

HALAPID



SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES



30

YEARS

PART ONE

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SPRING / SUMMER • 2021 / 5781

An anniversary
marks the time
to take stock —
assess what is and
what has been —
in order to grow
and move
forward.

Join us as we
celebrate SCJS
with a look back
and form thoughts
for the future.

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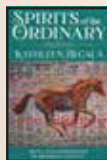
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Fostering research of
the worldwide history
of the crypto-Judaic
experience and
the emergence of
hidden descendants from
the Iberian Peninsula.

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HaLapid is usually mailed in the Spring and Fall of each year. Please send submissions to the editor-in-chief by March 1 and September 1.

FROM OUR PRESIDENT



CYNTHIA SETON-ROGERS

Dallas, TX
SCJS President

For me, the year 2021 will be one of reflection as I look back at what we have endured this past year. I know that most of you have been personally affected by the global pandemic from which we are slowly starting to emerge. Some have lost jobs, some lost love ones, and some tragically lost their lives to the virus. For those of you reading this, I hope you are able to not only remember what we lost but also reflect on what we might have gained. I know I will never forget how much I have come to appreciate the little things I had previously taken for granted.

This issue of *HaLapid* is also about reflection and is a magnificent tribute to the beginnings of SCJS three decades ago and to what we have become and accomplished together so many years later. Today we proudly continue the legacy that some of the pioneers in the field of crypto-Judaic studies have dedicated their lives to furthering. Our annual conference, to be held virtually on October 3-4, 2021, will include the Stanley M. Hordes Distinguished Scholar Lecture and a special panel in memory of David Gitlitz. I look forward to sharing those and other details with you, but rest assured, this conference will be one you do not want to miss!

Be safe, stay healthy, and be kind to one another.

CM Seton-Rogers
Cynthia M. Seton-Rogers



*With warmest thanks for
their generous gift*

DR. LARRY AND MRS. KATHY KANTER
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DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT



Long-range plans require
everyone's help.

Join us as a
development partner.

Contact Merrill Shapiro
ygarsaduta@gmail.com

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, an international academic and secular association, fosters research, networking of people and ideas, and the dissemination of information regarding the historical and contemporary developments involving crypto-Jews of Iberian origins and other hidden Jewish communities around the world. Membership dues fund the programs and publications of this non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, open to any and all individuals interested in learning more about this cultural phenomenon.



A unique community celebrates 30 years

We proudly bring you this special edition of *HaLapid* highlighting the evolution of SCIS from our inception in 1991 to today. SCIS has consistently grown and matured into the unique community of members and friends we have now; a mix of academics, historians, genealogists, Iberian descendants, *anusim* and more. We all share a common appreciation for the rich story that unites Christians and Jews and a wide variety of people of color. From every corner of the globe, the descendants of Iberian Jews are coming forth to share their customs and traditions, histories and stories. It is an honor to present them in this format.



CORINNE J. BROWN
Englewood, CO
Editor in Chief

The events of 2020-2021 postponed many things. The SCIS annual meeting was canceled; the conference and other gatherings put on hold. The world had other plans for all of us. We hope this year will bring a better climate to resume annual events and yes, we will gather this autumn, if only on Zoom. (See page 23.)

In this issue we revisit the city of Recife, Brazil, mentioned in the last edition in the book review of *The Diary of Asser Lev*, and the miracle of Dutch Jews arriving in New Amsterdam from Brazil in 1624, literally by accident. We take a look at Italian Catholic mourning customs in Calabria, a direct giveaway to the region's Jewish past. Further, you will learn about one SCIS member's remarkable family heritage and the undeniable presence of Spanish Jews in the city of Cotija, Mexico.

Among several new book releases and great reviews, we have a compelling personal interview with Jane S. Gerber and her new masterpiece *Cities of Splendor*. We even have a story about a humble bean that came with the Spanish Colonial settlers and stayed, to be used in recipes for hundreds of years (recipe included).

Above all, with deep sorrow, we remember our beloved colleague Dr. David M. Gitlitz who succumbed to COVID-19 in December 2020. You will find a series of tributes by those who knew and loved him.

All of this and more as we take stock of our organization's history and our members' talents, resources and contributions over 30 remarkable years. Let *HaLapid* be your voice.

Wishing everyone a healthy (and more "normal") 2021!

Corinne Joy Brown
Editor



READERS' FEEDBACK

Appreciation and rededication

Iwant to tell you how beautiful and smart your latest issue of *HaLapid* is! Oh gosh, how far you have taken this journal during your tenure. I really don't exaggerate when I say this. From the intro of Donna Medina and the Majorca [Mallorca] piece, to the more personal perspective on Doña Gracia to crypto-Jews on the Jewish Learning Channel — I delighted in reading it from page to page.

Thank you, thank you, thank you! So important too, since we've all been feeling so isolated through this pandemic. It made me feel the excitement of learning and connecting with others that feel the same way about crypto-Jews.

As poetry editor, I would like to dedicate myself anew to finding poems

that represent the quality of what this journal has become. It's exciting!

Miriam Herrera, Edinburg, TX



A lovely holiday respite

Yesterday's mail brought the current issue of *HaLapid* and I sat up in bed last night reading it. I couldn't put it down! The articles are fascinating and the layout is so colorful that I just had to write and tell you how much I enjoyed reading it.

I know that your editing takes much time and effort, but I for one, thank you for it.

Wishing you a HAPPY CHANUKAH.

Stay well, stay safe,

Joan Wohl, Philadelphia, PA 🇺🇸





As I look way back to August 1991 to the first gathering of what would become the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, I am impressed with the growth and maturity of the organization over the past 30 years, and how it mirrors the sophistication of the field, in general. The group of 35 that assembled at the Fort Burgwin Research Center, south of Taos, New Mexico, was comprised of scholars, religious leaders, descendants of *conversos*, and interested laypeople, each one demonstrating a thirst to learn more about the phenomenon of crypto-Judaism. By the end of the three-day conference, a consensus emerged: there was a need for a vehicle not only for disseminating scholarship, but to provide a forum for descendants to share their common experiences and feelings as they emerged from the shadows. Hence the origins of SCJS.

Well here we are, 30 years later, with a strong membership of nearly 300, hosting a conference every year (pandemic permitting), publishing a professional journal — *The Journal of Spanish, Portuguese and Italian Crypto-Jews (JOSPIC-J)*, currently on hiatus, as well as a world-class magazine — *HaLapid*, which under the direction of Corinne Joy Brown, has evolved from a basic newsletter into an attractive forum for discussion of contemporary and historical issues relating to the field of crypto-Judaism.



STANLEY M. HORDES
 Albuquerque, NM
 SCJS Founder • Past President
 Senior Advisor

The tables of life have turned and several of the attendees of that first gathering 30 years ago are sadly no longer among us: co-founders Rabbi Joshua Stampfer and Rena Down, Professor Tomás Atencio, Dennis Duran, and Rabbi Isaac Celnik. Also gone but not forgotten: Randy Baca, Berta Cobos Muskie, Trudy Coca, Fay Forman Blake, Judy Frankel, David Gitlitz, Gerald Gonzalez, Bob Hattam, Frances Hernandez, Cary Herz, Richard Santos, and Diana Zertuche, all of whom made contributions to SCJS and the field of crypto-Judaic studies.

But these pioneers have been replaced by a corps of younger academics and descendants whose contributions to scholarship and service to the community will ensure that the mission of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies is fulfilled. 🔥

Dedicated to celebrating three decades of growth and sending our message to the world, it is with great pride and pleasure that we present this two-part special edition of *HaLapid*. In Part One, founding members, past presidents, supporters and more, highlight and trace the journey. Part Two of this 30th anniversary edition continues in the Fall/Winter 2021 issue.

SCJS Origins: 30 Years of the Hidden Jews of New Mexico!

NAN RUBIN • SCJS FOUNDING MEMBER

When "Search for the Buried Past: The Hidden Jews of New Mexico" first aired on National Public Radio in 1988, we had no idea it would become a national sensation. The radio program reached millions of people and set the stage for a whole new wave of interest in Jewish genealogy, which eventually helped create the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies and now supports a steady stream of conferences, books, films and other media devoted to reclaiming this lost identity.

Benjamin Shapiro and I actually began working on the program in 1986 when he was program director at KUNM in Albuquerque and I was in Denver getting KUVO on the air. Ben invited me down to Albuquerque to meet Dr. Stanley M. Hordes, New Mexico state historian, and hear about the possibility of secret Jews living in New Mexico since the Colonial period.

In religious school I had read about *marranos* (term now obsolete, crypto-Jews preferred) in our history class, Jews who were forced to convert during the Inquisition but tried to maintain Jewish practices in secret at great risk. In Denver, I had even heard rumored stories from friends about older relatives not eating pork, or lighting candles on Friday night but then shutting them away in a cupboard or basement. It was a real surprise to think that after 500 years there might be such secret Jews today.

In Albuquerque I met Stanley, Tomás Atencio and a handful of others at the university. The group was outlining a research project to establish if these were genuine descendants of *conversos* from Spain. It was mostly anecdotal, but Ben and I thought regardless of finding real evidence, this would make a great radio documentary.

Even with Stanley's help, it was difficult to find people willing to speak with us and be recorded for national broadcast. Eventually we had enough interviews to produce a half-hour program, but to protect them, we used no names to identify

the participants. Even so, the program shared many provocative stories and practices that could be shreds of a lost Jewish past.

By popular demand "Search for the Buried Past" aired twice on NPR in 1988 and we thought we were done. We were totally wrong! Instead, the program hit a chord with listeners and generated more mail than any other program aired on NPR at that time. Back at my office in Denver, mail was pouring in and my office phone was ringing off the hook with people asking for information about how to research their own secret Jewish family history. It was unbelievable!

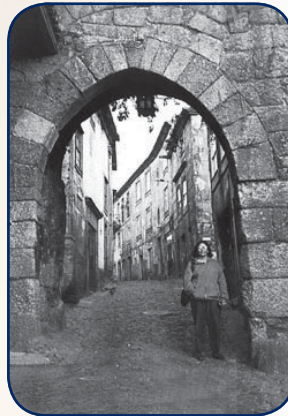


NAN RUBIN
Las Cruces, NM
Media Professional

Some historical sights around Belmonte, Portugal

Dennis Duran in Belmonte synagogue

Gloria Trujillo at Plaza Major

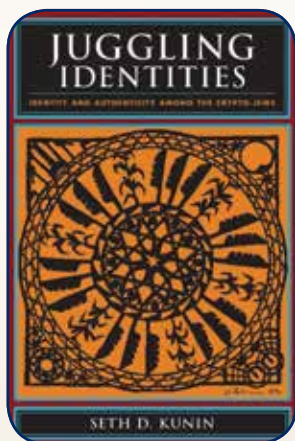


According to Stanley, after the radio program aired it was safe, even a little fashionable, to bring up a secret Jewish family history. "Rather than send people back into the shadows, [the radio program] created a climate of acceptability. If they are reading about it in the *Albuquerque Journal* or *New Mexico Magazine*, people are sitting back and saying, "Well, if it's being discussed here, then maybe we can talk about it now." And people who would not give me the time of day four years earlier, are now starting to feel like it's OK to discuss it." More than



discuss it, there were people now eager to exchange information and learn how to find their genealogy in state archives and church records.

It might have ended there, except the momentous anniversary year 1992 was fast approaching, a date that would mark 500 years since the 1492 Columbus expedition, but also 500 years since the Jews were expelled from Spain. By 1991, both fiction and nonfiction books were being published, like 1492: *The Life and Times of Juan Cabezón of Castile*, *Homero Aridjis*, a novel set in Spain of that year, and Jane S. Gerber's seminal work, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*. This history was of course, enormously meaningful to the Jewish community and it also generated intense interest in the story of the hidden Jews, who represented the idea of a living shard tied directly back to this tragic event.



From top,
Inquisition doorway

Seth Kunin's definitive
work, *Juggling Identities*


Inquisition insignia

It was in this environment, with Spain openly recognizing the far-reaching legacy of the Expulsion, and a small but growing group of individuals with ties to families in New Mexico actively searching for their family roots, that the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies was created in 1991. The organization provided Rabbi Stampfer and Dr. Hordes a place to base their scholarly studies and for Rena Down, it was an opportunity to share her own experiences through cultural expression.

But from the start, SCJS was created as a gathering of people exploring their families' travels through the Sephardic Diaspora and telling their personal stories of identity and faith. Dolly Sloan brought her poetry; Art Benveniste spoke about Greece; Bob Hattem shared his long ties to the Sephardic community in Los Angeles, and Gloria Trujillo, with her sister Mona Hernandez and cousin Ramon Salas talked about researching their extensive family tree from the early days of New Mexico. Expanding research is an important part of the mission, but the heart of SCJS has always been the excitement of a real space to share personal testimonies and emotional experiences with others as they discover their own past.

Ben Shapiro and I produced two more radio programs about the hidden Jews. "Rekindling the Spirit" was released in 1992 and included Dennis Duran attending the ceremony in Madrid where he was the sole New Mexican to witness the King's invitation to return. "He was just saying, come back home," Dennis related. "Eventually, I think a lot more people will go back because with the Sephardic Jews, with my family, it's always been taught that Spain is still home."

In 1994 we traveled with Gloria and Ramon to Spain and Portugal, to look for traces of their past and attend a special meeting of SCJS in Belmonte, Portugal, hosted by another community of hidden Jews that was mentioned prominently in Paul Cowan's 1982 memoir *An Orphan In History*. Broadcast in 1995, our final program, "Return to Iberia," was their moving story about finding proof of their Spanish ancestors and meeting the Jews of Belmonte who were returning to their faith.

These are powerful stories. Tomás Atencio put it this way, "There is a DNA molecule of the unconscious. In other words, there is a heritage that is in the collective memory that you're not going to wipe out. Once they learn about their heritage, many hidden Jews become almost obsessed with their family past, as though family history itself can be repressed and later, powerfully, unexpectedly re-emerge." The stories of the hidden Jews has always had deep resonance within the Jewish faith, and the existence of SCJS has helped to both explore and protect this heritage. 



The Early Years

MICHAEL F. ATLAS-ACUÑA • SCJS PRESIDENT, 1996

I am honored to write this article for the Spring 2021 *HaLapid* at Corinne Brown's request because I was president in the early years of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies; I was elected at the 1995 Tucson, Arizona conference. As I stated in my first President's Corner message in 1996, I had no intention of being involved at the leadership level because of my commitment to Temple Emanuel in Pueblo, Colorado, where I had just been elected president in 1994. Nevertheless, I agreed because of my belief in the SCJS mission, the wonderful people I was meeting, and the wealth of information I would gain.

The early years were filled with much excitement because we were just learning about crypto-Jews. Rabbi Joshua Stampfer, Dr. Stanley M. Hordes, and Gloria Trujillo had significant roles in starting the Society and implementing conferences. I attended my first conference in Buena Park, California in 1992, where I first met Gloria and her sister, Mona. The Society did not yet have a governing board and there was much talk about becoming a 501(c)(3) organization. In reviewing *HaLapid* issues from that time (Arthur Benveniste was editor), we were trying to figure out how a board would function, since everyone was spread around the United States and in some cases, internationally. Remember, this was before Zoom, which would have solved the problem had it been available.

While still planning a governing board, we proceeded with the next conference scheduled in Albuquerque, New Mexico on December 15-16, 1996. Like previous conferences, it was well attended — surpassing the Tucson event — a pattern that would continue. If my memory is correct, the Tucson conference was the first time we were blessed to hear Judy Frankel's music. I still listen to her CDs and am thankful that I had the opportunity to meet her. Her memory is a blessing to so many.

The early years saw their share of controversy; no organization is without it and SCJS was not spared. The big buzz phrases at the time were "cultural" and "Ashkenazi Imperialism." I do not think we ever resolved the culture issue, but I do recall the discontent of *anusim* members who voiced concern that there appeared to be an influx of Ashkenazi Jews taking over the Society and not always being sensitive to those who were revealing their Jewish roots. I know this sounds crazy, but I do recall several discussions on this topic and eventually coming to an understanding. In the end, we realized that the mission of

the organization had to be the guiding force and that we had strayed from it.

My presidency ended in December 1996. I then became involved with planning the next conference in Denver, Colorado held July 20-

22, 1997. The Denver conference was significant because it was in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the forced conversion of the Jews of Portugal. Gloria Trujillo was elected president at the Albuquerque conference and, together with Dr. David Kazzaz, worked on preparing the Denver event. (Dr. Kazzaz is a now-retired Denver psychiatrist who was forced out of Iraq in 1948 with the expulsion of Jews.) Dr. Seth Ward was also on the committee. As all previous conferences, the Denver event was well attended.

Temple Emanuel in Pueblo, Colorado hosted the annual conference at the nearby Holiday Inn, August 19-21, 2001, in honor of the congregation's 100th anniversary. The congregation had recently completed renovation of the synagogue, now on the National Registry for Historic Places. The Pueblo Jewish community was happy to host the conference and cherished the opportunity to show off its restored synagogue.

You can now see why I said that the early years were filled with excitement. In addition to what I have already covered, during this time the Abuyadaya of Uganda came to our attention and Kulanu, an organization supporting isolated, emerging and returning Jewish communities around the globe, was developing chapters across the country. Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn presented "The *Anusim* of Brazil" in Tucson, and we were always blessed with presentations by Seth Kunin, at that time of Nottingham, England. Another regular was Isabelle Medina Sandoval who inspired us with her beautiful poetry.

The 1998 conference was held in El Paso, Texas. I endeavored to recall events and all the people who had a significant impact on SCJS, but I know I forgot some and, for that, I apologize.



MICHAEL ATLAS ACUÑA
Pueblo, CO
Executive Director
Colorado Bluesky Ent., Inc.



One final trivia fact: In the beginning, SCJS membership rates were: Individual \$20, Family \$25, and Student \$10.

After all this activity, I dropped off the SCJS map and was not involved for many years — until the 2019 Denver conference. What a wonderful event! The attendance (275) was much higher than in the old days.

I am so happy to have been a part of those early years and to see how the Society has grown and is even more significant in its quest for the truth about *anusim* throughout the world.

For those who may be unaware, I converted to Judaism in 1986, after being enveloped by my wife's family. I did not realize that I had possible Jewish roots, but my wife, Helena inspired me to investigate my background. My brother, David Acuña who converted in 1990, and I started on this quest that eventually led us to SCJS. We have some evidence that leads us to believe we have a Jewish background; however the fact that we converted or returned is enough for us to live as Jews, and to still embrace our Mexican heritage. 🕯

A Descendant Looks Back

GLORIA TRUJILLO • SCJS FOUNDING MEMBER • PRESIDENT, 1997-2001

I remember my very first meeting with Dr. Stanley M. Hordes, which was quite by accident in 1987. My sister Mona Hernandez and I were on our first trip to New Mexico and we were very excited. We stopped at the old New Mexico Archives and Records Center in Santa Fe to do some research before returning home.

