

Table of Contents

President's Message	2
Reports	
SCJS Board meeting, July 22, 2012	5
Scenes from Conference 2012, Albuquerque	8
In Memory	
Eulogy for Dennis Duran	9
Paloma of the Sefarad	12
Areas of Inquiry	
Crafting (Personal Passion) + Credible (Thinking) + Crypto-Jewish (Facts, Languages) = Literature (National Standards	13
Anusim in two Ladino Novels	30
The Divine Mission of Conversos	38
Christopher Columbus: Crypto-Jew, Mystic Christian Zealot, or Both?	63
Personal Narratives	
Exploring Our Family History	81
Reclaiming a Heritage	85
Poetic, Artistic and Literary Expressions	
In the House of Mirrors	92
Book Reviews	
Cullen Murphy, God's Jury: The Inquisition and the Making of the Modern World	93
Ilan Stavans and Steve Sheinkin, El Iluminado – A Graphic Novel	96
Call for Papers	99
Affiliation with University of Colorado	100

President's Message

by Dolores Sloan

I write this from an apartment in Istanbul that I have rented during a research trip to Turkey and Portugal. It's one-half block from the Galata Tower, and I walk daily over cobblestones that have been trod for more than half a millennium by the Sephardic Jews, whose diaspora from Inquisition and exile took them east to the Ottoman Empire.



Thanks to SCJS members Rachel Amado Bornick and Gad Nassi, whose ancestors were among them, I have experienced the hospitality of descendants of those people who are taking or directing me to sites and resource people, opening their homes in some cases and sharing what they know of past and present. As readers of Rachel's fine article in this *HaLapid* will learn, some of the ancestors were *conversos*, as were the ancestors of many of our members whose *antepasados* made their way to New Spain and other parts of the Spanish empire. You can read Gad's articles in the *HaLapid* archives on our website, www.cryptojews.com.

It is our privilege, as members of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, to explore the history of those who left possessions and, too often, relations, behind in Spain and Portugal, seeking escape from the long shadow of post-expulsion oppression. This journey gives me a window into the experiences, past and present, of those who accepted Sultans Beyazit's and Suleiman's welcome in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

I invite some of those I meet to write articles for *HaLapid* or to consider responding to SCJS's Call for Papers for our next or future conferences. Some do travel to the US for professional or business purposes. And I will be sending

Matthew Warshawsky, our Program Chair for the 2013 Conference in Colorado Springs, their email addresses so they have an opportunity to consider this.

With computer and iPhone along, I have stayed informed on the Program Committee's work preparing the CFP and with updates from First Vice President Roger Martinez, a member of the History Department at the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs, who will serve as Conference Chair. Roger and his team are reaching out to both campus and community, inviting participation from professors and administrators at the university and from those who live in the surrounding area of early Spanish settlement. Chair Miriam Herrera and her Arts Program Committee are considering and selecting diverse offerings from among the arts, such as painting, photography, music, filmmaking, theatre and dance, and invite your suggestions.

The 2012 Conference in Albuquerque attracted the highest attendance of any recent conference, with the highest number of academic and cultural offerings. Conference planners are seriously taking the feedback from attendees in planning for 2013. The workshop on genealogy was well attended and well received. It will be offered again.

Colorado Springs will be a most memorable conference, and it would be wise to plan now to attend and enjoy, as well, the spectacular beauty of the Rocky Mountains and nearby sites. The dates will be July 28-30.

Every year, the conference offers a concert named after our member Judy Frankel, who preserved the songs of the Sephardim of the former Ottoman Empire and North Africa. One song spoke well of *raki*, that smoky drink I have seen in glasses on nearby tables of fellow diners in Istanbul and Izmir. I've yet to experience it, but in tribute to Judy, I close with words from a song she learned from an American descendant of Sephardim from Turkey.

*La vida do por el raki. No puedo yo dexarlo
De beber nunca me arti de tanto amarlo.*

I'd give my life for raki. I cannot get by without it.
I never have enough to drink because I love it so.

REPORTS

SCJS Board meeting, July 22, 2012, Hotel Albuquerque
Submitted by Rachel A. Bortnick, Secretary

President Dolly Sloan, returning to Los Angeles due to illness, joined the Board meeting by phone in order to complete the required quorum and get us started. Thus, Vice President Roger Martinez called the meeting to order at 8:45 a.m. He passed around copies of the revised agenda. The agenda was unanimously approved.

Miriam Herrera's nomination to the Board of Directors was unanimously approved.

Rachel's minutes of the midyear board meeting (Feb. 19-20, 2012, in Los Angeles) were unanimously approved as is.

Roger read the Financial Report prepared by Treasurer Juan Gutierrez. The balance showed \$16,630.31, not including the expenses incurred for the conference and other incomes and expenditures. The estimated balance was judged to be better than last year's. The report was unanimously approved.

On the matter of travel expenses to attend an event to which the Society is invited, the board moved, seconded, and approved a policy for the future, allowing the Society to pay travel expenses for the President, or his/her designate, in the amount to be determined by the board at the particular time.

Harry Ezratty reported that he would appeal for donations at the dinner/general meeting on Monday night (July 23) and that he would include a statement in the next *Halapid* to appeal to members to include the SCJS in their wills.

President Dolly Sloan's Report was handed out and

discussed in part. The board stressed the importance of earlier call for papers, and earlier posting of conference program. On the matter of SCJS affiliation with Texas A&M Hillel's crypto-Jewish center, the board suggested that rather than enter into a formal affiliation, the Society could have a symbolic presence there, perhaps by donating a piece of art to be installed for the Hillel premises. We will wait to hear further developments on this and on strategic planning from Dolly.

Roger Martinez gave his report on the progress of steps to associate with UCCS. The terms of the arrangement are still under development. Roger indicated that with the retirement of the UCCS provost and UCCS Dean of College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, the effort to form an affiliation with UCCS would take a year to bring to fruition. Roger had an upcoming August 2012 meeting with the new UCCS Provost, David Moon, to discuss the affiliation effort and after that meeting Roger would have more to report on the specific next steps. Overall, Roger was optimistic about the affiliation initiative.

Gloria Trujillo reported that there had been 55 registrations so far for the conference, with a few others promising to pay at the door. This presented a problem in ascertaining the number of dinners for Sunday evening. She also explained that costs for conferences had increased, and this should be taken into account in the future. For example, the cost of AV equipment this time was \$1,200, and we have had to pay for Internet access in meeting areas. (Internet access in guest rooms are free, but not in meeting areas.)

Mathew Warshawsky agreed to serve as Conference Chair until Seth Ward arrives.

Mona Hernandez reported on book sales and vendors' tables. The new form for book sales will ensure accurate record keeping for the Society and benefit the seller as well. Vendors pay a \$75 fee in advance and get to keep all proceeds of their sales.

HaLapid: Journal for the SCJS

Arnold Trujillo passed around a written program for his genealogy workshop, and asked board members to come around 4:00 pm to introduce themselves to the attendees.

Art Benveniste reported that the Society currently has 185 members. Mailing *Halapid* by regular mail costs \$2.50 each, whereas it costs 27 cents each by bulk mail, which requires a minimum of 200 copies to be mailed. So, Art will be mailing a few extra copies to non-members to bring the number up to 200. The December mass mailings brought in close to \$5000. The website fee is \$95/year, but it pays for itself with just four new members' subscription. The website averages 250 hits a day.

Seth Kunin appealed to us to write articles for *Halapid*, which comes out twice per year. The deadline for the next one is November, 2012.

About La Granada, Debbie said someone still needs to take the responsibility for doing it.

Mona suggested that we honor Bob Hattem, who was the founder and first editor of *Halapid*.

Abe Lavender reported that the academic JOSPIC (Journal of Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian Crypto Jews) is in its fourth year of publication, that it now has better layout with more color, that of the 500 copies printed, he gives 200 copies to Art for mailing to members. He brought 40 copies for the conference. The website is being updated as well. FIU and the Martin Sosin Foundation award \$2,000 each per year for the publication of JOSPIC.

For the date of the 2013 conference in Colorado Springs, most of the board members preferred the July 28-30 date (rather than July 21-23.)

Suggested sites for future conferences were Miami, Rhode Island, Philadelphia, and New York, as well as Durham (U.K.) and Barcelona (Spain).

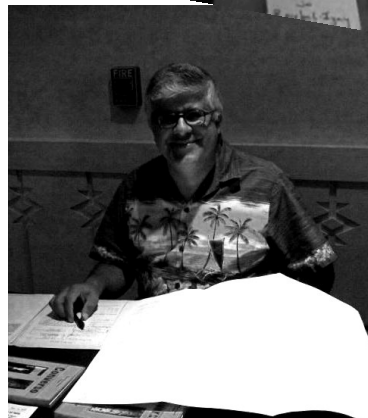
Rachel showed the binders in which the minutes and other archived material are being kept at present. She asked whether she should print and file here all the email correspondence, which resulted in decisions since she has become secretary. It was suggested that only the final emails reporting the decisions need to be printed out and filed.

Stanley Hordes expressed thanks for the work of the board.

Some members suggested that we send our opinions on the successes and shortcomings of the conference to Dolly, and that Dolly compile and summarize these and send a report to the board.

The board agreed to meet again during lunch on Tuesday, July 24, before the end of the conference.

**Scenes from the 2012
Conference
in Albuquerque**



Dennis Duran, 2012**EULOGY FOR DENNIS DURAN
SANTA FE, NM, AUGUST 31, 2012**

by Stanley Hordes



*Dennis Duran
speaking at the
Synagogue in
Belmonte,
Portugal, 1994*

This is a very sad day for all of us. We are here to mourn the passing of our friend – our brother - Dennis Duran.

It was my privilege to have been friends with Dennis for the better part of the past 25 years. I first met Dennis in the research room of the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives here in Santa Fe in the late 1980s. I was having a conversation with a couple of colleagues about some new research I was doing into the history of the crypto-Jews of New Mexico. As the discussion continued, I noticed a young man kind of eavesdropping on the conversation, inching closer and closer, so that he could hear better. After my colleagues had left, he came up to me and told me that some of the customs that I had been discussing had been practiced by his family, and he wanted to learn more about the topic. Turns out that Dennis had converted to Judaism a decade or so earlier in California, but he had no idea of any Jewish background in his family. Well, you all know the rest of the story about Dennis having received

HaLapid: Journal for the SCJS

confirmation of this heritage from family members, and his decades-long research into his family's past.

Dennis would never admit it, but he was an extremely courageous person, and his courage influenced the lives of countless individuals from within the Hispano community who also dared to emerge from the shadows and embark on their own exploration of their Jewish roots. Offended by an article published by a prominent scholar who questioned the authenticity of the phenomenon of crypto-Judaism in New Mexico, Dennis summoned up the courage to write a letter to the editor, letting her know his opinion of her work in no uncertain terms. Moreover, I recall the time that Dennis stood up to one of his employers, who refused to allow him to take time off from work to observe the Jewish High Holy Days.

Dennis was most proud of the leadership role that he played in the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, where he was quite active in the 1990s in organizing several successful conferences. The most memorable of these took place at La Fonda Hotel in 1992, when the NMJHS commemorated the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. We thought that we might have about 35-50 people attend. Imagine Dennis's surprise when some 350 folks showed up, and the event came perilously close to collapsing from its own weight. But, no small thanks to Dennis efforts, that event proved enormously successful, and attracted the attention, not only of local media outlets, but The New York Times, as well.

Yes, Dennis was "out there," appearing in newspapers, magazines, and documentary films, setting an example for others who followed a similar course.

Dennis's quest for greater knowledge about his heritage prompted him to embark on travels to Spain, Portugal, and Israel. Just days before his passing, he told me that the high

point of his life was when he was called up to the Torah at a Sabbath morning service at an Orthodox Sephardic service in Jerusalem – formal recognition of Dennis’s legitimacy as Jew, 500 years after his ancestors had been forced to convert to Catholicism, and forced to practice their ancestral faith in secret.

As many of you can attest, Dennis constantly portrayed himself as rather “taciturn” – “Stone-faced,” as he would always put it. But, also as many of us know, this characterization belied a wonderful sense of humor, and a love and appreciation of his friends and family.

Dennis is gone, and we mourn his untimely passing at an all-too-young age. But we all can take comfort in the fact that he will live on in the memories of the many, many people whose lives he touched.

Paloma of the Sefarad

August 21, 2012
In Memory of Dennis Durán

by Isabelle Medina Sandoval

From Noah's ark to the synagogues of Spain
The dove is empowered by the Sephardic reign
Cu cu ru cu cu

Perched on the cross near the Saint Francis belfry
the paloma's son soars in the plaza and pine tree
Cu cu ru cu cu

Am Ysrael
Nation of Ysrael
Am Ysrael
Hijo de Ysrael
Am Ysrael
Judío fiel
Cu cu ru cu cu
Cu cu ru cu cu

Descansa la paloma de la Sefarad
Cantando alabados para eternidad
Cu cu ru cu cu

The stars mark a faithful Jew
The stamens of the cryptic lily coo
El Shaddai of the Sefarad is true
Cu cu ru cu cu
Cu cu ru cu cu

Areas of Enquiry

Crafting (Personal Passion) + **Credible** (Thinking) + **Crypto-Jewish** (Facts, Languages) = **Literature** (National Standards)

by Isabelle Medina Sandoval

Numerous fiction novels have surfaced endorsing authentic representation of past and contemporary crypto-Jewish voices. Jewish and non-Jewish writers have seized the topic to construct stories of Iberian crypto-Jewish plots. What does it mean to craft credible Crypto-Jewish literature? Writing

encompasses the artful linguistic craft of balancing accurate nuances of language, culture and thoughts. The purpose of this paper is to explore the process of writing quality crypto-Jewish literature.

Education has been shaped by technology. Urban/rural individuals at home or school can access persons, articles and international research on a computer. As a result of technology impacting traditional reading/writing in the classroom, a national endeavor culminated in almost every state adhering to prescribed literacy standards. The chief change of this united effort is to require high school students to spend 70 percent of their time reading informational texts while using 30 percent of the school day studying stories, drama and literature. Relative to writing, high school students are required to spend the school day writing in the following categories: 40 percent persuading; 40 percent explaining; and 20 percent conveying experience. Bottom line, schools and students will apply critical thinking by reading more research-based materials and writing to persuade and explain. As a result of this change, writers of crypto-Jewish literature are forced to craft credible literacy for Jewish and non-Jewish audiences.



New Mexicans use *dichos* to express their thoughts such as—*Dime con quién andas, y te diré quién eres*. Exploring the topic of constructing credible crypto-Jewish literature, this standard of—*Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are*—is pivotal in establishing a baseline of the perspective and the personal passion of the writer. Four critical areas pertinent to writing worthy crypto-Jewish literature are: review of medieval Spanish crypto-Jewish writers; review of New Mexico crypto-Jewish resources of literature; formula for crypto-Jewish literature integrating personal and scholarly standards; and review of the process of writing an unpublished historical fiction crypto-Jewish novel.

First, who were some of the *converso* Iberian medieval writers? After the expulsion of Sephardic Jews of 1492, authors of Jewish extraction wrote prose categorized as Spanish literature. Lope de Vega, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, and Tirso de Molina penned Jewish experiences and topics in their respective writings.

Born in 1515 as Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada in Spain, Saint Teresa of the Roman Catholic Church was known as Teresa de Ávila. Her father was a *converso* merchant, and she established the order of the Discalced Carmelites. Finally recognized for her establishment of mental prayer, her book, *The Interior Castle*, reflects family dialog of *converso* hot topics. Her grandfather, Juan Sánchez, was forced to march through the streets of Toledo as he wore the attire of a condemned Jew. Besides suffering the public humiliation of originating from a Jewish family, Teresa lost her mother at the age of twelve. This fragile adolescent sought safety within the Catholic Church. Later, the Carmelite nun wrote her book within two months.

