

HALAPID



SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES



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Great News!

All back issues of *HaLapid* are now available ONLINE.
Current issue posted after next publication.
Just one more benefit of membership -
so join or renew now!
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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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EDITORIAL POLICY OF HALAPID

Contributions from writers all over the world are edited for grammar, spelling, typographical errors, and length. Content embedded in family memories may or may not be historically accurate; we reserve the right to edit material and correct obvious misstatements or historical errors. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of SCJS or *HaLapid*. Articles from *HaLapid* may not be reprinted without permission.

HaLapid is usually mailed in the Spring and Autumn of each year. Please send submissions to the editor-in-chief by March 1 and September 1, corinnejb@aol.com



CYNTHIA SETON-ROGERS
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When I answered the call to accept the SCIS presidency in January 2020, I was equally humbled and honored. But upon assuming my new role in June, I was faced with unprecedented challenges in the midst of a global pandemic that, at that time, seemed short-lived. We postponed our annual conference, hoping to gather the following summer. We then experienced the devastating loss of Dr. David Gitlitz in December 2020, but as he would have recommended, we made lemonade out of lemons and hosted a virtual conference in 2021 with a panel in tribute to his amazing legacy as the highlight.

As the light at the end of this very dark tunnel approaches, I pass the reins to Rosa Marina Siegel with the utmost confidence. Her dedication and commitment to this organization and its mission is without question. I hope you will join me in wholeheartedly welcoming and supporting her for the next two years.

CM Seton-Rogers

Cynthia M. Seton-Rogers • SCIS President, 2020-2022



ROSA MARINA SIEGEL
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As a descendant of crypto-Jews, selected to be your next president, I am deeply thankful for the trust placed in me. I can say it is one of the best feelings of my life and an honor, mainly because of the people I represent, from crypto-Jewish descendants to scholars, artists, poets, geneticists, genealogists, and all who are dedicated to the research and dissemination of the history of crypto-Jews of Iberian origin.

For *HaLapid*'s 30th Anniversary edition, I researched past articles, photos and conference programs. I enjoyed seeing the names of Jewish institutions (religious and secular), personal narratives, abstracts, petitions for family records sent to Spain, and more. I admired the accomplishments, connections, and camaraderie among conference attendees, plus what has transpired from the expulsion of the Jews from Sefarad through the Inquisition era until today, including the discovery of homes, *mikvahs*, tombstones, and secret diaries, as well as the recognition of the descendants of *conversos* and the reclaiming of their roots.

We are grateful to Cindy Seton-Rogers for her tenure as president of SCIS during difficult times. She helped with virtual events, Zoom calls, an online conference, and emails, keeping us connected. As we transition, we wish her much personal success ahead and thank her for her continued support.

Now that life is returning to normal, I am delighted to announce our in-person conference in Autumn 2022. I know we will accomplish wonderful things in the future, taking SCIS to greater heights.

Rosa Marina Siegel

Rosa Marina Siegel • SCIS President, 2022-2024

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.



The stories we inherit



CORINNE J. BROWN
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We have missed you. It seems like years have gone by, not months, since our last issue. But we are still here and growing. A small organization like ours relies on in-person meet-ups and we are so looking forward to seeing you all again at a time when it is safe to do so. Hopefully, that time is coming soon.

This issue of *HaLapid* was prompted by the many contributions dealing with family history, with generations and the stories we inherit. The search for identity begins with family and travels back in time, tracing heritage and roots. In these pages you will find stories by previous contributors like Carlos Larralde from California and Esther Malka Astruc from Israel, as well as SCIS past-president Genie Milgrom, and member Isaac Amon. We are grateful to hear their sagas.

Isaac Amon, enriched by ancestors from both the Sephardic and Askenazic communities, grew up with a keen awareness of the Jewish soul expressed through both views of our tradition. As a practicing attorney with a longtime interest in genocide, he understands the complexity of crypto-Judaic heritage and the many issues of those who were converted by force, as well as their adaptation to other cultures. We are sincerely grateful to him for allowing us to feature the family photo of his parents' wedding on our cover, extracted from his fascinating family history (see page 21).



HaLapid has joined the new journalistic standard and now lists email contact information for contributing writers. Follow-up questions may be addressed directly this way.

SCIS is that unique crossroad where academic research and family histories come together. We are grateful for those of you who stayed with us through the past two difficult years and who have renewed your memberships, thereby supporting the organization. To every new member: we could not be here without you.

Please enjoy these richly varied and fascinating journeys into the past and appreciate the amount of work each time-traveler undertook to share these stories with us. We celebrate you all!

Corinne J. Brown
Corinne Joy Brown
Editor, *HaLapid*

READERS' FEEDBACK

30th Anniversary - Part Two

I received my journal yesterday, and I am two-thirds of the way reading the information.

Your work is fantastic! I remember the old *HaLapid*. Your perspective in "Celebrating 30 Years – Part Two" defines the organization. Thank you for including me! I love the article by Esther [Astruc] – it reminds me of Madeline Albright.

You work hard... thank you.

Isabelle Sandoval, Santa Fe, New Mexico



A grateful author

Thank you very much for the wonderful review of my book! I'm very grateful for your take on it and for your kind words. I can't wait to re-launch this book with the other two as a package next year!

So many great articles and information in this issue of *HaLapid*. My favorites were reading about the highlights of the 30 years of conferences, seeing the photos, and Isabelle Medina Sandoval's article.

Thank you once again! I'm looking forward to the next conference and hope that I can attend.

Kimberly Sánchez Cawthorn, Aurora, Colorado



"Great job!"

I just wanted to say "great job" again. The current issue of *HaLapid* is chock full of good articles. I enjoyed every page.

Norma Libman, Placitas, New Mexico



My *HaLapid* just arrived. I don't know how you manage to out-do yourself with each passing issue! Outstanding job – once more!

Stanley Hordes, Albuquerque, New Mexico



A suggestion?

Thanks for sending *HaLapid*. Beautiful edition. If I may, I would like to make a recommendation that SCIS make t-shirts for our members to buy, or at least use to encourage membership by giving a free shirt with each full priced new membership or renewal.



I also belong to a *Galiciana* organization and they made a t-shirt a few years ago and I received one after renewing my annual membership with them. I wear it proudly everywhere I go. I would love to also proudly wear an SCIS t-shirt. My father is *Galiciana* and my mother is *b'nai anusim*.

Tsvi, via website query

(Great idea – let's think about this! Ed.)



A grateful artist

I appreciate your kindness in thinking of me and loved your style of expressing my story.

I have only gratitude for the time you took to make that a special piece in *HaLapid*. Thank you. *Abrazos!*

Sonya Loya y la familia, Farmington, New Mexico



SCIS fosters another connection

I can't thank you enough for sending the link to the film *The Journey Home*. Do you know any of the people in the film?

I'm asking because Blanca Carrasco of the Anusim Center – the person who drove Rabbi Leon to Juarez in the film – talks about her family tree that was researched by Maez, and she mentions that her family is from Monterrey, Mexico and that she is descended from the de la Garza family.