Mona was looking at the microfilm records and I went into the small library to ask the archivist if he could give me some research tips on my family. He asked what families I was researching and a man sitting at the other side of a large conference desk looked up from his yellow legal pad and

said that he was also researching one of my families. Long story short, it was Dr. Hordes and he asked if we could speak.

Of course I was interested in what he had to say. He quickly commented that my mother's line could be Jewish or crypto-Jewish. I wasn't surprised, as I had suspected that our family was a bit different from other families I knew.

In the next few years, Dr. Hordes started a group, the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, with Rabbi Joshua Stamper and Rena Down. The first conference in 1991 was held at Fort Burgwin, Taos, New Mexico. I agreed to organize the next conference in Buena Park, California. Since we were a very small organization at the time, I suggested sites to Dr. Hordes and Rabbi Stampfer, and they would contact the hotels.

By that time I had met two of my dearest friends: Dolly Sloan and Art Benveniste. Dolly was a great cheerleader and motivator, and Art took on the job of membership. I also met Isabelle Medina Sandoval, author and poetess from New Mexico, who provided me with many great insights.



GLORIA TRUJILLO
Whittier, CA
Converso Descendant

For the conference, Dr. Hordes helped by contacting prospective speakers, such as David Gitlitz, Seth Kunin, and Abraham Lavender. Dolly and Abe were instrumental in starting the *Journal of Spanish, Portuguese and Italian Crypto-Jews*.

Others who participated in the early years include, Bob Hattem, Kathleen Alcalá, Vanessa Paloma Elbaz, Judy Frankel, Seth Ward, Randy Baca, Dennis Duran, Miriam Herrera, Bill Munter, Bennett Greenspan, Nan Rubin, and Ben Shapiro. I know that there are many others whom I have failed to mention, and I apologize. My time with SCJS has been a labor of love and I have many wonderful memories of the people I met and places I visited. 🕯



Gloria Trujillo and her sister,
Mona Hernandez



Taking SCJS Abroad

ART BENVENISTE • SCJS PRESIDENT, 2002-2003

Bob Hattem was the first editor of *HaLapid*. I had known him for many years before he created the publication. One day in 1992, he said to me, "Judy Frankel says hello to you." Judy, who passed away a few years earlier, was a well-known singer of Sephardic songs and a member of SCJS. I asked Bob where he had seen her. He replied that the two of them had been at a conference of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. I had never heard of that society and I asked him what it was. He told me of the work of SCJS and that they had just completed a conference here in Los Angeles.

I was fascinated by his description and I cursed him for not letting me know about it beforehand. I would have loved to have attended the conference.

In 1993, the third meeting of SCJS was scheduled for San Antonio; I insisted that I attend that conference. Bob and I flew to Texas together. The conference experience fascinated me. There I met several of the early founders of SCJS including Stanley M. Hordes and I also learned about the small Portuguese town of Belmonte. It was announced that in 1994 the next meeting of the Society would be held in Belmonte. I was excited — I absolutely had to attend that meeting.

I had visited many parts of the globe including Africa, Asia and South America, but this experience in Portugal became one of the highlights of my traveling adventures. The small village of Belmonte is situated in the semi-isolated hills in northern

Portugal. In 1919, Samuel Schwartz, a Jewish mining engineer from eastern Europe, was assigned there by his company. Within the town, he somehow encountered a community of about 300 who attended the Catholic Church, but secretly observed a form of Judaism at home.



ART BENVENISTE
Venice, CA
Past Editor, *HaLapid*



Art Benveniste with Stan Hordes in Belmonte, Portugal, 1994,



Art's daughter and granddaughter at the Belmonte Synagogue, 2015




Art visits the new synagogue of the Belmonte Jews, 2015

When entering the church, they would whisper to themselves, "I come not to worship wood or stone, I come to worship only you, my God." Newborn babies were baptized in church, then a secret Jewish ritual was performed in the basements of their homes. Secret weddings were held at home and the couple slept together a few days before the official Catholic ceremony. About one week before Easter, they would secretly hold their *santa festa*, or Passover service

where they would eat unleavened bread and tell a very unique story of how the Jews were expelled from Egypt, and later by the Inquisition, and were rescued by Saint Esther.

The community continued to practice Judaism in secret until Rabbi Joshua Stampfer, a founder of SCJS who passed away in 2019, rediscovered them in 1987. He persuaded them to practice their Judaism openly; Portugal was now a democracy.

I have visited Belmonte two more times since that early trip. Today the Belmonte Jews have a beautiful synagogue and now after 500 years, are openly Jewish. 



Presidents OF SCJS



CINDY SETON-ROGERS
Dallas, TX
2020 - PRESENT



DEBBIE WOHL-ISARD
Phoenix, AZ
2017 - 2020



LEONARD STEIN
Jerusalem, Israel
2017 - 2018



JOE MALDONADO
Rome, NY
2016 - 2017



GENIE MILGROM
Miami, FL
2014 - 2016



ROGER MARTINEZ
Colorado Springs, CO
2013 - 2014



DOLLY SLOAN
Santa Monica, CA
2011 - 2013



KATHLEEN ALCALÁ
Bainbridge Island, WA
2009 - 2010



STANLEY M. HORDES
Albuquerque, NM
2008 - 2009



ABE LAVENDER
Miami, FL
2003 - 2007



ART BENVENISTE
Venice, CA
2002 - 2003



GLORIA TRUJILLO
Whittier, CA
1997 - 2001



MICHAEL ATLAS ACUNA
Pueblo, CO
1996 - 1997



RABBI JOSHUA STAMPFER
Portland, OR
1994 - 1995

Seeking a Permanent Home

DOLORES "DOLLY" SLOAN • SCJS PRESIDENT, 2011-2013

Just before January 2012, I signed my name as current SCJS president to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) founding the "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 disseminating information on the crypto-Judaic phenomenon and Sephardic Judaism."

The document formalized an agreement between the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS) and the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. Also signing were Roger L. Martinez, assistant professor, department of history, first vice president of SCJS at the time, and seven ranking UCCS administrators, headed by the provost. Dr. Martinez became director of the collaboration, establishing the university's Sephardic and Crypto-Judaic Studies Program to foster research, education and interaction among scholars and members of the community, some of whom shared *converso* heritage.

A program research fellow, I prepared curriculum for an online course about crypto-Judaism, its origins and practice, and developed plans for a companion course on Sephardic Judaism.

Early in the program, several scholars accepted invitations to address students and faculty in lectures on curriculum subjects. These were open and advertised to the public. SCJS contacts in Alamosa, Antonito, the San Luis Valley, and other southern Colorado communities

were helpful in initial outreach. Work began with a community college professor from that region serving as volunteer liaison to bring related programs to their towns and cities and to encourage enrollment in UCCS and the new program. This region was originally settled as the northern-most frontier of the New World Spanish Empire. Present residents include descendants of converted Sephardic Jews from the 16th to 18th centuries who were then seeking to escape the Inquisition, which was more active south of El Paso del Norte seeking out *conversos* secretly practicing the forbidden Judaism.

Alas, the program was paused when Dr. Martinez's work took him to Madrid for an extended period, and subsequently terminated when lack of a tenured director and a system-wide

UC funding crisis made vulnerable.


Despite its brevity of just under two years, the list of achievements inspires the search for a new SCJS affiliate.

The program generated interest in an aspect of regional history

related to the ancestry of many residents, and participants in the lecture series became aware of a little-known part of Colorado's past. Preparations were in place to introduce the two courses and discussions were underway with academic and community members in Alamosa for an off-campus local offering.

As SCJS completes three decades as the academic and cultural pioneer whose dissemination of research brought more international awareness to the crypto-Judaic phenomenon, its board of directors considers it necessary to restore this collaborative model in partnership with an institution harmonious with the mission, goals and objectives of the Society. This will allow a permanent home for SCJS papers and objects of material culture, as well as a resource for primary research materials in print and digital form. Periodically scheduling the Society's annual conferences at sites on or near our partner institution will be a financial and academic benefit to both groups.

The Society's archives are a vast trove of papers, documents, articles, books, and the variety of media and visual arts presented at our conferences or published in *HaLapid*, since the organization's founding 30 years ago. Housing these at an affiliate institution makes access more readily available to scholars and the larger community. A permanent address supports longevity for SCJS as the leading international resource for the variety of related academic studies accessible to descendants as well as the public. In addition to a four-year academic research university, the Society can also consider making its home at a museum or historical/cultural nonprofit organization whose goals and objectives harmonize with ours. Perhaps most important from a humanitarian perspective is the enrichment it will bring to the searches of regional individuals on Sephardic heritage.

We are currently exploring several of these potential venues for a permanent home and welcome your suggestions. Please email your ideas to dsloanauthor@gmail.com. 



DOLLY SLOAN
Santa Monica, CA
Retired Educator • Author



Help SCJS archives find a permanent home — email dsloanauthor@gmail.com



The Genetics - How It All Began

BENNETT GREENSPAN • FOUNDER, FAMILY TREE DNA

Upon the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, I read an article in *The New York Times* about people in New Mexico seeming to find connections to Judaism although they themselves had been Catholic for as long as they could remember. I was fascinated by the idea of these people wanting to have contact with Judaism because they felt or knew they were the descendants of *anusim*, those forced to convert from Judaism.

In 1993 I attended an SCJS event in San Antonio where author Trudy Alexis spoke about her then recent book, *The Mezuzah in the Madonna's Foot*. My interest was on fire. It was only logical that once I started FamilyTreeDNA, and after I understood the real potential that DNA offered, I would encourage

the use of genetic studies for the many Hispanics who wondered about being descendants of *anusim* themselves.

In 2002, shortly after starting the business, I tested the DNA of a woman who was from Spain and her female-inherited mtDNA was not found in any database, except in a private unpublished one of population geneticist, Dr. Doron Behar. The fact that the DNA matched no one other than nine Sephardic Jews, all living in Israel but originally from lands that



BENNETT GREENSPAN
Houston, TX
President Emeritus, FTDNA
www.GeneByGene.com
www.FamilyTreeDNA.com

welcomed Sephardic Jews fleeing Spain, showed the power that DNA studies offers a welcoming world.

I committed myself to do whatever I could to make sure that DNA testing would be known in the portion of the Hispanic community interested in asking the question: "Am I *b'nai anusim*?"



The people you meet at dinner...

SHELLY TALALAY DARDASHTI • SCJS SOCIAL MEDIA COORDINATOR



SHELLY TALALAY DARDASHTI
Albuquerque, NM
Genealogy Pro

In Summer 2000, Jewish genealogists from around the world gathered in Salt Lake City for the annual International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) conference.

One evening, as a group of old friends were off to a dinner at a nearby Italian restaurant, we were joined by someone we did not know. Genealogists are among the friendliest people on this planet (likely the universe) because we never know when a stranger might hold the missing link to our family history so, of course, we agreed to have him join us.

During dinner, our new friend said that he had a great idea and wanted to know what we thought about it. As he explained about consumer DNA testing and how it could link individuals and families, we were all firmly enthusiastic.

Our new friend was, of course, Bennett Greenspan, founder and CEO of the then brand-new FamilyTreeDNA (FTDNA) in Houston, Texas. The rest, as we say, is history.

FTDNA was the very first consumer DNA company – the true pioneer in what is now a massive industry with four main companies (FTDNA, Ancestry, MyHeritage, 23&Me) and a clearing house of sorts called GEDmatch (which does not test but does offer comparisons of tests done elsewhere). >>>





At first, FTDNA offered only male YDNA testing (direct paternal line, father-to-son), added female mtDNA (direct maternal line, mother-to-daughter), then autosomal atDNA (tests all lines), and continues adding advanced testing and new tools to analyze test results.

Today FTDNA is the only service to offer deep analysis for YDNA, two levels of resolution for mtDNA, and many advanced

tools and features. It is also the only service to host many geographical and surname projects which have produced fascinating results for genealogists across the spectrum.

Project administrators look forward to the annual conferences organized by the company, with sessions provided by experts in their fields, where new tools and features are announced, and where old friends can get together – some of us from that original dinner group in Salt Lake City. 🍷

Expanding Worldwide

GENIE MILGROM • SCJS PRESIDENT, 2014-2016

I am so thrilled to be able to say a few words for the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies on its 30th anniversary! SCJS will always be a home for me but was my everyday home during the time I was president for two-and-a-half terms.

It was a new world for me to step into the Southwest and learn directly from giants such as Dr. Stanley M. Hordes and Dr. David M. Gitlitz, as well as Dr. Roger Martinez, Rutgers scholar Dr. Samuel Temkin, and so many others. They may not have known it but all of them shaped my passion for being better than best at understanding, discussing and teaching about crypto-Jewry.

Because of my involvement with Dr. Martinez and Dr. Temkin, as well as my own *converso* lineage from the Iberian Peninsula, I was able to see beyond the shores of the United States and linked the Society on a more global scale by introducing the *conversos* of other

nations. I believe we are continuing toward the achievement of that goal.

Today SCJS is known around the world for its conferences, publications such as *HaLapid* and *La Granada*, and mostly for the amazing people on the board that directs it. I am not only proud but overjoyed to still be a member and advisor to this amazing Society. Here's to a lifetime of continued success! 🍷



GENIE MILGROM
Miami, FL
Author • Researcher

Congratulations!

Jewish Heritage Alliance takes this opportunity to congratulate the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies on this historic milestone.

Your contributions via your conferences and publications toward increasing the awareness of the story of Sefarad are immeasurable.

Here's to another 30 years.

MICHAEL STEINBERGER
Founder & CEO
www.JewishHeritageAlliance.com



Mazal Tov!

On behalf of the Anusim Center of El Paso, I extend a sincere *Mazal Tov* to SCJS on the occasion of its 30th anniversary.

The Society has been a source of education, information and inspiration to the Jewish and general communities throughout the world

For three decades, SCJS has been successfully teaching thousands of people about the history, meaning and contributions of crypto-Jews.

I congratulate you on this marvelous achievement.

RABBI STEPHEN LEON
Director and Founder
Anusim Center, El Paso, TX



Into the Future

DEBBIE WOHL-ISARD • SCJS PRESIDENT, 2017-2020

In 2017, I became president *pro tem*, then was elected to a full term in 2018-2020. At the time I felt like the link between the old and new generations of SCJS leadership. When I first joined as a member in 2008, I was soon mentored by Dolly Sloan to develop *La Granada* (*The Pomegranate*), the online electronic SCJS newsletter. It would be a quarterly, informal component of communication providing a congenial forum for exchange of ideas and information related to those interested in the crypto-Judaic experience since the time of the Inquisition and Expulsion through the current day. Articles would

be brief and encapsulated, and available online by request, with links to web resources to enhance the diversity of contributions. Bulletins about SCJS news and upcoming conferences would supplement our print mailings. Today *La Granada* enables us to reach over 2,000 people regardless of membership, conference attendance or geography.

At the start of my tenure as president in 2018, I felt the call to serve and shared my vision for what we could achieve if we moved forward with intention. Under my watch, we made strides in development and



DEBBIE WOHL-ISARD
Phoenix, AZ
Lecturer • Blogger

support by formalizing a generous, annually renewable grant thanks to the Robin and Bennett Greenspan Fund at the Houston Jewish Community Foundation, enabling us to cover administrative infrastructure. We hired a bookkeeper, a new webmaster, acquired new online tools and portals, and developed reimbursement for select board members' conference travel. I helped cultivate the relationship with Joe Lovett, whose involvement with SCJS served both the Society and the production of the film, *Children of the Inquisition*. I also implemented online voting for officers and online surveys, helping more people engage.

I am especially proud that SCJS stands true to its mission to research and educate, to bring people and ideas together for cross-cultural exchange. We are bound by mutual curiosity and respect for all forms of expression within the crypto-Judaic experience. Our conferences continue to be gatherings where people with more than one graduate degree mingle with individuals whose life experience is their degree. I proudly continue to serve on the board toward that goal. ■

The Pomegranate

When selecting the logo for *La Granada*, the new online SCJS newsletter, the process was one of pure imagery. Artistry reflected imagination. As art, it can portray whatever the viewer may find in it. Designers of the pomegranate logo selected this royally luscious fruit at first because of its historical connection between Mesopotamia and the Iberian Peninsula, and its later introduction to the Americas by Spanish settlers in the early 1500s. It is mentioned by Homer in Greek mythology and included in the Hebrew Bible within the poems of Solomon. It was cherished by Muhammad and included in Moorish architecture. It appears in Christian artworks and was invoked as a symbol by Queen Isabella of Spain.

The pomegranate is considered by many cultures and traditions to be a fertile symbol of life and renewal. How fitting it is then, to celebrate the pomegranate as a symbol of this society dedicated to researching, gathering and disseminating a broad spectrum of information about the lives of crypto-Jews throughout the past five centuries and today.

Like this many-seeded fruit, Jews of the Iberian Peninsula were scattered across the world. Hidden beneath a protective shell of secrecy, seeds of the banished and escaped multitudes took root, establishing early communities in the New World and in enclaves around the Old World in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire. Like the pomegranate tree, crypto-Jews have survived harsh conditions emerging from branches that appear lifeless during the deciduous winter season of the Diaspora.



La Granada
Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies



Telling the Story

JOSEPH LOVETT • LOVETT FILM PRODUCTIONS

Allow me to recognize the invaluable support I have received from the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies since almost the beginning of *Children of the Inquisition*. A filmmaker can feel more than a bit like Don Quixote when taking on a subject of any magnitude, let alone one of the scope of the complexities of the Sephardic Diaspora. Often I felt like I was sinking into a morass of confusion and contradictions and wondered, "Who really cares about this subject anyway?" The encouragement of people like Stanley M. Hordes, Genie Milgrom, Corinne Brown, and Debbie Wohl-Isard made all the difference. They kept me inspired, telling me that no one else had tried to tackle the entire Diaspora and make it accessible to the public, and insisting that I needed to continue.

Invitations back to conferences to show the progress we were making was a terrific reality check. Seeing how the new sequences affected an audience of interested and informed scholars gave me confidence that we were heading in the right direction. So thank you from all of us who have worked so hard and so long to make this film, and now this educational outreach, a reality.

Their story can now be told — and the news is good!