Where else would a *conversa* woman hide but within religious protection in perilous Spain? Her spiritual literature described seven dwelling places, a mirror of the Jewish

week. Teresa's personal knowledge of family Jewish traditions and crypto-Jewish practices undoubtedly shaped her perspective. Was her reference to 'light' a parallel to kabbalah? Regarding the seventh dwelling she wrote:

We forget that there is such a thing as inner light, illuminating our soul, and we mistake that radiance for darkness.

Another writer of alleged crypto-Jewish descent is Miguel de Cervantes, author of *Don Quixote*. Born in 1547 near Madrid, he is regarded as one of the world's most distinguished writers. As the son of a deaf surgeon, he was born the year Carlos V and Hernán Cortez died. It was also the year the *Index* by the *Inquisition* listed seditious or heretical books as deemed by Roman Catholic doctrine. Serving as a chamberlain to Cardinal Giulio Acquaviva in 1584, Cervantes had to document his "purity of blood" whereby he certified that he had no Moslem or Jewish ancestry.

Delving into the rich text of *Don Quixote*, Cervantes described snippets of Spanish La Mancha life. For example, in Part I, Chapter XX, he referred to the "*Cristiano Viejo*" or "Old Christian" to describe societal norms. Another example is found in the Preface of Part II whereby Cervantes would not attack a priest if he held "the rank of *familiar* of the Holy Office." Later, in Part II, Chapter XX, Cervantes quoted Proverbs 1:10 stating, "I cannot conceive or make out how it is that, *the fear of God being the beginning of wisdom.*"

Both Teresa de Ávila and Miguel de Cervantes were valiant individuals testing the boundaries of normative Spanish literature as censored by the ecclesiastical standards of the Inquisition. After the publication of *Don Quijote*, the name of *Dulcinea* (a female character of *Don Quixote*) appeared in New Mexico birth and death records. A painting of Santa Teresa de Ávila was hung in the Santa Cruz Church in New Mexico in 1733. These Iberian crypto-Jewish writers influenced the remote settlement in New Mexico.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines literature as—“writings of excellence expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest.” Despite Spain’s restrictive literacy policy to censor works not aligned with Catholic canon, Miguel de Cervantes and Teresa de Ávila wrote from the experiences of their crypto-Jewish authority. Their personal passion to produce their works shaped universal literacy.

Secondly, examining crypto-Jewish literature resources in New

Mexico, literacy was valued in the community. Church literature and services provided foundational written religious materials for the citizens. At the same time, the presence of the Mexican Inquisition in New Mexico was noted. One colonist of the 1693 Velasco-Farfán Expedition was examined by the Office of the Inquisition. Miguel de Quintana was born in Mexico City in 1673 and died in Santa Cruz in 1748. His wife was Gertrudis Moreno de Trujillo of Mexico City, and his parents were José de Quintana and Nicolasa Valdés de Cervantes of Mexico City. A scribe and notary, Miguel was recognized in the Santa Cruz community for his expert writing. It is believed that Miguel de Quintana descended from the Álvarez de Toledo *converso* family. The Office of the Inquisition investigated Miguel’s writings in 1732 for not being aligned with Catholic doctrine.

Relevant to Miguel Quintana, it is imperative to recognize the secretive intergenerational family practice questioning the validity of the Roman Catholic Church. It is evident that oral family history was transmitted by family members in colonial settlements of Mexico and New Mexico. The forced spiritual displacement caused family members to verbalize and transmit the importance of Jewish identity through words and practices.

Other crypto-Jewish literacy resources included exposure to church and government papers. Priests documented births, deaths, marriages, and investigations as well as performing consistent liturgical services in the community. On the oth-

er hand, the government updated land, civil, law, and legal papers pertaining to citizens.

The *alabados* or praises of the prayer books of the *Penitentes* are of particular interest. Mexican independence in 1821 from Spain had created new problems. The infant Mexican Republic had replaced Spanish government supported missionaries from religious orders with priests supported by respective parishes. When the local Catholic priests were made responsible for their own financial matters, members were no longer wards of mission endeavors. The new economic mandate required priests to be innovative and creative in procuring money to sustain religious traditions.

In fact, New Mexico's churches were barely affected by these changes. Most people had no priests to administer services or guide their souls. The split between Mexican and Spanish priests and the Vatican was intense. By 1830, Mexico experienced almost a fifty percent decline in priests, compared to 1810. Although the Church sided with Spain, it recognized Mexican independence in 1836, and the Vatican finally named a new archbishop in 1838. The number of parishes had increased with independence from Spain, but it was most difficult to find clergy to serve on the frontier.

Churches were required to maintain and sustain the finances of respective parishes. In 1833, the compulsory tithe for non-missionary churches was halted; members were no longer forced to give the Church ten percent of produce, wares or money. New Mexicans contested the payment of the tithe asserting that the income did not remain in the province. Some church members argued that the money went to urban Mexico and neglected the needs of salaries for priests, schools and seminaries within the struggling frontier community.

When Bishop José Antonio Laureano de Zubiría from Durango made his visit to New Mexico in 1833, he banned a

brotherhood of Catholic men. The Brothers of our Father Jesus, known as *Penitentes*, had their own liturgy and ceremonies. The brotherhood, a secret religious society, was comprised of men seeking a higher spiritual level. To express their personal penance, the men practiced flagellation, inclusive of whipping, to atone for their sins. On his return visit in 1845, Bishop Zubiría found the state of affairs as in 1832. He asked that the pastoral letter he wrote in 1833 be re-read in the churches. The letter echoed the earlier condemnation of *Penitentes*, the questionable conduct of priests, the lack of orderliness for religious services and the failure to baptize infants.

The *Penitentes* were criticized by Bishop Zubiría, and he commented on the “numerous years” of brotherhood practice in Santa Cruz de la Cañada. The precise origin of the brotherhood was unknown, although Oñate himself practiced flagellation in the spring of 1598 in El Paso. The *españoles mexicanos* of the 1693 Velasco-Farfán Expedition and other expeditions, as well as other colonist citizens, had observed similar penitential practices in Mexican and Spanish cities. With the sparse number of priests to serve all of New Mexico, the *Penitentes* brought order and charity to communities having no regular committed religious services for annual observances, birth, marriage and death.

Bishop Zubiría did give permission in 1833 for the *Penitentes* to worship clandestinely and to employ self-penance privately. Perhaps the Bishop comprehended the immense problem of not having ordained priests to serve all the people and extended this permission to allow lay persons to continue religious fidelity in a frontier world not having clergy or printed materials for believers.

Miguel de Quintana has been credited with authoring many of the *alabados* or songs of the *Penitentes*. It is interesting to note that some *alabados* have Jewish connections.

In 1848 Territorial New Mexico, Anglo ministers brought Bibles with them to win souls. It is believed that some of the first Hispano Protestants were crypto-Jews wanting to study Torah. Many rural homes studied Spanish Bibles and attended Bible studies.

The colonial Spanish language of New Mexico conveys the words/expressions of the times of *Don Quixote*. Words, proverbs, stories and songs correlate with the Sephardic Expulsion. Aurelio Espinosa documented that 80 percent of New Mexico and southern Colorado folktales were found in Spain. Serious researchers and writers are bi-literate.

Current literary resources include works by researchers. In his 1974 book titled *My Penitente Land*, Angélico Chávez wrote:

Another came later, a Gómez from Lisbon, also practicing Judaism in secret. And both are my direct ancestors on both the paternal and maternal side.

Reputable researcher Stanley Hordes has documented crypto-Jewish genealogy in his classic book *To the End of the Earth*. Hordes established credibility in the crypto-Jewish population by employing Spanish cultural and biliterate skills of reading and writing while gathering information among Spanish-speaking people. His biliterate knowledge augmented his capacity to collect data within the Spanish-speaking population.

Third, quality literacy standards of credible crypto-Jewish literature must be integrated into this genre. From kindergarten through college education, literacy is the foundation for all disciplines. Academic grade level literacy correlates with English, Spanish or other language standards. As students matriculate to institutions of higher learning, academic language knowledge becomes more complex. I have constructed a formula for insuring quality scholarly writing standards. The formula is: **Crafting** (Personal Passion) +

Credible (Thinking) + **Crypto-Jewish** (Facts, Languages) = **Literature** (Common Core Reading/Writing Grades College/Career National Standards) to produce works of excellence expressing lasting interest.

Crafting is determined by the excellence of the final work as exhibited by the personal passion of the writer. Jewish musician Judy Frankel devoted her life to recording Sephardic songs because it was her passion. Her personal standards were high, and she documented almost lost songs because of her efforts. The result of the artistic work is calculated by the degree of ardor exercised by the author.

Credible involves inordinate thinking by weighing facts and opinions to make conclusions. Teresa de Ávila and Miguel de Cervantes employed cunning tactics to integrate aspects of higher level thinking. Miguel de Quintana wrote from his heart while expressing thoughts certainly considered precarious by ecclesiastical standards. Angélico Chávez, Stanley Hordes, and David Gitlitz gleaned findings based on concise evidence after analyzing information.

On the other hand, author Philippa Gregory integrated the 1553 fictitious *conversa* Hannah Green in her bestselling book of *The Queen's Fool*. Although her Hannah character development may have facets of historical truth, the plot is that of a heroine *conversa* serving as a spy in the Tudor court. Credible thinking by the author to make conclusions does not appear to be evident. What is evident is that the author portrayed Hannah as a romanticized crypto-Jewish female trying to change English history.

The term crypto-Jewish incorporates Jewish history encompassing an account of people secretly practicing Jewish traditions and customs. Persons maintaining elements of Jewish religious practices are known as crypto-Jews. Maimonides stated that a Jew could assimilate outwardly and practice Judaism in private.

The value of quality crypto-Jewish literature is measured ultimately by non-Jewish and Jewish audiences. In teaching English Language Arts in the United States, respective states have had the latitude to establish state norms. Forming a national effort to provide consistent Language Arts teaching across the country, forty-seven states have adopted the College/Career Common Core English Language Arts Standards. This unified action has resulted in school districts implementing consistent Common Core Standards across the subjects of English, math, social studies, science, and technical subjects. This endeavor has the support of such organizations such as the National Parent Teacher Association, ACT, the College Board, the State Higher Education Executive Officers, the National Education Association, and various teacher/administrator organizations.

Within Common Core and balanced literacy--listening, speaking, reading and writing strands comprise the core components of Language Arts. For the purpose of crypto-Jewish literature, the areas of reading and writing are examined. Reading and writing have been aligned with the National Assessment of Education Progress writing and reading frameworks. Reading includes shifting the teaching of stories, drama, and poetry of literature from 30 percent of the school day to 70 percent being allocated to instructing exposition, argument, essays, speeches, opinion pieces, essays, memoirs, historical, scientific, technical or economic accounts. Writing standards change to high school students developing writing capacity to persuade at 40 percent, to explain at 40 percent, and to convey experience at 20 percent across all subject areas during the school day. English Language Arts classes can focus on literature; however, reading more informational material and writing to persuade and to explain become the literacy goals of math, social studies, science, and technical subjects.

College and career reading anchor standards incorporate the teaching of works of exceptional craft providing insight into the human condition. Students sharpen their ability to eval-

HaLapid: Journal for the SCJS

Common Core Writing Standards (English/Spanish Languages)	Unpublished Manuscript (English/Spanish Languages)	Proficiency Rubric -Grade (English or Spanish)
Text Types and Purposes	Text Types and Purposes	Text Types and Purposes
1 Arguments support claims (strong general knowledge)	1 crypto-Jews in NM 1940 and earlier	1 Low, Average, Proficient
2 Write texts to convey complex ideas clearly by selecting and organizing content	2 Organize by years; examine other works	2 Low, Average, Proficient
3 Write narrative to develop real or imagined experiences effectively	3 Describe events based on imagination or actual events of family members or others	3 Low, Average, Proficient
Production and Distribution of Writing	Production and Distribution of Writing	Production and Distribution of Writing
4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience	4 Write rough draft while developing life of characters for audience; develop plot of authentic crypto-Jews	4 Low, Average, Proficient
5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach	5 Write from male perspective; integrate several males into a fictitious person; write and then edit	5 Low, Average, Proficient
6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others	6 Check for other materials and contact other writers or contacts	6 Low, Average, Proficient

Research to Build and Present Knowledge	Research to Build and Present Knowledge	Research to Build and Present Knowledge
7 Conduct short and sustained research projects based on focused questions while demonstrating understanding of subject under investigation	7 Interview males with the experiences of the main character; ask males about plausible hypothesis; discuss plot with trusted friends; interview others	7 Low, Average, Proficient
8 Gather relevant information by assessing credibility and accuracy while avoiding plagiarism	8 Review timelines; review national, global, state and local history; write original material	8 Low, Average, Proficient
9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research	9 Review works of Stanley Hordes, David Gitlitz, archives, family history, genealogy, archives, online sources, books, articles, documents, and any references available	9 Low, Average, Proficient
Range of Writing	Range of Writing	Range of Writing
10 Write routinely over extended time frame for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.	10 Write in appropriate time frame—a page a day, week-ends, blocks of time	10 Low, Average, Proficient

HaLapid: Journal for the SCJS

uate complex arguments by reading high-quality timeless works embedded in complex literary and informational texts. The reading anchor standards focus on key ideas and details, craft and structure integration of knowledge and ideas, and the range of reading and level of text complexity.

Writing college and career anchor standards includes students producing writing of thoughts, feelings, structures and formats by combining different types of writing to assert and defend knowledge of a subject. Writers research the subject and report findings by evaluating sources in a clear manner. By producing high-quality first-draft text within a tight deadline, the writer edits the draft by making improvements. The writing anchor standards center on text types and purposes, production and distribution of writing, research to build and present knowledge, and employ a range of writing.

In addition to these national standards, the New Mexico Public Education Department defined standards for excellence of English Language Arts Common Core Standards as text including digital and multimedia communications. The definition further delineated that the guidelines will include the capacity for students to:

analyze and evaluate common characteristics of significant works, including Hispanic and Native American *oral* and *written* texts.

Finally, what are the standards for writing quality crypto-Jewish literature? To measure this principle, a comparison of integrating grades 6-12 Common Core Writing Standards has been compared to an unpublished historical fiction manuscript of *Elijah's Crypto-Jewish Trophy* I am writing.

Literacy Goal: To produce works of excellence expressing lasting interest Common Core College/Career Anchor Standards for Writing:

Writing college and career anchor standards include pro-

ducing writing of thoughts, feelings, structures and formats by combining different types of writing to assert and defend knowledge of a subject. Writers research the subject and report findings by evaluating sources in a clear manner. By producing *high-quality first-draft text within a tight deadline*, the writer edits the draft by making improvements.

In summation, I reflect on the New Mexico saying—*Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are*. Teresa de Ávila, Miguel Cervantes, Miguel Quintana, and Angélico Chávez knew their friends, and they balanced their personal passion by writing quality work.

