, emphasizing women's groups and their role in civic life. Sunday morning, after the respective societies hold board meetings, there is a possibility of a tour of two beautiful Jewish cemeteries before the conference adjourns at noon.

Details on cost and reservations are on the NMJHS web site, www.nmjewishhistory.org.

Do you have a presentation you would like to make at this conference? We await your proposal. Please contact me, Dr. Noel Pugach, with your proposals at npugach@num.edu, or telephone me at 505-323-2067. (The above information is used with the permission of *Legacy: Newsletter of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society*.)

THE CRYPTO-JEWS AND THE INQUISITION IN NEW SPAIN

A symposium on "The Crypto-Jews and the Inquisition in New Spain" was held April 17 and 18, 2008 at the Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. The symposium focused on one of the most prominent crypto-Jewish families to migrate to northern New Spain in the sixteenth century, the Carvajal family. **Dr. Stanley Hordes**, President of SCJS, delivered the keynote address. Information on the symposium can be found at <http://cushing.tamu.edu/symposium/>.



INVITED ARTIST

Angelina Muñiz-Huberman is one of the most famous contemporary writers from Mexico, and she writes about Sephardic traditions. Her short stories and novels are known throughout the Spanish speaking world. Perhaps, her most widely known novel is *El Mercader de Tudela* (*The Merchant of Tudela*), which is a story about the travels of Benjamín of Tudela, portraying him as a merchant. Her book *La Lengua Florida* (*The Flowery Language*) is a collection of short stories and poems in Ladino, which is one of the richest collections of literatura in that language that we have today. She has agreed to our reproducing in *HaLapid* this story about a young girl learning about the Jewish heritage of her family.

THE GIRL IN THE BALCONY KISUFIM

JERUSALEM CONFERENCE
OF JEWISH WRITERS 2007

Angelina Muñiz-Huberman

The scene takes place in a balcony. As if it were a scene from a classical play. A mother is talking to her daughter. It is a cool afternoon in the Condesa borough of Mexico City. The year is 1942, in the middle of the Second World War. The child is listening carefully; she is only six years old but she can tell that something important is about to be said. The girl is leaning lightly on the balcony and the mother has traces of a smile on her face. The girl is wearing a white apron over her dress and the mother is wearing a coat and a handbag on her left shoulder, looking like she is ready to go out.

Why choose a balcony to tell something that might be crucial for the child's future? Maybe because it is a remote part of the house? A part that seems separated, that seems to float in the air? An intimate space? A space where a secret can be kept? Where words can be pronounced aside? Where the wind blows the words away?

A balcony is a reduced space. It is a kind of boundary between the inside and the outside. Above all, it is a source of light. And yet, it is also a place of transition, where time is absorbed by space and the instant is the only measure. Although the instant could also mean eternity.

Thus, in a spaceless space and in timeless time, compelled by the concentration of precise words, truth is revealed to the small child. The light of knowledge illuminates the balcony and now she knows that she is one of the children of Israel. Her mother tells her how for centuries her ancestors would transmit the secret of their origins, always from mother to daughter, in a veiled manner and in a secluded place, so as to avoid persecution. And now, the child has been handed the responsi-

bility of continuing with this tradition. She has promised never to forget it and to transmit it, in due time, to her own children.

Light illuminates the balcony, but a seal of secrecy has been imposed. Knowing that every minute counts, the mother continues her confession. She teaches her daughter to make a sign in order to be recognized by other fellow Jews: with hands extended, the fingers are united in pairs to imitate the form of the first letter of *Shaddai*, the divine name. The girl also learns that her last name, Sacristán, as Christian as it seems to be, is actually the translation of a Hebrew word: *shamash* (sexton). Moreover, she is told that her family members were called "the Jews" in Casar de Talamana, their ancestral town.

With each day that passes, a new stone is added to the mosaic, a new piece of the puzzle finds its place. Little by little, the girl recognizes the complex pattern of her family. As far as memory can go, the family had lived for centuries in Spain. In 1492, when the Expulsion Edict against Sephardic Jews was issued, her family did not go into exile, but rather stayed and was forced to convert into Christianity, increasing thus the ranks of Crypto-Jews, also called Marranos, Conversos or New Christians.

If her family did not leave Spain in 1492, so what is she doing in Mexico in 1942? It is now her turn to experience exile. Her parents, Spanish Republicans, went into exile during the Civil War of 1936. The girl was born in France, and then, a few months before the Second World War was declared, they were just in time to take a boat to any place in the American Continent –any place was fine for them because they had no preferences. The boat was bound for Cuba, where they stayed for three years and then went to Mexico.

Once living in Mexico, the family moved several times. There was a trip to New York, just after the World War ended, to reunite with part of the family that had fled from the Nazi persecution.

Back again in Mexico and at school, the girl meets children who are survivors of concentration camps. She listens carefully to their stories, because one day she will be a writer and she will consider it her duty to tell such stories.

This way, a world of exile surrounds the child: the Jewish and the Spanish Republican exiles. Her parents often go to cafés and take her along with them since they do not want to be separated. There, they keep talking with other refugees about the end of



Angelina Muñiz-Huberman

the World War and their return to Spain, once the dictators Hitler, Mussolini and Franco are defeated. Being the only child in these reunions, she became an expert at listening and learning from the adults.

