

Tudo se ilumina para
aquêlê que busca la luz.
BEN-ROSH

HALAPID

...All is revealed to
one whoseeks the
light
ARTURO CARLOS
BARROS BASTOS

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Different Cultures, Same Goals ANUSIM AND HMONG USE ARTS FOR CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS SURVIVAL

by Adam Savran



The history of the anusim, while often not on the forefront of Jewish historical studies, is well known to many scholars.

Oftentimes, Crypto Jews are considered the primary example of a culture and religion kept alive by secretive cultural and religious expression, during an era of extreme oppression and genocide (Jacobs, 2002).

What is less known to scholars is the more modern history of the Hmong people in Laos, who, like their anusim counterparts, used secretive methods to keep their culture and religious heritage alive, during political oppression and genocide waged against them as was described by Hamilton-Merritt (2002).

During the Vietnam War, Laos was split by a civil war and secret American and Vietnamese involvement in that con-

t. The Lao people sided mainly with the communist Pathet Continued on p. 6

SCJS OBTAINS NON PROFIT STATUS

by Arthur Benveniste

"We are please to inform you that upon review of your application for tax exempt status we have determined that you are exempt from Federal income under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code."

Thus begins a document dated October 18, 2004 and addressed to the Society for Crypto Judaic Studies. The document goes on to state, "Organizations exempt under section 501 (c) (3) of the Code are further classed as either public charities or private foundations."

In addition to the above document from the U.S. Department of Internal Revenue, we have received a statement from the State of California declaring the SCJS to be a "Domestic Nonprofit Corporation."

This new status, obtained from both the State and the Federal Government has opened vast new opportunities to the society. We are now free to solicit grants from foundations and gifts from individuals. All gifts to the SCJS are now tax deductible.

We are very thankful to SCJS member Martin Sosin of Santa Monica, CA for his assistance to us. Marty, retired lawyer, volunteered his time to research our legal responsibilities and

Continued on p. 2

MY JOURNEY, MY RETURN, MY PILGRIMAGE

by Gregory Lee Cuellar

In crossing the Atlantic Ocean en route to the Iberian Peninsula, I could imagine the journey my ancestors made from Barcelona to the New World in the eighteenth century. In many ways my journey to Madrid, Spain can be described as a return journey to an obscure homeland. It is from this obscure homeland that I locate my even more obscure Sephardic heritage. In many ways my journey to Spain brought meaning and form to a fractured and colorless heritage. My journey rendered meaningful a history that I not only knew orally but could never really prove. Therefore, it is in this sense that I describe my journey as a return journey. It is not that I returned to a place once visited, but that I return to a clearer and more colorful history.

For someone who lives in the Southwest, recovering my Jewish heritage has not been easy. With the generous help of the Hispanic Theological Initiative and Brite Divinity School, I was not only given the opportunity to obtain a clearer image of my history but also participate in a historic event, the First St. Louis University Conference titled, "The *Conversos* and Spanish History 1248 to 1700," which was held May 21-22, 2004 in Madrid, Spain. Some of the notable presenters were Paloma Díaz-Mas and Francisco Márquez Villanueva. During this conference, I was able to engage in stimulating and insightful dialogue with scholars of *converso* and Sephardic history. From the various presentations and person-



"My journey to Spain brought meaning and form to a fractured and colorless heritage."

From p 1 to prepare the appropriate forms. He even got us an official stamp for embossing our documents. We couldn't have done it without him.

Our members have proposed many projects that would require foundation grants. Until now, we were helpless in applying for such grants.

Among the proposals are: Publication of an Academic Journal with peer reviewed research projects funded by the society; a DNA study into the genetic backgrounds of crypto Jews; Sending researchers to study archives in Spain, Portugal and Latin America; better communications with the media to get our story out to the public and much more

Readers of *HaLapid* are invited to submit more proposals to the board. Our email address is: mail@cryptojews.com

Board Elevates Conference Role Gloria Trujillo Appointed VP

Gloria Trujillo, who has served previously as SCJS President and Secretary, has been appointed by President Abe Lavender to fill the new position of Vice President of Meetings and Conferences on the Society's Board of Directors.

As organizing and administering meetings and conferences has become more demanding, the board felt that it merited a dedicated position, and that this be elevated to vice presidential status. As Conference Chair for SCJS meetings since the Society's early days, Gloria is eminently qualified to fill the position. She attended the first conference and has been an active member every since. Gloria has served on every board, most notably as president and recently as secretary.

Those who have attended our annual conferences have been impressed with their skillful organization. The credit for this belongs overwhelmingly to Gloria. Prior to each conference, she travels to the prospective city, visits hotels and chooses the best one for our needs; then arranges for discount rates, meeting rooms, food service, audiovisual equipment and an infinity of other items large and small: Will the hotel provide Kosher meals? Do we need extra mikes? Are there enough seats and how should they be arranged? What about vendor's tables? Is there enough coffee and plenty of cups? How about a hospitality room? Who will provide entertainment at our main dinner? Etc, etc, etc.

With Gloria as new VP of Meetings and Conferences, we know that the position is in good hands. Please see her article on her rite of return on page 11 of this issue.

Gloria's position as Secretary has been passed on to Louise Polsky, See the article on this page about Louise.



Gloria Trujillo and Stan Hordes remember early Society days

Meet Louise Polsky

SCJS Has New Secretary

Louise Polsky, long-time member of the Society, has been appointed Secretary by President Abe Lavender to fill the position vacated when the Board of Directors appointed Gloria Trujillo Vice President/Meetings and Conferences. See article this page.

Louise was born in Monterey, CA (Dec. 1938) to a Portuguese immigrant father and the daughter of Portuguese immigrants from the Madeira Islands. She graduated from Dominican College of San Rafael in Marin County.



Louise Polsky

After teaching middle school math for two years, she was hired to teach American Air Force dependents at RAF Lakenheath in England. There, she met and married Alan Polsky (the child of an immigrant father from Kiev and the daughter of Jewish Polish immigrants) who was serving at the base hospital.

The couple moved to Los Angeles, where Alan worked at Kaiser Permanente until his unexpected death in 1995. Their daughter, Karen, works in San Francisco.