This detail is significant for both myself and my distant cousin Daniela, here in Tzfat, who is descended from the same Portuguese ancestor whose descendants sailed to Mexico and established the community of Santa Maria de Los Lagos which is today Lagos de Moreno in Jalisco.

As for myself, the fifth cousin of my grandmother on my father's side, Augustus Wood, moved to Saltillo which is near Monterrey, and his son Alfonso Wood married Virginia Sanchez de la Garza of Saltillo. I happened upon a piece of information that said that the de la Garza family were crypto-Jews who were one of the founders of the crypto-Judaic community of Monterrey.

To me, it didn't make sense why my distant cousin would marry into this family – that also has connection with the descendants of my ancestor in Portugal who settled in Santa Maria de Los Lagos because of both historical and more recent intermarriages within these families.



The relationship between the family members – for both her and myself – of these two communities, in Saltillo and Lagos de Moreno, is that apparently there were some old, historical intermarriages (I know of one) between the two communities – even though the cities weren't close. Saltillo is in northeastern Mexico in Coahuila and Lagos is to the southwest in Jalisco. The distance is quite large.

This of course, produced a situation where my cousin Daniela (who also converted back to Judaism) is related to me in at least two ways. She recently saw a video posted on Ancestry showing her whole family tree and containing many significant details about these relatives and ancestors in Jalisco – such as which ones had been

tried by the Inquisition, which ones were reconciled, and which ones were burned at the stake. This is all from Jalisco.

But then there are the ones in Monterrey/Saltillo. I was wondering if there's any way to contact Blanca Carrasco. She might be able to give me more information about Daniela's ancestors there. And it would be nice for me to connect with her as well, because of all the history.

I had read the thesis by Schulamith Halevy of Israel in which she interviewed many people in Saltillo descended from the founders of that community in Monterrey, and they are all still keeping customs from their ancestors.

Now it's heartening to know that my grandmother's cousin married into this family and of course, it still leaves me scratching my head at the wondrous ways in which our Creator has interlinked and interwoven us to each other.

Would it also be possible for Daniela to get permission to see *The Journey Home*? Thanks for all your attention and help!

Daniela would write her own story for *HaLapid* but right now she's swamped and can't do any writing. But *be'ezrat Hashem*, my account will have to suffice (see page 17).

PS: Thanks for introducing me to Isabelle [Sandoval]! We've been having some amazing correspondences! Such a treasure.

Esther Malka Astruc, Jerusalem, Israel 



Welcome Our New President and Board Members



ROSA MARINA SIEGEL
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Rosa Marina Siegel PRESIDENT

Born and raised in El Salvador from parents who are descendants of colonial crypto-Jewish families of western Honduras, Rosa Marina Siegel is a biologist who worked as a consultant for the Green-COM USAID Environmental Education and Communication Project. In 1995 she created texts for the Spanish ecology children's booklets, *Colección Retonitos*, and produced similar publications with environmental non-governmental organizations (NGO). She also worked in El Salvador as consultant for various projects including environmental impact evaluations, hazardous waste management, and environmental legislature. She implemented activities with schools, colleges, NGO and rural communities to address a range of environmental issues like biodiversity conservation and ecotourism. In 1999 she worked with Pesticide Action Network to help create a database of Spanish educational materials for California farm workers, about the risk from pesticide poisonings, how to get medical healthcare and workers' rights. She has been a member of the North American



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Association for Environmental Education, Audubon Society of El Salvador and *Unidad Ecológica Salvadoreña*. Rosa attended NOVA Southeastern University for the coastal ecology program, and now works and lives in Florida with her husband, four daughters and one son. She is currently an avid researcher of *converso* Jewish ancestry in Central America through family narratives, DNA, Colonial and Inquisition records, and is an SCJS member, a past contributor to *HaLapid*, and a past SCJS conference presenter. Marina is an active member of the Sephardic congregation of South Florida and a guest member of the Sephardic congregation of Honduras and El Salvador.

Blanca Carrasco MEMBER-AT-LARGE

Blanca Carrasco is a direct descendant of Marcos Alonso de la Garza y del Arcon, co-founder of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, an important center for *conversos* and crypto-Jews in New Spain (now Mexico) since the time of Luis Carvajal and Diego de Montemayor. She grew up in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. During her college years her family migrated to El Paso, Texas where she still





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lives. Although raised Catholic, Blanca searched to find the place she could call home. In 2007 her husband and children reached out to Rabbi Stephen Leon to return/convert to Judaism. Blanca officially converted in 2008. She committed to the local Jewish community by volunteering with the El Paso Jewish Federation and as editor of *The Jewish Voice*, their monthly publication. She played an active role in Congregation B'nai Zion's Sisterhood and is currently a board member of the Anusim Center. Blanca is featured in Isaac Artenstein's film *A Long Journey: The Hidden Jews of the Southwest*, in Ron Duncan Hart's book *Crypto-Jews – The Long Journey*, and in the movie *Children of The Inquisition* by Joseph F. Lovett. Her passion to share her own journey as a descendant of crypto-Jews and as a *conversa* keeps her Judaism alive. Blanca hopes to help SCIS by coordinating events/presentations either in-person or via Zoom, MTeams; translation services, graphic design, and outreach efforts. Blanca has an Master's in Higher Education Leadership, a certificate in Women and Gender Studies, a Bachelor's in Graphic Design with a minor in Speech, and an Early Childhood certificate. She has been employed by The University of Texas–El Paso since 2001 and is currently the



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program manager for Student Success and Strategic Initiatives in the Department of Civil Engineering. Blanca is grateful and excited for the opportunity to serve as board member of SCIS.

Kimberly Sánchez Cawthorn

MEMBER-AT-LARGE

A sixth generation Colorado native, Kimberly holds a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Urban Education. She has over five years of experience in nonprofit management and development, and over ten years of experience in education. She taught every level of high school Spanish, from beginners to heritage language learners and the International Baccalaureate Program. She was program coordinator for the Master of Arts in Education Department at Regis University in Denver, teaching courses like Multicultural Perspectives and Foundations for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Educators. With a passion for genealogy, history and heritage of the people from Northern New Mexico and Southern

Colorado, Kimberly has discovered an unexpected link to Sephardic Judaism in her family. Intrigued by this discovery and the extensive work found in her research, in 2019 she wrote a historical fiction love story, *Love & Legacy: Amor Eterno*, hoping to spark further dialogue. In addition to her novel, Kimberly offers evaluation, writing, and editing work through her business, La Gente Legacy, LLC.

Isabelle Sandoval

MEMBER-AT-LARGE

Currently residing in New Mexico, Isabelle has served as a teacher, administrator, professor of Spanish, English, literacy, and bilingual education. A Santa Fe poet and writer, she has advocated for bilingual multicultural standards. Isabelle studies information regarding the experiences of the descendants of Iberian crypto-Jews grounded in genealogy, history, language, traditions, and DNA. As a Portuguese citizen based on her ancestral connection to Portuguese/Sefardita origin, Isabelle's goal is to enhance a Jewish learning community engaging in quality clarification, exploration and research. 🔥



History of Portuguese Jews in Holland

.....