But history does not turn out as one would like. Hitler and Mussolini were defeated, but not Franco. Thus, for the Spaniards, exile became a way of living which lasted till their death. The girl, always hoping to return to Spain, never considered the place where she was living as definite. From then on, she would think of herself as living in transit. To this feeling of not belonging, one must add that her looks and her Spanish pronunciation betrayed her as a foreigner in a moment in which an acute nationalism was characteristic of Mexican politics and life. Once, when playing in the street, a drunkard shouted at her: *güereja judía* ("dirty blonde Jewess"), but she did not consider herself insulted, on the contrary, she thought she had been recognized. At other times she was called a *gachupina* or *refugacha* (which are despective ways of referring to Spaniards) and all the sins of the Conquistadores were attributed to her.

She got used to accumulating exiles and to taking refuge in an inner world where imagination and freedom reigned supreme. Without knowing it, she was laying down the basis of her future literary trade.

The girl in the balcony had promised never to forget who she was and to give it back to the world. Surrounded by so many forms of antisemitism in literature, history, religion, and daily life, she decided to commit herself to writing about the spiritual significance of Judaism. Years later, in *La lengua florida*, she compiled an anthology of Sephardic literature from its beginnings to our days. *Las raíces y las ramas* was dedicated to explaining the Kabbalah and its manifestations. For another book, she chose the title of *The Merchant of Tudela* as a reminder of Shakespeare's ambiguous attitude towards Jews (*The Merchant of Venice*) while narrating the life of a famous medieval traveler (Benjamin of Tudela).

However, it was in her first novel that she touches a thorny issue. *Morada interior* tells the story of Saint Therese of Avila not from the point of view of her

Christianity, but as the daughter of Converso Jews. Her second novel, *Tierra adentro*, deals with the Inquisition and tells the story of a Sephardic young man's trip to establish himself in the Holy Land during the XVI century. Her third novel, *La guerra del unicornio*, has as its main characters a Jewish kabbalist, a Muslim alchemist and a Christian knight who lived in medieval Spain.

The Spanish exile as a subject appears in *Dulcinea encantada* and in *Las confidentes*, as well as in other poems and texts. Exiles intermingle in *De magias y prodigios*, *Areúsa en los conciertos*, *El siglo del desencanto* y *El sefardí romántico*. And also in the poetry books *Vilano al viento*, *La sal en el rostro*, *La memoria del aire*, *Conato de extranjería*, *La tregua de la inocencia*, *Cantos treinta de otoño*, *La pausa figurada*, among others.

In the genre she called pseudomemories (*Castillos en la tierra* and *Molinos sin viento*), life and creation join the exile and the word in a newly found space. In *El sefardí romántico* she uses family stories in an ironic or tragic manner while travelling through twentieth century history.

Thus, the cycle closes and the girl's search for the roots of her identity becomes her true life-long passion.

What does it mean?



LONG TIME HALAPID EDITOR REVIEWS SOCIETY ISSUES DURING TENURE

by Dolores Sloan

At the 2001 Conference of SCJS in Pueblo, CO, the Society made a significant change in its organization. Members attending the annual Business Meeting at the close of the conference on August 20, adopted new bylaws which provided for officers and a Board of Directors to be elected by SCJS members. The new rules replaced bylaws which had vested policy making authority in three persons, two of whom are founders of the organization, and one who has been active since the Society's inception in 1991.

The new bylaws established a position called Vice President of Communications, and gave the occupant responsibility for all publications and for *HaLapid* as Editor. I was elected to that position at the Business Meeting that passed the new bylaws. With the exception of a period of one year or so in 2006-7 when Seth Kunin served in that role, I was Editor through the publication of Winter 08. With this issue, *HaLapid* welcomes a new Editor, Ron Duncan Hart. Ron brings to the task expertise in various types of print and electronic media, as well as scholarship in the fields of study relating to crypto Judaism. He has presented papers at several of our conferences and has written articles for *HaLapid*. I am looking forward to his vision and skill enhancing our publication.

Ron asked me if I would write about developments of SCJS that I witnessed over the years since taking on the Vice President/Communications position and *HaLapid*. To do this, I reviewed my archive of past issues for the years of service and asked several members who have been active in SCJS for their perspective. It appears that there are several topics and issues that one can see in the life of the organization from 2001-08. I will summarize them below.

1. Questions of Identity

Yes, the organization has had to wrestle with its identity and how that should manifest in its policies, programs and publications. There are several aspects that have been discussed and debated repeatedly. The SCJS mission, which you can find on the cover page of this issue, is the formal statement that governs identity.

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies serves

the following purposes:
the fostering of research and networking of information into the historical and contemporary development of crypto Jews of Iberian origin. Membership is open to any one who is interested in this immensely fascinating and perplexing area.

The twin purposes seem clear enough, yet the language in which they are expressed has been interpreted in different ways.