Louise reports that "Sometime in the 80's, I started researching my Portuguese roots, which led to Al's interest in his Jewish genealogy. We joined the Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles and occasionally heard a talk on the Sephardim."

She then describes her reaction as she learned more about the Sephardic Jews and their conversion to Christianity in 1497.

"I was blown away because I had never heard a word of this in my Portuguese home. Do I have Sephardic roots? Maybe. There are some hints, but nothing definite."

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EDITORIAL POLICY

HaLapid contributors come from all over the world. The editors respect different national writing styles and, where possible, have left each item in the author's style. We edit for grammar, spelling and typographical error.

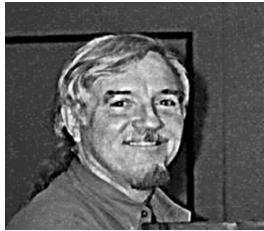
Many contributions are memoirs or retelling of family stories and legends. They may or may not be historically accurate, although they are indeed valid, sacred memories that have been passed along through time. Changes are made only for obvious misstatements or historical error.

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

President's Message

Emma Lazarus and Her Sephardic Message

by Abe Lavender



"Here at our sun-washed, sunset gates shall stand a mighty woman with a torch, whose flame is the imprisoned lightning, and her name Mother of exiles...Give me your tired, your Poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuge of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the Golden Door!"

These famous words are from the poem "The New Colossus," written in 1883 by Emma Lazarus, and later inscribed on the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor. As we remember the 350th anniversary of the U.S. Jewish Community, started in New York City by Portuguese Jews from Brazil in September 1654, as well as ponder the recent intense presidential election where we debated the meaning of breathing free in this and other countries, it is good to remind ourselves of how much our ancestors suffered in order to enjoy freedom, and the vigilance they expressed in maintaining it. It is fitting that Emma Lazarus, a descendant of early American Spanish-Portuguese Jews who had been exiled from their homelands, should express what freedom has meant to so many people of all faiths. It is also a symbol, mixed, that a genetic Cohen, a grandson of Jewish immigrants who came to this country to escape persecution, almost became president. This grandson, because of religiosity in the campaign, had to emphasize his Catholic altar boy youth. But, unlike other times and places, his genetic past did not become an issue, although his brother's Judaism and his wife's Portuguese heritage were noted by some.

Emma Lazarus was born in New York City in 1849, the daughter of an aristocratic and mostly assimilated family. As a youth she showed little interest in her Jewish heritage, although her grandfather had written the liturgy for the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue, and an uncle was the hazzan. In 1867 in "In the Jewish Synagogue in Newport," she showed dispassionate objectivity and referred to the Jews as "only a relic of the days of old." But, in the early 1880s she was extremely touched by the persecution of the Russian Jews who were then streaming into New York Harbor. Some of her poems were published as *Songs of a Semite* in 1882. She translated poems of the famous Sephardi poet Judah HaLevi, and wrote many other poems and essays on Jewish and non-Jewish topics. In "1492" she wrote "Thou two-faced year, Mother of Change and Fate, Didst weep when Spain cast forth with flaming sword, The children of the prophets of the Lord, Prince, priest, and people, spurned by zealot hate" and as a precursor of "The New Colossus," continued, "A virgin world where door of sunset part, Saying, Ho, all who are weary, enter here!"

As for John Kerry? His paternal grandparents, Fritz Kahn and Ida Loewe Kahn, converted from Judaism to Catholicism in 1901 in Austria, writing that it was their attempt to escape severe anti-Semitism. In 1903, they changed their surname to Kerry, still trying to escape bigotry caused by their Jewish surname. In 1905, they arrived at Ellis Island, greeted by the Statue of Liberty. One grandson, Kam Kerry, married an Ashkenazi and converted (back) to Judaism. My mind keeps going back to the Jews of Spain and Portugal. When will we all breathe free?

From the Editor

Articles Take Readers to Portugal, Southeast Asia and Spain

by Dolores Sloan



The good news is that we've recently received approval from the Internal Revenue Service to be classified as a 501.c.3, or non-profit organization. What are the implications of this designation and how will it affect the Society and its members? Now eligible for grants from foundations and philanthropic organizations, what are our priorities? Add a peer-reviewed journal to HaLapid as a regular offering for our members, the academic community and anyone interested in our area of interest? Sponsor research and/or conferences on specialized subjects such as DNA, cultural practices, migration patterns and other topics relevant to SCJS? Provide fellowships and/or scholarships for students and those who would have much to contribute to our knowledge of crypto Judaism? Please see **Art Benveniste's** update on this beginning on page 1.

Art also takes us to Maria Rosa Menocal's *Ornament of the World* and *convivencia*, when Moslem, Jew and Christian coexisted. See his review on page 9.

This summer, member **Greg Cuellar** visited Spain, where he was invited to present a paper at a conference on *conversos* at Madrid's St. Louis University. As you will read, beginning on page 1, the trip became infinitely more than an academic experience. He has titled his article "My Journey, My Return, My Pilgrimage." It describes how his trip brought meaning and connection to his understanding of family history.

In his article, "Porto Synagogue, Built for Barros Basto's Congregation, Comes Alive for Anusim, Both Religious and Secular," on page 8, member **Manuel Lopes Azevedo** brings us news from Portugal of a Jewish cultural organization in Porto, calling itself Hanamel, the Hebrew word for "port." He also writes about regeneration of the Porto synagogue built for Arturo Carlos Barros Basto's congregation in the last century, with funds from English Sephardic Jews.

Adam Savran not only impressed attendees at our annual conference in Portland last summer with his new suit, which he announced had been made for him by a tailor from the Hmong people of Laos, but also with his paper showing parallels between the Hmong and the crypto Jews of Latin America in using the arts to mask their hidden religious expression. He has adapted the paper into an article, "Anusim and Hmong Use Arts for Cultural, Religious Survival," beginning on page 1.