JONATHAN
GAVRIELOV



In 1492 the expulsion of Jews from Spain took place. Per historic reports, more than 150,000 Jews were expelled from their homes and another 100,000 were forcibly converted to Christianity. This deportation is considered to have been the most extreme in the history of Jews in the Diaspora. It broke the spirit of many believers in the salvation of G-d and caused masses of Jews to abandon the religion of their ancestors.

At the same time some 80,000 Jews found immediate refuge in neighboring Portugal which at the time was considered as advanced and “enlightened” as Spain. But after only five years, the Portuguese king passed a similar decree expelling all the Jewish subjects of Portugal.

Unlike Spain, the Portuguese authorities did not wait until the last minute to expel the

Jews — they forced tens of thousands to be immediately baptized and convert to Christianity. The remaining thousands became prisoners all at once and were led to the Portuguese colonies in Africa where they became slaves for the remainder of their lives.

LIFE OF THE JEWS IN PORTUGAL

Due to fear of ongoing religious persecution, multitudes of Jews lived in Portugal under the guise of Christians for centuries. They lived under constant suspicion and disrespect from the locals due to their loyalty to Christianity. This is why, in foreign languages, they were called crypto-Jews — hidden Jews; they were better known by the common derogatory name *marranos*, meaning pigs. Among their brethren however, they were sympathetically called *anusim*, meaning coerced.

In 1536 the Portuguese Inquisition was officially founded. In its early years, it secretly persecuted heretic Christians who did not adhere to the strictures of Catholic

orthodoxy. However toward the end of the 16th century, the religious institution began a systematic process of exposing Jews who secretly observed Judaism. These individuals received cruel public punishments, such as flogging, torture, tearing of body parts while alive, and the most infamous act, *auto da fé*, burning at the stake.

Due to the Portuguese Jews' extreme fear of the Inquisition's horrific acts, they decided to move to a place where they could openly practice their religion. Because of the great knowledge they possessed and because they were successful traders across many countries, they knew the way of life and languages of each country where they traded. This is why many chose to immigrate to the liberal Netherlands.

Above, *The Jewish Bride*, Rembrandt van Rijn

Right, Netherlands iconic tulip fields with modern windmills



THE ARRIVAL OF PORTUGUESE ANUSIM IN HOLLAND

At the end of the 16th century, about 3,000 Jewish *anusim* from the Portuguese coastal areas arrived in the bustling port city of Amsterdam. The metropolis was in its early stages of becoming one of the most influential, powerful and richest cities in Europe. At the time, the Dutch were in the midst of a long war with the Spanish Empire — later called the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648). Why is this relevant to our discussion?

During the 16th century, Protestant Christianity was received with open arms in Holland. However when the Catholic Spaniards came to conquer the Lowlands, they forced their religion on the local population. As a result, many thousands of Dutch citizens were massacred.

Due to the great suffering that took place in Holland, the Dutch became aware of the Spanish hostility and the destructive power of Catholicism. Following the war and its deadly consequences, the Dutch grew liberal, empathetic and tolerant toward other religions. This is why foreign believers like the Jews were unusually accepted.

The Portuguese Jews whose ancestors were expelled from Spain and also suffered from uncompromising Catholic zealotry, understood the Dutch plight more than anyone else. The *anusim* first settled in Amsterdam and then also in the cities of Rotterdam, Alkmaar and Haarlem; however the most influential and famous community was in Amsterdam.

For decades the *anusim* secretly and gradually moved in groups from unenlightened Portugal to enlightened Amsterdam. By the middle of the 17th century, the Jewish community in Holland had reached about 6,000 members.

LIFE OF THE ANUSIM IN HOLLAND

The reason for the immigration enabled the Portuguese Jews to build a strong international trade network from the Netherlands. This large-scale monopoly forged relations with European countries, the Middle East, North Africa, and more.

In addition, the community of *anusim* initiated extensive trade relations between the Dutch state and South America. The *anusim* also contributed significantly to the establishment of the Dutch West India Company in 1621, with some members of the community serving as distinguished board members. >>>



JONATHAN GAVRIELOV

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Jonathan Gavrielov works in the law firm of Cohen, Decker, Pex and Brosh as a writer, translator and legal assistant. Jonathan specializes in obtaining Portuguese passports for descendants of deportees from Spain, obtaining an Austrian passport for Holocaust survivors and their descendants, as well as various other Eastern European citizenships.

Along with handling clients in the field of immigration, Jonathan translates legal documents into Hebrew and English and helps with translation for Portuguese-speaking clients.

Jonathan holds a certificate as a tourist guide from the Hebrew University and is a lecturer in science and history for high school students in Jerusalem.

In addition, Jonathan is in charge of the historical research department of the firm. Among other things, he has written historical articles about the communities of Sephardic deportees from around the world. His works include comprehensive studies of all Sephardic communities in the Mediterranean, the former Ottoman Empire, Europe, Asia and the Americas. He is also responsible for writing content related to European Jews in Austria, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, etc. Furthermore, he is part of the firm's genealogy department, which specializes in finding roots among crypto-Jews and Sephardim.

Jonathan speaks Hebrew, English and Portuguese, and is always happy to help clients in Israel and abroad with their immigration needs.



Despite the variety of liberal professions prohibited to Jews such as law or obtaining a professorship, the community of *anusim* comprised a largely educated class. Among the members of the community were famous doctors such as the Bueno family that even served the Dutch royal family – the Order of the House of Orange. Business owners thrived in the trades of tobacco, pharmaceuticals, meats, and more. The *anusim* were also excellent entrepreneurs establishing sugar refineries, printing houses, bookstores, and so on.

DUTCH JEWS EXPAND IN AREAS CONQUERED BY HOLLAND

At the beginning of the 17th century, warships full of soldiers set out from the shores of Holland. The goal was to conquer parts of South America and expand Dutch influence in the area as well as increase state revenues by utilizing resources on the new continent.

The Dutch soon took over some of the Caribbean islands, then the Recife area

of northern Brazil, Suriname, the island of Curaçao and of course, New York, which at the time was called New Amsterdam.

After these conquests and following the trend of expanding Dutch trade in the Americas, the authorities in Holland encouraged immigration to the new colonies. As a result, a large number of Portuguese Jews left Holland and came to live in the New World. They first came as business people but soon invited their families thus establishing a rich and influential Jewish community.