First, let's look at the function of fostering research. Papers reporting on findings and developments in the study of crypto Judaism are presented at our annual conference and published in article form in *HaLapid*. In this sense, we are fostering research by giving studies and theories a forum to be brought to the attention of the diverse membership, consisting of scholars, persons of potential or proven crypto-Judaic background and of the general interested public. So are we, then, an academic or scholarly organization?

This question has generated discussion among members of SCJS on the interpretation of "academic," arising in different views about what background speakers and authors need to have to present papers or write articles for the Society. There has also been disagreement on what kind or degree or form of research merits approval.

Is there a place on the conference agenda for research in progress or theories that are not part of the conventional wisdom in this field? What shall be the qualifications of members of the Program Committee, who review applicants for presentations and decide on acceptance or rejection? What makes an article or paper appropriate for *HaLapid*? These are questions that have arisen in the life of the society with regard to the research component of our mission.

Then there is the second aspect, the "networking of information and ideas." I have seen this interpreted as the part of the mission that is more service oriented. It seems to imply that the Society has the obligation, after studying the phenomenon of crypto Judaism through interview and observation of real people, to provide research and information that helps the subjects of that research



deal with the individual and familial issues that arise as a result of these studies.

Others agree on this interpretation, but want the support of crypto Jews to go beyond the passive reception of services by them. They need to be sought out and valued as active participants on the board and committees and given more than token time at conferences.

Here, the two aspects we have discussed bring forth a third. Are those who have academic achievement in the field and are tenured members of faculties best suited to influence the direction of conference or *HaLapid* themes or policies? In the past year, I have seen increasing effort by those who say “yes” to steer the Society in this direction.

The question of organizational identity goes even further. Are we a secular or a Jewish organization? Since I became an active member in 1998, it has been made clear to me by those who serve as officers or board members that SCJS is secular; that it supports the crypto Jew in seeking information about his/her background but takes no stand on the religious path that is taken thereafter. It has been emphasized that our members, indeed, include those who continue with their formal religious affiliation or with the secular lifestyle of the past, as well as those who decide to practice Judaism.

This issue has arisen several times, for example at the San Antonio Conference in 2000, where a member’s suggestion that SCJS support Israel on a specific issue was supported by some members and considered a violation of the secular nature of the organization by others.

The presentation at last year’s conference by a panel of Messianic Jews has brought this issue up again. Were the speakers appropriate for our Society? How can we follow the principle of secularism by allowing speakers and members of all religious or nonreligious persuasions and be sensitive to the vulnerability of some of our crypto-Jewish and other members?

At the Pueblo conference in 2001, the membership approved a motion reaffirming the right of a then Roman Catholic priest to present his comments on present day Catholic-Jewish relations without hostile remarks from an audience member. Last year, a long-time, crypto-Jewish member wrote our President, objecting to the wearing of his collar by this same individual, now an Episcopal priest, as a speaker in our Conference.

Is the principle of secularism formalized in

policy? It is not in our bylaws. It may have been adopted by motion at meetings. Or does it exist *de facto* through its support by members who have been active spokespersons for the Society since its founding?

2. Educational or Activist?

Another question that has been asked is whether it is appropriate for SCJS to undertake activities in support of crypto Jewish individuals or communities or should its activity to be limited to education. As secularism is regarded as Society policy, so is direct action in the field. This issue has come up over the past five years when some members have advocated that the Society take part in helping the crypto-Jewish community in Belmonte, Portugal secure funds for educational materials and teachers for its youth.

3. Membership

As quoted above in the bylaws, membership is open to all. So who are our members? It would be helpful to know how they break down statistically among the three types: academics/scholars, crypto Jews and those who are neither and are interested in the subject.

At the Albuquerque conference in 2007, Abe Lavender presented an analysis of membership by geography. He posited that results indicate sufficient members east of the Mississippi to merit holding SCJS conferences there. Attendance has not met expectations, however, at conferences held outside the southwest and California, although other factors may have influenced this in Miami and Portland.

Still arguments have been made that, if SCJS is a national organization, then it needs to develop membership and hold conferences in areas beyond the southwest with significant crypto Jewish potential, such as the south east, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

When Randy Baca became Vice President/Membership in 2001, she undertook a vigorous membership campaign, which resulted in a geometric increase in new and returning members. Present membership is 244, according to Art Benveniste, current VP/Membership.

4. Funding

In 2005, SCJS was approved by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501.3.c non profit organization, which increases eligibility for grants from

awarding agencies and foundations. It also makes it more attractive for individual members and donors, offering tax benefits. A year-end letter to members and friends has brought in much-needed funds to our treasury.

The Society is in the second year of a grant from the Sosin-Stratton-Petitt Foundation to enhance programs in the arts at our conferences. There are additional areas which can be funded: scholarships and fellowships for students and crypto Jews to attend annual conferences, honoraria for the annual keynote speaker, specific research that the membership deems worthwhile.

Final Remarks

These are some of the issues that I have witnessed during my tenure as Editor of *HaLapid*. Perhaps I can use the bully pulpit in this overview of purpose, principles, policies and programs to present those I believe important for the welfare of the organization and the people it serves.