When we began our **Member Closeup** series in the Summer 04 issue, we envisioned allotting one page each time to descriptions of a member who has contributed much talent and/or energy to the Society. We find that there's so much to tell about each honoree that the article with pictures, has grown to two pages. So be it! After all, people *are* important, aren't they? This month we honor longtime Society member Rabbi Albert Plotkin, whose distinction goes beyond his services to SCJS, to *anusim*, his congregations and community, but also to Notre Dame, where our celebrated member was a unique student. To find out how, and more, read **Randy Baca's** interview on page 10. Then read **Gloria Trujillo's** account of her rite of return, officiated at by the good rabbi, on page 11.

From p 1 al conversations, I received strong confirmation of my own research on my family's Sephardic heritage.

One particular conferee, Kevin Ingram, informed me that his article would be of considerable interest to my own family research. Ingram's article, "Ignatius Loyola's *Converso* Background," argues that many of the families Loyola took residence with were of *converso* background. Ingram suggests that these associations come as a result of Loyola's own *converso* background. Among the *converso* figures associated with Loyola was Velázquez Cuéllar, a sea merchant from the town of Cuéllar. It is well documented that in the town of Cuéllar, there was a vibrant Jewish community before the expulsion. His research strengthens the history I received from my uncle Derile Cuéllar. Throughout my childhood, my uncle told me of the Jewish connections of the Cuéllar family. Oral narratives and family documents (i.e. deed of a Spanish land grant) suggest that my family came to New Spain in the 1700's and settled in the Northern Nuevo Leon area. Although research still needs to be done, Ingram's presentation only invigorates my own quest for substantiating my uncle's claims. In my conversations with Ingram, the possibility of a Cuéllar in the New World maintaining a *converso* heritage is not unreasonable.

Presents Paper on Lope de Vega Play

At the conference, I presented a paper titled, "A Portrait of the *Converso* in Lope de Vega's play *El Vaso de Eleccion San Pablo*," which fell under the Sub-textual Voices section. From this late 16th century play, I demonstrated the potential link between Vega's main character *Saulo* and the *converso* figure. In her dissertation, Roberta Zimmerman Lavine points out that Vega's opus poetically captures every aspect of Golden Age society, thus it is not a surprise that one would find reflected in his work themes involving the *converso* figure. In *El Vaso de Eleccion*, Vega draws on key *converso* subjects such as conversion, Jewish identity, and the law of Moses, in developing the play's overall theme. In Vega's portrayal of *Saulo*, there lies a stereotypical and subversive portrait of the *converso* figure. Vega presents *Saulo* as a zealous Jew who is proud of his Jewish lineage. It is in this portrait of *Saulo* that he emerges as the enemy of Christians. This portrayal of Vega's main character not only intensifies the drama, but establishes various hostile dichotomies such as the Law of Moses and the Gospel, the judaizer and the Christian. In the end, my participation in the conference not only contributed to understanding my own history, but it also allowed me to be an active agent in acknowledging the anti-Semitic environment from which this play emerged. Within this oppressive context, the voice of the *converso* community was silenced and obscured at all levels of Golden Age Spanish society. This national sentiment was often propagandized in contemporary literature.

In the days I had left following the conference, my return journey began to embody elements of a pilgrimage. Though many of the sites I visited are not internationally recognized pilgrimage sites. Their connection to *converso* and Sephardic history made them personally sacred. The first site was the Plaza de Vazquez de Mella on the Calle de las Infantas. In 1692, a judaizing cell was apprehended from a private home in Madrid on the Calle de las Infantas. On July 4, 1832 at the Puerta del Alcala also called the *quemadero* or *brasero*, these judaizing *conversos* were publicly punished in the last *auto de fe* held in Madrid during the reign of Philip IV. Of the forty-four people sentenced only the judaizing *conversos* were burned at the stake (Heilpe 1994, 222). Nowhere in this space is this history memorialized. All that remains is an empty plaza surrounded by uninspiring architecture, mildewed monuments and graffiti filled walls.

Visit to Sinagoga del Tránsito

Among the other sacred places I visited was the *Sinagoga del Tránsito* and Sephardic Museum located in the Jewish neighborhood east of Toledo. This inspiring synagogue was ordered to be constructed in 1336 by Samuel ha-Leví, treasurer of Peter I of Castille and advocate of the Sephardic Jews. Its head-board and high parts are decorated with nazari plaster (Muslim dynasty that ruled in Granada from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries) with Hebrew and Arabic inscriptions. The Synagogue of Samuel ha-Leví is popularly known as the most important demonstration of *hispanojudio* architecture. In the synagogue, I could still sense the spirit of the once vibrant Jewish community that occupied its halls and galleries. The walls and ceilings in the synagogue embodied this community's other history.

In touring the synagogue, I had the privilege to speak with a Spanish gentleman who had recently discovered his Sephardic background. Overhearing his comments about the synagogue, I asked him if he could help me identify Ps 122: 4-5 on the wall of the Galeria de Mujeres. This led to a conversation about his return to Sephardic Judaism. He was intrigued with my own efforts to recovery my Jewish roots. The gentleman encouraged me with a passage about dry bones in Ezekiel 37 1-12:.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely. Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. (11-12, NRSV)

According to him, these prophetic verses refer to the thousands of Sephardic Jews dispersed throughout the world who will recovery their Jewish heritage.

In the end, through the conference, synagogue, and museum, I was able to envisage the ritual symbols, rhythms, and places associated with the crypto-Jewish experience of my ancestors. My journey to Spain has given me a clearer image to a once faceless and obscure history. The vivid images experienced in my journey to Spain have both confirmed and challenged my Jewish identity. My journey serves to form a poetic language imbued with visual power that will forever prompt my imagination and stir my heart. It has allowed me to traverse an imaginary realm, mythscape, symbolic sacred geography, and a mythopoetic world that captures the essence of my crypto-Jewish heritage. My journey, my return, my pilgrimage, has converged with the journey of my ancestor where by an obscure history is replaced by a tangible history.

GREGORY LEE CUELLAR is a third year PhD candidate of Hebrew Bible/Rabbinic Literature at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, TX. A crypto-Jewish descendent from Cuero, TX, he plans to teach of Hebrew Bible. His dissertation topic explores an interpretation of Psalm 122 that takes into account the Sephardic liturgical tradition.