Over time, a significant portion of these families assimilated among the locals and the Christian population. Today the estimate is that there are millions of such descendants in North America, Central America and especially, South America. 🔥



Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam, exterior & interior

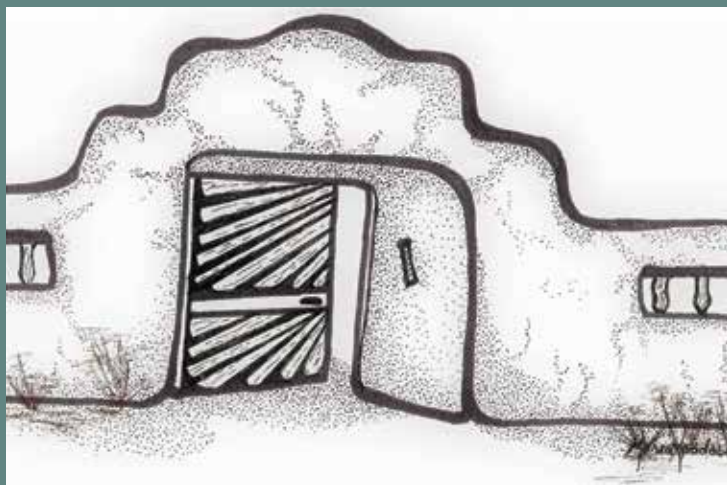


Portuguese Passports for Immigrants from Holland

If you can prove that 200 or 400 years ago your ancestors were among the Jews who came to the American continent from Holland, you are entitled to a Portuguese passport. This is possible, and is done on a daily basis at our law office, Cohen, Decker, Pex and Brosh, thanks to genealogists employed by us. Among the Dutch Jews were hundreds of surnames that to this day, are common among many South American residents. Here are some examples:

- Cardoso
- Pinto
- Abendana
- Fonseca
- Belmonte
- Attias / Atias / Athias
- Castro
- de Leon
- da Costa
- Sasportas
- Yeshurun
- Mesquita
- Sarfati / Sarfatti / Sarphati / Serfaty / Sarfate / Sarfaty / Sarfity / Zarfati / Tsarfati / Tsarfaty / Tzarfati / Serfati
- Oliveira
- Pardo
- de La Vega
- Palachi / Palacci / Pallache
- Francis
- Spinoza
- Aboab
- Maduro
- and many more.





SEPHARDIC HERITAGE INSTITUTE NEW MEXICO

.....
RABBI JORDAN GENDRA MOLINA

The past two years have made a large impact on our lives and we are all beginning to see the consequences. Two years ago, Centro Sefarad NM, an organization dedicated to crypto-Jewish history and culture in New Mexico, was founded under the auspices of the Jewish Federation of New Mexico. After two years of support, the Jewish Federation ended the arrangement while keeping control of the name. As a result, those involved created the Sephardic Heritage Institute NM (SHINM) instead.

In the long *converso* narrative, one word stands out: resilience. Resilience is not resistance, as resistance implies a breaking point. Apply too much pressure to an iron bar and it will break. Resilience on the other hand, is the art of continuing to move forward despite events beyond our control. It is the knowledge of how to take advantage of new opportunities and begin again, stronger and with an improved vision of the future.

The most valued element of any organization is the relationships between its volunteers — and our volunteers are resilient. The Sephardic Heritage Institute NM is a volunteer group with the mission to provide cultural and educational programs and resources for descendants of Spanish Jews who were forcibly converted to Catholicism during the Spanish Inquisition and who found refuge in the Rio Grande area, especially in New Mexico.

We also promote and build bridges with similar organizations at regional, national and international events to create awareness about the history and current state of this population. We collaborate with the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies (SCIS) and have collaborated with the New Mexico History Museum (Santa Fe) in their exhibit “Fractured Faiths,” providing Hebrew transcriptions and translations into English. This also involved cultural liaison and participation with other University of New Mexico faculty.



RABBI JORDAN GENDRA MOLINA, PhD
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Rabbi Jordan Gendra Molina is the first Spanish-born rabbi since the Inquisition and comes from a *converso* background. He has worked with the Jewish Federation of New Mexico's Sephardic Heritage program since November 2018. He was ordained at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), holds a PhD in Medieval Jewish History (Universitat de Girona), and a Master's degree in Linguistics and Semitic Languages (Universitat de Barcelona). He speaks over 15 languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan, English, Hebrew, French, Romanian and others. He has served as rabbi of Temple Beth Shalom (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania) and Congregation B'nai Tikvah-Beth Israel (Sewell, New Jersey), and taught at Wilson College and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. His academic publications focus primarily on medieval Spanish Judaism and include *Les Responso de Rabbi Simo ben Tsemakh Duran* [The Responso of R. Simon B. Tsmakh Duran] (Leonard Muntaner, 2001).

We also partnered with the Instituto Cervantes-Albuquerque for the festival *Resiliencia* (2019, 2020), bringing local and international (Spain, Poland, Mexico) speakers, experts and performers. The



event, from a weekend to a full week, included lectures, art exhibits, two concerts, and three films.

The Spanish Government has also recognized our achievements as a Sephardic community, inviting New Mexico representatives to participate in the fifth biannual summit of *Erensyia* in 2018. The program is sponsored by the government of Spain and Centro Sefarad-Israel (Madrid) to provide personal connection among global Sephardic communities.

The Sephardic Heritage Institute NM identified the need to bring awareness of genetics (including BRCA-I) and genealogy. In conjunction with the Jewish Genealogical Society of New Mexico, it cosponsored the annual Fall DNA/Genealogy Workshop, and the Spring Jewish Genetics Conference. Both programs have attracted the medical community and other experts, in addition to genealogists and the general public interested in DNA and genealogy.

Our activities

Since the pandemic began, all our activities are online with events on Zoom and Facebook Live! We also offer public talks about New Mexico, Jewish and Spanish Colonial history, and the history of the *conversos*. Our monthly activities include:

Tiempo de Reflexion

Each month we take time to reflect on our lives and our connections with the people around us from the viewpoint of Jewish perspectives, ethics, values, and the teachings offered by Jewish tradition.

Whispering Lines

Our monthly book club where we read and discuss — with the authors — books focused on crypto-Judaism. Selections range from personal narratives, historical novels, and academic books that reflect the particular experience of the Jewish people in the Western hemisphere and elsewhere during the Colonial Period. All are invited to participate. 



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“Heirs to the Land”

Spanish Jews take the spotlight in a Netflix series set pre-Inquisition

The series “Heirs to the Land” that dropped on Netflix in April takes a deep dive into what it meant to live



as a Jew in Spain at the time, when the strictly Catholic country began its descent into organized persecution of minorities that culminated with the Inquisition.

The series reflects a growing appetite in Spain for exploring local history in general, especially its oft-overlooked Jewish chapters.

www.jta.org/category/culture





Bloodsucking Pelicans

A Dutch Jewish Symbol?

Amsterdam's Portuguese-Jewish community adopted a seemingly strange image from Medieval Christian art

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DIKLAH ZOHAR

Amsterdam's Portuguese-Jewish community adopted a seemingly strange image from medieval Christian art. A bleeding pelican who wounds its breast and feeds its three young birds with its own blood is an unusual type of decoration in a synagogue. In Catholic Church art on the contrary, this very image appears frequently. The source of the iconography is, in all probability, the *Physiologus*, a collection of moralized beast tales from late antiquity.

Originally written in Greek (though none of these versions have survived) and translated into Latin, *Physiologus* was later introduced into most European languages and is also known as *Bestiary*. Despite its name, it was not a book of natural history but rather one intended to illustrate the metaphorical meanings — and more specifically, the Christian allegorical meanings — which the writers believed to be embedded in nature. The book became extremely popular in various editions during the Middle Ages and

Above, Illustration from a mid-15th century manuscript depicting a pelican piercing its own breast so that its young may drink from its blood (Courtesy: Museum Meermanno, The Haag, MMW, 10 B 25, Folio 32r)

Diklah Zohar

was born in Israel in 1968. She studied Art History and Jewish History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Classical Archeology at Leiden University.