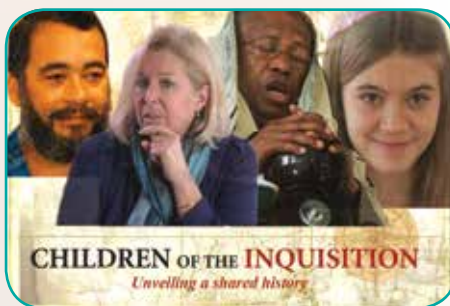
We premiered the film at the Seattle Jewish Film Festival to a sold-out audience in 2018. Professor Devin Naar, one of the main characters in the film, who founded the Sephardic studies department there, interviewed me for the audience after the showing. Since then we have appeared at many other festivals including Chicago Jewish, the Rhode Island Independent Film Festival where we won the Hearts and Minds award, the UK Jewish Film Festival, the Detroit and Flint, Michigan Jewish Film Festivals, and the Tel Aviv Jewish Film Festivals.

Internationally, in addition to the UK and Tel Aviv Jewish Film Festivals, Dutch television has broadcast the film twice and has contracted for the rights to broadcast it for three years. We have screened at Casa Sefarad in Madrid and have been the focus of a three-day seminar in Mexico City sponsored by *La Kehile*. In Melbourne, Australia the film was the focus of a *b'nai anusim* conference.

After a few months of community screenings in the US, we had to switch to online screenings with Zoom presentations which have been going incredibly well. What is so particularly



JOE LOVETT
New York, NY
Producer • Director



wonderful about online is that people can participate from all over the world both as registrants and as panelists. When an organization wants us to screen for their members, we open up a link (usually 48 hours ahead) from which registrants can stream the film at their leisure. Then we organize discussion panels on topics such as "Why Don't We Know This History?,"

"How Far Back Does Intergenerational Trauma Go?," "Feeling and Finding Identity," and more.

Panelists have included Jane S. Gerber, Rabbi Stephen Leon, Doreen Carvajal, Carlos DeMedeiros, Genie Milgrom, Anna Ruth Henriques, Ronnie Perelis, and our dear departed David Gitlitz — all of whom are in the film. Among others who have joined us are Keith Stokes from the Touro Rhode Island Synagogue, David Graizbord from the University of Arizona, psychoanalysts Anna Balas, PhD and Sam Gerson, PhD, and psychotherapists Ana Lehrhaupt and Anna Guerra, and genealogist Adam Brown.

(See page 42 for a partial list of our past presentations.) 🔥

It is a Privilege

Congratulations SCJS for the legacy of such great documentary and informative revelations about crypto-Judaic studies! As a new board member, I have the privilege to discover that legacy of 30 years by working with such a qualified organization. Thank you!

DONNA MEDINA
SCJS Treasurer, Greenwood Village, CO



A Journey from the Past to the Present

LORENZO TRUJILLO, EdD, JD • METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY

My journey started with an awakening and a search for a past that was hidden and in many ways, remains hidden. As a child growing up in Denver, Colorado in a Jewish neighborhood, I would play with my cousins and other children on the block. On Fridays, I would help Ms. Brammer turn off her lights; I did not know why she could not do it herself but the hard candy she gave me was well worth the effort.

I loved my grandmother's baked bread (challah) that she made on Friday mornings and enjoyed the smell of the special candles she would light on Friday night, and her prayers in Spanish that started with *Bendito sea Dios, Rey de todo el universo, quien nos ha santificado con tus mandamientos y nos mandas a encender las velas [del Shabbat]*. I do not recall her saying *del Shabbat* but maybe that is because I did not understand. In the evenings, she always recited prayers she had memorized and others she would read. I still have the candle holders she used and gave to me.



Above, The silver pin on the violin bow with a unique engraving symbolic of the rod of Aaron.



Right, top, My mother's treasured candle holders.



Bottom, The crucifix with a mezuzah hidden within..

When I traveled to our family land-grant in Arroyo Seco, New Mexico to visit our cousins, the women and men often prayed in special ways and in Spanish, which I did not fully understand.

I played with my cousins and basically, we didn't pay much attention. There remain many pieces of my family's past that exist only behind locked doors. As the elders pass on, with them go the deeper knowledge and understanding of our people. And as my cousins are now the elders, we only know of external and surface manifestations of our crypto-Jewish past. But this gives us more reason to look further and deeper with renewed thirst and passion.

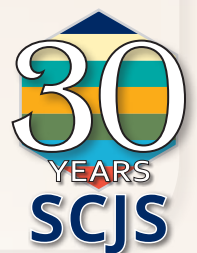
After my grandmothers passed, these special times fell to my subconscious, not to appear until my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. At the time of her diagnosis, studies about the BRCA1 gene and the relationship to the female Spanish Jewish settlers of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado were just beginning. As it turned out, she was one of the women who had inherited the BRCA1 gene. My mother eventually died from cancer and this gave rise to my questions about our family's Jewish background, especially since we were all very devout Roman Catholics.

I decided to search further. I clearly remember many cultural traditions and practices common in our family. The women would sweep debris to the center of the room and would pick it up rather than sweep it out the door. This was a rule in our family, especially in our New Mexico homes where my mother's family came from — a village near Taos. When we visited the gravesite of a deceased family member, it was my responsibility to place a rock on the headstone to let the relative know we were there. We still do this at the cemetery. For the longest time, I remember covering the mirrors and windows when a family member died.

Another revelation happened when my Taoseño cousin found a crucifix with a *mezuzah* — a hidden box on the back containing scripture from Deuteronomy written on a small parchment. >>>



LORENZO TRUJILLO
Denver, CO
Jurist • Educator • Musician





This led me to get some confirmation from a scientific perspective. I tested my DNA and this gave me indicators of European Jewish, Spanish (48%) and Sardinian (2%) ancestry. My mother was a dedicated genealogist and she had traced our family back to Spain, a record of which she published while in her 70s. Then, with DNA,


a reputable genealogist prepared a detailed record for me back to 1525, through both my father's and mother's sides.

The most recent piece of the puzzle came to me when I was given an old wooden violin case with the violin and bow. The case, violin and bow were found in an adobe wall vault in one of our family homes when a wall was removed during a remodel. The case is from the mid-1800s, as is the violin. The bow was very unusual. The pin on the bow was silver and engraved in a unique way.

After much research and with the help of Corinne Brown and local rabbis, it is believed the designs are symbolic of the rod of Aaron of the tribe of Levi which put forth buds and produced blossoms (Numbers 17:8). This discovery made my journey even more interesting because my grandmother would tell us grandchildren that we were from the tribe of Levites. I never understood what she meant and now, I cannot ask her.

The Levites' principal roles in the Temple included singing Psalms during services and performing other duties. Levites also served as teachers and judges. It is interesting that my family still have the roles of the cantors, musicians, teachers and judges in the church and community. We are one of few families responsible for teaching the old traditions in the music and dances handed down to us for centuries.

In 2019 I received my official letter from the Jewish Federation of New Mexico and *Apostille* certifying my Sephardic Jewish heritage and as a descendant of those families who were unjustly expelled from Spain in 1492. Special gratitude goes to the Society of Crypto-Judaic Studies and their meaningful conferences and profound learning experiences. Through their opening doors for the *b'nai anusim*, along with the teachings from Rabbi Stephen Leon and others, some of my cousins have returned and others are in the process.

My journey continues to unfold in many ways. I appreciate the deeply meaningful work of Michael Steinberger, Jewish Heritage Alliance; Rabbi Peter Tarlow; Centro Sefarad NM; David Wohl, composer, "Kaddish for Columbus;" Carla Sciaky, musician and teacher; Ashley Perry, Reconnectar, Israel; and especially the leadership of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. For me, and many others, you are opening the closed doors of centuries. 

With One Voice

The officers, board of directors and the entire membership of the St. Augustine Jewish Historical Society rise with one voice to congratulate the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies on 30 years of excellence and on beginning a fourth decade!

We all take inspiration from your passion, your devotion and your hard work over the long haul. During these 30 years, SCJS has become the "go-to" source for teaching the world so much, for responding to the problems, topics and issues of this important field. You elevate all of us with your dedication. Thank you!



RABBI MERRILL SHAPIRO
St. Augustine, FL
SCJS Development
and Support
www.sajhs.com

**ST AUGUSTINE JEWISH
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

In the Beginning

One last story from Dr. Hordes

I attended the 1990 annual conference of the American Sephardi Federation in Chicago, along with Rabbi Joshua Stampfer and playwright Rena Down. One evening, the three of us decided to take in a (fairly dull) baseball game. We were talking about the state of the field of crypto-Judaic studies and Rabbi Stampfer suggested we form some sort of organization that would facilitate communication among those of us who were working on various projects from differing methodological and regional perspectives. "Great," I thought, "Yet another academic group. Just what we need." But the more we talked, the more appealing the idea became and we decided to hold a conference to see if there was enough enthusiasm to form such an organization. We set the place and time — Fort Burgwin Research Center, south of Taos, New Mexico, August 1991. I think you know the rest of the story.



Meanwhile... as SCJS Slowly Grew

BETH CHERNOFF • SCJS RECORDING SECRETARY

1990-2000

The 1990s are often remembered as a time of relative peace and prosperity, but were in fact a turning point. The end of the Cold War and fall of the Soviet Union were followed by the Gulf War, broadcast in real time, along with the police beating of Rodney King, triggering a need for change in government and policing. The internet brought information-sharing to the world. After the murder of gay college student Matthew Shepard, the long-awaited emergence of gay rights and gay marriage hit mainstream. Terror became the focal point in the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995 and in Colorado at Columbine High School, April 20, 1999. The growing power of the internet, a more powerful press, the birth of cable channels, the link of entertainment culture to politics, and advancements in DNA evidence all came together at the close of the '90s during the impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton. Major themes of the '90s – technology, science, the press, and pop culture – set the stage for the new millennium.

2001 - 2011

The 2000 census population rises 13.2% since 1990. George Bush is elected president and the events of September 11, 2001 (9/11) quickly unfold. The US enters Afghanistan and Iraq. President Bush wins a second term, the War on Terror continues, and seven former Soviet bloc nations join NATO. The US population reaches 300,000,000. Space shuttle Columbia explodes upon reentry, killing all on board, and Rover MER-B (Opportunity) confirms Mars was once covered in water. An earthquake in the Indian Ocean followed by a tsunami, kills 300,000 triggering a worldwide relief effort. Hurricane Katrina strikes the Gulf Coast and levees collapse causing 1,300 deaths. The H1N1 Swine Flu virus becomes a global pandemic, the first since the Hong Kong flu in the late 1960s. Barack Obama becomes the first African-American president; over a million supporters converge on the National Mall. Distressed Wall Street, banking and car industries receive a \$780 billion bailout, but joblessness climbs above 10%. Tea Party protests make headlines. Montgomery Ward succumbs to low-cost retail giants like Walmart. Retailers suffer from new internet platforms.

Tiger Woods becomes the first golfer to hold all four major golf titles simultaneously, and Michael Phelps surpasses Mark Spitz's swimming record, winning eight gold medals in Beijing.

2011-2021

The decade begins with a global financial crisis; widespread unrest included Occupy movements and the Arab Spring. Global competition between China and the US becomes a trade war. The European Union faces a migrant crisis and Brexit. WikiLeaks publishes classified information while Edward Snowden exposes government secrets. Hurricanes, ISIS, cyber-attacks, police brutality and accompanying riots, plus Ebola make news. Bin Laden is neutralized. An oil rig



BETH CHERNOFF
Philadelphia, PA
Retired Librarian



The theme of our times

explodes in the Gulf of Mexico with devastating environmental results. Russia annexes Crimea, the US and Cuba re-establish relations, and Pope Francis comes to America. Barack Obama wins a second term; Donald Trump survives two impeachments. Smart phones, wireless devices and cloud computing become the norm. Social media spawns the

#MeToo movement and "woke" culture. Cable providers compete with streaming services; digital music overtakes CDs. Facebook is accused of privacy breaches. NASA space shuttle program ends. A Cornell 3-D printer creates a living ear, and driverless cars appear. American Pharoah wins the Triple Crown and the Chicago Cubs win their first World Series since 1908. George Floyd's death inflames a national outcry, "Black Lives Matter."

2010-2020 will be remembered as a time when democracy and national identity were tested, when a viral pandemic soared out of control and an insurrection and cancel culture rocked America. The election of a new president, Joe Biden, reset the course toward the future. 🇺🇸





M. MIRIAM HERRERA
Edinburg, TX

Miriam Herrera graduated from University of Illinois-Chicago with an MA in creative writing and was awarded an Abraham Lincoln Graduate Fellowship. Her poetry has been published in many journals and her first collection of poetry, *Kaddish for Columbus*, was the inspiration for David Wohl's composition by the same name for the 2019 SCJS conference in Denver.

A member of numerous literary guilds and poetry societies, Miriam is a member of SCJS and serves as *HaLapid's* poetry editor.

Miriam's enigmatic ancestry compels her writing. As evidenced by her family's uniquely hybrid practices and traditions, it is likely they descend from *conversos* from the Texas Rio Grande Valley. She writes about the paradoxical nature of identity and the many-layered process needed to reconcile the self's splintered parts. Her personal concept: identity is fluid and changing. The immersion in one culture at a time in the very midst of its homeland is very important to the process. "My poetic topics are not just about race and culture, but ultimately about the oneness of all and how this unity crosses all boundaries of race, religion, culture, and gender identity."

Today Miriam teaches creative writing and literature at the University of Texas Pan American, Edinburg, Texas.

ONCE AGAIN

Mother would dust the velvet painting of Guadalupe
Hang it in the living room, place near the gate
a Virgin Mary statue
Ringed by ivy, arms outstretched in blessing—
A serpent humbled at her feet.

If Mother were alive, she'd bring the Virgin a rose
Each Sunday for neighbors to spot from their porches
Wrap the mezuzah in satin
Nail to the window a silver hand on ribbons.

She would call us by our Spanish names: Mario, Maria, Liz —
Hebrew names whispered after dark
When anti-Semites strike the elderly, gut cemeteries
and bomb synagogues
Nazis unmask in daylight, chant "Jews will not replace us."

A sea of black men choked underfoot rises
Immigrant babies cry in cages, forsaken for months—
perhaps forever.

While satirists compose memes of Jewish lasers
torching California forests,
I ride out the nightmares.
Existing in a sanctuary of brown skin and almond eyes
My Spanish name now an amulet against the yellow star.

I dress in black and tear my blouse
Seek comfort in the hope a Jewish soul never dies.

But the suffering of the children
The poets, artists, doctors and scientists
who should have been
The burden of the righteous
Those who cannot hide or refuse
Sit on my chest like the wheels of a freight train.

Yet my treachery weighs more and seems infinite—
In the 21st century of this America

I am a crypto-Jew again.



THE UNSEEN GHOSTS

They emptied their souls from Judaism
Wealth
Fame
Fortune
Was lost to the hunter
Taken from the hunted
To be seen no more
Only shadows of the past.
This time, they stole my people's soul to
slaughter
By renouncing who they were
Their name and lineage
For another.
It is a cry.
They took their identity
Their Jewish souls
My eyes cried for this death
The bloodshed
The shame
The Inquisition tools
They stole the hearts of my people.
So I uprooted their oppressors foundation
And sent them to a safe place.
Though
Many were lost at sea
And their lineage records
Were left wasted at the river.
I knew those who were mine
And their souls live with me!
Though the earth tried to steal them from me
It could not.
I remember their loss
With the mourners of Zion.
I remember for their sake
And I seal it.



DONNA MEDINA
Greenwood Village, CO

Though SCJS board member Donna Medina was born and raised in Denver, her ancestral Jewish heritage came down the Santa Fe Trail in the 1800s settling in Trinidad, Colorado for a while before moving to Denver. Two rabbis told her parents they thought the family was descendants of children of the Spanish Inquisition. That news started a long journey of personal discovery.

Donna has a BA in music education from Metropolitan State University Denver and graduate work in theory and composition and instrumental music from Denver University, University of Colorado, and the Mozarteum University, Salzburg, Austria. She served with the Colorado Music Educators Association and played in several theater orchestras. Her choir and dance troupes performed for national music conferences, Renaissance and Shakespeare festivals.

Donna is a Colorado Hebrew Chorale Planning committee board member; a friend of Temple Aaron, Trinidad, Colorado; a life-long member of the Colorado chapter of Hadassah; a supporter of the Israeli American Council; and a long-time supporter of the Jewish National Conference. She has also attended the North American Jewish Zamir choral festival and Cantors Assembly workshops.



RECIFE

BRAZIL

Exploring the Cradle of Jewish America

BY P.V. (MEYLEKH) VISWANATH

Not long ago my nephew was married in Brazil. Brazil! Not New York, New Jersey, Miami or Israel. Certainly an exotic location. I wanted to attend the wedding set in Rio de Janeiro. But if I was going to cross the equator, I could not overlook another important Brazilian Jewish tourist destination — the town of Recife in the northern state of Pernambuco, about 1,500 miles from Rio, not far from Sao Paulo — where the largest Jewish community resides.

I first went to Salvador, some 500 miles south of Recife, a city with its own rich history. An early morning flight took me from Salvador to Recife (“reef” in Portuguese) where I met tour guide Carlos Masur. While my primary objective was Recife’s Jewish history, Carlos showed me all sorts of other noteworthy aspects of the city — some Jewish, others not.

Although modern Recife is quite spread out, the center of the city — where its origins lie — is focused on three islands: Recife, Santo Antônio, and Boa Vista. These islands originally formed part of the mainland, but were separated by a man-made canal, extending the River Capibaribe to provide easier access for ships. Mile Zero, known as Praça do Marco Zero on the waterfront, and the viable center of the city, is on the island of Recife not far from the historic Kahal Zur synagogue. The area around the Marco Zero has varied and interesting architecture. Many waterfront structures look colonial, reminiscent of the Bund in Shanghai, with some art deco examples thrown in. However once one leaves the waterfront, the buildings look different.

Still colonial, old Recife is interspersed with new construction. The unexpected building style is due in part to a full reconstruction of the city at the beginning of the 20th century.

Across from Marco Zero is a long tongue of land fronting almost the entire length of Recife Island. A narrow road built over the reef is partly car-accessible, and partly by foot only. On the reef is an open-air modern art museum with some vaguely Micronesian-looking sculptures, the Parque das Esculturas Francisco Brennand.