*SCRAPBOOK OF
A JOURNEY
THAT BEGINS
AND ENDS
IN SPAIN...*

Greg enjoys the view of Segovia from on top of its famous aqueduct. His travels open doorways to his heritage



He attends a conference on conversos in Madrid as both presenter and participant. Here, he enjoys conversation with a new Spanish friend of crypto-Jewish origin.

Greg takes notes during the conference. The paper he delivers analyses the role of the converso in a Lope de Vega play



From p 1

Lao government. The Hmong people, an ethnic minority in Laos, sided mainly with pro-American militias. When the United States pulled out of Laos and Vietnam, the Lao government waged a systematic campaign against the Hmong culture, religion and language. The Hmong religion, which blends Christian and animist beliefs, was particularly targeted because the Pathet Lao considered their Christian oriented religion to be western (Windland, 1992). The Hmong then hid their culture, religion and language inside the symbols of Lao nationalism, Buddhism and Communist propaganda (Cohen, 1987). Many of the methods used to disguise the Hmong way of life were similar to methods used by the anusim, particularly in Latin America. This paper contrasts and compares methods used by these two cultures to keep their respective ways of life alive in an environment of intolerance, providing evidence of each respective group protecting their culture using art, music, architecture and ethnic games. The evidence will be provided in the form of literature, first hand accounts and interviews.

Using Art to Mask Religious Practice

Both cultures used art as a way of hiding their culture and religion. This art manifested itself in various ways.

While the Jews in Latin America were being persecuted by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitors, it was not uncommon for them to use art as a way of practicing and protecting their Judaism (Klasbald, 1987). Historically there was the idea that Jews could not be artists because of the traditional Jewish rule against making graven images

(Exodus 20: 4-5; Deuteronomy 5: 8), but there have been conflicting interpretations about the meaning of these verses. Lavender (2003) claims that there have been many interpretations of the graven images rules within Judaism and that art was important to Jews living in Spain and Portugal before the Inquisition. It is not coincidental that the descendants of these people, who were living under persecution, not only practiced artistic expression, but also used it as a cultural survival tool.

In Mexico, it was quite common for Crypto Jews to use murals as a way of means of expressing ideas to each other. Among many, various abstract designs corresponded with Ladino letters and messages were conveyed in this manner (Morozoff, 1999). Jewish symbols were also transformed into either abstract designs or symbols found in another culture.

Another way Crypto Jews used art to practice their culture was not in what they displayed, but what they did not display. Oftentimes, in Latin America, Crypto Jews got themselves jobs as artists in cathedrals. They would then simply paint only Old Testament displays and avoid painting New Testament images. This omission was a signal to crypto Jews that a Jew was in that church (Ouaknin, 2000). Ironically, they used the symbols and headquarters of their oppressors to convey a Jewish message.

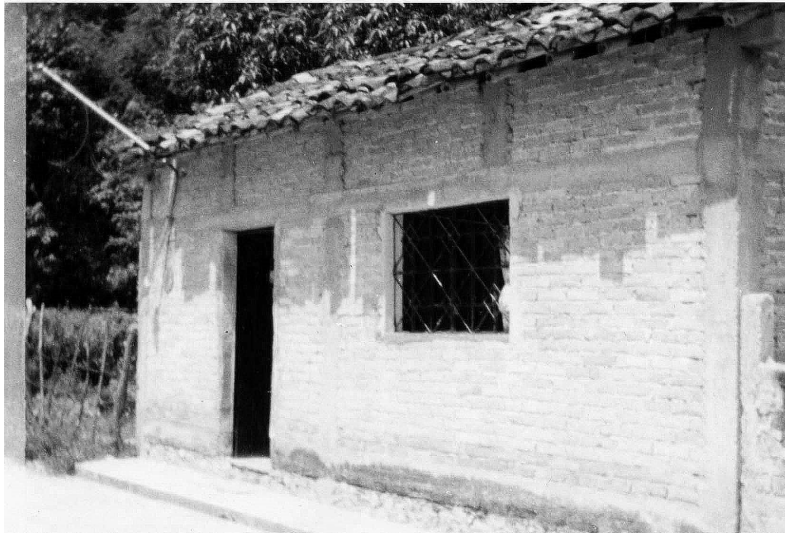
The Hmong, like the Crypto Jews, also used symbolism in art to disguise their own nationalism, as well as their Christian religion. They

are famous for their artwork in Southeast Asia and that group has a long history of artistic expression (Wilcox, 1986). It is not coincidental then that the Hmong would use artwork to practice their culture and religion cryptically.

The Hmong, are famous for their textile work and often use these textile wares to tell the history of their villages. Anti-government sentiment was (and still is) not allowed in communist Laos, and the Hmong could not speak out about their nationalist aspirations, due to a brutal crackdown against separatist leanings. Therefore, the Hmong communicated their thoughts in textiles (Chan, 1990). They created scarves, linens and other cloths, which donned the Hmong national colors. So as not to arouse suspicion, these colors were made dull. They also created textile wares with the red, white and blue of their American allies in the Vietnam War. In addition, the Hmong used large hawks to represent the

American eagle (Chan, 1990).

Religiously speaking, the Christianity of the Hmong was strictly banned. Therefore, artists hid their Christianity within the symbols of the Communist Revolution. Hmong artists would go to local police stations, government buildings and even army barracks, and draw figures important to Communist History. These figures were then drawn in such a way, that they actually represented biblical figures. For example, Karl Marx, the founder of communism was drawn in poses that would represent cruci-



A secret church in southern Laos. The wooden gate on the left has crosses embedded in the design

fixion. As was Christianity, Hmong ancestor worship was also banned in atheist Laos. The Hmong countered this problem by drawing their ancestors in a manner where they looked similar to Communist historical figures. Ironically as with the case of the crypto Jews, the Hmong used the symbols of their oppressors in the headquarters of their oppressors, to convey their ideas.

Another way these people hid their Christian affiliations was with the "cosmic cross," a religious symbol used by Hmong. A type of red cross was used by the Hmong to worship their ancestors and spirits they deem holy (Dunnigan, 1986). This also represents the Christian cross. When altered artistically, it also appears similar to the Communist red star. So the cross, when displayed, married the shamanist and Christian religions of the Hmong in harmony, while appearing like a symbol of Lao communism (Cohen, 1987).