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She is especially interested in synagogues and their decorative motifs. Her PhD research focused on mosaic art from the early Byzantine era in the Near East. Over the course of her studies, Diklah became interested in cultural exchange between the Jewish and the Christian artistic spheres, resulting in published works on Roman and Christian images in Jewish art. Today Diklah is the director of the Crescas Jewish Educational Centre in Amsterdam. Besides giving lectures and workshops, she is active as a mosaic artist.





Nicholas Hilliard's
"Pelican Portrait"
of Queen Elizabeth I, c. 1575



Painting of the interior of the Portuguese
Synagogue in Amsterdam by Emanuel
de Witte, c. 1680. From the Folklore
Research Center at the Hebrew University
of Jerusalem; available via the National
Library of Israel Digital Collection

was often illustrated. The pelican does not appear in all versions of the book, but it seems the basic concept of the odd behavior of the pelican was already established in the early Middle Ages.

In the 7th century, Isidor of Seville wrote in *Etymologies* (Book 12, 7:26): "The pelican is an Egyptian bird that lives in the solitude of the river Nile. It is said [...] that she kills her offspring and grieves for them for three days, then wounds herself and sheds her blood to revive her sons." Of all possible images, the Jewish-Portuguese community in Amsterdam chose none other than the Bleeding Pelican as its symbol. What is the reason for this peculiar choice?

In Christian art the pelican is symbolic and metaphoric with a specific reference both to the self-sacrifice of Jesus and the idea of resurrection. A medieval depiction of this scene appears in a 12th-century capital (head of a pillar or column) decoration in the so-called "Room of the Last Supper" on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The capital dates to the time of the Crusades and shows elements characteristic of the Romanesque style. The choice to use a symbol of self-sacrifice to decorate the room that the Crusaders believed to be the site of the Last Supper is not surprising. It is sometimes difficult to identify the bird as a pelican, yet most of the depictions in medieval Christian art do not actually resemble the bird at all. It seems as though the artists were not aware of the actual appearance of the pelican or that the natural appearance of the bird did not matter as long as it expressed the theological message.

In some manuscripts, the pelican appears as a bird of prey. However in other examples, such as the pelican decorating the dress of Queen Victoria I in a 1575 portrait now at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, it much more resembles a swan. The clear Christian message of the image makes it quite surprising to find the image in Jewish art. The history of the Portuguese-Jewish community in Amsterdam may clarify the reason for this choice.

The Sephardic-Portuguese community arrived in the Netherlands after the signing of the Union of Utrecht (1579), a declaration of religious tolerance that created an inviting set of circumstances for Jews to settle in the Netherlands and particularly in Amsterdam. The earliest Sephardic community in Amsterdam was Beth Jacob (named after Jacob Tirado, also known as Guimes Lopez da Costa, whose house the community used as a synagogue). The second was Neve Shalom, founded in 1608. Ten years later, Beth Jacob was split and a third community, Beth Israel, was founded. In 1639 these three communities merged together under the name Kahal Kodesh Talmud Torah. Before the unification, the symbol of the Neve Shalom community was the phoenix, which continued to be

used afterwards as well, appearing on *ketubbot* (Jewish marriage contracts) in Amsterdam throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

This legendary bird that appears in Greek mythology and in the Talmud also found its way into the medieval beast books and Christian iconography. According to the myth, the phoenix has an extremely long life but dies in flames from which it is reborn. Both the phoenix and the self-sacrificing pelican appear in the frontispiece of the 1749 edition of *Musaeum Hermeticum*, a compendium of alchemical texts. The idea of regeneration from the flames probably appealed to the Sephardic-Portuguese Jews who recognized the parallels in their own history as their ancestors suffered greatly at the hands of the Inquisition, including the *auto da fé* – execution by burning alive. The symbol of rebirth from the ashes – which can be seen as an allegory for building a new Jewish life in Amsterdam free of the fears that tormented Jews in Spain and Portugal – undoubtedly had its historic appeal. Moreover, the symbol was probably not seen as foreign or alien since the phoenix appears in ancient Jewish sources as well.

This cannot be said about the pelican however, which does not appear as a mythological bird in Jewish sources. Though it has clearly been used as a symbol of the Portuguese-Jewish community in Amsterdam for a few centuries – as evidenced by its appearance on letters, books and documents – it is not known with certainty when exactly the community adopted the Bleeding Pelican as its symbol. It has been suggested that this occurred after the three Sephardic communities merged into one. If so, it becomes a visual allegory for the unification of the three groups with the focus on the three young birds rather than on the adult pelican and its sacrifice: each of the young birds representing one of the Sephardic communities now unified and drinking from one source of tradition.

This seems to present a logical explanation for why the image of the Bleeding Pelican, which is very unusual in Jewish art, became the symbol for the newly-forged community. ■

This article originally appeared on The Librarians, <https://blog.nli.org.il/en>, the official online publication of the National Library of Israel dedicated to Jewish, Israeli and Middle Eastern history, heritage and culture.



*Decorative capital in "David's Tomb" on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem
(Photo: Diklah Zohar)*



Pelican feeding her own blood to her young, as depicted in a late 13th-century French manuscript. From the Getty Center (Public Domain)



Phoenix appearing on a ketubbah from Amsterdam, 1808. From the Rosenthaliana Collections – Special Collections of the University of Amsterdam; available via the National Library of Israel Digital Collection

Finding My 15 Grandmothers

Past and Present

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GENIE MILGROM

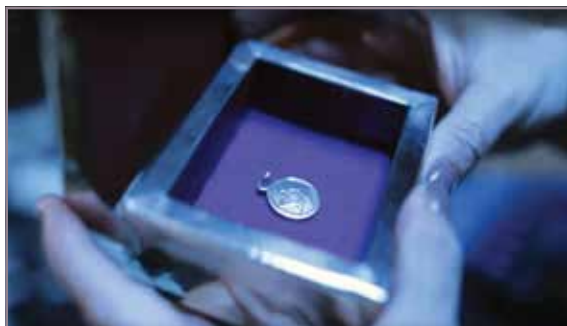
I was born into a Roman Catholic family in Havana, Cuba and emigrated to the United States when I was four years old. Brought up in Catholic schools all my life and very spiritual, yet having a distinct feeling of not belonging, was a disconcerting load for a young girl to carry. Nonetheless, that is how I lived through my entire childhood. At Barry College, a Catholic women's university in Miami, I studied comparative religion and realized that subconsciously, inexplicably, the Jewish religion is what I had gravitated toward my entire life. I began to study it from all angles on my own without anyone knowing. I was merely trying to bring meaning to the discomfort I had felt all those years.

I married a Cuban Catholic man at a very young age and had two children right away. I was consumed with being a young working mother and was not at all ready to face the unknown and the existential spiritual crisis I had been going through until I reached the age of 28. My kids were growing up and I could focus on the inner me. I finally decided to tackle the Jewish religion. In a lengthy five-year-plus Orthodox conversion, I was finally fulfilled as a Jewish woman.