1. The membership needs a vital publication/newsletter to continue bringing a balance of scholarly and personal articles and stories, as well as news on developments in other regions and countries and, of course, membership matters. The personal factor should never be subverted by the academic. It is important that members feel essential to the organization if SCJS is to thrive with new members signing up and old ones staying in. The Member Closeup feature should be continued, and a regular column instituted with news about members' achievements and events. It is important from an ethical standpoint as well as financially necessary for the Society's well-being to continue showing members that they are vital to our welfare and appreciated.

2. We need to draw on the skills and enthusiasm of non academic individuals and crypto Jews, and see that they are represented beyond token status on important committees such as Program and Fundraising and on the Board of Directors.

3. Space should be allocated on annual Conference Agendas for members to present untested theories and ideas or to seek feedback on work or events in progress. It might be worthwhile to add an additional day to the meeting to accommodate this in a meaningful way.

4. The secular principle needs to be formalized so that, like the specific items in our bylaws, it is defensible as established by the membership.

5. With the welcoming letter that each new member receives, include a statement summariz-

ing the Society's mission and explain the fundamentals such as the secular nature of the organization. This way, we've made an effort to do what we can to inform members of the nature of SCJS. Some mistakenly assume SCJS is helping anusim return to Judaism. There are fine organizations that do this, but we need to be sure that members understand that we provide research and information but do not advise or advocate what path is followed next.

6. A study needs to be done to recommend strategies to hold conferences and/or events beyond the southwest, in other parts of the country, even abroad in places such as Portugal, Spain, Brazil, etc. The President can appoint a committee to undertake this.

The Society for Crypto Judaic Studies has been an important part of my professional life. It has also enriched my personal sphere with friendships and good times. It is fitting to close with attention again to the twin aspects of the Society's mission: research and service, the study of a phenomenon and the honoring of those who are part of it, the academic and the personal. They are inseparable in our mission, and should have equal command of our dedication.



Member Report

B'ANI ANOUSIM ISRAEL TOUR BY SONYA LOYA

A dream come true for both **Rabbi Stephen A. Leon** and myself. We met over three years ago. Not only because it was destiny, but because I was organizing an Anousim tour to Israel, I called him to schedule a meeting and presentation and the rest is history!

Being at the Casa Doña Gracia museum in Tiberias, was a wonderful and fun experience. Being able to see the research they have done on this virtually unknown heroine of the Spanish Inquisition, was truly amazing. Our guide at the museum was a gracious and beautiful woman who comes from an Anousim background herself. Not only did we get to see the amazing reconstruction of one of the houses that Doña Gracia lived in, we also felt and experienced for a moment in time the legacy she left behind. Dressing up in clothes of that era brought out the fun childlike nature in all of us, as well as giving us a sense of what it felt like to live in that manner. Interestingly enough, they mentioned the newly researched book written by Andree Brooks; "The Woman Who Defied Kings, Doña Gracia Nasi", which I sell in my Judaica shop. There is very little written about Doña Gracia, let's hope the research on her continues, since there are still many unanswered questions about her life and death. Let me encourage each of you to go to the web-site to see a bit of what we experienced. www.donagracia.com

The high mountains of S'fat, felt more and more like home for me in many ways. Walking on the old stone roads up and down hills, being in art galleries in the city of the Kabbalah, where our ancestors left Spain, to build this beautiful city on a mountain to study Torah and create art was calling my soul. The peace I felt there was wonderful, I could feel my very pores soaking in the air.

Of all the moments of the trip that were beyond words, one for me was the very reason we were there: the *Kotel*. After each of us had a time of personal prayer, we then met to sit on the steps facing the wall. Saying *kaddish*, welcoming in the *shabbat* with prayers, songs and hearing Rabbi Leon's story of his first time to Israel, not able to go to the *kotel* to pray since it wasn't yet in the hands of the Jewish people, to the second time he was able to go, while on his honeymoon, to this

very special moment. Among the 29 people who experienced this trip, there were seven B'nai Anousim. Some have returned, some in process and some still in motion of coming back to reclaim their Jewish



Sonya Loya

identity and heritage. This moment wasn't just felt by us. I notice that others in passing, stopped to join in prayer or song or just to listen and feel the emotion in the air, which was truly a miraculous moment in our history, the return of our exiles!

Going all the way to Eilat, which was a surprise to me in its very contemporary style and fashion, to the Negev, which was truly inspiring, to see that the return of the Jewish people brings life to a desolate desert. Going back up the trail of many before us to Tel Aviv, finishing our tour with the Diaspora Museum and having been to Vad Yashem, was very touching and in all our continued learning one thing is hopeful; that in spite of all the places we have been exiled to as a people, bringing, Torah, medicine, music, art, banking, etc. and having gotten persecuted along the way we are still here! *Lechaim!*

Be well to all and come join us for the next B'ani Anousim tour.



B'ani Anousim in Israel

THE DONME SABBATEANS

*Followers of
Sabbatai Zvi,
they converted
to Islam*



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THE STORY OF DÖNMES- SECOND CONVERSOS:

A HUNDRED YEARS OF CONSPIRACIES

By Salim T. Nefes

Ph.D. student Kent University.