Music

Another way anusim and Hmong people hid their cultures and religions from their oppressors was by using music, which was utilized in the following ways:

Urban Crypto Jews used church hymns to pray in a Jewish manner. By omitting references to the New Testament in their prayers, they actually prayed Judaically while in a Catholic Church. For example, when a song or hymn would speak about Old Testa-

ment figures, the anusim in the Catholic Church would pray particularly loudly. When the song would go on to describe events in the New Testament, the Crypto Jews would often give each other symbolic gestures and turn silent (Interview July 20, 1998).

In rural Northeastern Brazil, Crypto Jews would often find employment as vaqueros, or cowboys. The cattle calls vaqueros used were often made into songs. Crypto Jews often prayed in the mornings by making the lyrics and sounds of their cattle calls, similar to Jewish prayers (Interview, August 12, 1998).

The Hmong people also used music as a means to hide their culture and convey various messages. Their language is unique in that it is very complex and tonal. For that reason, it is very hard for any non-Hmong to completely comprehend it. The Hmong language is so complex and cryptic, that it was used by the American Army for code purposes during the Vietnam War (Hamilton-Merritt, 1999). For this reason, the Hmong were able to easily convey messages within the context of daily tunes sung by them.

Songs that conveyed certain political messages were sung in a certain tone, a call for action would be indicated by a tonal change, the tonal change in the song would be too subtle for a non-Hmong to notice. Basic instructions were also given this way. For example, if a Hmong village wanted to hide a fugitive, they could simply raise the tone of their song and that would indicate that now the fugitive should escape the village before the authorities check more carefully.

The Hmong language is also quite cryptic and many words and sounds have a double meaning or are puns. During periods of persecution, the Hmong would utilize the double meaning of words in songs and be able to speak freely in verse. This would allow them to convey officially illegal ideas related to politics or their Christian and animist religions (Catlin, 1997).

Architecture

Both the anusim and the Hmong used architecture as a way of protecting their respective cultures and religions. This was done in the following ways:

When designing homes, Crypto Jews often created hidden rooms either under their homes or behind walls, which were designed to conceal their entrance and exit. These were used to conceal fugitives of the Inquisition.

Another Crypto Jewish architectural design was a secret escape hatch. This was built into their secret synagogues, as well as in churches where many Crypto Jews were in attendance and secretly practicing Judaism. An escape hatch such as this is found in the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, the oldest synagogue in the United States (Fisher, 1999).

A final design in the architecture of the anusim is the concealment of the building. In Latin America it is common for large walls to be used to protect homes. Crypto Jews took advantage of this phenomenon and built their houses of worship behind walls and gates. The synagogue of the Crypto Jews in Venta Prieta, Mexico, for example, is not visible from the street. One could walk right by ten times and not even realize that they are near a synagogue, due to the concealing nature of the architecture.

Using the circular settlement patterns of Hmong villages, the Hmong built secret churches, which were hidden behind the rest of the houses in the village, in the center of a circular pattern. This situation was perfect for them, as they needed also to pray to Hmong spirits, because spirits in the animist religion are supposed to dwell in the center of villages (Lemoine, 1999). In addition, the

Hmong created their churches with unadorned walls and ceilings, with the ability to contain pigs and chickens, like a barn. When the communist authorities would find these churches, the locals would simply remove all Christian materials which were portable and hide them; then move the animals, which were stored in the next house, a barn disguised as a residence. A small underground chamber would allow the animals to travel from the disguised barn to the secret church (Vang, 1998).

Ethnic Games

A final method used by both the Crypto Jews of Latin America and the Hmong in Laos to conceal their culture and religion was the use of games that were common in the area.

In New Mexico and perhaps Mexico proper, secret Jews would gather for prayer by sitting around a table with cards on the table with prayer books on their laps. When strangers came by they would play cards and, when they were alone, they would turn to the prayer books. It should also be noted that in New Mexico, cards are called *baraja*. The word *baraja* alludes to the word *Abaraha*, the word for prayer in Hebrew (Benveniste, 1999).

The Hmong, like the Crypto Jews, also made use of games to hide their prayer. They like to play a game with a type of dice. The playing of dice is common throughout this part of Southeast Asia. The Hmong, however, arrange the dice as numbers in reference to Old and New Testament verses (Baker and others, 1995).

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Porto Synagogue, Built for Barros Basto's Congregation, Comes Alive for Anusim Both Religious and Secular

by Manuel A. Lopes Azevedo

On September 8 of this year, the impressive Kadoorie synagogue (Mekor H'aim-fountain of life) in Porto, Portugal came alive with singing and dancing on the occasion of the dedication of a sefer torah donated by a rabbi whose grandfather was saved from the nazis by the then fledging anusim community founded by Captain Barros Basto in 1923. The "Catedral Judaica do norte de Portugal," as it has been called, is a majestic art deco three-story building in a leafy, upscale Porto neighborhood, which took nine years to build (1929 -1938). It was the vision of a romantic hero, Captain Arturo Carlos de Barros Basto (aka Abraham Israel Ben-Rosh), often referred to as the "Apostle of the Marranos" or the Marrano Moses but also the "Portuguese Dreyfus." He died a broken man in 1961.

Barros Basto dreamed of gathering the anusim of Northern Portugal and creating a large active community in Porto. At its peak, he may have had 10,000 adherents. He founded a publication called *Halapid* to rally anusim and help them learn about the religion of their ancestors. Barros Basto endured arduous trips to the countryside to meet and organize anusim, he begged for money and support from co-religionists in London, Amsterdam, New York, Paris and elsewhere, he established a yeshiva, he tried to recruit a rabbi, he founded and published a newsletter *Halapid*, he conducted historical research, he organized conferences, and he resisted attacks by the Catholic Church and a fascist state and their accomplices. He suffered many indignities and injustices. Following his death in 1961, he was buried, not in a Jewish cemetery (there is none in Porto and he did not want to be buried in Lisbon), but in Amarante, his place of birth, near Porto. The magnificent temple that he had built, with the help of the Jewish Community of London, fell into disrepair, its imposing doors closed to the curious. He seemed to have failed.