Where this reef begins is a neighborhood called Brasília Teimosa (“obstinate, pig-headed, willful”). Originally settled by squatters in 1947, it was scheduled for destruction in the late 1950s. The inhabitants however, did not give in easily and at night, rebuilt what the government destroyed during the day, hence the name. It resembles a typical Brazilian *favela*, a closely built neighborhood. On the other side of Brasília Teimosa is a curious neighborhood called Pina, named after a Jew believed to be “tight-fisted.” He was Andre Gomes Pina, and the neighborhood was once also called *Ilha do Cheiro-Dinheiro* (“Money-Sniffer Island”).

Old Sephardic Recife

The Kahal Zur Israel synagogue is located — ironically — at *Rua do Bom Jesus*, 197 (“Street of the Good Jesus”)! It was called *Rua dos Judeus* (“Jewish Street”) but again, ironically, only after the Expulsion of the Jews., and when the synagogue functioned, it was called





MEYLEKH VISWANATH
New York, NY

Prof. PV (Meylekh) Viswanath is the graduate program chair for the Department of Finance and Economics at Pace University in New York City. His research spans the more traditional areas of corporate finance, investments, insurance, and law and economics, and also the treatment of economic issues in world religions, primarily Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Meylekh most recent interests includes microfinance and financial market development in emerging economies. He believes economics can be used to understand history and economists need to understand history in order to better comprehend their own discipline.

The Portuguese came to Recife as early as 1534 and some reports state that a large proportion of whites in Pernambuco in the 16th century were probably Judaizers, many of them farmers, managers of sugar mills and plantations, and owners of boarding houses. According to historian Judith Elkin, Inquisition records from 1618-1619 show that many Brazilian *conversos* were openly Judaizing and in touch with the Jews of Amsterdam.

A well-known Jewish woman was Branca Dias, married to Diego Fernandes. They had a plantation in Camaragibe. Branca ran a school for girls and ladies in Olinda in 1550. At the same time, she and her husband celebrated Jewish holidays in secret. Supposedly a secret messenger would walk through town in a special dress — a sign there would be a Jewish service at Camaragibe. The term *esnogavar*, celebrating Jewish services in secret, is how the population referred to these practices; they alternated between open Christian services and secret Jewish services in this *Terra dos Sinagogas* (Land of Synagogues), as the plantation was called.

Only in 1630 when the Dutch West India Company conquered Recife, Pernambuco,

and Olinda, did the opportunity arise for Jews to openly practice their religion. According to local historian Tanya Kaufman, between 1637 and 1644 Jews enjoyed complete religious freedom under the reign of the local Dutch administrator, Joao Mauricio de Nassau. Many Dutch Jews came with the Dutch conquerors and settled in these areas.

It seems that the Jews had been in Recife from the very beginning of Dutch rule, as they had already acquired land for a cemetery in 1630. As early as 1640, documentary evidence proves there was a large community of successful Jews owning sugar cane mills. The congregation of Zur Israel was founded in 1637. At first they were not allowed to worship publicly. Only in 1640 did they begin to build their own synagogue (*esnoga*), completed in 1641, which functioned until the Dutch expulsion. It was located on *Rua do Bom Jesus*, now a museum. Two religious schools, *Talmud Torah* and *Ets Hayim*, were attached to the building. The first rabbi was the well-known Rabbi Isaac Aboab, a New Christian born in Amsterdam and brought by the community at a salary of 1,600 florins. In addition to Rabbi Aboab, the first religious functionaries of the synagogue were the

Boeckestraet or Goat Street. The roots of this community go back to the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal.

In contrast to the Expulsion from Spain, the king of Portugal forcibly converted all the Jews in his kingdom in 1497. This meant many faithful Jews were unable to leave and practice their religion outside the Iberian Peninsula. Resulting suspicions about these New Christians made life difficult for them. Therefore when the New World was discovered and Portugal began colonizing Brazil, many Jews took the opportunity to emigrate, hoping to continue practicing Judaism in secret.



Rua do Bom Jesus ("Street of the Good Jesus") — also called Rua dos Judeus ("Jewish Street") but only after the expulsion of the Jews.

hazzan (cantor), Moses Raphael Aguilar; the elementary school teacher, Samuel Frazão; the *shochet* (ritual slaughterer), Benjamin Levy; and the *shamash* (sexton), Isaac Nahamias.

Prior to the construction of the synagogue, the Dutch Jews worshiped in the house of David Sênior Coronel. Although the synagogue construction was initially undertaken without official permission, the importance of the Jews in the commodities trade led to tacit toleration of open worship. Another congregation, Magen Abraham, existed in Maurisstad on the neighboring island of Antonio Vaz. They did not have their own building and worshiped in the house of Joshua Jesurun de Haro. The two congregations merged in 1648. An interesting aspect of the Jewish presence is their attempt to adjust prayers to the southern hemisphere. In a question addressed to Rabbi Haim Shabetai of Salonica, the Jews of Recife wanted to know if they should pray for rain as Jews elsewhere in the world do, or if they should change the timing according to the rainy season in that part of the New World!

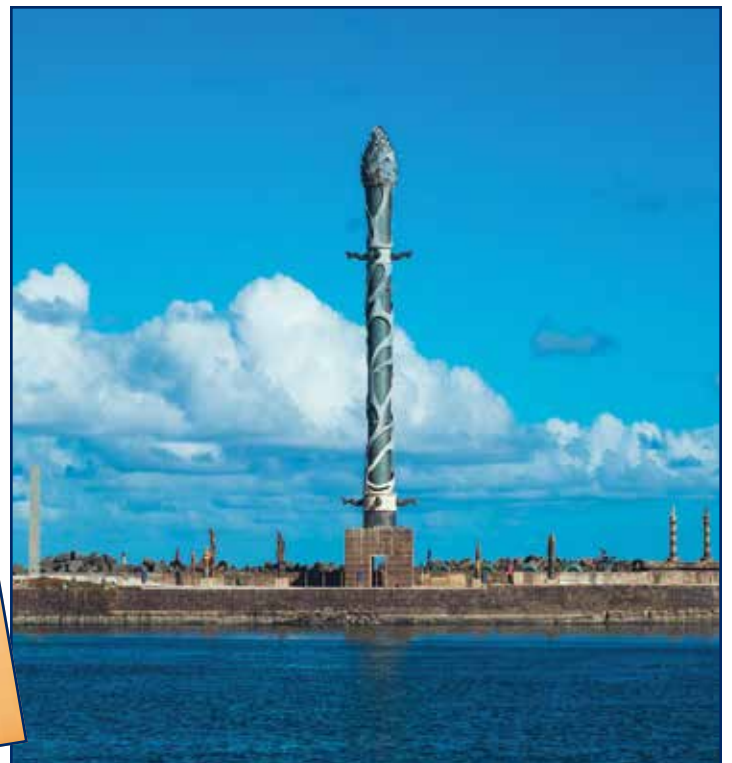
Some names of Jews recorded in the *Livro de Registros* (registry) of the Zur Israel synagogue were: Aboab, Sarfatty, Diaz, Pereira, Mendes, de Azevedo, Navarro, Cardozo, Machabeu, Da Fonseca, Nunes, Nahmias, Cohen, Henriques, Baruh, da Costa, D'Oliveyra, Coronel, Barzilay, Levy, Castiel, Ferreira, Da Silva, Lopes, Burgos,

Da Gama, Coelho, Salom, Azuly, Rison, Alvares, De Moraes, Pinheiro, Bemvenist, de Torres, de Avila, and Preto.

In 1654, when the Portuguese expelled the Dutch, they also expelled most of the Jews. Some opted to stay but fled to the *Sertao* (backcountry) and lived as crypto-Jews. If the Inquisition discovered them, they would be sent to Lisbon and burned alive. The Zur Israel building was gifted to the leader of the rebellion against the Dutch. Later the *Rua dos Judeus* was renamed *Rua da Cruz* and then from 1879, *Rua do Bom Jesus*. The building existed for about two centuries until it was destroyed by fire and replaced by a new building, occupied by the Banco de Credito Real de Pernambuco.

Regarding the Jews who left, in Judith Elkin's words, "150 families returned to Amsterdam; others went elsewhere in the Caribbean; and 23 stragglers wound up in the port of New Amsterdam where Governor Peter Stuyvesant reluctantly admitted them on orders from his stockholders back home. The congregation they formed, appropriately named *Shearith Israel* (Remnant of Israel), was the first Jewish congregation on Manhattan Island.

"It was not until the second half of the 19th century when Jews from Europe and North Africa arrived and it was not until the 20th century that a recognizable community of Jews once again flourished in Recife. 🇮🇱



Praca do Marco Zero in Recife — Colonial mark in Brazil where the Portuguese first arrived.



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David Martin Gitlitz, PhD

HISTORIAN, AUTHOR AND LEADING LIGHT IN THE RESEARCH OF THE WORLDWIDE STUDY OF CRYPTO-JEWS

The board of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies acknowledges with deep regret the passing of our dear friend, respected and esteemed academic, multi-accomplished colleague and SCIS senior advisor, Dr. David M. Gitlitz, historian, author and leading light in the research of the worldwide study of crypto-Jews. Following his biography, are remembrances by those who admired him.

Official Biography

When David Gitlitz first walked the Camino de Santiago, a network of pilgrimage trails in northwestern Spain dating to the Middle Ages, he was a young professor at Indiana University. The 500-mile trek became an enduring fascination for Gitlitz and his wife, the late Linda Kay Davidson, whom he met on that first trip in 1974.

They would return to the trail four times over the next 22 years and publish multiple books on the history and cultures of pilgrimages around the world, including one specifically focusing on the Camino. Both academics, the pair's first collaboration was a cookbook, *Drizzle of Honey: The Lives and Recipes of Spain's Secret Jews*, which won a National Jewish Book Award in 1999. Gitlitz had won the award three years earlier for his book *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews*.

Gitlitz, who died of complications from COVID-19 on December 30, 2020, in Oaxaca, Mexico where he lived in retirement, began his career as a professor of Spanish language and literature at Indiana University. Over the



DR. DAVID M. GITLITZ
Oaxaca, Mexico

next 45 years he held faculty appointments at the University of Nebraska, SUNY-Binghamton, and the University of Rhode Island where he also served as provost. His research interests grew to include Sephardic Jewish history and pilgrimage, and he served as a senior adviser to the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. He continued to publish new scholarly works even after his 2013 retirement to Oaxaca.

"His superb scholarship was always infused with a concern for humans, past and present," wrote Judith Cohen, an expert in Sephardic music and a lecturer at York University in Toronto, in a tribute.

"He was like a great walking, living library," Rebecca Romero, a family friend, wrote in an online eulogy. "He knew about everything! But he never lost his admiration about anything."

Gitlitz liked recording the migration patterns of local birds, his observations of the flora and fauna around him, and even had a blog detailing the couple's acculturation to life in Oaxaca.

He was well-known in the town of Santa Cruz Etla in the Oaxaca region, where he led youth trips to ecological reserves in the area and served as a tour guide for visiting friends and colleagues. Fluent in Spanish, he also participated enthusiastically in local events, like town assemblies and *Día de los Muertos* celebrations.

He is survived by his daughters, Abby and Deborah.

Judith Cohen Toronto, Canada

On December 30, I received an email from David's two daughters with the sad news that he had passed away that morning from COVID-19 complicated by liver transplant treatments and long-time lung issues. He died in Oaxaca, Mexico. He and his late wife and colleague Linda Davidson had moved to a small town in the region after retiring from their long teaching careers.

I first met them separately; Linda, for her medieval studies work, and David, for his work on the history of the crypto-Jews of Spain and Portugal. Shortly after the publication of their innovative book of recipes put together through their meticulous research on Inquisition documents, Tamar and I were staying with them in Rhode Island after giving a lecture-concert they had set up for us at



Rhode Island University, and we got to sample some of the recipes. David and Linda also published the now-definitive work on pilgrimages, and regularly led students and others on the Camino de Santiago. David demystified several historical myths, including that of the medieval key kept for centuries; he was brilliant, warm, funny, and interested in everything.



One of David's lesser known books is *The Lost Minyan*, a collection of short stories, historical fiction based on Inquisition records — his and Linda's superb scholarship was always infused with a concern for humans, past



Left, from top, David at home with wife Linda Davidson.

With Debbie Wohl-Isard and Gail Guterrez.

With Claudia Hagadus Long.

David traveled the Camino de Santiago several times, here with daughters, Deborah and Abby.

Above, from top, David speaks at SCJS Denver conference, 2019.

With Doreen Carvajal and Hilary Steinman.



and present. In Mexico they also became known for both their hospitality (I kept meaning to accept the invitation to visit) and knowledge of local birds.

Doreen Carvajal Paris, France

This has been a soul-crushing year. Another week. Another friend struck down by COVID-19. So let us celebrate the incredible life of David Gitlitz, a scholar from Rhode Island and Mexico who could stir up a medieval stew of *adafina*, translate ancient Spanish script, and recount in vivid detail what happened inside an Inquisition jail. Basically, he was a living library and storyteller, explaining history — from my 15th century ancestors in Segovia to pilgrimages to Graceland and his beloved Camino de Santiago de Compostela in Spain. What a Renaissance man! May his memory and legacy be a blessing to us all. When I finally make it to the Camino, I will toast his life.

Rachel Amado Bortnick Dallas, Texas

With his serious and uncompromising scholarship and engaging manner of sharing his discoveries of the crypto-Jewish experience, David Gitlitz has always been one of the most impressive lecturers at the SCIS conferences I attended. My admiration for him had already solidified when I read his amazing *Secrecy and Deceit; The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* and subsequent works. On a personal level, he was always amiable and friendly, yet dignified, and very realistic. At the last SCIS conference (2019) he sat next to me and soothed my distress with a comment that will always stay with me: "You cannot argue with emotions by pointing out facts," he said.

Stanley M. Hordes Albuquerque, New Mexico

Looking back, when the SCIS Board of Directors selected David Gitlitz as the first Distinguished Scholar Lecture for the 2019 SCIS Conference in Denver, I knew they chose very well. David and I go back decades and I would like to think that both of us have learned from each other. When we first met in Albuquerque one very rainy day (he, Gloria Trujillo and I were stuck in my car waiting for the rain to stop) we had an animated discussion about the extent of the survival of crypto-Jewish culture in New Mexico. As I recall, David was skeptical about some of my hypotheses. I would like to think that in the ensuing years,

we both influenced each other's work; he brought me back to earth, and I moderated his skepticism somewhat.

David's 1986 *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews*, and his very-recent *Living in Silverado: Secret Jews in the Silver Mining Towns of Colonial Mexico* served, and continues to serve, as a wonderful resource for me and for other scholars, providing encyclopedic context into which we plugged information from our own case studies.

A conversation between David and a student seeking help, 2020

STUDENT: "I am an undergrad at the University of Houston and a Mellon Research Fellow. My research question is about crypto-Jews in Colonial Mexico following the Expulsion from Spain in 1492. I am looking for Inquisition records from Mexico in the time frame of 1492-1810. Any digital archive material would obviously be great at this time. However, as the world reopens, I am wanting to travel there if you believe you have records that could benefit me. Thank you."

DAVID: "Here's what I can do, if you like. I've become pretty agile with 16th- and 17th-century paleography, though the 15th century stuff still makes me sweat. I did not have a mentor and I am largely self-taught, and remember with some delight the frustration of the struggle and the joys of finally figuring something out. I could have saved some months if I had had somebody by my side, masked and gloved, reading a few folios with me. I live in Mexico in a small village near Oaxaca and come up to Mexico City with some frequency. So if you ever come down for a long spell of working in the AGN archives and want a helpful pair of eyes in the next chair, let me know and we'll see if we can work something out.

"My other skill, it turns out, is helping early-career scholars figure out how to turn a vast, sprawling, fascinating project that has a zillion intriguing loose ends that just beg to be followed, into a focused effort that eventually gives birth to an artifact. If you ever need someone — maybe someone outside the judgmental processes of graduate school or a first job — to look at a work plan, or a draft, put me on your available-for-consultation list.

"And of course, if you ever find yourself in Oaxaca, next to my house in Santa Cruz Etla is a small *casita* with a view of Monte Albán that is always available for visiting scholars."

Literary Collection by David Gitlitz

Living in Silverado: Secret Jews in the Silver Mining Towns of Colonial Mexico, 2019

The Lost Minyan, 2010

Pilgrimage and the Jews, 2005, with Linda Kay Davidson

Secreto y engaño: la religión de los criptojudíos, 2003

Pilgrimage: From the Ganges to Graceland, An Encyclopedia, 2002, with Linda Kay Davidson

The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook, 2000, with Linda Kay Davidson

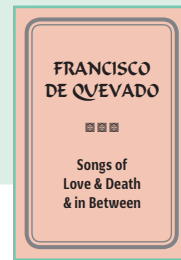
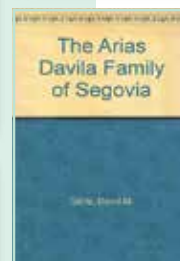
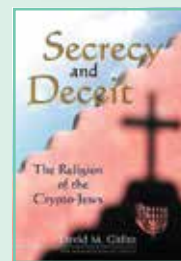
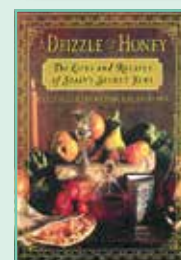
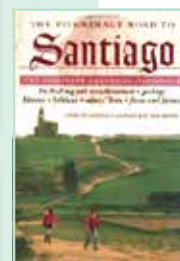
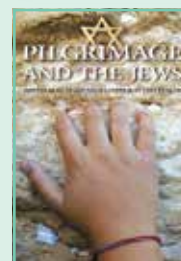
A Drizzle of Honey: The Life and Recipes of Spain's Secret Jews, 1999, with Linda Kay Davidson

The Best Boy in Spain / El Mejor Mozo de España, 1999, with Lope de Vega

Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews, 1996

Arias Davila Family of Segovia, 1996

Francisco de Quevado: Songs of Love & Death & in Between, 1980, (Design)



David was like
a great walking,
living library....