As a review, the formula for Crafting Credible Crypto-Jewish Literature is:

Crafting (passion) + **Credible** (thinking) + **Crypto-Jewish** (facts, languages) = **Literature** (Common Core Reading/Writing Grades College/Career National Standards) to produce works of excellence expressing lasting interest

In conclusion, when writing crypto-Jewish literature, the write strives for faultless passion by thinking and describing credible works based on authentic facts while developing the plot and text. In the sequel to *Guardians of Hidden Traditions*, my new book of *Hidden Shabbat, the Secret Lives of Crypto-Jews* by Gaon Books includes the following excerpt:

Crypto-Jewish families were settlers of the 1598 Oñate Expedition. Angélico Chávez, a former priest and renowned historian, first documented the *marraños* or crypto-Jews in his classic book, *Origins of New Mexico Families*. Prior to the publishing of this book, crypto-Jewish families had discussed oral histories in the privacy of the family home. Crypto-Jewish families had preserved customs such as sweeping the floor to the center of the room and not eating pork—family traditions handed down from one generation to the

next. Some families did not know why they performed these practices. Historians José Esquibel, Stanley Hordes and David Gitlitz, have documented valuable crypto-Jewish data. With the advent of technology, interested families and individuals were able to have immediate access to media, mail and research. Recent genealogical information has contributed to a clearer picture of Hispanic New Mexicans. Archival information of marriages, births, deaths, land records, divorces, church records and other records have yielded important facts. The marriages of colonial families from 1598 to present have resulted in the *manito* culture, or brother/sister culture, recognizing the blood relationship of the early colonists marrying family members that extends into one large contemporary family. DNA information has added a fascinating historical scientific dimension for New Mexicans. Using DNA samples, the New Mexico Family Tree Project has identified that 67% of male Spanish surnames originated from the Iberian Peninsula, while 33% of persons tested had Native origins. Through DNA samples, 15% of female ancestors were identified as having European origins, and 85% of persons tested had Native origin ancestry. This is explained by the fact that Spanish migration included few women. In addition to the New Mexico Project, individual DNA results of persons tested have documented Ashkenazim and Sephardim maternal and paternal ancestors. New Mexico is a diverse and complex state. People from all walks of life have sensed acceptance in this land of enchantment. Although some skeptics do not accept the crypto-Jewish phenomenon in New Mexico, many of us have lived it, and in this book I give the story of my family as best as I can re-create it. Having freedom of religious practice, at least by law, over the last century and a half, descendants of New Mexican crypto-Jews have been able to make choices about their religious futures.

Writing is a rigorous activity. Writing quality crypto-Jewish

literature is of mega importance because it describes my family and me. Writing incorporates the high school national Common Core standards as a minimum baseline for writing crypto-Jewish literature. A society changes by using tools such as technology to advance cultural literacy. A writer of crypto-Jewish literature writes with passion to describe authentic events correlating with research.

The Spanish saying of—*Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are*, reinforces the concept of reputation. Who am I? I write about the voices of my ancestors. I am Isabelle—daughter, mother, grandmother, educator, poet, writer, and friend. Who are my friends? My writing and my associates define me. Judy Frankel and Diana Bryer are my dear *hermanikas*. Look at the person sitting next to you or in front of you; I choose to socialize with members of the Society of Crypto-Judaic Studies. As a Spanish-speaking woman with crypto-Jewish ties, in the privacy of my home, I write to share my Jewish history with all people in the world.

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Anusim in two Ladino Novels

by Rachel Amado Bortnick



As a Sephardic Jew growing up in Izmir (formerly Smyrna) Turkey, I had very little information about my ancestry. We knew only that we had come from Spain, and that's why we, that is, all Jews of Turkey, still spoke Spanish – a language which our Turkish-Muslim neighbors called Yahudice, meaning Jewish. I was not even aware, during my childhood, that all Jews of the world did not speak Spanish, or that everyone who spoke Spanish was not necessarily Jewish. (There are several anecdotes relating to how widespread that belief was.) Today, our language is called Judeo-Spanish, or Ladino, in order to distinguish it from the contemporary normative Spanish or Castilian. It is essentially Medieval Castilian, with many influences from Turkish, Hebrew and other languages, which reflects its long history of evolution in a totally non-Spanish environment in the Ottoman Empire.

As to my personal ancestry, we could guess that my mother's family name, Algranati (later turned to Algranti) indicated that the family's origin was in Granada, but we knew little else. However, my father's family, the Amados, had French citizenship until the end of the Ottoman Empire, and knew that the family had come to Turkey not from Spain, but from Bayonne, in France. Many years after I left Turkey was I to learn that Bayonne was a center of settlement of former *conversos* fleeing from the Inquisition in Spain. It stood to reason, then, that the Amados had at one time converted to Catholicism and then had to flee, somehow, to Bayonne, and from there, via some unknown route, to Turkey. Originally the family name, as with other conversos who took the surname Amado, had probably been Haviv¹ (Hebrew for "beloved," *amado* in Spanish.)

Why and when did the Amados go to Bayonne, and from where? How long did they stay, and by what route did they come to Izmir? We will probably never know the answers to these questions are questions, but we can imagine them.

I give you this background as context to the subject of my presentation, and of my interest in it.

As Cecil Roth indicates in his classic work, *The Marranos*, thousands of *anusim* (or *marranos*, as he calls them) came to the Ottoman Empire throughout the 16th and 17th, and even into the 18th centuries. Already by the early 1500s there were separate *kehilot de Portugal*, Portuguese congregations, in cities like Salonika, Constantinople, Adrianople, and, a little later in Smyrna, founded by people who probably had left their native country as Catholics and arrived here to become Jews again. These congregations were constantly reinforced with new arrivals that had been born and raised as Catholics but wanted now to embrace the faith of their ancestors. Roth says:

So frequent was the phenomenon of repentant New Christians that special regulations were required to deal with the problems which arose in consequence... (201) and the *responsa* of Levantine rabbis of the period are filled with discussions relating to the position of the Marranos in Jewish law. (202)

I have found several works, in fact, that cite rabbinic *response* (*halachic*, or Jewish legal rulings by rabbis) dealing with questions that arose in the process of integrating these converso newcomers into the Jewish community. But there may be yet more waiting to be investigated. A friend of mine, Dina Eliezer, who spent many months organizing the ancient books in the library of my community in Izmir, told me that she found many manuscripts of *responsa* on those issues, that none has touched in over two hundred years.

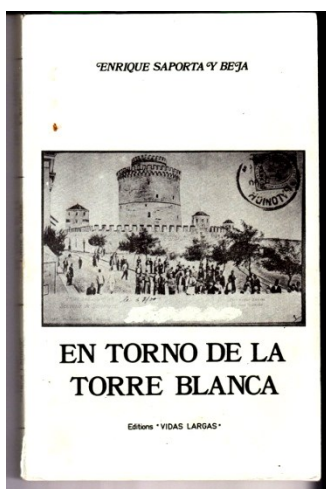
Certainly the matter of conversos in the Ottoman Empire has not been a subject of adequate academic or popular at-

tention, with the exception of the most famous of them all, Dona Gracia Nasi, and her nephew Don Joseph Nasi. Nor have I found any works of historical fiction, in any language, which brings to life an ordinary converso who arrives in the Ottoman Empire.

None, that is, except the two in Ladino that I will talk about today, which happen to be the last two novels to be published in ladino: *En Torno de la Torre Blanca*³ by Enrique Saporta y Beja, published in France in 1982, and *La Megilla de Saray*, by Eliezer Papo, published in 1999 in Jerusalem. These two books, totally different in style and content, are each a tribute to an important Sephardic community, Salonika and Sarajevo, birthplace to each author, respectively.

In the first book *En Torno de la Torre Blanca*, the title, refers to the White Tower, *la Torre Blanka* (*Beyaz Kule* in Turkish) in Salonika, in the area where most of the city's Jews lived. The book is a loving tribute to that great Ladino-speaking community which was annihilated in the Holocaust. The author explains in his introduction that this book is not fiction, but is a fictionalized tale. (“...*no es un romanceo, es un cuento romanseado*.”) It describes that community in its most vibrant times, in the first years of the twentieth century, with flashbacks into specific episodes in

its history, including also detailed information on traditions, way of life, folk tales, proverbs, and song lyrics, which is why it is often used as a resource for these subjects. Only the main characters are fictional, used as a vehicle to bring the entire story to life.



Salonika, now known by its Greek name, Thessaloniki, was for more than four centuries a predominantly Jewish city, where even the Muslim and

Christian residents had to speak Judeo-Spanish in order to do business with Jews. Another group had developed there in the 17th century, the *dönmes*, Jewish followers of Sabetai Sevi who had outwardly converted to Islam. The decline of Jewish life began soon after the city passed from Ottoman to Greek control in 1912, and the great fire of 1917 that destroyed thousands of Jewish homes.

The book takes us through all these periods, but the decimation of the community in the Holocaust is mentioned only in the author's introduction, as his reason to have written this memoir of the once-thriving community into which he had been born.

The *converso* story I will summarize here is an incidental passage in *En Torno de la Torre Blanka*, only serving as background information on the main character, Maurice Toledo, around whom the entire picture of the Salonikan community is woven.

After Maurice, or Moshe Toledo is born in Salonika towards the end 19th century, to Luna and Avram Toledo, we are taken in a flashback to 1391 in Seville, Spain, as the murderous anti-Jewish riots rage on. Avram ben Ascher, son of the treasurer of the duke of Toledo, accepts baptism, and is given the surname Toledo by his protector, the Duke. In 1492 Mauricio Toledo, Avram's grandson, witnesses the Expulsion of the Jews, and is subsequently denounced to the Inquisition for Judaizing. He manages to escape, first to Navarre, where local *marranos* (this is the term used) help him eventually cross the border into Bayonne. But since his aim is not to stay in another Christian country, but to go the land of *El Grande Turco*, the Grand Turk, where he can be his Jewish self, he leaves for Venice, and finally arrives in Salonika.

Once he gets there, things are not as easy as he had imagined. He goes to register in *El kal de Kastilya*, the synagogue of the people from his city, but is ill received by the so-called "voluntary" emigrants, who resented "marranos"

who had stayed behind for personal convenience and now were here only because the Inquisition is after them.

Mauricio, like other newly-arrived marranos, stood out with his Christian attire and actions. He tended to cross himself as he entered the synagogue, or when he met a funeral procession. He reached to take off his hat before entering the synagogue, and confused the “Ave Maria” with the “Shema Israel.” As he still wore Spanish dress with the sword on his side, the locals avoided him and crossed the street to the other side when they saw him coming. Once, when he accidentally bumped into someone on the street, he politely excused himself, but the Jew cursed him by calling him “Goy⁵, son of a Goy!”

So, Mauricio had to go to the synagogue called Baale Teshuva⁶ founded by *marranos* (term used in the book.) Like the others had been, he was also circumcised. Eventually Mauricio, having proved himself to be a good Jew, observant of the commandments, is admitted to the Kastilya synagogue, and since then his descendants have been registered there. And therefore, that is where in the 19th century, his direct descendant bearing his very name, Moshe Toledo, is registered.

Now let’s look at the other novel with a converso character: *La Megilla de Saray*, about the Jewish community of Sarajevo (Saray in ladino), Bosnia, up until the eve of the Bosnian War of the 1990s. Very different in style and content from *En torno de la Torre Blanka*, *La Megilla* is comprised of 13 chapters, each set at a particular time of change in the city’s history, with only the first six chapters set in a relatively short period, the 16th century, which saw the arrival of the Spanish Jewish exiles to Sarajevo. Although a few characters appear in more than one of these chapters, there is no continuous story, and each chapter can be read independently of the others. Yet only by reading the entire book can one get the message of the novel, to understand how historical events have shaped the soul, so to speak, the

intellectual, emotional, and even linguistic make-up of Sarajevo's Jewish community.

La Megilla de Saray is written in the Bosnian dialect of Ladino, with special regard to the gender, age, and educational background of its speakers at the particular time period. This work is, in fact, a masterpiece of Ladino rhetoric, with its clever play on words, witticisms, and of the rabbinic tradition of casuistry called *pilpul*.

Chapter Six, where the converso character, Yosef, takes center stage, best demonstrates this mastery of Ladino rhetoric. Let's start with the chapter's title:

Verso kontra verso kon el konverso kontraverso
(Verse against verse with the controversial converso)

Here, Yosef is described as an *anus* from Lucena (Spain) who returned to Judaism in Kushta (Constantinople), "a person of many thoughts, of great ideas, and even greater doubts. A good and unpredictable mixture of information, honor, pain, cynicism, rebellion, passion, sense and impatience, love and self-centeredness. In other words, a world unto himself."

The chapter, one of the longest in the book, consists of 22 pages of dialogue between Yosef and his best friend Avraam, an observant and learned Jew whose sharp mind is a perfect match to Yosef's brilliant, inquisitive, skeptical, equivocal, and argumentative one.

Here's a line from their long discussion surrounding the very familiar issue of "who is a Jew." It follows Avraam's assertion that a person born a Jew is a Jew (96.)

Y - What does that mean that he's born a Jew? Jeronimo de Santa Fe and Avner de Burgos also were born Jews. don't tell me you'd count them in *minyan*.

The discussion continues on, covering almost every dogma and contradiction within Judaism, as brought out and questioned by Yosef, and as explained logically by Avraam, only to be argued and questioned further by Yosef, intermingled with much clever and humorous comments. At one point, Avraam tries to put an end to Yosef's concern with contradictions by saying:

Kerido miyo, de kontradiksiones no se muere. La vida mizma es una kontradiksion grande. (My dear, one does not die of contradictions. Life itself is a great contradiction.)

Of course, Yosef challenges this explanation, which gives way to a long discussion on the question of "free will", which in turns leads to Avraam's explanation of the difference between "cause" and "motive" with anecdotal illustrations. The conversation ends when Avraam gets up to wash his hands before saying his prayers. And, Yosef indicates with a nod of his head that he will continue to think about the matters they've discussed, and leaves the room as suddenly as he had entered, never to appear in the novel again.

The depictions of the converso characters in these two Ladinic novels complement each other. While *En Torno de La Torre Blanca* relates the physical journey from Spain and the difficulty of the social integration of the *marrano* into the community, *La Megilla de Saray* shows us the inner struggles, the intellectual uncertainties vis-à-vis religion in the mind of a person who will never take what is told to him at face value.

These have brought me closer to my own ancestors who no doubt went through similar physical and psychological trials and tribulations as they traveled from place to place and as they switched religious alliances. It is said that the original Sephardic Jews in Izmir, Turkey, had been transferred

there from Salonika in the end of the sixteenth century. Perhaps my ancestors were among those, like Mauricio Toledo or Yosef in the two novels.

In any case, what is certain is that conversos from Spain and Portugal did not only come westward, they went East as well, and that most of us Turkish and Balkan Sepharadim also have *anusim* in our ancestry.

Endnotes

¹Haviv, usually pronounced “Habif” in Ladino, is still a common Sephardic surname. And, ironically, one of my father’s sisters married a Habif in Izmir, thus reverting, unbeknownst to her or to any of us at the time, to her ancestral family name.

²Roth, Cecil, *A History of the Marranos*. Schocken Books, New York, 1974.

³Editions Vidas Largas, with preface by Haim Vidal Sephiha, and introduction by the author.

⁴Privately published by the author, and now available for free download on the Internet at: [http://www.esnips.com/displayimage.php?](http://www.esnips.com/displayimage.php?album=1292393&pid=10094125#top_display_media)

[album=1292393&pid=10094125#top_display_media](http://www.esnips.com/displayimage.php?album=1292393&pid=10094125#top_display_media)

⁵Non-Jew.

⁶. masters of repentance, denoting returnees to Judaism.