Introduction

In the following pages, I would like to discuss the history of conspiracy theories about a crypto-Jewish group Dönmes in Turkey. I will start the discussion by describing the group's story and then compare it with the conspiratorial accounts about them, where I will basically summarise the history of the group. Then, I will go on to analyse the conspiracy theories surrounding the group so that historical explanation of Dönmes could be complemented by the social constructions or scaremongering about the community. As hinted in the title, it has been a century on the dot since these theories started to be circulated in Turkey. In this sense, I will also attempt to show the changing discourses of conspiracy theories about Dönme community in last hundred years.

Dönmes-Second Conversos

Dönmes, one of the many different names like Avdeti, Sabbatean (Sabataycı), Selanikli- *Salonican*, is given to a crypto-Jewish community originated in seventeenth century. However, they call themselves 'Ma'aminim' *the believers* (Şişman, 2002b). The majority of the group has resided in Salonica and the rest in other cities such as Istanbul and Izmir (Smyrna) in Ottoman Empire until the population exchange between Turkey and Greece

(Baer, 2007). There is not much information about the group's numbers, networks and effects.

According to Şişman (2008: 25-26) there are four distinct periods in group's history. The first is when its founder Sabbatai Sevi has lived in seventeenth century. The second period has started after his death and prolonged eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which the structure of the community has changed. The third epoch is at the beginning of twentieth century, when the Dönme group has been influenced by modernisation movements of Europe. The fourth era of the group's history has begun in 1990s (ibid.). In my discussion, I will follow these historical categories and will begin with Sabbatai Sevi's story.

Sabbatai Sevi, the leader of the Jewish messianic movement in seventeenth century, laid the foundations of Dönme community (ibid). He was a rabbi, studied Talmud and Halakha (Jewish law). Later, he was influenced by Lurianic interpretation of Jewish mysticism. In 1665, his collaborator Nathan of Gaza, who had a prominent role in Dönme movement, declared Sabbatai Sevi as the expected messiah of Jews. This claim gradually gained acceptance by the Jewish community. As Neyzi (2002: 143) cites Sabbatai's pronouncement created so much expectations in Jewish community that people started to believe that Sabbatai Sevi will topple the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet the IV.

Moreover, he created a big impact not only in Jewish circles within Ottoman Empire but among different religious groups throughout the world. For Şişman (2008; 2002a, 2002b) millenarian Christian movements also recognized Sabbatai as the potential Jewish messiah who would provide the necessary conditions for the second arrival of Jesus, and therefore they helped the spread of his message around the world. In parallel, Popkin and Chasin (2004) discuss these effects of Sabbatai Sevi among Protestants in the Netherlands. In similar, Hathaway (1997) mentions the controversy the group members created in Ottoman Egypt in seventeenth century. In short, Sabbatai Sevi became a very important religious figure in 17th century all around the world.

In response to the growing movement, Jewish religious authorities requested Ottoman Empire to take action. Sevi was taken to court, and was forced to convert into Islam. After conversion, he was given the name Aziz Mehmet Efendi and employed by the Emperor with a high salary. According to Şişman (2008), the palace showed him hospitality by giving him Emperor's name as well as employing him in a good position. Nonetheless, Sabbatai was taken to court second time with the claim that he was not ful-

ly converted. He was sent to small town Ülgün in today's Albania, where he spent the rest of his life.

Despite, Sabbatai Sevi's conversion into Islam produced a great disappointment among Jews, after his death in 1683 several hundred families of his followers followed him and converted into Islam (Scholem, 1971). This group was the origins of Dönme community. They publicly acted as Muslims but practiced their version of Judaism in private and did not marry with outsiders. According to Danton (1997: 25) neither Turks nor orthodox Jews have liked Dönme community, they had tense relationships. It should not go without mentioning that not all of Sevi's followers became Dönmes, some others like Nathan of Gaza stayed in Judaism and some like Jacob Frank was converted to Christianity.

In the second phase of their history, Dönmes' existence has stayed as an open secret (Baer, 2004) in the Ottoman Empire. In other words, their existence has been acknowledged by others but no actions have been taken. In this period, Dönme community was divided into three sub-sects; *Karakaşlı*, *Kapancı* and *Yakubi* due to different claims on who incarnated Sevi's spirit (Baer, 1997). People, who believed Jacob Querido, Sevi's brother-in-law as Sevi's incarnation, created *Yakubi* (Jacobites) group in 1683. Subsequently, there were further arguments among the remaining group about whether Baruchya Russo (Osman Baba) was the incarnation of Sevi. This dispute created another split of Russo adherents *Karakaşlılar* from the remaining *Kapancı* group who continued to believe only in Sevi (ibid.). This division shaped the basic structure of Dönme society and so these groups specialised in different trades and had limited contact with each other.