I was not ready for the inevitable fallout at home however, and found myself as a single mother, having lost relationships with most of my family and childhood friends. In addition, I was not feeling fully accepted by the new Jewish acquaintances I had

made at the synagogue. It was a very difficult time for me until I eventually met my husband Michael, who is a very observant Ashkenazi Jew from Antwerp, Belgium; we hit it off and got married. To this day, Michael is my soul mate and completes me fully. Together we became active in our synagogue and community and I began to thrive in this new environment, even though I had undergone an identity crisis and metamorphosis to reach the place where I was finally comfortable and content. It is not a journey for the faint of heart.

We went through our lives in this way for a few years until the day my maternal grandmother died. She left instructions to give me some of her jewelry with a hamsa (hand of G-d) and earrings with a Star of David. I had never seen them before. On that day my mother also gave me a family tree that my grandfather had made. My grandmother had been quite close to me and had taught me customs in the kitchen that she said were family traditions, yet I



knew to be Jewish, such as checking eggs for blood, leafy vegetables for insects, and taking dough from large amounts of baking, wrapping it in aluminum foil and throwing it in the oven to burn. All of these are kosher dietary customs but the real clue came on the day she died. My mother insisted on a burial before 24 hours had passed, as is the family tradition.



The next day, I was able to understand in a fraction of a second that my maternal grandmother had been sending me clues all along. She and my grandfather were first cousins from a tiny village on the border between

Spain and Portugal. They had moved to Cuba in the 1920s and the family tree that had been carefully crafted by my grandfather showed a family that had first and second cousins intermarrying at every generation. No one had ever married outside of the family. I soon realized that my family had what is known in genealogy as a collapsed pedigree, since the family was marrying from within.

All of these clues led me to realize that the fire burning within me since I was young was in reality a strange sort of call to return to the ancestors. I knew at that moment that I must have come from a maternal Jewish lineage and felt a strong emotional urge to prove it.

By that time, thanks to genealogy, I was aware that we had an unbroken maternal lineage to the pre-Inquisition Jews of Spain and Portugal. But I had worked long enough alongside Orthodox rabbis to know that the proof had to be solid and covered by a plethora of documentation. Off I went to Spain with my family tree — which took me back to the 1700s — and found a genealogist there to help. I asked him to corroborate all the information in the tree that I had and asked him to get me every single birth, marriage and death certificate. This was accomplished fairly quickly as the family had all come from the small village of Feroselle and the archives contained these documents. The genealogist did not however, have the knowledge to prove that they were hidden Jews through the centuries. So it was incumbent upon me to

find hidden clues such as generations of babies not being baptized. Slowly, slowly, we worked our way back to 1545 and the actual mention of a woman whose family had been found guilty of being Jews during the Inquisition.

By then I had developed a strong following on social media and hundreds were waiting to see my results so they could connect their ancestry with the Jewish people as well. I wanted a certification that I had been born Jewish so that the legacy of the grandmothers would endure the generations that would follow me. I contacted the chief Sephardic rabbi in the United States at the time and he told me to contact Dr. Stanley Hordes, a past president and founder of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. Thus began my very long relationship with not only Dr. Hordes, but with SCIS as well. >>>



Feroselle's mayor presents Genie Milgrom with the key to the city



Genie shares 500 years of genealogy with the mayor of Feroselle — on one piece of paper!



Feroselle, Spain



After Dr. Hordes reviewed my work, he ascertained that I indeed descended from a Jewish Pre-Inquisition family and I subsequently received a letter stating that I had been born Jewish from Rabbi Marc Angel, then chief rabbi at Shearith Israel, the Sephardic and Portuguese synagogue in New York. While this letter rocked my world, I knew I wanted something from the Jewish court in Israel as well, so that all the corners of the earth would accept me and my family as Jewish by birth.

In the meantime, I continued to go back in history finally reaching 1405 pre-Inquisition Spain and Portugal and learned that more than 45 members of my direct maternal family had been burned to death as martyrs in the Inquisition. I also went to Fermoselle with historians to prove that Jews had lived there. During my visits there, I found ritual baths and two ancient synagogues that history had forgotten, as well as a labyrinth of tunnels underground that led from the border of the village all the way to the river Duero that forms the natural boundary between Spain and Portugal. At the end, I had accessed Catholic Church records, land sale documents, last wills and testaments, historical information, a bride and orphan foundation (a very Jewish type of fund), and so much more. With all this in hand — a legacy of 15 grandmothers — I went to Israel and several years later received another letter, this time from the high religious court stating that I had been born Jewish and all my ascendants and descendants were also Jewish. The opus achieved!

Since then I have researched my father's family and learned that on his side as well, they had lived in Cordoba as Jews and all the way down to my paternal great-grandmother whose last name was Sigler de Espinosa. Clearly, a heady Jewish legacy was evident. They owned the *Casa de la Juderia* in Cordoba, Spain which today is the main focus of the Jewish ghetto.

I continued to search for evidence of our Jewish name and only a few months ago, found several other Jewish last names in our history: De Leon, Narbonne and Gumliel. All were practicing rabbis in Spain and then in Portugal before 1400.

Today I am very involved in global advocacy for the crypto-Jewish descendants via several organizations. I work with many communities from Monterrey to Recife and make sure they have adequate educational material, prayer books, etc.

I am also very active spearheading a program to digitize all the Inquisition records around the world so that others may find their lineages as well. At this juncture, we are halfway finished with Portugal and on board to continue with Spain and Mexico.

Through all these years, I have spoken at more conferences and venues than I can count, as well as directly to governments at the Parliament in Israel, The Press Box at the EU, and AIPAC in the United States. I personally digitized and uploaded more than 50,000 entries that are being housed at www.jewishgen.org and soon at the American Sephardi Federation. These are Inquisition genealogies, names, dates and relationships from around the world found in out-of-print books and dissertations.

The call of my ancestors was loud and coursed through my blood. I understood the assignment and took it on. There is still much work to do and I intend to give it as much power in the future as I have in the past. 🔥

Genie spoke about her history, the research for her books, and her work toward digitizing written Inquisition records around the world in a 2019 interview at the EU Parliament in Brussels with a reporter and Rabbi Avi Tawil, Director of the European Jewish Community Center. Thereafter she shared her journey in a speech at the Cervantes Institute honoring the 2019 EU Year of Cultural Heritage Restoration.



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A TALE OF TWO BROTHERS

.....
ESTHER MALKA MARGARETTEN ASTRUC



On a Friday night in Tzfat (Safed), one of Judaism's four Holy Cities, my 14th cousin Daniela Esther, sat facing me on the sofa, the nearby Shabbat candles bathing her face with a warm glow. Outside, the moon cast its pale light over the quiet, ancient streets of the city of miracles—the newfound home we were somehow both destined to choose in the eternal land of our people.

Had it been just four years since Daniela returned to the Jewish faith of her Portuguese ancestors? And myself, almost 50? It was hard to believe. She was in the midst of telling me an incredible story — one I had heard only a little of previously.