The Divine Mission of Conversos

by Juan Bejarano-Gutierrez
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Introduction

Whether or not Conversos were actually sincere converts to Christianity or in fact crypto Jews appears to have not been a consideration in the attitude of Don Isaac Abravanel regarding their eschatological role. While rabbinic responsa relate the halakhic decisions that were given in relation to a whole host of issues including the obligation of Conversos to levirate marriage, their eligibility to serve as witnesses, the kosher status of food handled by them, etc., the works of Abravanel provide a review of how Conversos could be perceived as part of the Divine plan and how they may have seen themselves theologically. Whatever view is taken regarding the ultimate rationale behind the Conversos' conversion to Christianity, their importance to Abravanel was anything but insignificant. Regarding this, Ram Ben Shalom boldly notes: "Abravanel assigns the conversos a central role in the Redemption."¹

As an avid messianist, Abravanel interpreted Obadiah 1:20 to refer to the continued presence of Jews in the Iberian Peninsula. The expulsion of Jews of Spain in 1492 and those of Portugal in 1497 complicated his views. The presence of Conversos in

the Peninsula and the phenomena of crypto-Judaism provided a means of potentially resolving the theological complications resulting from the two expulsions. Abravanel speculated that Obadi-ah's prophecies "perhaps were also written about the sons of Israel who no longer practiced their religion as a result of the persecutions and destructions, and who stayed in France and Spain in the thousands and constituted large communities there. They would return to worship their G-d, as some are doing today, and by doing so the prophecy will be fulfilled."²

Yitzhak Baer believed that Abravanel's writings were written to strengthen Jews and Conversos alike in their expectation of an imminent messianic redemption.³ For Benzion Netanyahu, Abravanel's writings at best referred to a small minority of Conversos who continued to practice Judaism clandestinely. Hence Abravanel's views on Conversos were in Netanyahu's eyes irrelevant to what he believed to be the realities of everyday Converso life and in his opinion the lack of continued adherence to Judaism by most Conversos⁴. Abravanel certainly understood however, that Conversos could not be universally categorized as either sincere Christians as Netanyahu and Norman Roth argue for, or as complete adherents to Jewish practice as seemingly depicted by Yitzhak Baer. He understood the underlying motivations for most conversions. Don Isaac Abravanel states:

"Because of the miseries, the condemnations, and the massacres by the enemies,

they left the totality of the Law, and they thought to become like one of the people of the land.⁵”

Types of Conversos

Jose Faur has designated four primary types of Conversos:

the sincere convert to Christianity, the convert who remained faithful to Judaism, the individual who desired to partake of both identities, and those individuals who abandoned belief in either religious system and adopted for lack of a better term, philosophical inclinations that were largely anti-religious⁶. I would argue there was a fifth category consisting of Conversos who simply did not know what to do in the midst of the circumstances they found themselves in and simply cobbled together a life from the circumstances they now faced. While Abravanel saw those Conversos who had turned skeptical towards all religious practice as *minim* for their total abandonment of Jewish belief and theology, he also believed that these Averroistic Conversos served a subversive role which would undermine the foundations of Christian theology and in fact promote Jewish monotheism. In his *Yeshuot Meshiho*, Abravanel stated:

“When a man subscribes to no faith, when he is void of religion, he will more easily accept the true religion than will someone else who follows a rival faith. Thus, it was G-d’s wisdom that before the arrival of the messiah and the revelation of G-d’s faith, the entire

Kingdom will be afflicted with heresy.”

Many Conversos resigned themselves to their status as “New Christians,” and they abandoned Jewish praxis for practical reasons. Again Don Isaac Abravanel states:

“They don’t observe G-d’s laws, rituals, and commandments for fear of the Gentiles. Lest they [the Christians] should say that since now they form part of them and their society, if they observe the laws of Israel they would be killed as sectarians and heretics.”⁷”

Skeptical Conversos and the Undermining of Christian Faith

Yet their attachment to “their” new faith was often empty as well. Abravanel relates: “And they don’t observe the religion of the Gentiles, because they don’t believe in their religion.”⁸ For those that remained in the realm of Christian belief, the questions raised by Conversos about Christian doctrines such as image worship, the cult of saints, and classical Christian approaches to interpreting Scripture heralded the very same issues that were brought to the forefront of the Protestant Reformation⁹. Whether Conversos continued to observe Jewish practice or had sincerely adopted Christianity. Abravanel understood that neither “class” was safe from Inquisitional scrutiny. Abravanel re-

lates that “Those who believe in their faith, like those without belief, both are burned.”¹⁰ Regarding these skeptical Conversos Abravanel also wrote:

“...you have also failed to observe the laws which are in accordance with the dictates of reason [i.e. morality]. This is so because you have abandoned [the Jewish] religion, but on the other hand, ‘the [rational] laws of the nations around you, you have not observed. This means that although the [conversos] have made themselves as if they were just like the rest of the people of the world, they have failed to observe the [moral] laws of these people. Accordingly, they are like heretics and sectarians, because they don’t believe in either of the two religions: in the law of G-d or in the [moral] laws of the nations.”¹¹

These Conversos were players in a cosmic play ultimately determined by G-d. The play according to Ben-Shalom was the ongoing development of civilization in its understanding of the Divine and in the ultimate acknowledgment of the G-d of Israel. Even false religions played a part in this process. For Abravanel, the then current state of religious affairs, among Jews as well as among Christians and Muslims pointed to a growing theological crisis. The Talmud noted that the

Messiah would not come until the entire Kingdom was afflicted with heresy¹². For Abravanel, the process was unfolding before his very eyes and in a rather strange observation he points to the corruption of the Christian priesthood as evidence of heresy spreading.

“The perfect one [Rabbi Yitzhak] said that until the entire kingdom shall be inflicted with heresy, meaning all the nations of the world, in general, and in particular the wicked kingdom. He is possibly speaking of Rome [all of Christianity] as where the number of heretics will increase, as we see happening today in the kingdom of Spain [Sepharad] where the heretics and apostates in their various countries have increased, and where they are burned in the many thousands because of their heresy, and when all the priests and archbishops of Rome seek to enrich themselves and take bribes, and are not concerned with the fate of their religion for they too are branded with heresy. It is also possible that he meant here the Ishmaelite nation...¹³”

The role assigned by Abravanel to the Conversos was long term and could be related to the role that Queen Esther had filled. Queen Esther had maintained her Jewish identity secretly and ultimately used her position to

defend the Jewish people. But Queen Esther was not the only example that the Bible offered with respect to dissimulation or secrecy. The patriarchs Abraham and Isaac had both been deceptive regarding their marital status for fear that the Egyptians and Philistines would kill them to take their wives. In doing so they had gained favor for themselves and saved themselves, their households, and the future people of Israel. In another example, the newly healed Assyrian officer Naaman acknowledged the G-d of Israel as the one true G-d and nevertheless asked Elisha the prophet for permission to “bow” while entering the temple of his master in what would appear to be an idolatrous act for the sake of his position in his master’s court. Elisha granted his approbation apparently understanding the difficult position the officer faced.

Conversos and Jewish Views on Early Christians

But it is in the key players of early Christianity that Conversos may have actually found the most amazing examples of subversion, self-sacrifice, and divine purpose. Jewish tradition first rooted in the polemical work *Toldot Yeshu* saw individuals such as Peter and Paul, the early founders of Christianity as having lived double lives. On the surface these individuals had clearly abandoned Judaism and had founded a movement that

while based on Jewish ideas had quickly veered from its Jewish origins. Their purpose, in sacrificing their identity as Jews, was to insure that the new movement was sufficiently distinct from Judaism and insure the welfare and continued existence of the Jewish people. Simon Peter was in fact Rabbi Simon Kaipha who had only feigned conversion to Christianity for the purpose of rising to its leadership. As leader, he replicated the miracles of Jesus and used his power to insure that a clear separation between Judaism and Christianity would arise, since in its early days the distinctions were not so clear. In addition, he converted and gained reigns of the movement to make certain that Jews would not be murdered by Christians. According to one source, another key objective of the dissimulating Peter was to guarantee that forced conversions would not be enacted.

“From now on, you shall not force [one] to adopt your faith and be coerced to undergo baptism, unless he does so voluntarily. If you would force the Jews to convert to your religion, they might understand that your religion is not good. Thus, each one who converts should do so by his free will. And even if he says that he comes of his own will, he will only be accepted after he has sat for thirty days in the home of good people; and any child

younger than nine years of age you shall not receive since he cannot understand what it is he does.¹⁴”

Ben-Shalom notes that Simon Peter appears to be the first figure in Jewish sources serving as a false convert. His actions embody the idea of *mitzvah habah b'averah*, the view that a commandment can be fulfilled through a transgression. According to these legendary sources, while Simon Peter acted as pope of Christianity, he clandestinely maintained his links to the Jewish community and even authored several liturgical poems that are part of the synagogue liturgy. These liturgical pieces include the *Nishmat Kol Chai*, the *Eten Tehilah* (one of the liturgical poems for Yom Kippur), and other *Piyyutim* (liturgical poems such as the *Berachot haSheer*)¹⁵

. In what appears to be a counter-story to a passage in the Pauline epistle to the Romans in which he declares his willingness to lose his own soul ‘that Israel might be saved,’ one version of the Toldot Yeshu it is said “It is preferable to lose Shimon and one hundred others like him than to lose one Jewish soul.¹⁶” A parallel story can also be found for Paul under an individual named Eliyahu.¹⁷

Conversos and the Jewish Pope

The most striking example of a covert emissary is the mystical story of a Jewish pope which perhaps more than the examples of Peter or Paul appear much more connected

to the Converso experience. The story appears likely based on the actual case of Pope Anacletus II (1130-1138) whose parents were Jewish converts to Christianity. Despite their conversion and his studies, accusations were levied against him that he stole from the Church and distributed holy vessels to Jews. According to the story, a child named Elchanan was kidnapped by a Christian servant. Elchanan was the son of Rabbi Simon the Great of Mainz. The story relates that Elchanan was raised by nuns and grew up to become a great scholar until he was elected as Pope. Despite his rearing, Elchanan was cognizant of his Jewish background and believed he was fulfilling some kind of Divine mission. Unbeknownst to him the mission was to protect Jews from Christian oppression. Elchanan surrounded himself with Jewish advisors and his beneficence towards Jews was unequalled. Like many Conversos, Elchanan remained Christian because of his important position and his property. When, according to the story, Elchanan met his father he asked the following:

“Father, can you tell me if there is hope for me after this life? Will G-d have mercy on me? Rabbi Shimon answered: ‘My dear son! Purge this concern from your heart for you were a forced convert [anus], and while still a boy you were taken from your father and your faith.’ ‘But father!’ his son

continued, 'I have long known that I was born a Jew and in spite of this I have continued to live among the gentiles to this very day. The comforts I had were what kept me from returning to the true G-d. Will G-d forgive me?' Simon answered: 'Nothing stands in the way of repentance [teshuba].'"¹⁹

There are various alternate endings to the story.

One version has Elchanan returning to Mainz and living openly as a Jew. Before doing so he writes a polemical work undermining Christianity and orders that all successors to the papacy read this work. Another version ends with Elchanan committing an act of suicide right after declaring his rejection of Christianity.²⁰

Conversos knowingly or unknowingly had examples they could draw on for some measure of comfort. But the weight of their conversions would nevertheless weigh heavy on many and hence we find the Converso Fernando de Madrid relating to a non-converted Jew close to 1481 that the messiah would not appear until forced converts atoned for their sin. When the messiah did appear, he would appear in Seville, the initial center of Inquisitional activity and severely hit with executions and punishments.²¹

The philosophical leanings of many Conver-

sos and the spread of Averroistic tendencies may have served as part of the motivation for the work of Alonso de Espina who authored *Alborayque*. The book was a reference to the mythical mount of Mohammed which was a hybrid of various creatures. The Conversos as far as de Espina and other Spaniards were concerned, were nothing more than subversive hybrids that did not adhere to Catholic teaching or observe Catholic practices, with the possible exceptions of birth and death rituals. The seditious aims were evident de Espina argued, in the fact that Conversos acquired public offices and most seriously their entrance into the priesthood with the intent of learning the secrets of Christianity. Conversos becoming doctors were also positioned to murder Christians, sully pure Spanish blood by marrying Christian women, and inheriting Old Christian fortunes. Oddly enough, Christian notions of a Converso conspiracy may have only served to justify in the minds of many Conversos their nominal lives as Christians²². While the Inquisition may have brought funds to the Crown and may have ultimately provided Spain with a cohesive national identity, the religious and theological motivations behind the desire to expurgate Judaizing from Spanish society was so strong that it cannot be ignored as the central goal of the Inquisition. As Beinart notes:

“Here we must draw a distinction be-

tween the assimilation of the Conversos into Christian society and their infiltration into various walks of life by achieving positions from which they had been barred as Jews...Christian society reacted in its own way to this penetration; and the Inquisition set out its own way to combat the New Christian's unwillingness to become faithful followers of the Catholic faith."²³

Abravanel's Contact with Conversos

The complicated nature of Abravanel's view of Conversos was most certainly formed through his intimate contact with various Conversos at court. During his tenure as head accountant for Inigo Lopez de Mendoza, the second duke of the *Infantado* and during his support in financing the final military campaign against Granada, Abravanel interacted with a number of prominent Conversos. This interaction may have possibly led to the very unique perspective regarding both the situations that Conversos faced as well as the underlying hope and assumption that many in fact remained aligned with and united with the Jewish people.

To highlight this, Ben-Shalom points to Abravanel's interpretation of a biblical passage dealing with the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem during the reign of King Hezekiah as related in II Kings 18 and in a second passage Isaiah 45:15. In the first passage an Assyrian emissary named

Rabshakeh approached Jerusalem in an attempt to persuade the city to surrender. Rabshakeh began his entreaty by noting that G-d Himself, had ordained Sennacherib's conquest. Most significant is his address in Hebrew, to the dismay of Hezekiah's courtiers, and not in Aramaic. The ministers pleaded with Rabshakeh to converse with them in Aramaic and not in Hebrew. Rabshakeh ignored their request and now changed his tone by claiming that just as the gods of other peoples had abandoned them, so too would the G-d of Israel. Ben-Shalom notes that the Talmud first posits the view that Rabshakeh was in fact an apostate Israelite (*yisrael mumar*)²⁴. Rashi also added to this view in stating that Rabshakeh was a deserter to Judaism as is evident in his acknowledgement of the G-d of Israel, but nevertheless promoted idolatry. What is most significant however, with regards to the connection to Conversos is Rashi's further elaboration on the story. According to Rashi, Hezekiah's ministers Eliakim, Sebna, Joah while asking Rabshakeh to speak in Aramaic and not in Hebrew, nevertheless did not believe that as a deserter that he meant to induce fear among the populace. The three ministers, Rashi posited, believed that his familial ties would prove strong enough to convince him to agree to their request. Abravanel however, believed that the reason for the minister's request was not related to the fear it would induce. It was instead connected to a concern for Rabshakeh's own precarious situation which was eerily and most certainly not a coincidental comparison to the

plight of Conversos in his own day.

“It was not appropriate to see Rabshakeh speaking in the Jewish language, for he would appear to them as a Jew, especially because of what he spoke for he spoke of the shrines out of respect for G-d, and also said that G-d had told him to go up and destroy [Jerusalem]. All this shows that while he was a convert, he was [still] a believer in the L-RD our G-d, who shall be blessed. And this is not appropriate [behavior] for someone who has left [his] religion, since he acted like an Aramean [but] spoke in the language of the Jews, and the convert in appearing before the gentiles should protect himself from suspicion. And they hinted at this saying, ‘do not speak with us in a Jewish [language] within earshot of the people on the city wall,’ [Kings 2, 18, 26], as if they were concerned for his reputation.”²⁵

Abravanel’s unique interpretation placed concern for the convert’s safety as paramount. While Abravanel did not explicitly reference Conversos, the connection is clear and examples comparable to the situation above are available. Two individuals stand out as examples. Diego Arias Davila and Pedro de la Caballeria were both victims of the Inquisition. Davila had been financier and counsel to the King of Castile. Davila was accused posthumously of having been conversant in Hebrew and of reading

the Book of Psalms in Hebrew with other Jews. He was also accused of meeting Jews regularly in the street and meeting with them in their homes and singing in Hebrew.