On September 8 of this year, everything appeared to be changed. The presence of grand Sephardic rabbi of Israel, Shlomo Moshe Amar, signaled a new phase of Barros Basto's work. The doors of the "cathedral" of the north were once again thrown open, welcoming a new wave of anusim who had dreamed of entering those doors for years; and come they did, philosophers, doctors, poets, professors, professionals, artists

Members of Hanumel, Porto anusim cultural organization, gather at the historic synagogue. The author is third from the right; SCJS member Naomi Leite on far left



and youth. Some are religious, others are secular, but all are curious and excited about their new journey of discovery and learning. Together, with the understanding of a sympathetic orthodox rabbi, Elisha Salas, provided by Amishav, an Israeli organization, they are embarking on the experience of a lifetime; Hebrew, Torah and Talmudic studies, as well as services at the synagogue. Soon, I expect to see tours of historical Jewish Porto, academic conferences on such great philosophers as Uriel Acosta (born in Porto, often cited as the forefather of Baruch Spinoza), cultural events, theatre and film programs and an ever-expanding community of diverse anusim discovering their roots through all the variations of Judaism.

Although Barros Basto's tireless work to form a normative Jewish community from the remnants of 500 years of oppression and the fires of the inquisition failed, his efforts are not forgotten by today's anusim. Perhaps his daughter's dream of justice for her father will someday be realized.

Also in early September, Hanamel and Hahaber, anusim cultural organizations from Porto and Lisbon, respectively, called a conference for anusim in Tomar. A report on that conference and events since then will appear in the Spring issue of *HaLapid*.

MANUEL A. LOPES AZEVEDO, who refers to himself as "a lapsed lawyer," was born in the Azores, lives in Vancouver and sojourns in Porto. He is the founding president of the Portuguese Benevolent Society which publishes Lusitania.ca, a trilingual zine. He is a student of Sefardic history and a member of SCJS.



Grand Sephardic Rabbi of Israel officiates at dedication of sefer torah to Porto synagogue founded by Arturo Carlos Barros Basto. Photo by Naomi Leite



ORNAMENT OF THE WORLD

How Moslems, Jews, and Christians Created the Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain

By María Rosa Menocal

Almost every day headlines announce another story of sectarian violence somewhere in the world. And in most cases radical Moslems are involved. Their adversaries are Jews in Israel, Hindus in Kashmir, Christians in the former Yugoslavia and Christians and Animists in Sudan. Travel the world and you will find churches converted into mosques. Or mosques and synagogues converted into churches. Our history books are filled with stories of "heretics" and "apostates" being forcibly converted, beheaded or burned at the stake. Always to the "glory of God." It would seem that the various religions were doomed to challenge each other for all time.

I write these words shortly after hearing of another suicide bombing in the Middle East. But Muslims, Christians and Jews once lived together in harmony and prosperity. It was in al-Andalus beginning in the Eighth century and lasting until religious fanaticism ended it in the Eleventh Century. This period of *convivencia*, or living together, was ushered into Moslem Spain by the Umayyad Dynasty and with it came one of the great Golden Ages of human history.

Today, in most of the industrialized world religious tolerance is the norm. And even in centuries past there were examples of enlightened regimes that protected the rights of religious and ethnic minorities. The level of tolerance of these governments may not reach the heights that we aspire to today, but compared to the standards of their day, they were indeed models of enlightenment.

One such society was that of the Ottoman Turks. Jews and Christians were classified as *dhimmi* or protected "People of the Book" who shared Abrahamic monotheism with Islam. Through the *millet* system members of the religious minorities were restricted in many aspects of government and a few other areas of life, but they were free to practice their own faith and, within limits, administered their own communities.

Convivencia in Spain existed a half millennium before that of the Ottoman Turks. The religious tolerance of the time allowed a flowering of philosophy, theology, science and culture almost unknown at the time, indeed a Golden Age.

This period of *convivencia* is the subject of María Rosa Menocal's book.

In the year 711, Moslem Berber tribesmen from North Africa crossed the Straits of Gibraltar into Spain. The Visigothic kingdoms of Spain had persecuted Jews since King Recaredo had become a Catholic almost two centuries earlier.

In 750, the moderate Umayyad dynasty in Damascus was overrun by the radical Abbasids. A massacre followed. Abd al-Rahman, the young sole survivor of the Umayyad monarchy set out with his followers, across the desert toward the *Maghreb*, the West. In five years, he arrived in Spain, *Al Andalus*. Soon the Caliphate of Cordoba is established and the Golden Age followed.

In *Ornament of the World*, María Rosa Menocal, takes the reader through this golden age.

Here the Jewish community rose from the ashes of an abysmal existence under the Visigoths to the point that the emir who proclaimed himself caliph in the tenth cen-

tury had a Jew as his foreign minister. Fruitful intermarriage among the various cultures and the quality of cultural relations with the *dhimmi* were vital aspects of Andalusian identity as it was cultivated over these first centuries.

She describes how the Arabs reintroduced Greek philosophy to a Europe which had lost it. How the Jews were instrumental in the dialogue between the Moslem and Christian worlds. How the magnificent Arabic literature and poetry influenced both Jews and Mozarabs (Arabic speaking Christians) into producing their own magnificent literature. How Maimonides and Averroes tried to reconcile religion and rationalism and influenced later movements towards reform in the Catholic Church and helped bring on the Renaissance and Age of Reason. How Jewish philosophy, theology and literature blossomed to produce the works of Judah Halevi, Hasdai ibn Shaprut, Samuel the Nagid, Isaac Abravanel and Nachmanides.

Monocal then shows how a golden age can decline into centuries of intolerance, persecution and finally Christian extremism culminating with the Edict of Expulsion and forced conversions under Ferdinand and Isabella.

In 1031, the Umayyad Caliphate (or the Caliphate of Córdoba) shattered into fifteen independent dynasties, or *Taifas*. The *convivencia* unraveled and the Christian kingdoms of the north found it easier to expand into Al Andalus.

In 1086, the fundamentalist Almoravids of North Africa crossed the Straits of Gibraltar to help the *Taifas* fight the Christians. By 1091, the Almoravids controlled almost all of Al Andalus. By 1150, the Almoravids were succeeded by the even more fundamentalist Almohad Dynasty which was dedicated to strict enforcement of Islamic rules and customs.