The third period of Dönme history has been shaped in the late 19th and early 20th century. The community has been influenced by modernisation movement in Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, they have established modern schools (Neyzi, 144) and become a community with a good education and global commercial ties (Baer, 2007). They were cosmopolitan figures and proponents of modern, secular ideas in the Empire (Ortaylı, 1998). The relative freedom of Dönme women (Hanioglu, 1994) has contributed to their fame of representing cosmopolitanism. Besides, young Dönmes have published a modernist journal *Gonca-ı Edeb* in this era, where they advocated the Enlightenment ideas against the dogmas and prejudices (Şişman, 2002a). In the same period, Salonica, where most of the group members lived, was the centre of *Young Turks* and the *Committee of Union and Progress*, i.e. the modernist movement against the Sultan in Ottoman Em-

pire. Hence, some Dönmes, such as Mehmed Cavid Bey the Minister of Finance in 1908, have played important roles in the movement (Neyzi, 145).

In this regard, the third phase of Dönme history has been shaped by group's modernisation, and involvement in politics. There have been a few other important incidences which have effected the destiny of the group as well; the fall of Salonica in 1913 to Greece, 1917 fire in Salonica, 1924 population exchange between Greece and Turkey, Karakaşzade Rüşdü affair, and the Capital Levy. To start with, Salonica fell to Greece in 1913, and soon after that Greek authorities wanted to create a Greekified population by getting rid of the remaining Turkish citizens in the city (Baer, 2007). Hence, Dönme became unwanted in Greece, as they were counted as Muslim Turks. Furthermore, as Bessemer (2003: 120) states the 1917 fire in Salonica has been another traumatic experience for the group: after losing their previous status, they also lost an important amount of their religious texts.

Subsequently, Dönmes have been included in the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, which was meant to be in between Muslim Turks in Greece excluding the Western Thrace and the Orthodox Greeks excluding the ones living in Istanbul (Baer, 2004). Some Dönmes objected and claimed that they were Jews, who wanted to convert back to Judaism. However, their appeal was refused by Jewish religious authorities who did not count them as Jews (Galante, 1935: 77-79 cited in Baer, 2004: 693).

The Capital Levy law of 1942 in Turkey brought the community back into spot. The law was intended to tax the citizens who made fortunes from the 2nd World War time economy (Neyzi, 146). However, it was quite heavy handed on non-Muslim minorities. What stroked Dönmes' attention was their inclusion, along with Christians, Jews, and other foreigners, to taxation. They were shocked by the incidence as they were thinking themselves as an invisible group. It also created a belief that the government secretly kept secret records of Dönmes. According to recent interviews (Yurddaş, 2004) with group members, the fright is conserved until today, and they also fear that it can happen again. Therefore, Capital Levy affair harmed group's assimilation into Turkish society.

Dönme group in their third historical phase has represented global, cosmopolitan, modernising face of the Ottoman Empire (Baer, 2007). Accordingly, they have played important roles in C.U.P and modernisation of Turkey. Moreover, it seems that the group has been seduced by the new promises of

modern Turkey, such as secularism, equality of all citizens regardless of ethnicity and religion. As some scholars mention (Baer, 2004; Neyzi, 2002) Dönmes have attached themselves with the ideas of modernity and secularism of newly born Turkish republic, so that they could have been integrated into the society. Nonetheless, the conspiratorial accounts and blames about the group, and Turkish state's exclusionary practice exemplified by Capital Levy have disappointed Dönmes.

After Capital Levy, almost fifty years the groups' existence was most of the time only cited in right-wing conspiracy theories as well as in academic literature, but did not much concern the public. However, they got back to the spot in 1990s, when the group entered into their fourth historical period. During that era, while Turkish society was becoming a more multicultural one, the minorities gained more voice and acceptance. Films such as *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri*, whose story line is about the injustices on minorities in Capital Levy, had their sympathetic and nostalgic look towards non-Muslim minorities. In the meantime, the Dönme debate was called back through another acclaimed group member/confessor Ilgaz Zorlu. He wrote articles about the history of the group and wanted to convince Dönmes and Jews for the necessity of Dönmes conversion back to Judaism.

After the success of his works and acceptance especially by the Islamic spheres as the authentic voice of Dönmes, Zorlu established his own publishing house, Zvi/Geyik Publishing. He published his works as well as conspiratorial accounts on Dönmes (Eygi.). Zorlu's appearance in the media later triggered more works on the subject, predominantly conspiracy theories. Another important event in 1990s was Halil Bezmen's accusations of the existing discrimination against Dönmes in Turkey. They created a controversy in Turkish media and heightened the interests on the community (see. Bali 2008). In conclusion, it could be asserted that the fourth and the last stage of the Dönme history witnesses an increased amount of attention to group's characteristics in both academic and conspiratorial senses. In the next section, where I will talk about conspiracy theories, I will be able to analyse this in more detail.

Conspiracy Theories about Dönmes

This Dönme affiliation with modernisation movement has later produced one of the most classical themes of conspiracy theories. The reactionary circles against modernisation have framed Young Turk movement as a Jewish/Dönme conspiracy,¹²

These accusations have been voiced loudly after the 1908 *coup d'état* by the *Committee of Union and Progress*, in which Dönme Mehmed Cavid Bey and Jewish-freemason Emmanuel Carosso were among leaders overthrowing Sultan Abdulhamid II. In addition, Theodor Herzl, the head of the World Zionist Organization, came to Istanbul in 1899 to buy Palestine from Abdulhamid II for Jews to establish a state (Bali, 2008). Abdulhamid II did not grant the request. In this regard, when C.U.P toppled Abdulhamid II and exiled him to Salonica, some conspiracy theories held Jews responsible from the *coup d'état*.