Pedro de la Caballeria, who had converted in 1414 in the aftermath of the great Tortosa debate, appeared as both an advocate of the Jewish people as well as an adversary. Caballeria was accused of participating in Shabbat dinners in the homes of Jews. In them he was able to participate actively in the associated blessings and also conversed in Hebrew on various biblical topics. When one of the persons present confronted Caballeria over his rush to convert, Caballeria purportedly retorted that as a Jew he could only have achieved the office of rabbi, but now as a Converso, he was one of the leading advisors to the city. Caballeria credited his success to the “little crucified one” and noted that no one could protest against his observance of the Yom Kippur fast or of all the holidays if he chose.²⁶ Proficiency in Hebrew as a continued sign of allegiance to the Jewish people was apparently perceived by Inquisitional authorities as a viable evidence. Abravanel in contrast to Rabbi David Kimchi and Gersonides also presented an arguable favorable explanation regarding Rabshakeh’s closing derogatory comments regarding G-d.

“Take note that in the first words which Rabshakeh spoke to Eliakim and his friend, nothing was said against G-d, the

Blessed One, and he [Rabshakeh] showed in his remarks that because he was of Jewish seed, he spoke out of respect for G-d...And so “Eliakim kept him to his word and told him not to speak with us in the Jewish language in earshot of the people, which meant that for the sake of his reputation they advised him not speak the Jewish language for fear that he would be suspected of being a son of Israel in his faith. [Thus] in order to remove suspicion, Rabshakeh stood and railed against the people with the other words, which did not respect G-d as did the first things he had said. Instead, he cursed G-d and blasphemed him saying that his concerns and his power were like those of the gods of the idolaters; all this in order to remove suspicion from himself, because he was a Jewish convert.”²⁷

Returning to the Caballeria, his father authored a polemical work against Judaism, Islam, and heresy. Alfonso was ultimately accused of assassinating an Inquisitor, a charge which he was eventually absolved from by the pope. At his trial he was accused of holding favorable views towards Jews and providing them with assistance clandestinely. He was said to have an ongoing relationship with Rabbi Isaac de Leon and also was said to possess Jewish books. Caballeria was also accused by a non-converted Jew of possessing a charm given to him by a Sicilian rabbi, while another Jewish witness tes-

tified he had successfully dissuaded him from converting to Christianity. While caution regarding Inquisitional records should be noted, the fact that Jewish witnesses attested to several incriminating instances is quite compelling as to some continued connection on the part of Caballeria.

Whether or not Abravanel's interpretation of Rabshakeh was influenced by his knowledge of Alfonso de la Caballeria and others is unclear as Ben-Shalom notes. Any assumption that Abravanel simply wanted to believe that many Conversos were in fact uniquely positioned to help the Jewish people as a consequence of their or their parents' conversion or that many of them actively retained Jewish practices to the best of their ability is refutable. A letter written by the Jewish community of Saragossa in the first half of the 15th century refers to Converso serving as the ambassador of the King of Aragon in foreign territory. The individual had undergone baptism as a child during the mass conversions of 1391. The Jewish community's clear support for this Converso is quite clear and similar to Abravanel's characterization of Rabshakeh.

“And in order to be liked by all who see him and achieve the goal of his mission, he would give expression to his wisdom, would speak [and] publish pronouncements before the gentiles in accordance to their ways, and would sometimes ask Jewish scholars to come hear his preach-

ing. He is nimble [Heb. Zariz] and very careful not to speak anything negative about the seed of Jacob. On the contrary, he will bring them to love us, and no strengthen those who strike us illegally, because he is a wise and, smart man. And if sometimes speaks a few [harsh] words, they do not hurt or destroy; he says them only to flatter publicly. And because some if the less regarded [class] of our time think that this commandment [of helping the Jews] is fulfilled by a transgression, and it would not be right to assist them in any way, we write these words of ours to you as a legal precedent: our opinion is that we are commanded to satisfy their [the converts'] wishes [in order] to guard the derelict, broken, remaining remnants that are dispersed among the –Christian]. A little here, a little there...and so do well by him, for that is what we do.”²⁸

In this most striking passage, the mitzvah of assisting and protecting Jews is applied to this Converso despite the complicated actions of the individual. Abravanel's positions are reflective of his eschatological view that the Conversos would one day return openly to Judaism. In the meantime, their precarious position, caught between two worlds even after conversion pointed to the emptiness of Christianity.

Conclusion

The peculiar dilemma of the Conversos can be further related in the story presented by Abra-vanel.

“And there was a wise man of our people who changed his religion; overcome by seething waters, he became a Christian. After his conversion those who loved him, and were his friends asked him, what do you think of these religions, all of whose ways you have experienced, and he replied to them: I have truly seen a world turned upside down, because as a Jew, I did not see G-d, for no mortal man may see him and live [Exodus 33:20]. However, he always sees me, as it is said: can a man hide in any secret place and I not see him? [Jeremiah 23:24]. After I converted to Christianity, it was the opposite, because I see G-d many times each day, yet he does not see me, for he has eyes, but does not see. And I think this is what the prophet meant in saying: verily thou art a G-d that hidest thyself.”²⁹

The Conversos as Ben-Shalom notes is an expert witness who can testify to the veracity of or lack thereof Christianity. Once again, Abra-vanel's portrayal of the realization that some Conversos faced can be corroborated in Inquisitional documents which reveal subtle references by Conversos to the Catholic paraphernalia that would be perceived as idolatrous by the average

Jew. In the end the role that Conversos played was a complicated one, but a Jewish one. As Ben-Shalom summarizes:

“The Conversos had not gone over to the other side. Their world had not truly turned-or been turned-upside down. Their ambivalence had a sense of belonging to the Jewish collective. As such, Abravanel as his exegetical remarks reveal, could integrate Conversos into the Jewish world and assign them an important role in the history of redemption.”³⁰

NOTES

¹ Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Converso as Subversive: Jewish Traditions or Christian Libel?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50:2 (1999): 259-283.

² Isaac Abravanel, Commentary on Obadiah 1, 20 in Commentary on the Prophets (Tel Aviv, 1960), p 117 cited in Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Converso as Subversive: Jewish Traditions or Christian Libel?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50:2 (1999): 259-283.

³ Ibid. 259. Yitzhak Baer stated that "Conversos and Jews were one people, united by bonds of religion, destiny and messianic hope, which in Spain took on a unique coloration typical of the people and the country... The confession and testimonies contained in these records (of the Inquisition) breathe a nostalgic yearning for the national homeland, both earthly and heavenly- a yearning for all things, great and small, sanctified by the national tradition, and for something even greater, which had created the people and maintained in life." Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Volume 2, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1961), pp. 424-425.

⁴ Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Converso as Subversive: Jewish Traditions or Christian Libel?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50:2 (1999): 259-283. See Benzion Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain: From the Late 14th to the Early 16th Century, According to Contemporary Hebrew Sources*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp.177-203.

⁵ Abravanel's Commentary on Ezekiel 5:6. Cited in Jose Faur, *Four Classes of Conversos: A Typological Study*, *Revue des Etudes Juives*, CXLIX (1-3), Janiver-Juin 1990, pp. 113-124. While these were immediate reasons, scholars look to understand why Spanish Jews converted in such large numbers in contrast to other Jewish communities faced with desperate circumstances. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi notes the following: "Will we ever know how many Jews were lost over the years? Amongst the Jews who were lost must be counted not only those who were the victims of massacres and martyrdoms, but equally those who went over to the other side or converted. And these Jews were lost not because- as the most simplistic explanation would have it- they were seduced by purely secular ambitions or material benefits; they were conquered by a real, a genuine despair; they feared that the Jewish people had no future." Yerushalmi quoted in Pierre Birnbaum, "Exile, Assimilation, and Identity: from Moses to Joseph," in Carlebach, et al. *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, 1998.

⁶ Jose Faur, *Four Classes of Conversos: A Typological Study*, *Revue des Etudes Juives*, CXLIX (1-3), Janiver-Juin 1990, pp. 113-124.

⁷ Jose Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity*, (New York: SUNY, 1992), p. 50.

⁸ Ibid. 50.

⁹ Ibid. 40.

¹⁰ Isaac Abravanel, *Ma'ayannei ha-Yeshu-ah* (Wells of Salvation) (Stettin, 1860), 12, 5, p. 57b. See also Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Typology of the Converso in Isaac Abravanel's Biblical Exegesis," *Jewish History* 23:9 (2009): 283-292.

¹¹ Abravanel's Commentary on Ezekiel 5:7. Cited Jose Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity*, (New York: SUNY, 1992), p. 50-51.

¹² Sanhedrin 97a.

¹³ *Yeshuot Meshiho*, 34a cited in Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Typology of the Converso in Isaac Abravanel's Biblical Exegesis," *Jewish History* 23:9 (2009): 283.

¹⁴ A. Jellinek, *Beit Ha-Midrash*, Vol. 6. (Jerusalem: Bamberger et Vahrman 1938), p. 10. See also J.H. Greenstone, "Jewish Legends" HJ, XII pp. 89-104.

¹⁵ Jakob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949) pp. 201, 383. See also Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943) pp. 50-51.

¹⁶ A. Jellinek, *Beit Ha-Midrash*, Vol. 6. (Jerusalem: Bamberger et Vahrman, 1938), p. 9.

¹⁷ See Kraus, *Leben Jesu*, pp. 176-17; also J.H. Greenstone, "Jewish Legends" HJ, XII. pp 95-96. S. Legasse, "La Légende juive des Apostres et les rapports judéo-chrétiens dans le haut Moyen Age," *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclesiastique*, LXXV (1974), pp. 104-106.

¹⁸ A. Jellinek, *Beit Ha-Midrash*, Vol. 5. (Jerusalem: Bamberger et Vahrman, 1938), p. xxxviii.

¹⁹ A. Jellinek, *Beit Ha-Midrash*, Vol. 5. (Jerusalem: Bamberger et Vahrman, 1938), p. 151.

²⁰ Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Converso as Subversive: Jewish Traditions or Christian Libel?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50:2 (1999): 259-283.

²¹ Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain: Volume II*, (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1961), p. 352.

²² Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Converso as Subversive: Jewish Traditions or Christian Libel?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50:2 (1999): 259-283.

²³ Haim Beinart, *Conversos on Trial: The Inquisition in Ciudad Real*, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1981), p.25.

²⁴ Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Typology of the Converso in Isaac Abravanel's Biblical Exegesis," *Jewish History* 23:9 (2009): 283.

²⁵ Abravanel, Interpretation of II Kings 18:26, *Interpretation of the Former Prophets*, p. 656. Cited in Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Typology of the Converso in Isaac Abravanel's Biblical Exegesis," *Jewish History* 23:9 (2009): 283-285.

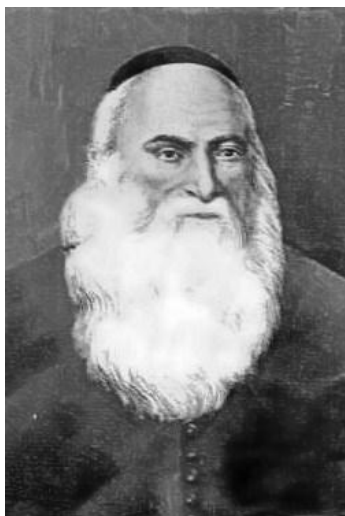
²⁶ Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Typology of the Converso in Isaac Abravanel's Biblical Exegesis," *Jewish History* 23:9 (2009): 284-285.

²⁷ Abravanel, Interpretation of II Kings 18:26, *Interpretation of the Former Prophets*, p. 657. See Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Typology of the Converso in Isaac Abravanel's Biblical Exegesis," *Jewish History* 23:9 (2009): 285.

²⁸ Fritz Baer, *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien*, I (Berlin 1929), pp. 757-758.

²⁹ Abravanel, Commentary to Isaiah 45: 15, p.222 cited in Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Typology of the Converso in Isaac Abravanel's Biblical Exegesis," *Jewish History* 23:9 (2009): 287-288.

³⁰ Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Typology of the Converso in Isaac Abravanel's Biblical Exegesis," *Jewish History* 23:9 (2009): 289.



There is no extant image available of Isaac Abravanel. The above image, by an unknown artist, is frequently used to illustrate articles and papers about him.

CHRISTOPHER COULUMBUS: Crypto-Jew, Mystic Christian Zealot, or Both?



by Harry Ezratty

On May 8th, 1506, the 56 year old, "Great Discoverer," Christopher Columbus, finally succumbed to his many illnesses in the city of Valladolid. Attending him during his last hours were his sons Diego and Fernando, his loyal shipmates Diego Mendez and Bartolomeo Fieschi and a small circle of friends and admirers.

One of history's greatest explorers who had earned the Spanish titles of Don, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy of the Indies and Governor of Santo Domingo (the last two were taken from him), now rested in a simple coffin wrapped in the coarse brown robes of a Franciscan friar. The humiliating chains, with which he was once bound as a common criminal, also lay alongside his body according to his wishes.

His small funeral entourage snaked its way through the city without the fanfare one might expect. After all, as a result of his four voyages, Columbus had discovered the West Indian archipelago and was instrumental in the discovery of two continents, enlarging Spain's colonial base. During his lifetime he saw the wealth of the Indies flow into Spain's treasury, making her a world power. But the Admiral of the Ocean Sea, the author of all this, went quietly to the city's Franciscan cemetery where he would rest until his coffin would be transferred to the city of Santo Domingo, together with that of his deceased son, Diego.

His quiet and unheralded death resulted from his years of bizarre behavior; and, in the eyes of the crown, his failure to produce what he had promised. If one examines Colum-

bus's personality from the time he advanced his first discovery proposals to Portugal's King John in 1485 and his death in 1506, great psychological changes may be seen. They resulted from a combination of nagging illnesses, rejections by the crown, mistreatment by powerful persons who entered his life and the obsession that it was he who was elected by God to release the city of Jerusalem from the clutches of Islam.

After the second of his four voyages to the Caribbean, it was obvious that at sea Columbus, a navigating genius with superb innate knowledge and a sure sense of how to act in a maritime crisis. On land however he was not a leader of men. He was in fact a failure. During the last years of his life he was an embarrassment to the crown. He fought with his king and queen to retain titles and monies they took from him. He appeared before them dressed as a monk. Although Queen Isabella had given him a fine house in Seville, he chose to live in a monastery, preferring the harsh life of a religious ascetic. He wrote mystic Christian tracts and seriously proposed a second crusade to retake Jerusalem from Islam, he being selected as God's chosen to accomplish this task.

He even advanced that during his third voyage he had discovered the Garden of Eden, a necessary requirement for his conquest of Jerusalem. There were other strange personality features of his later years. He advanced to his monarchs that the world was an oval, shaped like a pear, topped by a woman's nipple. After stumbling on to the site where the mighty Orinoco River spilled into Venezuela's Gulf of Paria, the great advocate of a spherical world went on record as saying: *...I have come to the following conclusions concerning the world; that it is not round as they describe it, but the shape of a pear, which is round everywhere except at the stalk, where it juts out a long way...like a woman's nipple.* He declined to explore the river's source which would have made him the discoverer of South America. He believed the great Orinoco issued from paradise. In one of

his many observations he noted that as a result of his explorations the world was divided thus: *Six parts are dry and only the seventh is covered with water. Experience has already verified that.*

No wonder Columbus was a puzzle to those around him and to later historians who have tried piercing basic elements of his fabulous life and placing them into some coherent form. His birthplace, his real name and his native language were all purposely wrapped in obscurity. Who was this man who history says was a citizen of Genoa, yet neither spoke nor wrote in that dialect even when addressing Italians? Why did he speak and write in Spanish with marvelous eloquence, but with glaring errors? Why were the errors in Spanish attributed, by experts, to Columbus's use of the Catalanian dialect?