”



Isaac Ammon St. Louis, Missouri

When I wrote my undergraduate thesis in 2012 at Washington University in St. Louis on the Spanish Inquisition, I reached out to David. He graciously responded, suggesting possible ideas, and recommending sources. We engaged in correspondence and after writing it, my thesis was awarded highest honors by the department of history! I sent David a copy, and he responded immediately, providing genuine feedback on the paper and encouraging me to continue ahead with my career. I became a lawyer in 2015, and in 2019 I earned an ISD (PhD in Law) in comparative criminal procedure. In my doctoral dissertation, I incorporated the Inquisition trial I wrote about in college thanks to Professor Gitlitz's invaluable suggestions. I'm truly sorry to hear of his passing; it is a tremendous loss for everyone, particularly those engaged in the study of evoking the lost world of Sepharad and the crypto-Jews. I had hoped to meet him one day but he shall forever live on in my heart, and his immense readiness to assist a college

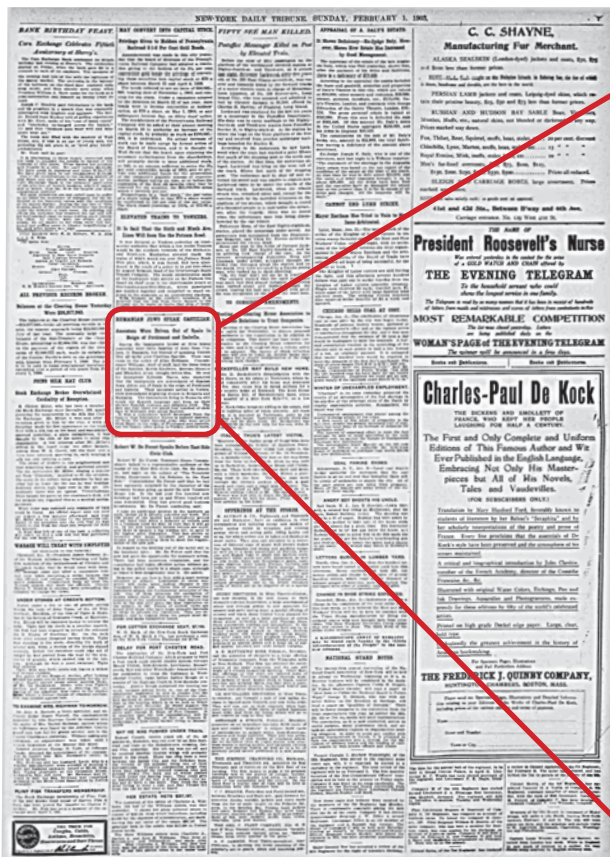
student shall always be an inspiration to me. A few days ago, I gave a Zoom lecture on Sephardic history where 60 people from the United States and Canada attended. I was thinking of David during that entire talk. May his memory truly be a blessing and may his soul repose on High. 🕯️

Deborah Gitlitz: The best way to remember my father

One way David's legacy will continue is through our support of several local projects close to his heart. If you would like to make a gift in his memory, he was committed to these three organizations: *Libros Para Pueblos*; *La Mesita* ecological reserve; and *Los Kiskadees*, the bird guide training program in which he was involved.

For more information and how to donate please visit www.facebook.com/debrarian/posts/10158880235433911.

PAST NEWS BLAST



*Many thanks to Merrill Shapiro
for this piece of history.*

NEW YORK DAILY TRIBUNE.
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1903

RUMANIAN JEWS SPEAK CASTILIAN

Ancestors Were Driven Out of Spain in
Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella

Among the immigrants landed at Ellis Island yesterday were three families of Jews from Crajova in Rumania, but instead of speaking Yiddish they all spoke pure Castilian Spanish. Their case came to the notice of Allan Robinson. Commissioner Williams, chief of staff, had the three heads of the families, Moritz Kaufman, Moremo Haravor and Minachen Alcas, brought before him. He sent for Interpreter Ephraim Navon, who explained that the immigrants are descendants of Spanish Jews driven out of Spain in the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. Their ancestors settled in Turkey, their descendants migrating thence to Bulgaria and Rumania. The descendants living in Rumania still speak the Spanish language and keep up their ancient Spanish customs and religious rites. The men say that there are about four hundred of their race in Rumania who speak Spanish.

It was a coincidence which developed from the inquiry that Interpreter Navon is himself descended from the same Spanish Jews who were exiled from Spain in the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, but his family, after going to Turkey, settled there. (Note — today the country is spelled Romania.)



Cotija and its Sephardic Origins

The hidden
inheritance
of a town
in western
Mexico

BY JOSÉ OVADIAH NAVARRO

A flawless SCIS conference was held in the emblematic city of Santa Fe, New Mexico in June 2016. There could not have been a more meaningful place to transport us to the Sephardic crypto-Jewish era and the arrival of Sephardim to this side of the Atlantic, especially those families who settled in the 16th century when it was still Mexican territory, then a part of the kingdom of New Spain.

This research pays special attention to the history of the Sephardim in the southwest United States and in northeast Mexico. Little is spoken about the arrival of important Sephardic groups that came from Portugal to Mexico City; even less is known about the history of an evident group of Spanish-Portuguese crypto-Jews who, in their escape from the claws of the Inquisition, settled in the 17th-18th centuries in a mountain valley far from Mexico City. That place represented shelter for those who wanted to live their lives in peace.

They were unique inhabitants who settled in the lovely colonial town of Cotija de la Paz in the State of Michoacán in western Mexico.

At the SCIS conference, I had the opportunity to tell a story that, although familiar to some of the locals, seems little known elsewhere. I am passionate about this story because it is my own — that of my family and ancestors — and defined my legal background as Jewish, alongside my wife and children, before a rabbinic court. It started with my parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, etc. who were born in Cotija and descended from families of Sephardic origin who ran away from the Inquisitorial courts' intolerance against the Jewish people, converted followers of the Law of Moses, that prevailed in early Mexico. Conditions of the time were difficult for secret Jews of Portuguese ancestry.

My story is based on arduous research on the Sephardic origins of Cotija and my family, based on a common methodology used

Based on a presentation given at the 2016 SCJS Conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico





JOSÉ NAVARRO
Mexico City, Mexico

José Ovadiah Navarro is a direct descendant of the Sephardic families of Cotija. His family decided to return/convert to normative Judaism to claim the faith of their ancestors.

The Navarro family are active members of Beth Israel Community Center (Mexico City) where José is also executive vice president.

A researcher and columnist of western Sephardic history/heritage and crypto-Jews for eSefarad, Diariojudío, Enlacejudío and others, José's book, *Cotija Tierra Morenika*, gives testimony for future generations about the Sephardic and Jewish ancestry of many Cotija families.

A philanthropist, José helps Jewish foundations in Israel and Mexico.

in this type of research. It puts together pieces of a puzzle starting with the history of the Sephardim expelled from the Iberian Peninsula and continues with the arrival of most of them to Mexican territory, mainly to Mexico City, during the 16th and 17th centuries. It concludes with their migration through the mountainous areas where a legacy of traditions, beliefs and shared names are interwoven in Cotija. The lineage was confirmed through a complex DNA study which showed interesting findings that seem to relate the itinerant life of the Sephardim who moved between Mexico, Barbados, the Netherlands, England and Brazil, all territories where the Sephardic last name "Navarro" can be found, and which could explain the European or

Mediterranean appearance of groups of families that reside in Cotija, Michoacán, regular followers of endogamy.

The Portuguese Sephardim in the early modern age of Mexico

As the prominent Mexican historian Miguel León Portilla points out, by identifying the establishment of a thriving community of Jews with Portuguese ancestry over a long time in Mexico, the Portuguese had an important presence within the great multicultural and multilingual mosaic that has shaped Mexico from the early 1500s. He clarifies that such presence is not limited to the period when Spain and Portugal were linked, but from before. Following this period, several Portuguese peoples came to Mexico. Some joined the conquering Spanish army, others had different occupations and interests. Many settled in the main towns. Portilla highlights that among these people were several of converted Jewish ancestry who were crypto-Jews, as many men and women kept in secret their adherence to the Law of Moses.

It is well known that when the Portugal and Spanish Crowns were linked from 1580-1640, six decades of continuous immigration of Portuguese Sephardic Jews known as New Christians (due to forced conversions), came to Mexico. They created new settlements in Mexico City, and throughout the country.

British historian Jonathan Israel states that during these years, Portuguese crypto-Jews had already established a wide trade network in Europe, as well as the Spanish and Portuguese colonies and during the 17th century, strengthened a "blooming and important" sales force between Mexico City, Veracruz, Guadalajara, Michoacán, Puebla and Zacatecas by trading goods and merchandise from faraway places. According to Israel, the vast majority were from Lisbon, Seville (of Portuguese parents)

and Castelo Branco in Portugal. Nevertheless, Mexican Inquisition records from 1620-1650 show that several Portuguese Judaizers also lived in France and Italy (Livorno, Ferrara and Pisa).

Records from 1619 give an idea about the distribution and common occupations of the Portuguese community. Many were farmers, ranchers and soldiers. A large number resided in small towns and specialized in the transport and trade of merchandise via mule trains. An outstanding fact was that many were highly qualified artisans either in big cities or small towns, including painters, carpenters, shoemakers, and makers of leather goods.

Due to vicious persecution against Portuguese crypto-Jews by the Inquisition in Mexico from 1640-1659 resulting from the division of the kingdoms of Portugal and Spain, historian Alexandra Uchmany states that "an important part of the population of these new Christians were brutally slain and stripped of their belongings by the Inquisition. Many were exiled and others merged with the population."

Nevertheless, other sources found small family groups fled north or went into mountainous areas on the border of Jalisco and Michoacán where Cotija is located and where Sephardic Jews were able to live in relative calm without being disturbed.

Location, topography and history of Cotija

Adjacent to the border of Jalisco, in Michoacán, Cotija is six hours by car from Mexico City and three hours from Guadalajara. It is surrounded by lakes and mountains reaching 1,630 meters (5,348 feet). The region was a discreet and thriving shelter for Sephardim. Cotija might be the sole town in Mexico with a clear awareness of its Jewish Sephardic ancestry. Even the website of the municipal government highlights this: "Even though Cotija is an eminently Catholic town, the oral



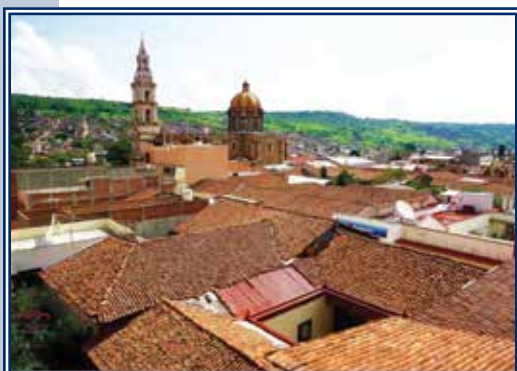
Map of Mexico



Cotija regional map



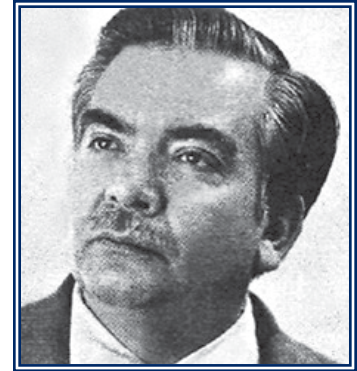
Cotija landscape



Cotija town view

tradition states that it was founded by an important number of Sephardim or converted Jews."

Most local historical sources pinpoint the arrival of Sephardic Jews to Cotija around the 17th and early 18th centuries, noting the arrival of 25 Sephardic Jewish families with easily recognizable, traditional Spanish-Portuguese surnames like Mendoza, González, Valencia, Navarro, Silva, De la Parra, Barajas, Farias, Espinosa, Méndez, Chávez, Maciel y Torres.



Luis González y González

Renowned local historian, Luis González y González, scholar of the micro-history and knowledgeable about the origins of the area's population, highlights the following: "The Jews settled in the region in the early 18th century because they were fleeing and wanted to settle in inconspicuous places. These towns were comprised of Jewish people. When I was a child, the majority had biblical names: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. They avoided mixing meat and milk and did not work on Saturdays because it was the Day of the Virgin. There are many Chávez in Cotija. The surnames in that area are of Jewish origin."

Local and family traditions

Among the most common Sephardic Jewish traditions detected in groups of families in Cotija is the use of biblical names Joseph, Benjamin, Abraham, Jacob, Esther, etc. Many families who do not work on Saturdays or do not eat meat with milk, do so without knowing exactly why. Another custom in some of the *rancherías* consists of taking a small piece of tortilla dough from the main dough ball, similar to the ancient tradition among Jews of setting apart a piece of masa (taking of challah). On some ranchos, a chicken's throat is cut and it is not prepared until the blood has completely drained, replicating the laws of *kashrut*.

Regarding my family traditions, I have childhood memories of my father who showed a particular and exaggerated interest in his personal hygiene on Saturdays and a reluctance to eat meat with milk, "It is like vomit," he said. At family or friends' events such as weddings or baptisms, he literally ran away from church, exiting to smoke a cigarette or eat some tacos. On the other hand, he expressed his apparent non-existent religiosity, and would say "you don't have to pray in many chapels, because there's only one big one," alluding to the idea that there was only one God. Another





The so-called "Spanish Ranchers"



de la Para Family

peculiar customs was that after Easter, my father would not smoke or shave for 40 days. That makes me wonder if he was trying to emulate *Sefirat Ha Omer*.

Endogamy

For generations, the Cotija families have avoided marriage with locals and until modern times, encouraged marriage between relatives, mainly between cousins or members of the same group. It is a rooted custom among other Sephardic communities, assuring the transmission of their genes for generations, demonstrated by the European or Mediterranean appearance of the families. White skin and light eyes are their main physical characteristics.



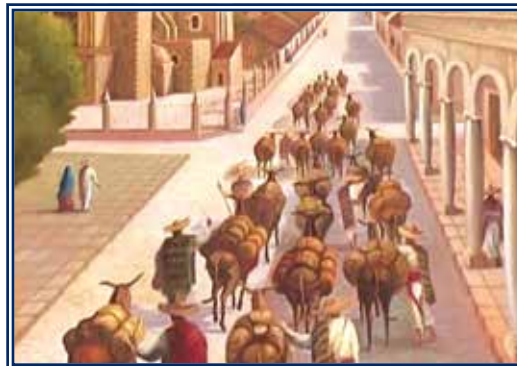
The Navarro Family in Cotijos

Language

As local bibliographic sources state, most of the families living on area ranches have a Sephardic origin and an entrepreneurial culture led by bushy-bearded patriarchs can be found. When I was a boy, I saw, coming down from the mountain, these intelligent and inquisitive men who were tall, white-skinned with light eyes, boasting long and thick beards which gave them the air of prophets, and they spoke Old Spanish with a strange accent.



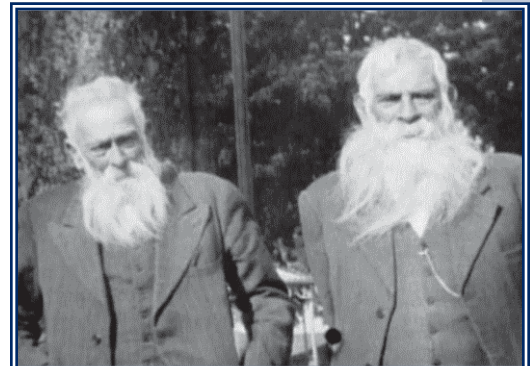
The "White Ranchers"



Cotija Museum of History

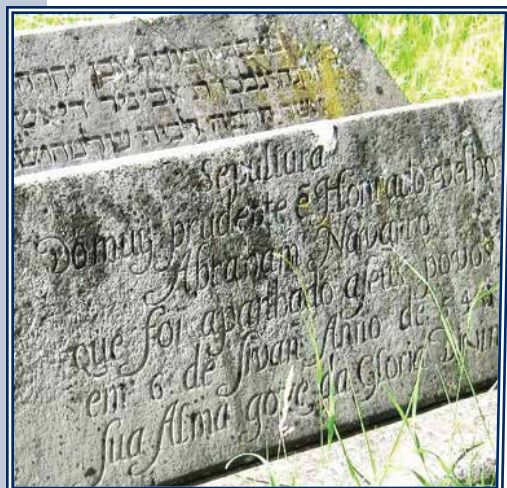


The "Aierrios" traded throughout the territory from northern Mexico to Guatemala with their pack of mules.

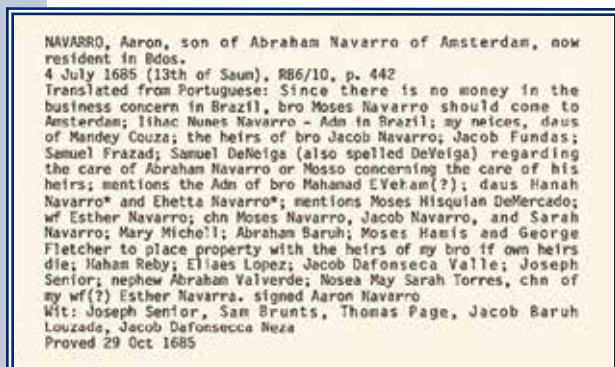


Patriarchs Pueblo en Vilo (L) and Luis González y González





Abraham Navarro's
Jewish gravestone in Amsterdam



Aaron Navarro's will in Barbados



Navarro DNA map

Surnames

Important Spanish-Portuguese surnames stand out in Cotija and in my own family. They are traditional names found in other places where Sephardic communities of the same origin settled. I emphasize my father's surname, Navarro, which can be abundantly found in Sephardic Jewish communities in Portugal long before Spain's Edict of Expulsion in 1492 and in Spanish Jewish communities in Turkey and Greece to this day.

Sephardic Genetics (DNA)

Among the most outstanding findings in my DNA test done by FamilyTree DNA, (experts in genetic research) is that my Y chromosome DNA: "R-M269/L23/S116" is characteristic of the Sephardic communities of Europe and North Africa in a proportion of approximately 10 percent. In Sephardic Jewish communities from northern Portugal, there is a higher proportion, nearer to 30 percent, with an additional 25 percent in Sephardic populations from northeast Brazil. My DNA tests revealed, through autosomal DNA, an interesting result of 20 matches with genetic cousins who are Sephardic and Ashkenazi, some located in territories where exiled Portuguese Sephardic communities settled, and where many Sephardi Jewish families had the surname Navarro. (See map.)

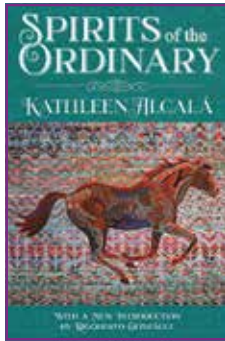
Conclusion

The town of Cotija and its Jewish-Sephardic origins is unique when referring to descendants of the Spanish and Portuguese exiles settled in American lands. An historical bibliography, surnames, traditions, and customs, together with genetic conservation through endogamy, and the recent custom of speaking old Spanish, are all factors that identify a legacy heritage in Cotija. It speaks through *vox populi*, a shared consciousness of a Jewish Iberian ancestry of several of its families, also manifest in the unique characteristics of its heirs who maintain a continuous sense of pride for being "Cotijense." 🔥

Spirits of the Ordinary — A Tale of Casas Grandes

By Kathleen Alcalá
with a foreword by
Raven Chronicles Press
Seattle, Washington, 2021.