It was Maimonides' misfortune to have lived his early life in the Córdoba of Almohad fanaticism. His family was forced to adopt Islam. After moving to Fez in Morocco then to Cairo, Egypt he returned to the open practice of Judaism.

In time the Christian kingdoms advanced, pushing the Moslem states back to North Africa. In 1492, all of Iberia came under Christian rule. Soon all Jews and Moslems were forced to convert or leave. Apostates faced the Inquisition. But there was another Inquisition, an "Inquisition of the Books." It is described by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*. Writes Monocal:

It was not just the books, of course, but the knowledge of the languages of those books, Arabic and Hebrew that had disappeared in Cervantes' time – the very skills that had once made knowledge and the transmission of knowledge and learning possible ...

And so a Golden Age faded away.

Just weeks after Monocal finished writing this book the horrible events of September 11, 2001 took place. In her Postscript she describes how until then she, like almost all Americans, felt that the forces of "uncompromising religious intolerance ... played little part in our lives."

Certainly the Greatest Golden Age in Jewish history was in the United States in the Twentieth Century. It is still going on. Will it last or fade away, as did the Ornament of the World?

Reviewed by Arthur Benveniste



Introducing Albert Plotkin:

The Best Rabbi Notre Dame Ever Produced!

Allow me to introduce one of my very favorite people in all the world, Rabbi Albert L. Plotkin. The rabbi was one of the first people I met when I moved to the Greater Phoenix area in 1976. He'd been here since 1955. I was on a personal mission to save the world--or at least my small portion of it. The good rabbi had a significant head start on me. But everywhere I went, there he was. The Greater Phoenix Ecumenical Council, the YMCA, the Urban League, the NAACP, the Interfaith Council, National Council of Christians and Jews. It seemed every dinner I attended, Rabbi Plotkin was receiving an award, giving the benediction, making a speech. I was soon honored to call him my friend.

All these many years later, we connect again through the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. And, thanks to *HaLapid* editor Dolores (Dolly) Sloan, I had the remarkable opportunity to expand our friendship over lunch, notebook at hand, asking question after question of this much-loved, much-admired, gentle man.

"Where were you born, Rabbi?"

"South Bend, Indiana," he replied.

"South Bend, INDIANA?"

"Well, Aunt Lena was supposed to go to Chicago, but she got off the train in South Bend. She was a little lost." was his intriguing answer. We were off and running.

Aunt Lena, intrepid older sister of the good Rabbi's father, was the first of the Plotkin family to emigrate, escaping Eastern Europe's pogroms and daily persecution. Chicago's loss was South Bend's gain. This remarkable woman started a small grocery store, made enough money to send for her remaining siblings--who all joined her in the growing grocery business. Sam Plotkin of Pinsk, Poland, soon met and married lovely and talented Sophie, whose family immigrated from Odessa, Russia--who *did* make it to Chicago!

Along came Albert, then brother Sam, who died in 1996.

"Where'd you go to college, Rabbi?"

"Notre Dame," he responded impishly.

"NOTRE DAME! That's the most Roman Catholic College in the universe--the 'Fighting Irish' and all that!"

"It was the middle of the Depression and things were tough," he explained. "All my classmates went to Indiana University and joined Jewish fraternities. My father simple told me, 'We're broke. You're going to Notre Dame, you can live at home and work in the store. It was pretty strange. I had one other Jewish boy to pal around with. Our motto was, 'Hold High the Star of David, even as you bear the Cross.'"

I only wish you could have seen the mischievous twinkle in his eye as he said it.

But the strict and dogmatic Christian Brothers of Notre Dame had met their match: Albert Plotkin came complete with a win at the Major Bowles Amateur Hour, danced a mean tap routine, and had a fabulous tenor voice which soon landed him a slot in the Notre Dame

Glee Club. He shelved books for spending money, worked for Philosophy Professor Gerald Patrick Fitzgerald and helped out at the Plotkin family store. While burning the midnight oil studying, he found time to teach Sunday School and Hebrew and fill in when the Cantor at the small South Bend Synagogue was unavailable. His years volunteering made him sure of one thing: his life's calling was to be a Rabbi.

During a tour of the Notre Dame Glee Club to Cincinnati, while the other fellows went off to drink beer and chase girls, young Albert presented himself at the Hebrew Union College, asking to be admitted immediately following graduation.

"At first, they thought I was a Vatican spy," Plotkin says impishly. "But somehow, I got in, even though I flunked my first entrance exam. It was pretty rough: I was up against all the New York yeshiva



In earlier times, young Rabbi Albert and Sylvia celebrate Hanukkah with their two daughters

Rabbi Plotkin accepts award for Randy Baca at SCJS Portland Conference



boys who were MILES ahead of me in Hebrew, Talmud and Torah. Took me six years to get through!" But from Notre Dame, he received the top grades of his class and graduated *magna cum laude*.

Ordained in 1948, major life changes came quickly. In 1949, he met and married the love of his life, Sylvia, accepted a pulpit at a synagogue in Spokane,

Washington, started the city's May Festival (now an annual event), and began his tireless work promoting tolerance and understand, all the while combating religious and racial bigotry through the many organizations and groups still a major part of his life's work today. Six years and the JC's Man of the Year award later, a chance meeting with Rabbi Abraham Lincoln Krohn, then Senior Rabbi of Temple Beth Israel in Phoenix, Arizona, brought more change. Plotkin was offered the opportunity to become Rabbi Krohn's successor.

"I called Sylvia and told her to start packing--kids, dishes--everything. She said, 'but I just hung the new drapes!' so I told her she should take them down, pack them, and we'd rehang them in Phoenix."

The year was 1955. Phoenix was still a segregated community. The entire Jewish population numbered just a few hundred families. Now, Temple Beth Israel, in stunningly beautiful facilities which include the Sylvia Plotkin Judaica Museum, is the spiritual home of more than 1,600 families and is just one of many Jewish congregations in the area. Much has changed. The lovely and vivacious Sylvia died in 1996; their beautiful daughter, Deborah, succumbed to cancer nearly four years ago. The Plotkin's surviving daughter, Janis, is a talented filmmaker and the pride and joy of his life.