Who was he, whose own son and biographer admits his father regularly changed his name to conform to the country in which he was resident and purposely clouded his background? Why was he, as Governor of Santo Domingo, cast in chains, vilified as *converso* and Jew by its residents and forced to write to Queen Isabella and King Fernando in his defense denying the accusations? And who is this man who was familiar with and regularly quoted the Hebrew Bible?

For those of us in the Twenty-First century, answers too many of these questions are not readily accessible. But we can, as investigators of history, sift through the facts of this fascinating man's life and arrive at some reasonable conclusions.

The city of Genoa is where most historians agree Columbus's was born. But much controversy surrounds that fact as does the age he left his home to make his way at sea. Columbus writes that he was ten, but some historians say he was fourteen. This is an important fact as we shall see later, since it bears on his education.

That Columbus was self-educated there is no doubt. He rose from grommet or cabin boy to ship's master while still in his teens, learning navigation, ship-handling and the other skills necessary to command a vessel. He spoke and wrote in Latin, Spanish and Portuguese, with great eloquence. Where he acquired fluency in these languages is unclear. The general agreement among historians is that he learned them during his residence in Portugal- from 1479 to 1487. But as noted, his Spanish was liberally laced with Catalanian dialect.

As a young man Columbus exhibited no particular religious excessiveness. He was a daring mariner travelling to the reaches of the then known European world. He sailed throughout the Mediterranean and then to Ireland and probably as far north as Iceland. He was a warrior too. On more than one occasion in his youth he fought as a privateer. Later, as explorer, he was to lead men into battle against Caribbean natives, mutinous members of his crew and colonists in the settlements he governed. In 1478 at age 25, he participated in his last battle as a privateer, losing his ship and becoming a castaway in Portugal.

This is the event that changed his life. For it was in Portugal, at the time, Europe's greatest seafaring nation, that he formed the kernel of his grand idea that land lay to the west of Europe and that by sailing there Europeans could reach Asia. Today we know Columbus was not the first to reach the Western Hemisphere. The Vikings preceded him and there is some evidence that Irish priests may have also touched American shores. It was nevertheless Columbus, and the Columbian Exchange, that exploited the discovery, colonizing it and seeking riches and souls to Christian conversion.

Washed ashore in Portugal, Columbus decided to stay. His younger brother Bartolomeo, had already been living in Lisbon earning his way as a mapmaker and book dealer. Columbus joined him. He had to have met many Jews dur-

ing this time, for mapmaking, dealing in books and the fashioning of marine devices was a profession to which Jews were drawn in proportions far outweighing their numbers to the general population. At this time, in the margin of one of his books, now housed at Seville's Columbus Collection, he notes: *All peoples received their astronomy from the Jews*. He had been reading the Hebrew bible, but in what language? He also read extensively from extant treatises about the size of the earth, the ratio of the volume of water to land and the hypothetical distances westward from Europe.

He married the sister of the governor of the remote Atlantic island of Porto Santos. He moved there, noting its winds and tides and questioning mariners about strange corpses and carved wooden objects obviously not of European origin. Here, poring over the library of his deceased father-in-law, he made extensive studies of tides, winds, weather, cloud formations and seasonal storms. He drew conclusions as to how a mariner might use westerly winds to sail to Asia and then safely return with the wind at his back. The way of the return voyage was a secret he was to keep to the last.

Most cosmographers believed he could not return. His father-in-law's books contained many observations new to Columbus and the volumes were gifted to him by his mother-in-law. He began reading all he could of the world written by Greeks and Romans and he read much of the Hebrew bible as well. We know that he was deeply influenced by the Hebrew bible, quoting extensively from the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets and other sources. Columbus even made errors in dates based upon the Hebrew calendar which is significantly different from the Christian. He regularly based time on the "destruction of the Second Temple."

Slowly he formulated a plan by which he could sail west and then return safely. Columbus was aware, which most mariners were not, that westerly winds were part of a cyclical system that turned back on itself on an easterly course

across the Atlantic to Europe. Because of connections through his in-laws, who were lesser nobles, he managed two audiences with John, King of Portugal. He was rebuffed both times. Known in Portugal as Cristovao Colom, he left for Spain, intending to put his ideas before the king and queen of Spain. In Spain he would become known as Cristobal Colon.

It has been advanced that Columbus had no formal education; that he was self-educated. It is hypothesized that he learned Spanish, Portuguese and Latin while living in Portugal. There is a serious flaw in this theory which will soon be addressed. Columbus took his young son, Diego to the Spanish monastery, La Rabida, in the city of Palos. His open purpose was to leave his son with the Franciscan friars to be educated while he proceeded to the royal court of Castile to espouse his proposal of discovery, to be known as *The Enterprise of the Indies*.

But there is evidence that, the always well prepared and ambitious, Columbus was aware of two priests at the monastery connected to Queen Isabella. Juan Perez had been her confessor and Antonio de Marchena was a well-known and influential cosmographer who had consulted at the court of Castile. To believe that he fortuitously stumbled on these two men at this remote monastery can be immediately dismissed. Knowing how the ambitious Columbus seized every opportunity to advance his plans dismisses any concept of coincidence. Using his powers of persuasion, he spoke to both men of his plan to sail to Asia. They must have been convinced, since Marchena referred him to a powerful noble who in turn introduced him to the king and queen. Both clergymen continued to be influential in the future, boosting him at court, Perez representing him at the negotiations between Columbus and the crown, known to history as the *Capitulaciones de Santa Fe*. Columbus was on his way, though it would take almost eight frustrating years for his plan to be accepted. At la Rabida Diego received a religious education which was to make of him a strong Catholic, something Columbus must have wanted.

In 1488, when Columbus approached the crown with his discovery plan, Spain was in the grip of the Holy Order of the Inquisition. What was unusual about Spain's Inquisition was that it was not initiated by the church as had historically been the case, but by the crown. In 1484 Isabella and Fernando petitioned the Pope for authority to establish an inquisition. Once granted it became a political and not a religious instrument. The crown, not the Pope authorized the Spanish church to proceed against heretics. It is also to be noted that the Inquisition had no authority or jurisdiction over Jews, only over those who had converted and deemed to have lapsed in their Christian faith. Columbus, an astute observer of the conditions surrounding him, was certainly aware of the turmoil and terror caused by all this. As a foreigner he had to be wary and extra careful about his behavior and certainly his background.

One of the problems he faced was his accented and irregular Spanish. While an eloquent and convincing orator and a marvelous writer, everyone at the Castilian Court noted his errors. Aside from those of his spoken Spanish they noted written errors in spelling, grammar vocabulary and phonetics. Every serious linguistic expert, including Ramon Menendez Pidal, head of the Royal Spanish Academy in the 20th Century, who wrote extensively on Columbus and his language (*La lengua de Cristobal Colon. El estilo de Santa Teresa y otros sobre el siglo XVI, Madrid, 1958*) came to the conclusion that Columbus had an overlay of Catalan, the basis of his many errors in Spanish. Columbus, Menendez Pidal argued, despite these imperfections *reached some unexpected stylistic heights*. This being so and if the theory is that he learned his Spanish while in Portugal, how to explain the Catalan influence?

Menendez Pidal, however, dismisses the theory that Columbus could have been Jewish, even though *Ladino* the written Judeo-Spanish dialect has roots in Catalonia. He notes no Judaic content in the Admiral's writings and that some

of the errors could also be attributed to Portuguese creeping into his Spanish.

Menendez Pidal is disputed by Professor Emerita, Estelle Irizarry, who was head of the Department of Hispanic Literature at Georgetown University. Professor Irizarry is no amateur. She is a full member of the North American Academy of the Spanish Language and a corresponding member of the Royal Spanish Academy. Spain honored her with the Cross of the Civil Order of Alfonso The Wise. Professor Irizarry used a tool not available to Menendez Pidal or the earlier philologists who examined the writings of Columbus. It is the modern computer.

In her book, *Christopher Columbus: The DNA of His Writings*, Professor Irizarry points out that much of Columbus's writings, as we read them today, were edited by many writers, correcting his punctuation and "errors" in Spanish. In order to properly analyze his work she went to the original documents and compared them to the edited versions.

Her first significant finding was variance in punctuation. Medieval Spanish and Portuguese were bereft of punctuation. Not so Catalan. Writers in that language regularly used the *virgule*, a slanted line (/), as a comma or a rest pause. Professor Irizarry found that Columbus's original writings were liberally and professionally filled with *virgules* which had been removed in editing. Professor Irizarry asks the question;

"One wonders why Las Casas (Columbus's earliest editor of the Logs of Discovery and letters) did not qualify for posterity Columbus's place of origin and mother tongue. How could the Admiral walk around with his two brothers without anyone knowing from where they hailed, when accents typical of speakers of other languages are so easily recognized?"

It should be noted that many editors, especially Las Casas, frequently exhibited frustration with the Admiral's punctua-

tion, spelling, grammar, date usage and other “erroneous” elements of his writings.

Menendez Pidal’s conclusion that there is no Judeo-Spanish in Columbus’s writing based upon his comparison of two writings: those of Columbus and of a Jew writing in 1410. Irizarry dismisses the analysis. And rightly so; Judeo-Spanish, or *Ladino* as it is now commonly called, has never been a language with rules and regulations common to English, Spanish, Portuguese or French. The difference of 80 years between the two comparisons is therefore significant.

Go to any *Ladino* chat group on the internet. Spelling, phonetics, pronunciation and even idioms vary from country to country, region to region and even between the ages of the chatterers. The reason for this is that *Ladino* is a language that relies heavily on borrowed words from the region in which the speaker may reside. And its spelling is phonetic, which varies from community to community. There is a constant running commentary among these chat groups about a correct word, the definition of an idiom and even the proper spelling or grammar to be used. For example, the C in Turkish is pronounced Ch, thus Castro becomes Kas-tro, and Salonica becomes Salonika. Nevertheless all these differences have been and are still comprehensible to *Ladino* speakers for over half a millennia. Menendez Pidal was obviously unaware of this. Whole paragraphs in *Ladino* could vary in spelling, grammar and use of idioms and still be comprehensible to the competent reader. Columbus when writing about Zion on occasion calls it Sion. That is the *Ladino* spelling for Zion. It is also a well-known family name among Sephardim. The name Sion can be found on tombstones in ancient Spanish graveyards and in Portugal, North Africa, the old Ottoman Empire and Brazil.

Irizarry investigated, through the computer, the following subjects contained in the Admiral’s writings: loan words; regional variances; archaisms; and family language. She noted inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies pointing to *Ladino*

usage in every category. The computer found what Irizarry calls: *Remarkable Ladinisms in Columbus's writings*, such as his continuous use of *tener* instead of *haber*. Professor Irizarry, has as many philologists before her, concluded that Columbus was not an Italian speaker or writer. The few examples of his Italian we have are also filled with errors. When he had the opportunity to write to the Berardi family, his Italian financiers and his Italian clergy friend, Gaspar Gorrico, he used Spanish. What Irizarry says is that Columbus was either a Jew or of a family of crypto-Jews that under cover passed on its traditions of literacy and religion to him and his younger brothers Bartolomeo and Diego.

The conclusion, according to Irizarry, is that Columbus was raised speaking *Ladino*, that he was either born in Catalonia or Genoa to where his family fled from religious oppression. If the latter, then while in exile the family continued using *Ladino* much as most immigrants cling to the languages of their birth, passing them on to their children. The Columbus or Colombo family was outwardly Christian to avoid the persecution they endured in Catalonia. This theory explains the Admiral's ability to write and speak well. It is a Jewish tradition that elders take care that the young among them attain literacy, especially in the Hebrew bible. If Columbus went to sea at 14, as some writers conclude, he had a good opportunity to learn reading and writing with some proficiency. Note that his younger brothers Bartolomeo and Diego could also read and write and were involved in mapmaking and book selling. Both of these trades require skills in reading, mathematics, and the knowledge of Astronomy. No one explains how Bartolomeo could have set himself in business in Lisbon before Columbus arrived, without being able to speak at least some form of Spanish or Portuguese.

It was not until Luther translated the bible from Latin into German around 1520, that Germans would be the first Europeans to read the bible in their own vernacular. In Spain the church made the Latin version its own province. The

clergy read the bible to their mainly illiterate congregants, putting their own interpretations on the text. But Jews were reading their own bible, the Prophets, Psalms and other holy books in Hebrew and probably Spanish or a form of Ladino, just as Columbus was able to do.

Unlike *Yiddish* for Ashkenazi Jews, *Ladino* was and still remains a language with elements of holiness just below Hebrew. It is still used extensively during the service. The Five Books of Moses have been translated into *Ladino* for regular use as have scholarly commentaries on the scriptures, the most notable of these being the *M'eam Loaz*.. In his writings Columbus quoted extensively from the Hebrew Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Hosea, Micah, Obadiah, Baruch, Zachariah, Micah and Zephaniah. He also cited Chronicles, the Psalms and other Hebrew sources. Columbus wrote and read Latin and could have read these works in that language; but his extensive use of the sources mentioned strongly suggests a lifetime of familiarity with them.

So, even if Columbus was not outwardly Jewish, he may well have been aware of and infused with his heritage. His biographer-son Fernando hints that this is so, when he wrote: *The Admiral wished that his fatherland and origin should be less certain and known*. Fernando further explains all the many names by which Columbus was known (I counted at least six): *This leads me to believe that just as most of his things were worked out of some kind of mystery, so in what pertains to the variations in his name and surname there is sure to be some mystery*.

Obviously even Columbus's own sons were heirs to the mystery of their father's family origins. Why? An explanation could be that Columbus wanted them to be ignorant of their heritage lest they be targeted by the Inquisition. He took care to have Diego, his only son at the time, undergo a Christian education.

The celebrated historian-diplomat, Salvador de Madariaga concludes that Columbus was of Jewish heritage. In his biography of Columbus, *La Vida del muy magnifico senor Don Cristobal Colon*, he writes:

Like the squid, he (Columbus) oozes out a cloud of ink round every hard fact of his life. This ink, multiplied by the industry of his historians, has made but blacker and thicker the mystery which attaches to him.

So why the mystery? An obvious answer is that as a foreigner, and Columbus was regularly called “the foreigner” both at court hearings and in royal documents, seeking Queen Isabella and king Fernando’s patronage, he needed to navigate carefully. When he arrived at the court of Castile, Columbus had to have noted that the most important courtiers surrounding the king and queen were converted Jews or one generation away from a family conversion. Luis de Santangel, a favorite of King Fernando, saw members of his family beheaded for their roles in a plot leading to the assassination of an Inquisition official. He and his family were ruthlessly investigated by the Inquisition. The survivors were made to proclaim public and humiliating penance. The families of Juan Pedro Sanchez and Alfonso de la Cabellaria, others of King Fernando’s favored courtiers, were also forced to do penance. Years later, Fernando issued an edict ordering inquisitors to desist from investigating Santangel or his heirs, proof that the Inquisition was a political and not a religious engine.

It does not take much sophistication to realize that someone with Columbus’s background could be easily suspect regarding his religious beliefs. What any person, obsessively driven by the desire to fulfill a dream, would logically do is deflect investigations into his past. He would become *Muy Catolico que los Catolicos*: that is, “More Catholic than the Catholics.” Aware that Isabella was devout in her faith Columbus espoused an added element to his plan. It was one

he never brought up in his two earlier audiences with King John of Portugal. Columbus knew his prospective patron well. He piqued her interest with a plan to elevate Christianity; he proposed a portion of the riches drawn from his discoveries be set aside to finance a second crusade to liberate the Holy City of Jerusalem from Islam. As an added sop, Columbus's discoveries would convert godless heathens and idolaters to Christianity. What better way to show his devotion to the Church and Christianity?