The author of this work, Kathleen Alcalá, is a past president of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, the publisher of *HaLapid*. Alcalá has spoken about her novels at the Society's annual conferences, and I have recommended her writings to those interested in reading or studying fiction based on crypto-Jewish motifs. The book reviewed here was first published in 1997. In full disclosure, I know the author, had not read her book, and jumped at the opportunity to read the new edition. — Ed.



The action of the book takes place in northern Mexico in the mid-19th century, with part of the story bringing us north of the Rio Grande. The home of the protagonist, Zacarías, and many of the other main characters is Saltillo (about 60 miles west of Monterrey). The story brings us to Monclova, just over 100 miles north of Saltillo, and especially to the Casas Grandes region (over 600 miles northwest of Saltillo). The homes, streets, alleys, canyons, and lifestyles of northern Mexico are compellingly drawn, as are the leaders and communities of indigenous people. In her introduction, Alcalá notes that she received a few comments about such things as the names of towns and some of the geographical details, but she also notes that the novel reflects the stories told by family and residents of

northern Mexico, Texas and New Mexico. The fact that so many of the stories are set in real places gives energy to the fictional narrative. The book is enriched by poetic insertions, some quite substantial, as well as occasional quotes, paraphrases of references to the Bible, and to the Zohar, the central book of Kabbalah.

This novel is a riveting story, with interesting and diverse characters against a backdrop of evolving, dynamic roles of Jews, Catholics and indigenous people, and differing approaches to history, identity, and ultimate values. Alcalá has strong and complex female characters, a point raised in the foreword. There is Mariana, a wife and mother who does not speak due to an unspeakable horror, but communicates quite effectively. Notable is a former slave who, liberated by her master, becomes his wife, and becomes a wealthy and fiercely independent business owner upon his death. Alcalá brings us twins who are gender-ambiguous, and a female photographer who dresses as a male to set up a studio in a frontier town — although seems always to be self-conscious about doing so. Given changes in how society views these issues today, one wonders how, or whether, Alcalá might have reimagined them had she been writing an updated version rather than republishing the novel. Interactions with indigenous characters and communities play a central role in the story as well. Zacarías can communicate in several native languages; there is a tribal elder who protects him, and his value system is transformed by his experiences among the indigenous people in the Casas Grandes area.

Readers of *HaLapid* may be especially interested in the exploration of Jewish continuity and identity, a complex and multifaceted part of the story. The main character is aware of a Jewish heritage, most powerfully articulated by his father, the expert in Zohar and Kabbalah, whose library and gated courtyard provide rich symbolism. Zacarías seems alternately

to embrace, reject, ignore and reaffirm his Jewish tradition, with a striking and seemingly unlikely act asserting Jewish continuity towards the end of the book. His son Gabriel's story is briefly told in an epilogue: Gabriel becomes an Evangelical, and "catches the reader up" with the outcomes of some of the members of his family. (The adoption of Protestantism rather than Catholicism as a symbol of Jewish heritage is a motif frequently encountered in modern-day crypto-Jewish narratives.) This reviewer found that in a ways the brief epilogue provides a key to the entire story, suggesting the different ways the issues explored in the novel affected its characters and by extension, the real inhabitants of northern Mexico, Spanish heritage and the indigenous, whose stories and history inform this work.

Water and light are often deeply symbolic in traditional Jewish literature, as metaphors or similes for Torah or for the Divine Presence. Alcalá's story contains rich, suggestive imagery of the well-watered garden and fountain, a miraculous ability to find water, and the power of water itself. Water can save or overpower, protects or guide, support communities and send special people out into the world. The interplay of light is part of a process that transforms character and meaning; the gleaming spot of sunlight may be the guide to spiritual prosperity that gives meaning to life more powerful and rewarding than the brightest gold nugget.

Alcalá is an important writer of fiction representing stories from Mexico and what is today the Southwestern US. *Spirits of the Ordinary* paints a broad palette of the people who inhabit this region, how they relate to their past and their future, and what they — and we — value or should value. And it provides a good read!

— SETH WARD, PhD

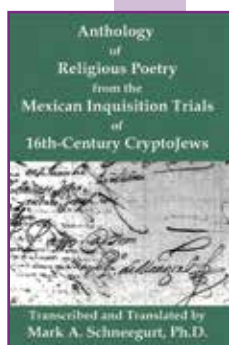


Anthology of Religious Poetry from the Mexican Inquisition Trials of 16th-Century Crypto-Jews

By Mark A Schneegurt
Amazon, 2020

Let anyone forget the sacrifice of the Portuguese Jewish martyrs who died by fire in the 16th and 17th century, author Mark Schneegurt reminds us of their lives and loss with unerring scholarship and inherent passion. This remarkable collection of eloquent poems (*canticos*), psalms, canticles, and biblical verse, transcribed first into Inquisition records and presented here in Spanish and English, reflects the voices of the famed Carvajal family and other notable Jews who were persecuted in Mexico City. (The Carvajal family emigrated to Mexico from Portugal nearly a century after the Jews were expelled. They were ultimately imprisoned by the Inquisition, tortured, and executed after celebrated trials in Mexico City near the close of the 16th century.)

Schneegurt opens with this homage: "Today is the 424th anniversary



of the *auto da fé* of December 8, 1596, when the central figures of this work were martyred and burned at the stake. These were Portuguese Jews that escaped to Mexico, living in hiding as Catholics."

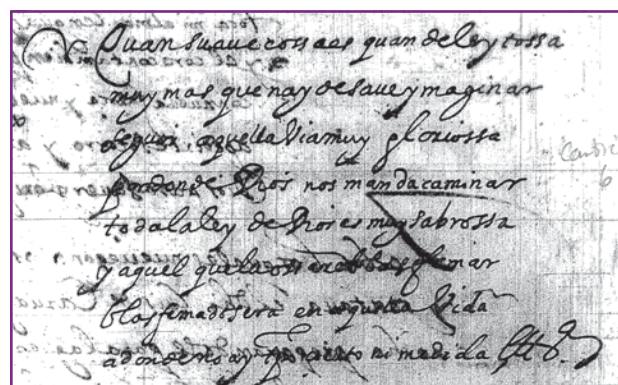
According to the author, handwritten transcripts of Mexican Inquisition trials of the late 16th century contain contemporaneous notes detailing the questioning and torture of crypto-Jewish family members and their associates. Individuals suspected of being Judaizers were arrested and imprisoned for months or years. Prisoners would be questioned by local Inquisitors sanctioned by the Church in a tribunal chamber, prison cell, or torture chamber. Inquisitors were meticulous in gathering information from the testimonies, and portions of testimony from the trials of other crypto-Jews were often copied and added as evidence against the accused.

Deprived of all traditional institutions of observance (synagogues, *minyans*, and written texts), crypto-Jews in Mexico lost the Hebrew language and the daily liturgy of known prayer. Instead, an oral tradition altered fragmented versions of a few traditional prayers in Spanish and phrases of transliterated Hebrew. crypto-Jews in Mexico relied on a body of religious

poetry and prayers created within their community connecting them to the Laws of Moses and helped them seek redemption from sin or escape from their embittered lives.

Throughout the collection of trial transcripts from Mexico City are crypto-Judaic religious poetry and prayers, originally intended to be recited in private. Prisoners were required to sing or recite these poems during confessions and these works were often used as evidence against the accused, often noted only as a single line in a transcript. Many poems are often attributed to Luis de Carvajal el Mozo. Most likely, many of the poems arise from communities in Portugal and were learned by the Carvajals from family and friends.

Lic. Manuel López de Morales is given credit for certain poems (an excerpt below), often with reference to his handwritten prayer book. His uncle is claimed to have burned in Lisbon while reciting religious poetry. Religious writings



Cantico 6 from Leonor de Carvajal

*Cuan suave cossa es deleytossa
muy mas que nayde save ymaginar
sequir aquella via muy gloriossa
por donde Dios nos manda caminar
toda la ley de Dios es muy sabrossa
y aquel que la ossare blasfemar
blasfemado sera en aquella vida
a donde no ay tiempo cierto ni medida...*

How pleasant it is, how delightful,
much more than anybody knows to imagine
to follow this very glorious path
whereby God commands us to walk;
the whole law of God is very pleasant,
and he who dares to blaspheme,
cursed will they be in that life
where there is no certain time nor measure...

Accents in Spanish do not appear until 1753. Learn more in 30th Anniversary—Part Two, HaLapid, Autumn 2021



were also associated with crypto-Jewish mystics in Mexico who attracted circles of devotees. Regardless of their authorship, these poems represent some of the earliest Jewish poetry written in a Western language. (A compelling example is found on the previous page.)

Author's note: From all of the nine *canticos*, only a couple of verses of *Cantico I* have been previously translated. Even in Spanish, the full *canticos* only seem to exist in the 1935 transcript of Luis by Obregon. Hamilton only included transcripts of the first five *canticos*. So any of those pieces, except the first two paragraphs of *Cantico I* are novel.

“

*Please find their
soulful writings
inspirational.
They glow with
a love... and
a faithfulness
that spans
generations.*

”

Schneegurt was able to gain access to rare original sources housed in special collections of academic libraries across America. This work could not have been done without microfilms of original trial transcripts shared by the Latin Americana Collection of the Bancroft Library at University of California, Berkeley and the Walter Douglas Collection at the Munger Research Center of The Huntington Library (Pasadena) among others. Numerous scholars quoted for contributions include Ron Perelis, Miriam Bodian, Martin Cohen, Seymour Leibman, Alfonso Toro, Mathew Warshawsky, and SCIS senior advisor, historian Stanley M. Hordes. The author has also included photographic reproductions

of paleographic transcripts provided by the Seymour B. Liebman Collection of The Latin American Library at Tulane University (New Orleans), among others.

For the benefit of scholars researching this subject, be aware the collection includes all of the poetry from the original Inquisition trial transcripts of Luis de Carvajal el Mozo, Leonor de Andrada, Isabel Rodríguez, Justa Mendez, Francesca de Carvajal, Manuel de Lucena, and Leonor de Cáceres. It also includes excerpts from the trials of Sebastián Rodríguez, Lic. Manuel López de Morales, Francisco López Blandón, and others.

Schneegurt adds this memorable thought in closing, “I pursued this work to preserve their memory, the story of their faith, and their prayers; a unique liturgy of Iberian crypto-Jews. Found in centuries-old original transcripts in rare library collections, their poems and prayers were at risk of being lost, physically and in our collective conscious. Please find their soulful writings inspirational. They glow with a love of the Lord and a faithfulness that spans generations. I finished this anthology for Hashem, for His martyrs, so that they are not lost or forgotten. Their hopes and prayers through years of torment are now saved in words on single-copy documents that have yet to be digitized. A little less at risk and worth the effort.”

— **CORINNE J. BROWN**

Mark A. Schneegurt is an author, educator, scientist and entrepreneur. His books range from scholarly works on science, religion and literature to popular books on The Beatles. He has authored over 80 publications and has made over 200 public presentations of his works. Recipient of awards for teaching and research, Dr. Schneegurt holds degrees from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Brown University, with professional appointments at Purdue University, University of Notre Dame, and Wichita State University.

Jacobo's Rainbow

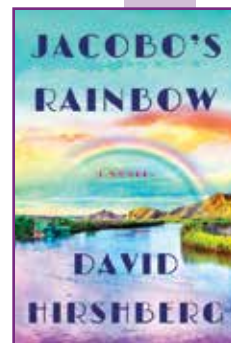
By David Hirshberg
Fig Tree Books, 2021

David Hirshberg propels the reader into the mix of the turbulent 1960s as if this novel was constructed from personal conversations between the characters and the author. They are all agents and witnesses of their times with intersecting ethnicities, religions, races, genders, languages, and ages. Characters in this captivating narrative hide, discover and reveal their true inner selves as they interact with events and each other.

This is a saga that drops bread crumbs for the discerning eye to follow, gratifies the reader who recognizes them, and revels in the “aha” moments when the pieces come together.

Hirshberg is immensely skilled at conjuring plausible events that serve the narrative. He captures the essence of anti-Semitism experienced by Jews of different hues and origins. The author represents with imagined accuracy the experiences of young men and women caught up in the Free Speech movement and the jungles of Vietnam.

— **DEBBIE WOHL-ISARD**
Editor, *La Granada*



INTERVIEW

David Hirshberg

Debbie Wohl-Isard: First, please tell me about your secret name. I find “crypto” meaning in just about everything, and a hidden name intrigues me. What is behind your *nom de plume*?

David Hirshberg: Well, I must tell you that it has no crypto-Judaic intent. It’s simply a coincidence. I was a successful entrepreneur and when I turned to a career in writing four years ago, I didn’t want people to Google my name and be confused. So I chose a name that honors my father-in-law and my maternal grandfather, both of whom had a huge impact on my life. It’s ironic that I chose a name that sounds more Jewish than my true name, as so many others have adopted names reversely to sound more Gentile, for self-preservation.

DWI: What was the historical evidence behind *Jacobo’s Rainbow*?

DH: There are no facts. Not a word of it is true. There are no composites. The places and events are all made up. I did no research for back-up. This was intentional. This is a story to enjoy, not to critique for accuracy.

DWI: So how did you write a book that feels so true? A universality is evoked by your characters, a commonality of experience and feeling. It’s hard to believe it’s not all true.

DH: I started by NOT doing what other authors do. I did not consult original documents or sources. I visited no libraries, nor did I watch any films or documentaries, or read any diaries or letters. I conducted no interviews. I didn’t want to be biased or think “I can’t use those words.” I didn’t want to be constrained by concern that anyone would think that I “cribbed” their words, or claim that events were not accurate as I describe them. A Vietnam veteran who read the manuscript

told me that he didn’t know that I was a medic during the war. I wasn’t! I was in college during the Free Speech movement, and perhaps I absorbed some of the atmosphere that existed in the country at that time, but that is all.

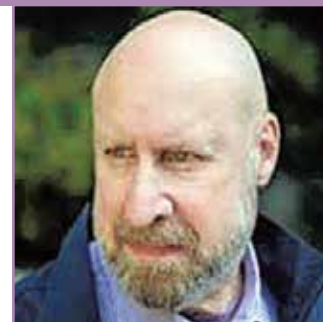
DWI: Why did you set the book in New Mexico as opposed to the Bay area of California, since you delved into the “Turbulent Sixties?” After all, that’s where the Free Speech Movement actually occurred.

“

Not a word of it is true... I did no research... This was intentional. This is a story to enjoy, not to critique for accuracy.

”

DH: The Free Speech Movement was the setting for the story, which raises questions very relevant today about the definition of free speech, our involvement in wars, and anti-Semitism on college campuses. If the book were to have been centered at UC Berkeley, however, it wouldn’t have allowed me to weave what I call ‘Jews of Different Hues’ into the American fabric. The history of Jews in New Mexico going back to the 16th and 17th centuries, along with the relocation of Jewish scientists and engineers to work in Los Alamos in the middle of the 20th century, opened up the opportunity for a story that involved both Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews to take center stage. And not to be left out, I added a character of Mizrahi origins. On top of



DAVID HIRSHBERG
Bedford, NY

that, a New Mexico locale enabled me to include an important character who is a Native American. None of that would have been possible if the book had a Bay Area focus.

DWI: What about the parts of the story that involve crypto-Judaic connections?

DH: Again, no facts. Except that it’s true that people left Turkey and other parts of the Ottoman Empire and came to Mexico and then to the US at some point in time. I have a good friend who is a Ladino speaker and I didn’t even ask him about words that I use. Any Ladino words come from a dictionary that was copyrighted in 2000.

DWI: But the inclusion of secret hallways and tunnels, hidden along the banks of a river, must be based upon facts drawn from crypto-Judaic sources?

DH: No! I figured that people at risk would seek and find escape routes. The idea of the tunnel came from an Orson Wells movie — *The Third Man* — as well as from my experience in Italy when touring a palazzo and the docent opened every door but one. She said that she didn’t want me to hit my head (I’m 6’4”). It turned out to be the entrance to a series of passages that likely could have been used by servants. Could they have been used for escape? Sure. Yes, I used a tunnel, but it was not related to any historical group of people; it did represent secret passageways used by persecuted people, who frequently planned escape routes “just in case.” >>>



DWI: What about names? I was shocked when the character Ben Veniste was introduced. At first I thought it was a typo, then wondered if it was one of the “crumbs” dropped throughout the book. I waited with anticipation for rewards for the crypto-savvy reader.

DH: Yes! The surname Benveniste is a prominent historical name from the Ottoman Empire. I realized early on that I could employ it as a literary “feint.” The college kids in the story don’t learn for a long time that the character’s name is Ricardo Benveniste. It’s a sucker-punch for them and a good laugh for the knowledgeable reader, one who enjoys literature about the crypto-Judaic experience. As you know, there are other clues in the book for which the reveal is eye-opening and I don’t want to take the fun away by even hinting at them here.

DWI: Indeed, other hidden clues throughout the book will pique the interest of readers who enjoy crypto-related novels. I invite readers to let me know what they find.

DH: There are not only crypto-Judaic-related hints. Let’s point to the tall “Holy Man” in Vietnam. Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Mizrahi readers may all wonder if it is a reference to another large creation whose image appears over centuries when fear abounds.

DWI: As the book reaches its conclusion, some loose ends get tied up in a neat resolution of the storyline. Others not so much. Isn’t that like life itself?

DH: Everyone will have an idea how the story ends, or how they’d like to see it end, and my intention was to leave some details “out there.” The book contains coincidences, as well as plausible similarities to events that could have happened to real people, had they existed. But this is a work of the imagination. As Jacobo says in the book, “My guess is that you’re going to believe this is fiction; that would be a delusion.” And yet, in a sense, it is all true.

Cities of Splendour in the Shaping of Sephardic History

By Jane S. Gerber, PhD
The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization in association with
Liverpool University Press, 2020

Imagine a chance to attend a series of lectures by the erudite and enthusiastic Professor Jane S. Gerber as she explores the unique relationship between the Sephardim and their countrymen across the ages. Think of sitting in a comfortable chair, a glass of wine or a cup of coffee at your elbow, as you are transported to a world of art, beauty, horror and destruction. This is not a lightweight tome, but it is written so that the historian, the researcher, and the novelist can all enjoy the work, and take knowledge from it at any level. That is the experience of reading *Cities of Splendour*.

“The ingredients of Sepharad were... multilingual and cosmopolitan. There was no single prototype of a Sephardi Jewish community. The challenge for the historian is to capture the many contexts in which the life of the Jews from Iberia unfolded without either romanticizing, essentializing or diluting their fragmented reality.”