In parallel, Kedorie () shows that British ambassador of the period, Sir Gerard Lowther, have been one of the conspiracy theoreticians. Hepkon asserts (2007) that Lowther is the founder of the conspiracy theories about C.U.P. Likewise, well-known anti-Semites like Sergei Nilus, the first publisher of the classical conspiracy theory *The Protocols of Elders of Zion*, has supported Abdulhamid II against C.U.P (Ben-Itto, 2005: 93). In short, the exile of the Abdulhamid II in 1908 and the involvement of Dönmes in C.U.P as well as their cosmopolitan appearance have culminated into conspiratorial explanations. Dönmes, for claim-makers of conspiracies, have represented the change modernisation brought to the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the reactionary movements have accused Dönme's about those transformations. Accordingly, we see conspiratorial accusations on Dönmes in Islamist journals such as *Volkan* as early as 1908 (Baer, 2004).

After the establishment of Turkish republic in 1923 C.U.P cadres have gradually become the founding elite. For example, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk the founding father and the first president of modern Turkey was a member of the party. Besides, he was born in Salonica, and attended to a modern school established by a Dönme in his childhood. Such facts have increased the suspicion about the people from Salonica and their origins as they seemed to constitute the founding elite. They have also been used by far right-wing and Islamic conspiracy theories as proofs to delegitimise or Judaise the foundations of Turkish Republic.

Subsequently, before the deportation of Dönmes to Turkey, a self-acclaimed member of the group Karakaşzade Rüşdü has submitted a petition to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey against the incoming Dönmes. He basically argued that they were a separate group who never mixed with Turkish community and therefore their deportation to Turkey should be subject to their willingness to assimilate in Turkish society (Bessemmer, 2003). In other words, he urged Dönmes either not to come to Turkey or to ac-

cept assimilation. Rüşdü's petition has fired different discussions on Dönmes, including conspiratorial accounts. In the end, Karakaşzade Rüşdü has retreated in the debate after the immense hostility shown to the group (ibid. 123). As Bali (2008: 17) mentions the debate has gained an important amount of attention in contemporary media, although lasted a few weeks.

This trend was followed by ideological texts which claim for Dönme conspiracy theories from 1948 onwards. The publications were mainly done by Islamic right-wing journals and newspapers such as *Sebülreşşad*, *Büyük Doğu*. For example, the newspaper *Büyük Doğu* published confessions of an alleged Dönme Nazif Özge in 1952 (Bali, 2002). There are a couple of factors which could have been influential in right-wing's ability and motivation to publish on the subject in that period. First of all, after 1946 the state censor on published materials has been decreased in Turkey due to the beginning of multi-party system. This has meant the end of limitations on publications of right-wingers and especially Islamists. Moreover, on May 15, 1948 Israel proclaimed its independence (Bensinger, 2002: 25), which created a war right after between Israel and Arabic states Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. It created anti-Zionist or anti-Semitic sentiments in the whole Islamic world.

In the meantime, the right wing conspiracy theories on Dönmes in Turkey generated violence on some group members such as Ahmed Emin Yalman, who was an important journalist in Turkish media with a secular-liberal and modern stance. The hostility towards Yalman has gone so far that there was an armed attack to him on November 22, 1952 (ibid. 187). The right-wing conspiracies on an existence of Jewish press in Turkey also contributed to the assassination of well-known journalist Abdi İpekçi the editor in chief of newspaper *Milliyet*. He was murdered by an ultra-nationalist urban guerrilla, Mehmet Ali Ağca in 1979 (ibid).

Afterwards, the main boom in Dönme discussion has taken place in 1990s, when the repressed identities in Turkey has started to be represented more in public space. Moreover, Zorlu's attempts to bring Dönme issue to public concern have increased the interest. Like Karakaşzade Rüşdü, Zorlu has attracted the interests of right-wing circles as an authentic voice. Islamic writers such as Eygi and Dilipak have found chances to support their perspective through engaging debates with Zorlu as well as corroborating with him. In short, in 1990s there was a significant increase in Dönmes ranging from newspaper articles to alleged Dönme lists in internet, from 13

conspiracy theories to academic works on the subject.

Accordingly, the conspiratorial perspective has not only been confined to right wing or Islamic perspectives in 1990s. The left wing writers have been affiliated with Dönme conspiracy theories as well. A well-known Marxist professor Yalçın Küçük has published articles about Dönme community. He has been followed by a journalist, Soner Yalçın. His *opus magnum* *Efendi* series, which will be discussed in the following chapter, has become the one of the most popular conspiracy theories in Turkey. Leftist conspiracy theories have updated the reactionary stance of Islamic and right-wing conspiracy theories in a different manner. Despite having a very different methodology and content, they have attributed their political discontents to secret Dönme/Jewish activities. In other words, they have framed the current transformations in Turkey in a Dönme conspiracy theory. Furthermore, unlike previous theories they do not only talk about alleged Dönme politicians. They have had many well-known or successful people such as Eurovision song contest winner Sertab Erener, or Nobel Prize winner novelist Orhan Pamuk. Unlike the right-wing accounts, the left-wing discussions have attracted the attention of the general public. For example, Yalçın's *Efendi* series was published by *Doğan Yayıncılık* (Doğan Publishing House) one of the most popular publishing houses of Turkey. As a result, the leftist writers have popularised the Dönme debate.