When he returned from his first voyage Columbus appeared before the court triumphant and in the finest clothes. He was surrounded by fabulously colored birds, exotic natives, lush fruits and vegetables—all unknown to Europeans. But with each successive voyage we can see a subdued Admiral. He began wearing the brown robe of the Franciscans. Toward the end of his life he wore one every day. He was caught up in the crusade of his own making. When he appeared at court after his third voyage, he and his two brothers had been condemned by the colonists of Santo Domingo. They called them Jews, conversos, marranos and faraoes (a disagreeable and anti-Jewish term of the time meaning Pharoahs). The brothers returned to Castile in chains amid jeers and the banging of pots and demeaning whistles from the settlers they once ruled.

As Columbus appeared before his monarchs he lay prostrate in his simple friar's robes and kissed their hands, tears tumbling down his cheeks, a dramatic change from his triumphant first voyage. It was at this audience that he was stripped of his governorship titles and his agreed upon shares of the profits of discovery. It made him bitter, more withdrawn and ascetic. He began writing his arcane and mystical book *Libro de las profecias* (The Book of Prophecies), a stew of citations from biblical and classical literature. It was Columbus unleashing his bitterness and the idea that his discovery was really a grand plan to restore Zion. Despite the contempt he had endured from those around him, Columbus tells us, in this book, that he persevered. It was he who was God's chosen to liberate Jerusalem from

Islam and convert the world's godless to Christianity. Before that he wrote, he had to find the Garden of Eden.

Yet he abandoned caution altogether when he wrote that Revelations could come to anyone-Jews, Moslems and peoples of every faith. It was a heretical concept and one wonders why he was not brought before the Inquisition to answer for it. Centuries later, writers, reading the Book of Prophecies, claim there are signs of madness in Columbus, perhaps even the onset of senility.

Powered by a maniacal obsession and ignoring debilitating illnesses, he petitioned Isabella and Fernando to undertake a fourth voyage. One historian tells us that the monarchs wished to be rid of this old man who was now an embarrassment to the crown. Better to be rid of him. He was old, wracked with failing eyesight, arthritic pain, malaria and other illnesses. He was an annoyance, constantly petitioning the royals for the return of his titles and profits, bringing his claims to the law courts, filling king and queen with wild ideas of a second crusade and conversion of the world's idolaters: the Garden of Eden. The monarchs ordered the fourth voyage, with a clue as to how they felt about his presence at their court. They ordered him to immediately assemble his fleet and sail without delay.

Even before the beginning of the fourth voyage, the one he called *El Alto Viaje*, The High Voyage, he had already been transformed into what modern observers would call a "born again Christian." It was his last and greatest voyage. It would be filled with dramatic mutinies, battles against warrior natives, hurricanes, vicious weather and many examples of his magnificent seamanship. There was also a full year as a castaway in Jamaica after a shipwreck. During this time he worked on his book, becoming more embittered. For despite the fact that the Governor of Santo Domingo knew where he was, he refused to liberate Columbus and his crew. Instead the Governor sent a messenger in a small boat unable to take more than a few men off the island. The messenger brought a cask of wine and a side of salt pork for

over a hundred stranded men. Was the Governor trying to tell Columbus something with the pork slab, thinking the Jewish Admiral would not eat it? It was the people of Santo Domingo years early that cursed Columbus and his brothers as outcast Jews and marranos.

We can tell from his writings and his son Fernando's biography (Fernando accompanied his father on this voyage and was shipwrecked with him) that Columbus suffered debilitating physical ailments, with bouts of blindness, incoherence and loss of memory that sometimes lasted for days.

He now considered himself God's instrument and a totally devout Christian.

There is an easily mapped and radical transformation in Columbus's personality. First he is the young sailor, who exhibits no particular religious zeal and whose curiosity leads him to believe he could find an easy route to Asia. Then he becomes the ambitious and confident drumbeater, seeking patronage of kings and queens for his dream. He is at court eager to cloak his true background by embracing the church and making of himself one of its great defenders. When he feels his work has not been duly appreciated, losing some of his honors and riches he becomes a religious mystic. The change is complete. Columbus goes to his grave still believing he discovered the path to Japan and India. He was abused and maligned by society and his royal patrons, going to his final rest as a pious Christian in Franciscan robe.

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HaLapid: Journal for the SCJS

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HaLapid: Journal for the SCJS

Personal Narratives

Exploring Our Family History

by Baron Castillo

My story begins in the year 2000. I was a Deputy Sheriff in California and after twenty years, I decided to retire in the year 2000. Since high school, I have been very interested in Spanish History, so when it came time to retire, I planned it that on the day of my retirement I would be in Madrid. I booked a tour with a Los Angeles radio station I listened to, called KFI 640, where one of the evening hosts was Rabbi Chaim Mentz.

In Spain, on the day of my retirement, I was standing under the gates leading to the town of Granada. It was raining and I had a glass of wine in one hand and a Cuban cigar in the other. I was thinking out loud, "This is the place where El Cid rode off in battle to rid Spain of the Moors." It was a feeling of great pride to be a descendant of such a great people and such a great country. During my trip, I met and sat next to another member of my travel group by the name of Pam. I was on the trip by myself as a single man and wanted to keep it that way. However, during the trip, I came to find a connection with Pam. We dated after returning to California.

Pam is Jewish and, during one of our dates, she picked up a magazine called *The Jewish Journal*. I was scrolling through the magazine and read a short article about crypto Jews. The article described how some Spanish Americans came from Jewish ancestry and are known as crypto Jews and *Moranos* because they had to hide their Jewish identity during the Spanish Inquisition. After reading the article, I figured the article was talking about a rare group of several hundred people and did not think much more about the subject. The only connection I found with my family and

Pam's traditions was that my mom always had the family over for Friday evening dinner and would light candles.

I took the magazine with me and ended up taking it to my dad's house, where I just left it on the counter. Several weeks later, I visited my dad again. For some reason, he left the magazine open to the Crypto-Jewish article, so I asked him, "Are we those people?" He said "On your mom's side of the family," then suddenly left the room and would not talk about it for weeks. When he did talk about it, he said that being Spanish was hard enough, that it's something you should not talk about, and that they kill Jews. At a later time, my dad finally talked to me about the Jewish ties on both his and my mom's sides of the family.

I can remember when I was a teenager, someone had spoken badly about a Jewish person, and my dad looked at me and said "Don't *ever* talk bad about Jews." I asked him why, and he said, "Because they have been through enough." I also remember when I started doing research for my family genealogy, I started to figure out that some of our family members from New Mexico had married cousins, as did our grandparents. My dad told me that many of our early family members did marry cousins because they did not want to "mix with other people." I was told at a young age by my mom and dad that we were Spanish, but they never talked to us kids in Spanish; however, they would talk to each other in Spanish, as was the custom among my other cousins' families

Another interesting thing about my dad is that when I have seen him in Church, he mumbles softly the whole time. I have no idea what he is saying; however now that I attend a *shul*, it reminds me of the Jewish tradition of *davening*. I can also remember my mom telling me when she was a young girl in La Jolly, New Mexico, that strangers or as she called them, "Gypsies," would try to come to their village, so the adults would make all the children go inside their

homes, and the men would meet the Gypsies on the outskirts of town. The men would give them some food, but would not let them make camp to their town. Another unusual thing about my family is that my dad, Domino Castillo Jr., married my mom, Adelica Peralta, and my dad's brother, Toby Castillo, married my mom's Sister, Ida Peralta.

Several years ago, my dad was talking to a friend of mine from Madrid, Spain. They were both speaking in Spanish and my friend said, "Some of the words you use are from an ancient, almost-extinct language." I later learned that the language my dad was speaking was Ladino. My dad is from Socorro, New Mexico, and my mom is from La Jolla, New Mexico. My dad now lives in Hesperia, California and my mom has since passed.

After talking to my dad, I decided to go through several of my hundreds of Spanish History books because I did not remember reading anything on Spanish Jews. To my surprise, I could not find anything in them about Spanish Jews, and that is when I started my search. I went on the internet and found some information, joined several sites, including the Society for Crypto- Judaic Studies.

In 2006, Pam and I went to Tuscany, Italy, where I asked her to marry me, and in 2007, we went back to Tuscany where we were married. Pam started attending a *Chabad shul* in Bel Air with Rabbi Mentz, the same Rabbi from the radio station I listened to back in 2000. I went to *shul* with her several times and Rabbi Mentz welcomed me with open arms. On Shabbat, Rabbi Mentz would hold a program he calls Torah Entertainment. Rabbi Mentz would talk about the famous Rabbis from Spain, the Ladino language, and Spanish History. I would be screaming inside my head, "Spanish rabbis! Ladino! Marranos! Does anyone else know about these rabbis, the language, or the people?" I have been learning with Rabbi Mentz since 2007 and have since found that my purpose in life is to "Spark the Jewish

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light of the hidden Jews and brighten the light of the Jews.”
G-d willing!

Baron Eric Castillo was raised in Baldwin Park, CA, and his parents were from New Mexico. He attended Mt. San Antonio College, then Cal State Los Angeles. Once he became interested in Spanish history he joined the California Mission Association. He received his California real estate license when he was 18 and his Brokers license at 21, making him one of the youngest brokers in California. He became a Deputy Sheriff at the age of 23 and retired from Orange and San Bernardino Counties as a Deputy Marshal and Deputy Sheriff at the young age of 43. He is married and has two girls attending college, one son who is in the marines, and a stepdaughter who practices law. He was raised a Catholic and is now a Chabadnic. His hobby, he says, is “driving everyone crazy with his interest in Spanish History.”

Reclaiming a Heritage

By
Carl Montoya



During the tumultuous '60s, when the Civil Rights movement exploded and the great American “melting pot” idea was rejected, minorities and other groups began rediscovering and reclaiming their heritage and customs. This is when my interest in family roots emerged and, while I didn’t realize it then, it was to have a profound effect on my life.

Although I was born in New Mexico, my family moved to Arizona during the early '50s. As I began reading about New Mexico history and exploring my family roots, I was astonished to learn that Spanish colonists had settled the area nearly four centuries earlier in 1598—before the Pilgrims’ landing at Plymouth Rock in 1620. This is when I developed an interest in genealogy and started researching my ancestors.

Using genealogical records, family stories, DNA test re-

sults, historical texts and events, I have attempted to patch together the history of my family covering more than four centuries. My story begins with an ancestor's journey from Portugal, to New Spain (Mexico), and finally to New Mexico. It culminates in the exciting discovery of my heritage and explains how and why I reclaimed it.

History

In 1535 the Inquisition (the institution that guarded the orthodoxy of Catholicism in Spain chiefly by the persecution of Jews and others) was established in Portugal, but had little impact until the Spanish authorities took charge in 1580. The Inquisitors began aggressively persecuting the conversos (Jews forcibly converted to Catholicism), who they believed were still practicing Judaism, and these actions ignited an exodus of conversos to the New World and other parts. My earliest documented ancestor, Diego Blandin Gonzales, was among those who joined the exodus.*.

Gonzales enlisted as a soldier in 1579 on the vessel Santa Catarina under the command of Governor-Captain General Luis de Carvajal, which sailed from Seville carrying 100 soldiers and 60 families. The passengers were mostly Portuguese and many were likely converso relatives of Carvajal. Since conversos were prohibited from immigrating to the New World, Carvajal persuaded the Spanish king to issue a decree preventing the customs authorities from inspecting the passenger list for conversos prior to departure. The Santa Catarina landed at the Port of Tampico in New Spain in 1580.

Although the Holy Office of the Inquisition was established in Mexico City in 1571, it had yet to make its presence felt. This changed in 1596 when eight members of Carvajal's family were charged with Judaizing (practicing Judaism in secret) activities and burned at the stake. Carvajal died in captivity before his sentencing was carried out. These

events likely persuaded Gonzales and other conversos to flee as far away from the Inquisition office as possible.

Two years later in 1598, after securing financing, recruiting settlers and obtaining official approval, Juan de Oñate, the founder of New Mexico, was finally able to depart with an expedition he had organized. Gonzales joined the expedition, which established the first permanent settlement in New Mexico. It is estimated that about one-third of the 135 settlers and soldiers with Oñate were conversos, many of whom had been passengers on the Santa Catarina.

The Spanish Inquisition followed the settlers to New Mexico in 1626, but only a few incidents of Judaizing activity were reported there, one of which included a governor. The Inquisition was finally abolished in 1821 when Mexico won independence from Spain, and the conversos assimilated into the social fabric of New Mexico's towns and villages.

Family

Unlike a number of my crypto-Jewish (Jews who practiced in secret but observed another religion) counterparts in New Mexico whose families can recall observing various Jewish traditions such as lighting candles on the Sabbath or refraining from eating pork, my experience was more obscure. I had to rediscover my crypto-Jewish heritage, as my family no longer observed these traditions and customs. It was only after many frustrating years of genealogy research and studying Judaism that I learned to ask very specific questions about our family background and customs, which enabled me to begin unraveling and eventually discover clues of my crypto-Jewish heritage.

If you were to ask my parents or extended family if they had Jewish roots, they would answer "absolutely not" since many of them are devout Catholics. Too many centuries have taken their toll on the crypto-Jewish beliefs of my family, and they

have no explanation for the Jewish remnants of family traditions that were once observed. What few traditions survived were unknowingly discarded when they moved from the rural to urban areas or when the older generations passed. Examples of these vanished traditions that parallel Jewish religious practices include:

Children were given names from the Five Books of Moses (Old Testament); such as, my parents Esther and Jose (Joseph), although my father does not use his first name. Other family given names included Jacobo (Jacob), Solomon, Benjamin, Daniel and David.

A mourning period was observed for one year when a close family member, such as a parent, died with mourners respectfully limiting their social activities during this period.

Mirrors were covered when my maternal grandmother's mother died.

Family members were often blessed by my grandmother for special circumstances such as a hospital stay, a birth or marriage, or travel.

Great care was given to draining the blood thoroughly from newly-butchered animals.

After more than four centuries in New Mexico, my family's crypto-Jewish traditions have essentially disappeared in the two generations preceding mine.

DNA

Beginning in the '90s, occasional news articles about Hispanic New Mexicans carrying the Sephardic (Jews from Spain and Portugal) DNA gene began to appear in newspapers, magazines, and other publications. While it piqued my inter-

est, I hesitated to take a DNA test although I had an innate sense that a Jewish connection existed. I finally succumbed to the temptation and took extensive DNA tests from Family Tree DNA (FTDNA), and the results confirmed Sephardic DNA.

Additionally, my J2 (Y-DNA) result, which is passed down from father to son through generations, indicated the likelihood of priestly descent, a Cohain, from the biblical forefather Aaron. Only about five percent of male Jews have this DNA type. Although a DNA test alone cannot be used to confirm this status, it does indicate there is a high probability that this tradition may have previously existed in my family.

While several Gonzales ancestors have been identified in my family line, I am still researching genealogy clues that will explain the circumstances behind the surname change to Montoya.

Based on historical events, the migratory patterns of my ancestors, the crypto-Jewish traditions that once existed and my DNA tests, I have been able to discover and unravel my Jewish heritage.

Return

Growing up in Arizona during the '50s and '60s, I had little exposure to Judaism. The first Jewish person I recall meeting was a political science professor who made me aware of prominent Jews such as Marx, Einstein and Freud and their impact on history. He recommended the book, *Jews, God and History*, by Max I. Dimont, which I eagerly read. My lifelong odyssey to learn more about this ancient religion and its people had begun.