The book covers six cities in chronological order of historical importance in the Sephardic journey. Cordoba leads off, in 950–1150; Toledo follows, 1150–1350; Safed, then Venice, next come Istanbul and Salonica, leading up to Amsterdam

in the semi-modern 1579–1700. In each chapter Dr. Gerber describes the intense interrelationship between Jews and Muslims, Jews and Christians, and Jews and the developing world.

A striking note of this narrative is the depth in which Jews interacted with the world around them. Beginning in 950, Jews of Cordoba were actively enmeshed in the government, in arts, in society. They rubbed shoulders with Muslims and Christians and enriched and were enriched by the interaction. It would be wrong to use the

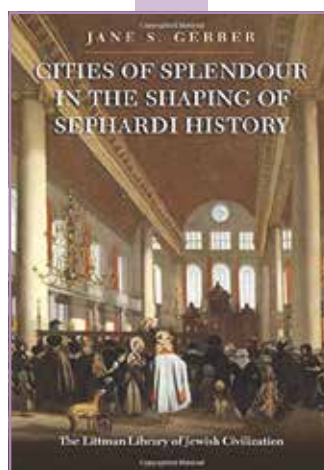
word tolerance in the modern sense, the author tells us, but the word interdependence might work.

“[A ruler] might turn to a Jewish subject to help him govern his unruly population, entrusting Jews with the finances or affairs of state. *Raisons d’état* in such instances overrode the strictures of Islamic law. Examples abound of the meteoric rise of Jews in the courts of unpopular or isolated rulers.” And like meteors, those rises were often brief and short-lived.

By the 1200s, “Mounting missionary zeal against Jews (and Muslims), accompanied by anti-Jewish legislation, spread from Rome.” Jews were forced to attend disputes where they were required to “defend” Judaism against legal and theological attacks. Toledo was not the Eden as it is sometimes portrayed.

But what of the *conversos*, the crypto-Jews, the *anusim*? The Expulsions in Spain (1492), and Portugal (1497) “were echoed in Sicily, southern Italy, and Sardinia, as the Jews were driven out of their homes to drift like flotsam from one Mediterranean port to the next, briefly finding refuge in one place only to face expulsion again...”

Jews began living as secret Jews in Iberia, the Low Countries, France and England. But there was no relief in sight. Messianic



prophecies and the calculation of dates when the Messiah would come proliferated, and pseudo-Messiahs appeared. Those living in secret derived hope from the messianic predictions, with their concrete proposals to bring an end to Jewish suffering. These pseudo-Messiahs are discussed in depth in the Sated chapter, enlightening readers to a different view of the crypto-Jew of the time.

The book moves from Sated 1500-1600 to Venice 1516-1648. Venice's ghetto allowed Jews to remain in the city, apart and part of the city, with specific charters that had to be renewed, like green cards now. They could be in Venice but were not allowed to "roam around at night," thus being confined behind their gates at curfew. Nevertheless, *conversos* came to the ghetto as refugees, sometimes from as far away as Antwerp. Conditions were severely overcrowded, and there were divisions between Tedeschi, Sephardim, and other *conversos*, each with their own synagogues, clothing, and housing groups.

The most interesting portion of the Venice chapter, in my opinion, is the discussion of the role of Doña Gracia, and her immersion in banking and trade. Schooled in these areas by fellow *conversos* in Portugal, she fled first to Antwerp and then to Venice. A wealth of fascinating detail in this chapter will well-inform those in SCJS who are interested in the life of the *conversos* beyond Iberia and Latin America.

The book touches on England and the Lupo and Bassano *converso* families. It moves then to Salonica, where the tensions between *conversos* and traditional Jews become evident. Much like in other histories that are well-known in SCJS, the *conversos*' plight was exacerbated by their spotty, mythologized knowledge of Judaism. Even today, *conversos* must often face the fact that much of what they grew up with as secret traditions bear only slight resemblance to accepted Jewish practice.

“

Gerber examines... not just the [myths] perpetrated by outsiders but the self-perception myths that informed the crypto-Jews...

”

Dr. Gerber considers Amsterdam the first of the “modern” societies in which Sephardim and *conversos* became integrated into the mainstream of the city. But she credits the Sephardic history of being part of their locale and culture for eight centuries for allowing them to be Jews at home and citizens on the street.

This book is a gem. It is an appetizer, the main course, and the dessert, depending on the reader's choice and level of knowledge. There are sufficient footnotes supporting the facts to allow the serious researcher to go beyond the text. Dr. Gerber delves into art, poetry and textiles that illustrate ways of life. She examines the myths, not just the ones perpetrated by outsiders but the self-perception myths that informed the crypto-Jews, especially once they reached Amsterdam. There is something delicious here for all our readers, and the book will leave you well informed and satisfied.

—CLAUDIA HAGADUS LONG

Notes: First, the book is expensive, as history texts often are. If you buy it on Kindle, it is about half the print price and the plates at the end are still beautiful if your device is relatively new. Second, Dr. Gerber uses the term *marranos* throughout the book in place of crypto-Jews or Secret Jews. See the interview below.

INTERVIEW



JANE S. GERBER, PhD
New York, NY

Dr. Jane S. Gerber

Claudia Hagadus Long: As the author of *Cities of Splendour in the Shaping of*

Sephardic History, you continue to add to your body of work regarding Sephardic Jews. What intrigues you about this people?

Dr. Jane S. Gerber: The Sephardim always related to their surroundings in an individualistic way. I was intrigued as a scholar-in-residence when I was called upon to lecture in Spanish cities about their now-vanished Jewish populations. They were trying to capitalize on the few remaining relics, to attract a well-educated, well-read Jewish traveler.

I didn't want to write a travelogue. There were myths to be examined, there was a history of assumed nobility — the Sephardim considered themselves to be the aristocrats of Judaism, the upper echelons of the Diaspora from Jerusalem.

CHL: I can hear your voice in the book. Who is the intended audience for *Cities of Splendour*?

JSG: I would say it's for the adult lay reader in the Jewish community. There are many who are intrigued and looking



to go deeper, or beyond the drama of the crypto-Jewish experience. It speaks to all who are hidden — the disappeared of Argentina, the gay and lesbian community — all seek a voice through that experience.

CHL: I must ask—you use the term *marrano* throughout. Today's reader will find that offensive. Why use it?

JSG: To me, the term is historic and heroic. It became the term used by those the *conversos* lived among, especially after the Inquisition ran out of Jews to persecute. Not having explicitly Jewish people to arrest, they went after those they thought were insufficiently Christian. The

people who tried to maintain their Judaism in the face of such stressors, in secret and with increasingly less access to tradition and Jewish law, were heroic. I use the term with pride.

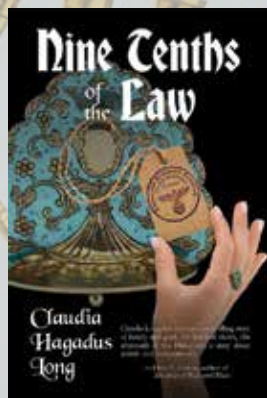
CHL: What's next? What's your next book going to be?

JSG: I'm fascinated by the Sephardic migration to Morocco and the interconnected lives of Jews and Muslims there. Do you know the work of De La Croix? He painted the Jews of Tangiers. I was especially intrigued by the painting that hangs in the Louvre, "A Jewish Wedding in Morocco"... oh! [laughs]

The next book is called *Jews and Muslims in Morocco—Their Intersecting Worlds*. It has contributions from many scholars. With the pandemic and all of us staying at home with nowhere to go, the book was compiled in one year. That's an amazingly short time for an academic book. It came together very quickly and should be out in a few months.

CHL: Thank you, Dr. Gerber, for the generous and enthusiastic gift of your time to talk about your work and your book — and the promise that there is more to come. 📖

Two sisters, their mother, and a Nazi thief...



In her fifth novel, a contemporary intrigue, Claudia Hagadus Long follows two sisters, their mother, a Nazi thief and the menorah stolen in WWII. This link that binds them uncovers secrets that might tear them apart.

Available however and wherever you buy books.

Life of 16th-Century Heiress, Philanthropist and Crypto-Jew Hits Italian Comics

The true story of Doña Gracia Nasi, whose courage and charity helped countless hidden Jews like herself during the Inquisition, is retold in 'The Wandering Jewess'

By Giovanni Vigna
The Times of Israel

The heroic life of Doña Gracia Nasi (1510–1569) has been turned into a “graphic history” by an Italian weekly. Entitled “The Wandering Jewess,” the four-part comic series explores how Nasi, even as she fled the Inquisition and fled across the Mediterranean, “financed the publication of the Ferrara Bible in Ladino, promoted the publication of texts for crypto-Jews and helped to reeducate Jews who had been forcibly converted to Christianity.” Gianluca Piredda, the series’ writer, views Nasi as a proto-modern example of female empowerment, “It’s precisely her ability to face adversity that fascinated me. Today we would say that she was a resilient woman, an example of feminism before its time, strong and courageous.”



Gracia Nasi in Antwerp in a scene from The Wandering Jewess, story by Gianluca Piredda and art by Leo Sgarbi. (Courtesy Piredda)



How the Crypto-Jews Made Their Way to JewishGen

BY GENIE MILGROM

A decade ago, I embarked on the ambitious journey to document my own crypto-Jewish lineage which had been locked inside my Roman Catholic family for over 520 years. I was working blindly, as I did not know anyone who had been able to accomplish this and there was nothing written about it anywhere.

All I knew was that I needed to find the primary sources for an unbroken maternal lineage going all the way back to a woman who was Jewish. So, how to begin? Like any genealogy project, I had to start at the end with myself and work backwards. This task would be a major challenge because my family was from Cuba where borders are closed, and from Spain before that, where the Inquisition had destroyed any evidence of Jewish life, including cemeteries, synagogues and all documentation. Somehow I was undaunted. Working back slowly, I was able to find all the birth, marriage and death certificates going back to 1545, and then it stopped. The Church records became scarce; I was able to see the names on my tree in some Inquisition files, but how to match everything up?

I began documenting the lineages spelled out in the Inquisition records and then uploading all those references to spreadsheets. I searched libraries and book repositories for references to the villages where my family had migrated as Jews pretending to be Catholics and I uploaded all that information to spreadsheets. I did this for hours that turned into years. I just pounded away, loading spreadsheets.

Finally, I was able to match my names and families making my way back to 1405 pre-Inquisition Spain and Portugal. I was able to prove that I descended from a long line of Jewish women who had been forced to convert to Catholicism, and I returned to the religion of my ancestors.

But the searching and uploading did not end there. My family in 1405 still had Catholic-Spanish names and I wanted more than anything to know the original Jewish



GENIE MILGROM
Miami, FL

family name before 1405. So back I went, researching and uploading to see what other dots I could connect.

At that juncture I had many spreadsheets from archives and internet sources, out-of-print books and dissertations. I created elaborate pivot tables with all the data and still no Jewish family name! I finally realized it was becoming a search with no end, so I let it rest, knowing that I would have to respect my grandmothers from over 500 years ago who had tried — and succeeded — to hide to protect themselves.

The challenge morphed into helping others find their own lineages and I started uploading even more information. Cemeteries, information from Amsterdam, wills from London, random notary records, and on and on so that perhaps the true Diaspora of the crypto-Jews could come to light. Yet I had no way to connect the spreadsheets.

I dreamed of someone typing a name into a program that would search across all the spreadsheets, and JewishGen, the most comprehensive online site exclusively for all types of Jewish genealogy, offered me that very solution. Hand-in-hand, I worked for months with JewishGen's executive director Avrami Groll, polishing and honing the fine details until finally, together we gave birth to the Genie Milgrom Crypto-Jewish Collection at JewishGen, www.jewishgen.org/databases/cryptojews.

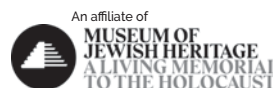
Now anyone can insert a last name and follow the locations where that name was used, with many references to the previous Jewish names and the new Catholic aliases.

So far, over 60 sources have been uploaded and more are on the way. The website, www.JewishGen.org, also contains guidelines for how to start working the genealogy and what tables to use when researching medieval documents.

A dream came true, as crypto-Jewish genealogy made the big leagues! 🕯️



www.jewishgen.org/databases/cryptojews



ON THE WEB



In May and June the Santa Fe Distinguished Lecture Series/Jewish Learning Channel will host two Zoom webinars that are of special interest.

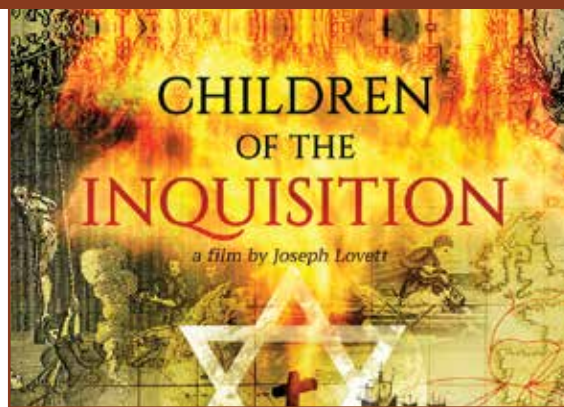
May 26, 4 pm MST (6 pm EST) — Award-winning author Sarah Abrevaya Stein of UCLA will talk about her book *Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey Through the Twentieth Century*. Through letters, she reconstructs an intimate view of the lives of these Sephardic families. The book is compelling to read, and she will be in conversation with Vanessa Paloma Elbaz of the University of Cambridge about memory and Sephardic traditions. Prof. Stein is the winner of two National Jewish Book Awards, the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish literature, and a Guggenheim Fellowship, among others. *The Economist* named *Family Papers* a Best Book of 2019, while *The New York Times* Book Review selected it as an Editors' Choice Book. *Family Papers* was also a finalist for the National Jewish Book Prize.

June 16, 7 pm MST (9 pm EST) — Prof. Devin Naar of the University of Washington, an expert on the Sephardic world of Greece presents "From the Ottoman Empire to Auschwitz: Sephardic Jews and the Holocaust." He will focus on the Jewish geography and history of the Ottoman Empire up to its annihilation in the Holocaust. The Sephardic Jews of Greece had the highest death rate of all the Jewish communities in the Holocaust. Prof. Naar is the leading scholar on the Jews of Salonica and of the Ottoman Empire, including their descendants today who live in Israel, Latin America, and the United States.

Register for these talks at www.SantaFeDLS.org. Here you can also get more information about other speakers and their topics.

If you miss either of these live lectures or would like to view other programs on Sephardic Jews or the crypto-Jewish experience, go to www.JewishLearningChannel.com. You can see films on the Sephardic Jews of Gerona, Segovia, Toledo, or Casablanca, and there are more than a dozen films on people in the American Southwest making their return to Judaism. 🔥

FILM



Screenings Since June 2020

March 2021, Orlando, FL — The Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida, Orlando

February 7-14, 2021, Melbourne, AUS — The Return of the B'nei Anousim Symposium — www.Shavei.org/Blog/2021/01/28/The-Return-Of-The-Bnei-Anousim

December 15 - 18, 2020, Tel Aviv, Israel — Tel Aviv Jewish Film Festival (SUBTITLED in Hebrew) — www.Bit.Ly/3nnulyn

November 22, 2020, Newton Centre, MA — Hebrew College (VIRTUAL) www.HebrewCollege.edu/Events/Film-Screening-Of-Children-Of-The-Inquisition-And-Discussion-With-Director-And-Guests

November 12, 2020, London, UK — UK Jewish Film Festival (VIRTUAL) www.UKJewishFilm.org/Event/Children-Of-The-Inquisition/

October 25 - 29, 2020, Palo Alto, CA — Congregation Kol Emeth (VIRTUAL) www.Kolemeth.ShulCloud.com/Event/ChildrenOfTheInquisition

Children Of The Inquisition: Virtual Film Screening on October 25 & 26, Guest Speakers on October 27, 28, & 29 - Event www.Kolemeth.ShulCloud.com/Event/ChildrenOfTheInquisition

October 22 - 24, 2020, Trinidad, CO — Temple Aaron (VIRTUAL) www.TempleAaron.org/Past-Events

October 13, 2020, St. Cloud, MN — St. Cloud State University, Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (VIRTUAL) — www.StCloudState.edu/Chge

October 7 - 9, 2020, Albuquerque, NM — Centro Sefarad NM & Cervantes Institute, Resiliencia Festival (VIRTUAL) — www.CentroSefaradnm.org

October 4 - 30, 2020, Detroit, MI — The Lenore Marwil Detroit Jewish Film Festival (VIRTUAL) — www.CulturalArts.JCCdet.org/FilmFest

August 11, 2020, San Diego, CA — 40th IAJS International Conference On Jewish Genealogy (VIRTUAL) — www.iajgs.org

July 30, 2020, New York, NY — Museum Of Jewish Heritage (VIRTUAL) www.mjhnyc.org/Events/Children-Of-The-Inquisition-Film-And-Discussion/

July 20 - 23, 2020, Mexico City, MX — La Kehile Comunidad Ashkenazi (VIRTUAL) — www.LaKehile.com

For information, to schedule an event, and to make a donation, please visit www.ChildrenOfTheInquisition.com



Film Enriches Dialogue Among Diverse Jewish Communities

A *Long Journey: The Hidden Jews of the Southwest* premiered simultaneously on New Mexico PBS and Canal 22 (Mexico's Cultural TV) in November 2020. Response has been more than enthusiastic.

A Long Journey is an unqualified success. Our broadcast was the second-highest rated in the country for PBS programming across the system in that time slot. For the whole evening we were number one with *A Long Journey* as a strong lead-in.

— Franz Joachim, General Manager & CEO, New Mexico PBS.

The bi-national broadcast garnered great press, including *The Santa Fe New Mexican* and *The Albuquerque Journal* whose article was picked up by UPI and published in many other media. Producer Paula Amar Schwartz, Director Isaac Arntstein, and film principals Ron Hart, Stephen Leon and Blanca Carrasco have conducted online presentations with a variety of organizations both academic and religious.

Audiences appreciate the deep meaning and beauty of the cinematic experience. Many believe *A Long Journey* has contributed to an enriched dialogue between diverse Jewish communities. Since the El Paso broadcast, Rabbi Leon has received many requests from members of the El Paso-Juarez community to teach classes on Judaism.



Descendant Tim Herrera celebrates Shabbat with his family.