Their popularity lies in their ability in promoting books with more sophisticated appeals. They use scientific language, footnote, citations which promote a more stylish appearance compared the religious or ideologically biased language of right-wing conspiracy theories. For example, both Küçük and Yalçın make use of onomastics in their search for people's origins. Besides, the left-wing approaches promote a more complete picture of the political structure of Turkey by including whoever is successful in their schemes. In this regard, they transgress the limitations of the previous theories and reach to a wider audience. It should not go without mentioning that while some left-wing originated approaches have entered into Dönme conspiracy theory domain, majority of left-wing socialist movements condemn these allegations (see. Kurtuluş Cephesi).

In 1990s, Islamic and the right-wing interest in Dönmes have remained unchanged. They have seen Dönmes as controlling the media, causing the moral decay and keeping their religious heresy. In addition, we see the mention of Kurdish nationalists to the issue of Dönmes. Bali (2008) cites that Kurdish na-

tionalist figures such as Musa Anter, used to accuse a member of parliament, Coşkun Kırca for being a Dönme and trying to throw Kurds out of their lands (ibid. 176). All in all, it could be argued that Dönme theme has become a popular political theme in 1990s.

Conclusion

To sum up the discussion, it could be argued that although the Dönme community has existed since 17th century, the conspiratorial accounts have started in the beginning of the 20th century. This points an important fact of the dependence of these theories on political and cultural discourses rather than the existing realities. This aspect should be carefully noted while talking about conspiratorial accounts, especially on crypto-Jewish communities.

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This paper, being an early draft, largely draws on the third

According to Neyzi's interviewee (2002: 153) the terms of

Ref to 1908 coup d'état, explain what it is!

As Bessemer (2002: 22) states there were unproven conspiracies co-operate with Jewish and Zionist banks while attempting

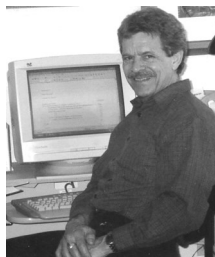
Ağca later has escaped from prison and assassinated Pope John Paul II

Dilipak has written a book on the frauds in a Dönme origin. He had the chance to publish his collected essays on Dönmes by Zor

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

RON DUNCAN-HART



Assuming the responsibility as editor of *HaLapid: The Journal of the Society for Crypto Judaic Studies* is a pleasant and at the same time daunting task. I appreciate the confidence of those who suggested me for this position, and I look forward to collaborating with members and others who have stories to tell or articles to present. In addition to the analytical articles about Sephardic and crypto-Judaic traditions, *HaLapid* is a story telling venue to be valued.

Since Dolly Sloan has been editor of the journal for so many years, I asked her to share with us some of her thoughts as she looks back over this time of being at the center of the flow of information about the Society. She kindly conceded to do that and has prepared a thoughtful article with policy considerations which appears in pages 6 to 8.

My background is in anthropology, and I lived and worked with my family in Latin America for twenty years. There I learned to honor both sides of the family (mother and father) by using the two last names. During those years I worked under the auspices of UNICEF, the Ford Foundation and Fulbright among others, first working on issues of social change among urban and rural poor and then gradually changing to look at the traditions that formed Latin America today. That led me to the compelling stories of Spain, Jews, the Inquisition, and, of course, the crypto-Jewish experience.

The question arises, "How do you define the crypto-Judaic experience?" One of the characteristics of Judaism is that borderline world of those who were born Jewish but did not continue Jewish identity, including the famous early examples of Cain and Esau. The lines of identity in Judaism have been porous with people leaving and returning and others entering. That phenomenon is perhaps exaggerated by the Diaspora with its special cultural, social, political, and economic forces that push and pull Jews. Pogroms, expulsions, genocide threat Jews, as do the pressures of neighbors and the business world.

Leaving, returning, and the fear of being openly Jewish has not been limited to the Spanish speaking world as we can see in the articles in this

issue and in the Spring, 2008, issue on the Donme Sabbataens and their conversion to Islam. It happens in the United States, as it has happened from Europe to China.

It continues happening today. On a trip to not long ago, we were visiting the remaining Jewish communities in a country where most of the Jews have left. In a place where religious and ethnic militancy can be intimidating, we arrived to the house of a Jewish family and knocked at the door, but no one answered. Their old telephone number was disconnected. A business man across the street offered us their current number. We called, and when the family realized that we were Jews, they became nervous, asking us not to give their new number to any other Jew. The conversation was short. They did not want to meet us. Their fear had apparently caused them to go underground. It continues happening today.

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