Although I married a non-Jew, reared four sons and eventually divorced, my interest in Judaism never waned. Throughout my adult life, I have had a lifelong fascination

with Judaism and Jews. This was manifested by my tendency to befriend Jews in both my work and social circles. In 1998, when I married a second time to a Jewish woman, I began to occasionally attend religious services and observed the major Jewish holidays with her and her family. While I was actively involved with Judaism, it wasn't until 12 years later in 2010 that I made the decision to return.

There was no eureka moment—I just felt ready. I wanted to be a Jew: to be counted as part of a *minyan* (ten persons needed for the Sabbath service); to be called to the *bimah* (elevated platform) for an *aliyah* (blessing recitation) during the Torah reading; and to be a participating member of a congregation. On June 23, 2011, I honored my ancestors by reclaiming the heritage that had been forcibly taken from them and celebrated my “return” to Judaism.

My return was preceded by a year of independent and guided study with a rabbi and completion of the required rituals: *a hatafat dam brit* (ritual circumcision); an appearance before a *beit din* (panel) who evaluated my knowledge, motivation, and intent to live as a Jew; and finally, immersion in a *mikveh* (ritual pool), which marked my spiritual rebirth as a Jew. As is the custom, I took the Hebrew name of Reuven Calev ben Josef v' Esther. As a returning Jew and not a convert, I was allowed to use my parents' names as part of my Hebrew name.

My return marked a watershed event in my family's history. Despite the expulsions and forced conversions of the Jews in Spain and Portugal, and the pursuit by the Inquisition over the centuries, my ancestors' heritage has survived. After devoting much of my life to researching my family history, I feel deeply humbled and honored to be able to reclaim a lost religion and culture, and resume the traditions of my ancestors.

*Stanley M. Hordes, *To the End of the Earth: A History of the crypto-Jews of New Mexico* (Columbia University Press, 2005).

Carl Montoya is a career federal employee and, since 2007 has served as the Associate Regional Administrator for the U.S. Department and Health and Human Services (HHS) in Philadelphia. Prior to Philadelphia, he worked in Washington DC for many years in various jobs with HHS, and before that served five years in the Foreign Service at Embassy London with the Department of State. Carl currently resides in Moorestown, NJ with his wife Donna. They are members of historic Temple B'nai Israel in Burlington, NJ, and Congregation Beth Tikvah in Marlton, NJ. From a previous marriage, Carl has four adult sons and was just recently blessed with a new grandson. Carl's hobby is genealogy and he relieves his frustration from hitting the proverbial genealogical "brick walls" by being an avid runner and practitioner of Yoga.

*

Poetic, Artistic and Literary Expressions

In the House of Mirrors

by Esmeralda Bernal

In the house of mirrors
Flowers recede into their seed;

While covered mirrors yearn for a last look
At the fleeting bones of ancestors in flight.

In the kitchen the last egg tinged with blood
Has been discarded in the garden.

The last of the azahar¹ tea has been sipped.
On this day of goodbye the nerves need calming.

The ancestral knives and prayers, which sliced chubascos
Into harmless portions, are packed into memory.

The last room has been swept from edge to center.
Not even footstep echoes are left upswept.

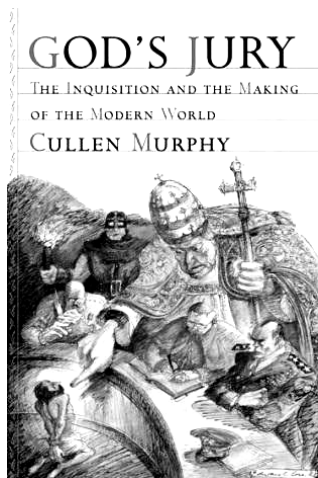
The old Ford filled with sueños de suerte² heaves forward.
The new diaspora begins, California fields wait.

—Raymondville, Texas, 1965

¹Azahar: orange blossom from the Arab word al-zahar Ancestral knives: refers to the custom of using knives and prayer to calm and minimize storms.

²sueños de suerte: good luck dreams

Reviews



GOD'S JURY
THE INQUISITION AND THE MAKING
OF THE MODERN WORLD
CULLEN MURPHY
Cullen Murphy, *God's Jury: The Inquisition and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012)

Reviewed by Matthew Warshawsky
University of Portland

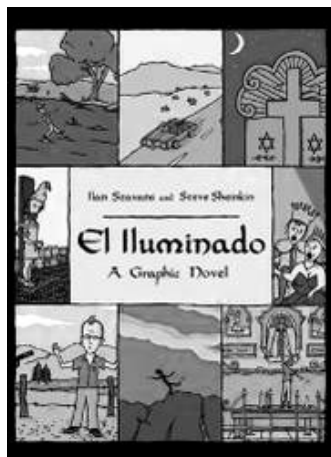
Presently editor at large of *Vanity Fair* and previously managing editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Cullen Murphy is an adept storyteller whose new book, *God's Jury: The Inquisition and the Making of the Modern World*, is sure to engage specialists and generalists alike. In 250 pages he presents a personalized and compelling account of the medieval, Iberian, and Roman Catholic Inquisitions, as well as vestiges of these tribunals that have persisted and even thrived in political and religious institutions of more recent times. Two achievements of the book in particular stand out: the line of continuity it establishes between 600 years of iterations of the Inquisition throughout Catholic realms; and its demonstration of the perseverance and modernity of what the author calls the "inquisitorial impulse" (233). In fact Murphy argues convincingly and ominously that "bureaucracy, communications, the tools of surveillance, and censorship" (233), all ingredients necessary to the Inquisition's functioning centuries ago, are stronger and more entrenched today than at any previous time.

Murphy's literary journey across the field of inquisitorial history derives immediacy from the actual journeys on both sides of the Atlantic that he undertook while researching the book in order to understand how the Inquisition operated and why its legacy continues to endure. Describing at the start of the book a tour of the sprawling Inquisition archive in the Vatican, officially called the Archive of the Congre-

gation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he articulates a straightforward and enduring definition of an inquisitorial tribunal: “a set of disciplinary procedures targeting specific groups, codified in law, organized systematically (. . .), backed by institutional power, and justified by a vision of the one true path” (6-7). Subsequent visits to places where throughout the course of its painstaking and pain-inducing history the Inquisition brought this definition to life inform the author’s reflections on the history and legacy of this court. This approach enables him to trace the roots of the modern Inquisition back to the late Roman empire, where starting in the fourth century, “any deviance from orthodox Christian teaching became a crime—indeed, became tantamount to treason, which carried the death penalty” (34). Without overwhelming the reader, Murphy then shows how the Inquisition prosecuted such deviance from official Catholic beliefs, whether in the case of the Albigensian Crusade against Cathars in southern France during the 1200s; the effort of the Iberian Inquisition over 350 years to uproot crypto-Jewish heresy on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond; or the drive by the Roman Inquisition during the Counter-Reformation and afterwards to staunch the spread of Protestantism and other ideas considered heretical, most famously the heliocentric view of planetary motion that Galileo championed in the 1600s. While the term “Spanish Inquisition” appears with increasing frequency in popular discourse today, few know much about its actual workings or those of the medieval and Roman varieties that preceded and followed it, respectively. Using an engaging anecdotal style, Murphy fills this lacuna admirably and with balance, examining the mindset that made possible each inquisition and focusing on specific cases and individuals in order to explain how the tribunals functioned.

In the book’s last two chapters, Murphy verifies his claim that “inquisitions are not hard to find” (188) by describing the adaptability of the aforementioned tribunals to modern efforts to enforce specific ideologies and punish dissent. History really does repeat itself when one views through the

lens of the Inquisition, for example, the obsessive domestic spying by the secret police in the former East Germany or the abuse of Muslim prisoners at the U.S. military base at Guantánamo, as Murphy does. In fact, the ever-increasing size of bureaucracies—consider the Transportation Security Administration—, more sophisticated means of data collection, the pervasiveness of the Internet, and competing moral certitudes all demonstrate the strength of the “inquisitorial impulse” (248) today. This last component of a modern inquisition is especially important, since “moral certainty ignites every inquisition and then feeds it with oxygen” (244). While the Catholic Church may no longer enforce its version of truth to the same extent as when inquisitions were first established, inquisition-like apparatuses thrive because we live in a time when “the presumption is now widespread (. . .) that a lack of certainty is unacceptable” (245). Among other examples, Murphy shows how this presumption has both underpinned the denial of due process to prisoners held in offshore American military installations and fueled a contentious backlash against Islam in many parts of the United States. *God’s Jury: The Inquisition and the Making of the Modern World* is an especially important book because of the clarity with which its author argues that inquisitions are not a product of less-civilized times. Rather, the premise that they serve as a means for one group to impose its vision of the world on others, as well as their use of well-defined operating procedures and skilled bureaucracies, demonstrate the modernity of a phenomenon that is not a bygone relic but a growing feature of societies today.



Ilan Stavans and Steve Sheinkin, *El Iluminado – A Graphic Novel* (New York: Basic Books, 2012)

Reviewed by Kathleen Alcalá
Northwest Institute of Literary Arts

Why is a raven like a writing desk? Lewis Carroll posed this riddle, through the March Hare, in “Alice in Wonderland.”

Ilan Stavans poses a similar question in his new graphic novel, “El Iluminado,” illustrated by Steve Sheinkin, from Basic Books/Perseus. The book tackles the mystery of the Crypto-Jews, a population in the Southwestern United States and Northern Mexico, among other places, who claim Jewish ancestry dating back to the Spanish Inquisition. Who is a Crypto-Jew?

Stavans overcomes the first hurdle of tackling this subject: who can write about this group, if it is secret? Stavans appears in the book as, well, himself, a Mexican Jew of Polish ancestry. In the presumably fictional narrative, Stavans is invited to Santa Fe to give a lecture on Crypto-Judaism. While there, he is drawn into a web of intrigue by locals involving the suspicious death of Rolando, who claimed to have definitive proof not only of his own Jewish ancestry, but papers that would blow the lid off the secret Jewish roots of most of the population of New Mexico.

In a series of events that involve abandoned ranches, midnight bonfires, loose rafters, frisking a statue of the Virgin

Mary, and having his hotel room tossed, Stavans manages to include most viewpoints on this matter: those who believe, those who disbelieve, and those who believe but prefer to keep it a secret. The most threatening group is made up of those who plan to exploit any proof for the sake of their own academic careers. Since this has been a pretty obscure topic until recently, readers “in the know” can speculate on who the real players might be.

At the same time, Stavans retells the historically documented story of Luis de Carvajal the Younger, whose insistence on Jewish study and practice during the time of the Inquisition led to his death and that of several members of his family in Mexico. Rolando’s modern story eerily mirrors that of Carvajal, who wrote his memoir under the name of Josef Lumbroso, Joseph the Illuminated.

Sheinkin, with whom Stavans has collaborated before, provides simple illustrations that mimic the two-dimensional quality of the santos that appear in early New Mexican religious art. Many panels involve no dialogue, just the puzzled looks of people involved in an enigma reaching deep into the past. This is a graphic novel in more than one sense of the word, in that it faithfully portrays Carvajal’s self-circumcision and Rolando’s attempt at authenticity.

According to an article in the New York Times, the Spanish government recently offered citizenship to descendants of those expelled from Spain during the Inquisition <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/09/sunday-review/a-tepid-welcome-back-for-spanish-jews.html?src=me&ref=general>. So this topic is timelier than ever.

In the interest of transparency, I have written on this topic, and Stavans has acquired my work for some of his many publishing projects. My family is of Crypto-Jewish ancestry, but I was unaware of the history behind our own stories until Isaac Maimon, a Sephardic Jew from Turkey, made me aware of the larger culture of Jews who left Spain and

Portugal during the Inquisition, but feigned conversion to Catholicism in order to remain in her territories. Most of their descendants have probably forgotten their ancestral roots, thinking they are Old Catholics, but the stories have persisted, and as time passes, more and more are coming out to claim their heritage. Simultaneously, DNA testing and the spread of knowledge through the internet have made it easier to put together the pieces of this puzzle.

Like the March Hare, Stavans wisely chooses to leave the question unanswered. For those not familiar with the history of the Crypto-Jews, “El Iluminado” offers a good introduction, especially for a generation growing up in an age of internet transparency, who might be mystified by a time when keeping family secrets, could spell the difference between life and death.

CALL FOR PAPERS

23rd Annual Conference Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies

Colorado Springs, CO, July 28-30, 2013

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies will be holding its 23rd annual conference Sunday, July 28, through Tuesday, July 30, 2013, at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs.

We invite papers on crypto-Judaism from any discipline (e.g., anthropology, history, sociology, philosophy, literature, music, etc.) and from any geographic location or time period. We also welcome papers on all aspects of the Sephardic experience and that of other communities exhibiting crypto-Jewish phenomena. Papers breaking new ground in research on crypto-Jews in New Mexico and Southern Colorado are particularly welcome.

Interested scholars and professionals, including advanced graduate students, are invited to submit proposals for papers, presentations, or workshops. Proposals are also welcome from individuals with personal stories or other personal research relating to crypto-Judaism.

Proposals may be for individual papers/presentations or for complete sessions on specific topics. Please indicate if presentation represents completed research or work in progress.

Conference presentation proposals must include a title, a 200-word abstract, and a brief bio.

Please send proposals or inquiries to Matthew Warshawsky, International Languages and Cultures, University of Portland or warshaws@up.edu

HaLapid: Journal for the SCJS

Overview of the SCJS-UCCS Affiliation

Beginning January 1, 2013, the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies will enter into a formal affiliation agreement with the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs. The affiliation, which will be directed by Dr. Roger L. Martinez (SCJS 1st Vice President and UCCS Assistant Professor of History), will be named, “The Sephardic and Crypto-Jewish Studies Program, an scholarly affiliation of the *University of Colorado – Colorado Springs* and the *Society for Crypto-Jewish Studies*.” In particular, this endeavor aims to foster collaborative scholarly research on Sephardic Jews (Jews of Spanish and Latino-descent) and crypto-Jews (Sephardic Jews that retained their faith in secret) in the greater Southwest United States and the world.

The affiliation aims to promote greater interdisciplinary work among the UCCS faculty and student body, the *SCJS*, the community of southern Colorado, international scholars, and members of the Sephardic community. Additionally, the affiliation seeks to engage Latino students and community members into a vigorous discussion of related issues of culture, religion, and identity. It will be first university-based program in the United States that fosters the integration of university scholars and students, community members, and an international association for the purposes of studying, discussing, and dissemination information on this cultural-religious phenomenon. Some of the more important goals of this affiliation include:

SCJS will hold its annual society conference at the *UCCS* campus or in the Colorado Springs area in every odd-numbered year, commencing summer 2013.

The *UCCS Humanities Program* and the *Sephardic and Crypto-Jewish Studies Program* will co-develop interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate Humanities courses relating to Sephardic and crypto-Jewish studies.

The Director of the *Sephardic and Crypto-Jewish Studies Program* will participate in team-taught theoretically oriented courses for Humanities undergraduate and graduate students. In particular, the Director will focus on supporting courses co-taught with the *UCCS Department of Languages and Cultures*, the *UCCS Department of History*, the *UCCS Department of Philosophy*, and the *UCCS Department of Visual and Performing Arts*.

The Director of the *Sephardic and Crypto-Jewish Studies Program* will pursue external and internal grant funding to support student and faculty research and scholarly presentations.

This affiliation will promote the inclusion of *UCCS* faculty and student contributions to *HaLapid*, the quarterly journal of *SCJS*, as well as the *Journal of Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian Crypto Jews*, the peer-reviewed journal of the *Florida International University* and *SCJS*.

The *Sephardic and Crypto-Jewish Studies Program* and the *UCCS Heller Center for the Arts and Humanities* shall investigate creating an archive to serve as the permanent repository *SCJS* materials (*HaLapid*, *JSPICJ*, meeting and board minutes, records, notes, membership records, collections of members' publications and research libraries).