Viewers on both sides of the border continue to be fascinated by the histories shared between Latino and Jewish people throughout the Southwest and Mexico. The film currently airs across the US; the Spanish-subtitled version plays in US cable systems with Latino packages carrying Canal 22. It is also available at www.pbs.org/video/a-long-journey-the-hidden-jews-of-the-southwest-pjxuez

For more information visit www.cinewest.net

Order Back Issues of HaLapid

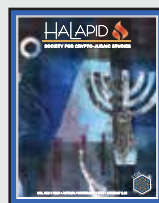
Own beautiful back issues of *HaLapid*! If you are a new member and would like to see what you missed, we still have copies of some past issues (in the current format) and will happily send them. Email your request and address to the editor - CorinneJB@aol.com; Payment instructions will be sent to you. \$9 each plus shipping.



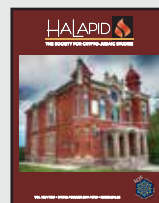
Autumn/Winter 2020



Spring/Summer 2020



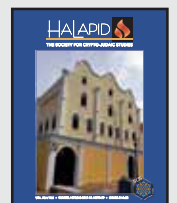
Autumn/Winter 2019



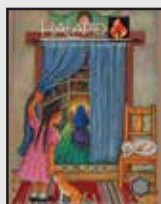
Spring/Summer 2019



Autumn/Winter 2018



Winter/Spring 2017-18



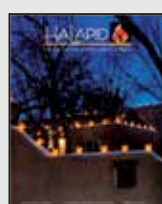
Spring/Summer 2017



Autumn/Winter 2016



Spring/Summer 2016



Autumn/Winter 2015



Spring/Summer 2015



Autumn/Winter 2014



Spring/Summer 2014

Coming soon: Read back issues of *HaLapid* ONLINE! www.cryptojews.com



Jewish Mourning Customs Found in Calabria

BY RABBI BARBARA AIELLO



In Calabria, Jewish traditions that “hide in plain sight” often form the basis of Christian traditions. That is how the Jewish mourning tradition *sheloshim* informed the Catholic practice of observing *trigesimo* after a person’s death.

Both words, *sheloshim* and *trigesimo* mean “30” and refer to the end of the 30-day period of mourning for the loved one who passed on one month prior.

Here in Serrastretta, the body is buried by sundown of the day after

death and a seven-day period of intense mourning is observed — a practice that evolved from the Jewish tradition of *shivah*.

In Serrastretta, as well as in surrounding villages, family members observe ancient Jewish mourning customs as they cover mirrors, framed artwork and television screens with white sheets. When fellow mourners arrive to offer condolences, they are welcome to eat a slice of a hardboiled egg as a reminder of the cycle of life. And as Jewish mourning *minhag* requires, all mourners including immediate family members are seated on low chairs. 🕯

Rabbi Barbara is Italy’s first woman rabbi. She serves synagogue Ner Tamid del Sud, The Eternal Light of the South, the first active synagogue in Calabria in 500 years since Inquisition times. The synagogue is a recognized affiliate of the Reconstructionist movement and is “pluralistic,” in that the approach is egalitarian and services and membership are open to Jews of all backgrounds, especially the *b’nai anusim*, those whose ancestors were forced into Christian conversion centuries ago. As director of the Italian Jewish Cultural Center of Calabria (IJCCC), Rabbi Barbara serves Italians, Italian-Americans and Italian-Canadians helping them discover and embrace their Jewish roots.

Historians note that prior to the Inquisition in Italy 500 years ago, more than 50 percent of the population of Southern Italy — including the region of Calabria, the island of Sicily and the Aeolian Island chain — was Jewish. In fact, in hundreds of tiny villages along Calabria’s coast and throughout the Calabrian mountains, vestiges of what once were thriving Jewish communities abound. Long hidden and lost rituals and practices have come to light as a result of Rabbi Barbara’s investigations and discoveries — fascinating stories that she shares online with audiences worldwide.

For many of those with Italian heritage, the urge to connect with Judaism is a strong one. Through the surname research program at the IJCCC Rabbi Barbara has assisted hundreds of Italian individuals in the discovery of the Jewish roots of their family



RABBI BARBARA AIELLO
Calabria, Italy

surnames and has helped many of these “hidden” Jews to “come home.”

Rabbi Barbara has been a featured speaker on the topic of Italian *anusim* and has traveled in the United States and in Europe as part of an educational program to bring the international *anusim* experience to the forefront of Jewish thought. Most recently appearing at the National Press Club in Washington, DC as a featured “Newsmaker,” and as presenter at the United Nations conference on Religious Pluralism sponsored by the government of Bahrain.

In addition, Rabbi Barbara was host of the Radio Rabbi program broadcast every Sunday morning for 15 years. The program featured Jewish traditions, culture and music and was live-streamed and podcast around the world.

Before becoming a rabbi, she was founder and director of The Kids on the Block puppet program used around the world to teach

children and adults to accept and appreciate difference and diversity; and she is an award-winning author of a children’s book series based upon her characters.

Rabbi Barbara is a graduate of Indiana University of Pennsylvania where she received the Distinguished Alumni Award. She holds an MS from George Washington University in Washington, DC and received *smicha* (rabbinic ordination) from The Rabbinical Seminary International and the Rabbinical Academy, New York City.

She has won several awards, among them Washingtonian of the Year, *Parents Magazine*’s “Good Parent to Know,” and the Surgeon General’s Medallion for Excellence in Public Health from Dr. C. Everett Koop.

For her innovative work with Jewish seniors (creation of a replica of the Kotel from shoeboxes, the Chanukah Menorah Extravaganza, and creation of the Jordan River for Tashlichoo), Rabbi Barbara is a three-time winner of the Association of Jewish Aging Services (AJAS) Spiritual Programming Award.

In 2015, HaKodesh Press published Rabbi Barbara’s book on her work in Italy, *The Cat That Ate the Cannoli – Tales of the Hidden Jews of Southern Italy*, and Israeli film producer, Carl Perkal produced a documentary film that features Rabbi Barbara’s work, *The Secret Jews of Calabria*.

Rabbi Barbara Aiello
rabbi@RabbiBarbara.com
www.RabbiBarbara.com.



Bolita Beans

BY DIANE MOCK

As a child, I learned that “Jack” did not have the market cornered on magic beans. Bolita beans, largely known, grown and consumed in southern Colorado and New Mexico, make their own magic. Every summer I remember listening to my Uncle Milo talk about a must-make trip to the San Luis Valley to buy a supply of bolita beans. He swore by them. He raved about them. It seemed he would die without them.



DIANE MOCK
Aurora, CO

I wondered, what made them so special?

In 2017, at a farmers’ market in Alamosa while browsing bolita beans, I got into a conversation with a fellow shopper. I told her I had never eaten bolita beans and wanted to try them. I shared Uncle Milo’s testimony and asked her what made bolitas so special? At that moment she revealed the secret to me. She said, “They’re special because they don’t give you gas.”

As Uncle claimed, bolitas were a delicacy only grown in “The Valley;” he was partly correct. Most are grown on Southwest farms. They seem to have the greatest appeal among Latinos in that region and are not as widely known or available as black or pinto beans. According to www.cooksinfo.com, “Bolita beans were grown by Native Americans in the American Southwest, then adopted by Spanish settlers who moved up from Mexico. They have been grown for quite a while in New Mexico.”

By contrast, another source, www.localhavest.org, claims “Spanish settlers to the northern New Mexican region initially presented the bolita bean to North America. After this introduction, the bean was incorporated into much of the American Indian food traditions in the Four Corners region. With its high protein content and general ease on the stomach, the bolita bean became an important crop bean, quickly becoming extensively cultivated throughout the American Southwest.”

Bolita origins are obviously just as mysterious and elusive as the beans themselves. Since the San Luis Valley is currently a COVID-19 hot spot, I purchased some online and paid a hefty price! For me, the price is worth memories of Uncle Milo and my Sephardic roots. I invite you to try some for yourself. 🍲

How to Cook Dry Beans (per Diane Mock)

Ingredients

1-2 cups dry beans of choice
(1 cup dry beans yields about 3 cups cooked)
½ large onion
6 (or more) cloves fresh garlic
- OR - garlic powder (see below)

Spices

1 tsp salt
1 tsp oregano
1 tbsp garlic powder - OR -
fresh garlic (see above)
1 tsp red chili powder (if you like a little kick) - OR -
¼ tsp or less red chili flakes

Preparation

Place beans on a flat surface and clean out broken beans, small dirt clods or rocks. Place in a colander and rinse well.

Soak beans

Place beans in a large bowl and fill bowl with water, add 1 tsp salt, cover with a lid or plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight. Soak beans until they hydrate. You will know they're hydrated when they plump to about double in size. Hydration should take 4-12 hours. (I encourage this soaking step. Beans cook tender when they are pre-soaked! I've had crunchy beans — it wasn't enjoyable!)

Cook

Place hydrated beans in a slow cooker or pressure cooker. Cover the beans with 2-4 inches of water or veggie broth or combination. Add diced onion and garlic. Sprinkle in spices. Cook 4-6 hours in slow cooker or on “bean” setting of pressure cooker. Taste for spices and adjust if necessary. Add more liquid if necessary during the slow-cooking process. When beans are tender, thicken, if desired, with cornstarch slurry or paste of equal parts flour and oil.

Serve with chiles and tortillas.



We're Connected!

BY CORINNE JOY BROWN

Important News for Scholars and Historians: SCJS now participates with the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem

SCJS is now sharing articles with the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem. We will send digital copies of *HaLapid* for their archives. They are also interested in collecting books by our member authors and already have many of them. For those who use Facebook, feel free to check out their FB page and their “Life Before the Holocaust” group, which deals very broadly with Jewish life in and relating to Europe over the centuries

Founded in Jerusalem in 1892, the National Library of Israel (NLI) serves as the dynamic institution of national memory for the Jewish people worldwide and Israelis of all backgrounds and faiths — past, present and future. Its world-class collections — including manuscripts, ancient maps, rare books, photographs, press, communal and personal archival materials, and more — tell the historical, cultural and intellectual story of the Jewish people, the State of Israel, and the Land of Israel and its region throughout the ages.

NLI is now in the midst of an ambitious journey of renewal to encourage diverse audiences in Israel and around the globe to engage with its treasures in new and meaningful ways. This is taking place through a range of innovative educational, cultural and digital initiatives, as well as through the construction of a new landmark complex designed by Herzog and de Meuron, on schedule to open its doors in 2022.

We invite you to visit the National Library of Israel online to explore the catalogue, including millions of digital items; contact the expert reference team for questions and guidance; visit “The Reading Room” for a range of live and previously recorded events; and check out “The Librarians” blog for stories about history, heritage and culture!

One of the leading online initiatives which you may find of interest is JPress — the Historic Jewish Press Project, an amazing resource that includes millions of searchable pages of historic Jewish and Israeli press in numerous languages, covering continents and centuries.



For National Library online events visit www.live-events.nli.org.il/english. (For upcoming and recorded webinars, click “Events in English” at the top of the site.)

Many thanks to our cordial and friendly liaison Zack Rothbart, Manager, European Content & Global Media Relations.
zachary.rothbart@nli.org.il 📧

Centro Sefarad NM Makes a Global Splash

BY SCHELLY TALALAY DARDASHTI


The past few months have been busy for Centro Sefarad New Mexico with virtual conferences, presentations, monthly Friday Kabbala Shabbat, and the start of “Introduction to Judaism” (in Spanish). The website is up and running while online resources are being added.

Centro Sefarad NM’s director Rabbi Jordi Gendra-Molina (from a *converso* family in Barcelona) and board member Schelly Talalay Dardashti both spoke at the recent “Roots Tech Connect” in February, the largest genealogy event in the world, produced by www.FamilySearch.org. Due to the pandemic, this year’s edition



was completely virtual and completely free. More than one million global attendees in 242 countries viewed some 1,800 recorded programs in 40 languages. The programs will be online for about a year. Rabbi Jordi presented two programs, "Routes of the Sephardic Diaspora" and one on paleographic handwriting in English and in Spanish, while Schelly presented a three-part series about Sephardic resources. SCIS past president Genie Milgrom also presented several programs.

In addition to this massive worldwide reach, Schelly and Centro Sefarad NM and SCIS board member Maria Apodaca presented several virtual team talks to Jewish genealogical and historical societies. One was for the new Jewish Genealogical Society of Santa Cruz (California) and, on August 23, 2021, they will present at the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society (California). Schelly will also speak on Sephardic topics at the National Genealogical Society conference (May), the Southern California Genealogy Society lamboree conference (June), the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies conference (August), and the Hispanic "We Are Cousins" event on an overview of Sephardic DNA and major projects (September). All talks by Schelly and Maria always reference the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies.

A comprehensive list of resources and a continually-updated bibliography is available at www.CentroSefaradNM.org 



**SHELLY TALALAY
DARDASHTI**
Albuquerque, NM



**RABBI JORDI
GENDRA-MOLINA**
Albuquerque, NM



Rediscovering the Converso & Latino Connection to Israel

The Jewish Heritage Alliance and the Jewish National Fund are collaborating on a presentation that explores the *converso* and Latino connection to Israel. The compelling story of the Sephardic experience begins hundreds of years ago with Sefarad, the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula, and is an essential segment of Jewish history involving not only persecution and forced conversions, but of hope and survival. The Sephardic experience is more than our shared history. It is a story of belief, redemption, and the recapturing of a past for generations yet to be born.

Working with Samuel Richardson, PhD, director, JNF Small Community Outreach, we created an epic journey, a key to understanding the need to continue the task of building and securing our people and our land through the Jewish Heritage Alliance and the Jewish National Fund.

Join us at www.JewishHeritageAlliance.com.

Webinar 1: April 25 (rebroadcast available)

History, Organization and Outreach
Dr. Peter Tarlow
Rabbi Gilberto (Emanuel) Ventura
Ashley Perry

Webinar 2: May 30 (rebroadcast available)

Amazing Stories / The Journey
Dr. Lorenzo Trujillo
Genie Milgrom
Hannah Eyal

Webinar 3: TBA (approx. Jun 27)

Importance of the Latino/Converso Communities to Israel. Will also discuss Doña Gracia Nasi, earliest Zionist, etc. >>>



Jewish Heritage Alliance

Women of Sefarad Webinars

Dates, Topics and Presenters

March 7: *The Crypto-Jewish Women of Spain*
Prof. Renée Melammed, Key Speaker

April 11: *Doña Gracia*
Michal Aharoni Regev, Author
Prof. Avi (Abraham) Gross, Key Speaker
Irit Ahdoot, Director and Curator,
Doña Gracia Museum

May 2 and June 6: *Interiority and Hope*
Dr. Aliza Lavie - Connecting Crypto-Jewish
Women to Zionism and Prayers
Prof. Inés Noguero - DNA in the Genome Era

June 6: *New Christian Women in Portugal*
Prof. Elvira A. Mea, Braganza Museum, Porto
Museum & Hugo

July 11: *Sephardic Women and the New World Trade Connection*
Prof. Daniel Strum — The Sugar Trade: Brazil,
Portugal, and the Netherlands
Dr. Rachel Amado Bortnick — The Ladino Language Central Role
in the Sephardic Universe.

August Date Pending: *Crypto-Jewish Cuisine*
Ruth Calvao & Ines Castro

September Date Pending: *Sefarad Women Heroines*
Irit Ahdoot, Director and Curator, Doña Gracia Museum

For other webinars outside of this series – visit our website
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NEWS FLASH — Buried treasure found!

SCJS senior advisor and founding member Stanley M. Hordes recently unearthed six cassette tapes from the very first SCJS conference at the Fort Burgwin Research Center near Taos, New Mexico in August 1991. Written transcripts are on the way!



Did you know... ?

Jewish settlements in Macedonia and Dalmatia (region in Croatia) date back as far as Greek and Roman days, and small communities existed in Slovenia and Serbia in Medieval times, but the first major wave of Jewish immigration to the South Slav lands came as a result of the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. By the mid-16th century, Sephardim began to establish communities in the Balkan hinterlands of the Ottoman Empire, including Belgrade in Serbia, Sarajevo in Bosnia, and Skopje and Bitola (Monastir) in Macedonia, as well as in Dubrovnik and Split on the Dalmatian coast.



YOU are part of a Mission!



Through your support of our studies of the history, cultures, arts and current status of crypto-Judaism in the United States and throughout the world, we continue our mission of nurturing a global organization for those researching the history of crypto-Judaic and hidden communities around the world.

Our first conference, held near Taos, New Mexico in 1991, was organized by a small, dedicated group of people who established SCIS to foster research and the exchange of information about *conversos* who settled in the outer regions of the Spanish empire. The secret observance of Sephardic customs and traditions by many descendants continue still.

Today SCIS is regarded as the primary body of scholars, artists, crypto-Jewish descendants and interested individuals investigating this phenomenon and inspiring new research directions. Although our roots are in the American Southwest, our horizons extend world-wide, with enriched conferences, exciting new media and affiliations.

Our website, www.cryptojews.com, has archival status because scholars and interested individuals may access hundreds of articles and papers from past issues of *HaLapid*. It also features stories and news of SCIS and related events.

Since 1991, we have attracted members from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Latin America, Spain, Portugal, Scotland, England, France, Italy, Israel, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Macao, Goa, Central America, the Spanish Caribbean Islands and elsewhere. Your continued membership and donations make it possible for us to continue our mission. We welcome new and renewing members. We are all active participants in this important field of study.

In addition to membership, we welcome donations to our other funds. The Randy Baca/Dennis Duran Fund provides assistance for those researching possible Sephardic ancestry but cannot afford to attend conferences. A donation to our Conference Fund ensures the participation of outstanding keynote speakers and supports special conference programming. In addition, your contribution supports our mailing and publication expenses.

With continuing support, we look forward to a long future of outreach, encouragement and discovery!

Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies

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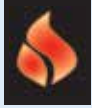
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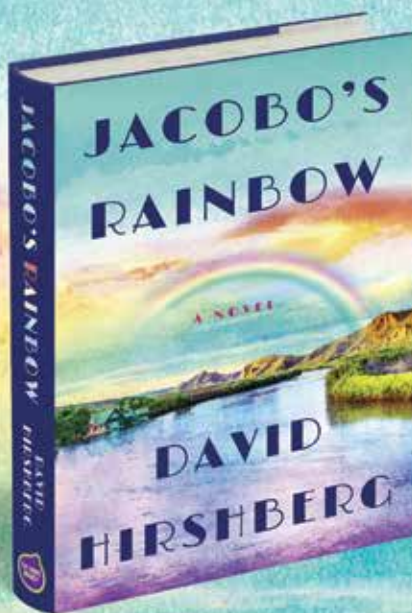
Tudo se ilumina
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All is
illuminated
for those
who seek the light

— Avram Ben Rosh —

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