“At the time,” she began, “about eight years ago, I was still a Christian. My *abuelita*, my grandmother, Maria Esther, had been raised Catholic in the town of Lagos de Moreno, Mexico. Later she moved to Los Angeles, California, where my dad grew up. ‘Lita,’ as I called her, always told me we were descended from royalty. She made me memorize the *apellidos*, the surnames in our family, going back several generations. Every time I would visit, she had me recite them. Before she passed on, Lita gave me a framed picture of myself. Sometime after her death, I opened the frame to take out the picture — and was shocked to find a whole family tree of our ancestors going back many generations hidden inside. I realized that Lita hid it in order to pass the tree down to me without my aunt, who would not have approved, preventing her.

“I was able to use this family tree to jumpstart my genealogy search,” Daniela continued. “And of course as you know, this led me all the way back to Portugal, to our common ancestor, my 13th great-grandmother Violante Gómes, a Jewish *converso* woman. ‘Wow, Jewish ancestors,’ I thought, ‘I must look into this!’ Within five years after delving into the works of the Rambam and other Sefardi rabbis, I completely changed my whole belief system and converted to Judaism.”

I smiled. How funny and ironic. Daniela's story was the exact opposite of mine. While she returned to the faith of her fathers because of her discoveries about her family tree, I had always been clueless about my Jewish ancestry — until 44 years after my own conversion! How did I get to that point? And how did Daniela and I — whose families had split into two different directions and spent the last 400 years on different continents — find each other once again? I choose to believe the Creator, who led us both back to His People, brought this about.

.....

My name is Esther Malka and although I live in Tzfat — having moved to Israel from the US four years ago — I was born in Moline, Illinois, far from any large Jewish community. As related in my previous story, “A Broken Chain” (*HaLapid* Autumn/Winter 2021), I believed while

growing up that our family was the same as all the neighbors around us — Protestants and Catholics from northwestern Europe. Nothing gave us any reason to think otherwise.

Things changed when I turned 12 and became friends with Leah, a Jewish girl who moved to our town. I was instantly drawn toward the warmth of Leah's Jewish family and their small community, and when I attended Shabbat services with her and felt the presence of her G-d deep in my heart, I became drawn to His people.

>>>



Purim celebration — Daniela (l) dressed as our distant relative Doña Gracia Mendes-Nasi, and I am Queen Esther, whom the anusim revered.

Above, (l) Don Antonio, Prieur de Crato, XVIII King of Portugal and (r) Juan Gómez de Portugal



Over time, Leah taught me whatever she knew of her faith and eventually, one day, I found myself standing before a Jewish rabbinical court reciting *Shema Yisrael* as a newly-welcomed Jew. In that moment, I embraced Judaism, not because I had any inkling of Jewish roots nor remembrance from my childhood of the strange customs kept by my grandmother Marie — but because this is what my soul had drawn me to. I came to a Jewish life from deep within.

It was 44 years later, only after I had married and our children had grown, that my daughter and I decided to investigate our family tree. We joined a genealogical website and started tracing the ancestors of my maternal French great-grandmother Emilie Pellissier. We had a hunch we might find something interesting — and were shocked when we found that her family had Spanish surnames that were Jewish in origin from Catalonia.

In my ongoing efforts to research our family, I found that the only branch I was able to trace was that of my great-grandmother's father, Marcel Pellissier. I hit a brick wall when it came to her mother Sophie Testuz's side. But one day a distant French cousin sent me the solution to my dilemma, one that turned my life completely upside down. What she sent was a link to a document stored in the French National Library Gallica titled *Descendance de Don Antonio, Prieur de Crato, XVIII Roi du Portugal*, written by Viscount Antonio de Portugal de Faria.

I was baffled. Who was Antonio, Prior of Crato, 18th King of Portugal, and what did he have to do with my great-great grandmother Sophie's family? I was soon to find out. Although the document was written in French, I was able to read it because I had studied French in school. I was dumbfounded. It turned out to be the story of my family, my distant ancestors.

The document begins with a narrative, well-known in Portuguese history and proceeds to list a large family tree descending from

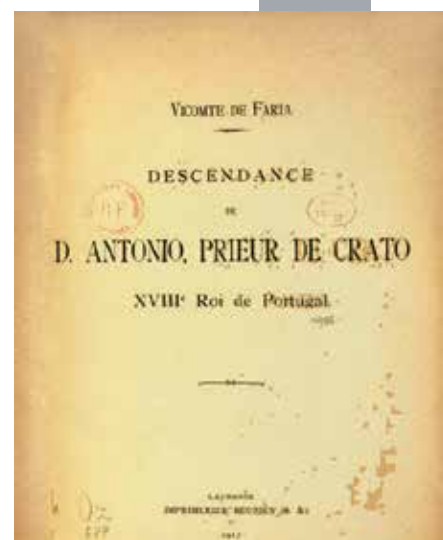
this ancestor, Don Antonio (1531-1595), all the way through his descendants, to my great-grandmother Emilie, her daughter, and my grandmother Marie Pellissier Alden, and her siblings who were young girls at the time it was written in 1917. Without any doubt, this was my family.

Later my first cousin Joshua discovered in a box of papers inherited from his parents, a very old letter written in French by my great-grandmother Emilie's older sister Adeline, which also told of this story and served as additional validation. It seems that our immediate ancestors were aware of this history even if, for whatever reason, they did not share it with our generation.

• • • • •

The story begins with Violante Fernandes Gómes, born in 1510 as a New Christian or *converso* in Torre de Moncorvo, Portugal. She was the daughter of Pero Luis Fernandes Gómes, a powerful Portuguese nobleman who descended from Jews, and Victoria Mendoza Llaralde, the daughter of a Portuguese *converso* family. Violante, also known as Yolanda, was nicknamed *Pelicana* meaning "the she-pelican" in Portuguese. This name evidently was a derogatory term referring in some way to her family's *converso* status. Violante grew up and her beauty caught the attention of an important person — Prince Luis, Prior of Crato (1503-1555) — the son of King Manuel I of Portugal and his second wife Maria, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella.

This may sound incredible, but truth is often stranger than fiction and this story is a real part of Portuguese history. Since Prince Luis' title of Prior of Crato was a hereditary title of the clergy, he was not permitted to marry, but Violante insisted their relationship be legitimate and so they did marry — in secret. They had two sons, Antonio and Juan. As brothers, they shared the same parents but that is where the similarity ends. Their paths in life diverged greatly as did that of their descendants.



A discovery that turned my life completely upside down.



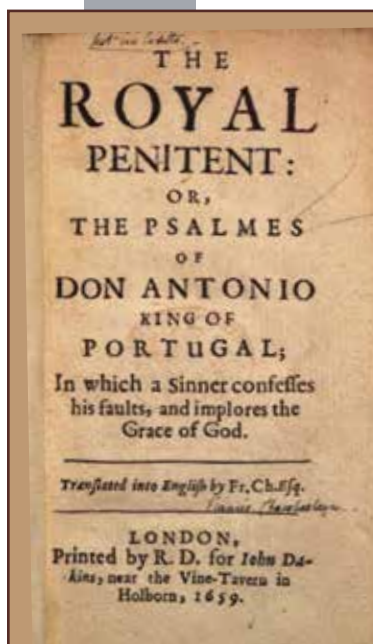
Countess Emilia D'Orange-Nassau Princess of Portugal



Prince Manuel I de Portugal Avis



Violante Fernandez
Gómes



A confession



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ANTONIO

Violante's son Antonio inherited his father Prince Luis' title, Prior of Crato, and was educated within the Church in Coimbra but he later relinquished any connection to the clergy or religion. He won the hearts of the Portuguese people, fighting valiantly in battles on behalf of his country, and living independently. Through his union with a Portuguese woman, Ana Barbosa, possibly with Jewish ancestry, he had a son, Prince Manuel (1558-1638) who was born in Tangiers, Morocco while Antonio was serving as Portuguese governor. During this time Portugal controlled several Moroccan coastal ports.