Honored by countless organizations, both religious and secular, Rabbi Plotkin was named Rabbi Emeritus of Beth Israel in 1991. At least once a week, he visits hospitalized veterans at the Carl T. Hayden Medical Center. Recently celebrating his second Bar Mitzvah (traditionally done 70 years after the first), Rabbi Plotkin is so in demand to preside at weddings, *bris* ceremonies, bat and bar mitzvahs and funerals, I think I need to get my reservation in very soon. I definitely want Rabbi to handle my funeral. But, I don't yet have a date.

This good man, friend of the late Golda Meir, Rabbi-in-Residence at All Saints Episcopal Church, Phoenix, since 1957, teacher of Hebrew Bible through Arizona State University's Jewish Studies Program, has just dedicated the first synagogue in Sedona, AZ, a project he (and Sylvia, of course) began working on in 1991 at the invitation of a small group of Jewish families. The new synagogue, named in honor of Albert and Sylvia Plotkin, was dedicated earlier this year and has a current membership of 300. He makes the trip from Phoenix twice each month to conduct services.

"Being in our new building in time for this year's High Holy Days was one of the most joyous moments in my life," Rabbi Plotkin said. "I didn't carry the Torah, the Torah carried me."

Plotkin first became aware of Sephardic Jews through his beloved wife, Sylvia, while they were still in Seattle. The interest, at first driven by Mrs. Plotkin, grew during their years in Arizona. Trips to Brazil and Spain, membership in the SCJS, study, meeting Anusim, presiding over emotional "Rites of Return," including one for our own former SCJS President Gloria Trujillo, have turned Rabbi Plotkin into an incredibly welcoming source of religious and emotional support to those exploring their long-hidden Sephardic ancestry.

Whether playing Beethoven on the piano, comforting the afflicted, afflicting the comfortable, singing the role of the Emperor in *Tou-randot*, accepting his Alma Mater, Notre Dame's Distinguished Alumni Award, or singing carols while serving ham to the homeless each Christmas Day at the St. Vincent de Paul Society's dining room, Rabbi Albert Plotkin transcends Judaism in a way that has warmed the hearts and souls of tens of thousands of people from all walks of life and all faith traditions.

Along the way, he's written numerous books, including *Sacred Works: The Practice of Charity in Early Church and Synagogue*; *The Ethics of World Religions*; *The Religion of Jeremiah and Plotkin: A Memoir*. He is currently compiling *My Favorite Sermons*.

I, obviously, could write a book of my own covering this fascinating man's fascinating life. But if you look in an English/Yiddish dictionary under the word *mensch*, you're likely to find the definition is simply Rabbi Albert L. Plotkin. Before I get my funeral reservation locked down, I guess I'd better schedule my own Rite of Return. I certainly don't want anyone else to welcome me home. For that, one needs a friend.

RANDY BACA, frequent
HaLapid writer, is former
SCJS VP/Membership



"Anxiety and wonderment"

Member Recalls Rabbi Plotkin and Her Rite of Return

by Gloria Trujillo

My story begins in late 1995 at our 5th annual conference in Tucson. We had had a wonderful turnout of SCJS members and the Jewish community. One attendee, who showed up for the last day, was named Sylvia Plotkin, wife of Rabbi Albert Plotkin. Although she had never been to any of our conferences, I was impressed with her genuine interest and concern for the emerging anusim. I made sure that I found time to speak with her. She made the room come alive with her presence, and it seemed that almost everyone knew her.

One of our presenters, Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, was organizing a tour to Brazil the following summer to meet Portuguese Anusim. Several members of SCJS went on the trip, including Rabbi Plotkin and our Past President Arthur Benveniste. We were later able to hear from some of the Brazil participants at the 1996 conference in Albuquerque.

At the close of the conference, the final panel convened at a restaurant to discuss the recent trip to Brazil and their meetings with the anusim. The after dinner presenters were Rabbi Plotkin, Arthur Benveniste, Andrea Nasrollah, Judith Fein and Marge Danies. Each spoke about impressions of the trip, and how profoundly it had affected them.

It seemed obvious that everyone was taken with Rabbi Plotkin's warmth and sincerity, including me. Rabbi Plotkin believed that the anusim could return to Judaism without converting, and I wondered if he would consider helping me with my return. Two other anusim at the conference were also thinking about a return, and luckily one of them lived in Phoenix. He said that he would speak to Rabbi back home. We soon learned that Rabbi Plotkin would be happy to help, and we three anusim met on a Friday late afternoon at the Phoenix airport.

We drove to Congregation Beth Israel to meet Rabbi Plotkin. He welcomed us and told us what to expect. I felt as though I had already returned and I was anxious and full of wonderment at what was to come. I was surprised when we walked up front and saw a small group of congregants sitting in the temple. I realized that they had come to witness our return and I was happy that they had taken the time to participate and celebrate our return. After the ceremony, we were presented with certificates signed by Rabbi Plotkin, dated 16 Tevet, 5757.

It had seemed like a long journey to get to this point, especially after a not-so-encouraging meeting with a well known Sephardic rabbi a few years earlier. The rabbi had told me that the anusim were welcome, but he was very adamant that they would have to go through a full conversion "just to be on the safe side." Many of my anusim friends were just as adamant that they were already Jews, and conversion was not an option.

Rabbi Plotkin is one of the few voices of hope and I and others have been most fortunate to know such a caring individual. The flame of our Jewish faith will never be extinguished for the anusim who have either chosen to return or convert, thanks to the good works and deeds of Rabbi Plotkin.

GLORIA TRUJILLO is the
reason SCJS conferences
come out so well



HALAPID

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FIRST CLASS

INSIDE YOUR WINTER 2005 ISSUE:

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Visit to Spain Becomes Pilgrimage
Anusim, Laotian Hmong People Share Hiddenness
Porto Synagogue Serves Religious, Secular Anusim

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The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies serves the following purposes: The fostering of research and networking of information and ideas into the contemporary development of Crypto Jews of Iberian origins. Membership is open to any one who is interested in this immensely fascinating and perplexing area. If you are interested in joining, the annual membership dues are as follows:

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