Antonio returned to Portugal just as the current king of Portugal, his uncle Cardinal Henrique, died. Antonio was then crowned king of Portugal, as a logical contender to the throne, with the support of the people who loved him. In *History of the Marranos*, author Cecil Roth maintains that Antonio had the support of all the *conversos* since they saw his ascent to the throne as potentially helpful.

Antonio had barely ruled when Phillip II of Spain (Antonio's cousin) sent a formidable army to oust him and succeeded in taking control of Portugal. Antonio fled to the Azores Islands with his oldest son Manuel where he ruled for three years until Phillip was proclaimed king of Portugal, which became an autonomous state under Spain. After two failed attempts to regain his throne by enlisting fleets of ships from France and England to fight Phillip, Antonio returned to Paris, his funds depleted, and lived out the rest of his days in exile as an advisor to King Henry IV of France who gave him a stipend to survive. He lived in constant fear of Phillip's assassins who were out to kill him and never gave up hope of regaining the throne and throwing off the Spanish Hapsburg rule of Portugal.

In his old age, Antonio reviewed his life and felt he had not maintained the highest standards. He turned to his

Creator, and with deep regret over his misdeeds, wrote a volume in Latin in 1592 called *Psalmi Confessionales*. Alone, ill and in exile, Antonio died in 1595 and was buried in Paris.

Fortunately, I was able to obtain a downloaded copy of the English translation of Antonio's work. It had been translated posthumously into English in 1659 as *The Royal Penitent, Psalms of D. Antonio, Prior of Crato, King of Portugal*. I read it with mixed emotions. After all, it was written by my own ancestor 400 years ago! I read how Antonio listed every single errant deed he had committed in his life, expressing great remorse. I felt sad that Antonio — although actually a Jew — never had the opportunity to experience the beliefs of his mother Violante's people. I believe that 400 years later this was left for me to do.

PRINCE MANUEL AND EMILIA

What became of Antonio's oldest son Prince Manuel? As mentioned, Prince Manuel escaped Portugal together with his father Antonio, and went on to marry Emilia d'Orange Nassau, a Huguenot princess, the daughter of one of the regional rulers of the Spanish Netherlands, William I "The Silent" (1533-1584). Together they had nine children. Life was agreeable until the family coffers ran dry and they were faced with serious financial problems.

At the same time, Spain offered Manuel a job as governor of the Indies. He jumped at the offer and although this development brought financial salvation, it spelled doom for his marriage to Emilia, whose country, the Netherlands, had been fighting to break free from Spanish rule since 1556.

Emilia considered Manuel's decision to work for Spain an act of treason against her country and left, taking her six daughters with her to Geneva, Switzerland. Not long after, Emilia passed away and her



daughters returned to the Netherlands — except for one, my ancestor Maria Bélgica who, newly married, remained behind in Switzerland.

Here the Gallica narrative of Antonio and his descendants ends. But for our family, it was only the beginning.

Many generations after Emilia's death, our family (which had remained Huguenots) were still residing in Geneva when in 1860, my great-great-grandmother Sophie Testuz married and moved to a town on the French-Swiss border where her daughter, my great-grandmother Emilie Pellissier, grew up and married an American, my great-grandfather Edmund. He later brought her to live in America where my grandmother Marie, her sisters and later my parents, were born.

So this is our story — one that traces a *converso* woman, Violante Gomes, mother of the 18th King of Portugal, down through the ages to me, a girl from Moline, Illinois, who finally returned to the people of her ancestors. The question still remains: where does my 14th cousin Daniela Esther fit in with all this? In order to answer that question, we have to go back to Violante and her two sons, Antonio and Juan. What became of Antonio's brother Juan?

JUAN

The Gallica author, Antonio de Faria, wrote that Juan married Catalina Lopez de Nava of Spain, and sailed with her to the New World to what is now Jalisco, Mexico. He and his family founded the settlement of Santa María de Los Lagos, now known as Lagos de Moreno.

I was interested in learning about Juan's family because after all, his descendants are my distant cousins too. I discovered that the family of Juan's wife, Catalina Lopez de Nava, were *Judiazantes*, or *conversos* who were practicing Judaism in secret for many generations. Several of their descendants had been caught by the

“
400 years later!
It took just a few moments of relating our respective family trees to realize exactly how we were related.
She was a descendant of Juan —and I, of his brother Antonio!
”

Mexican Inquisition and some had been burned at the stake.

Meanwhile, during this time I was fortunate to relocate to Jerusalem and in 2021, to the northern city of Tzfat. While celebrating the holiday of Purim with friends, I happened to mention in passing how the *conversos* of Spain and Portugal had revered Queen Esther, the first crypto-Jew. When they asked if our family descended from *conversos*, I said yes — and they told me about another person they knew here in Tzfat, also a convert to Judaism, with a similar background. “She’s even descended from Ferdinand and Isabella.”

“But I am too!” I remarked. “Please, can you give me her number?”


They were only too happy to oblige and the very next day, *Shushan Purim*, in my home, I met Daniela Esther — my 14th

cousin. It took just a few moments of relating our respective family trees to realize exactly how we were related. She was a descendant of Juan — and I, of his brother Antonio! As we celebrated Shabbat that special Friday night, Daniela recounted stories about her *abuelita* María Esther who had grown up in the same town that Juan and Catalina founded centuries ago. Stunned, I reflected on the interesting aspects of it all.

Daniela's ancestor Juan, married a woman whose family continued to guard Judaism in secret and their descendants carried on those traditions for centuries afterwards in a place where many *converso* descendants are found. She was coached by her *abuelita* to memorize the family names and that is how Daniela found her way back to Judaism.

In contrast, my ancestor Antonio had nothing of Judaism in his life, having been raised and educated in the Church. He was forced to flee to France where he died a Catholic and his descendants lived on in Switzerland as Huguenots. And although my grandmother Marie did keep a few *converso*-type customs, she did not wish me to discover our Portuguese-Jewish past.

And yet, far from any Spanish or Portuguese speaking people, in the heartland of America, something ancestral awoke in me and I was drawn back to my People.

Daniela and I, two related souls, were both brought back, each in our own way. And two brothers, separated by vast distances, time and tumultuous world events, were likewise brought back together through us, their descendants, after 400 years, in an amazing act of divine providence in the mystical city of Tzfat where miracles still happen. 



500 YEARS IN THE LIFE OF THE AMON FAMILY



From the
Surrender of Spain
to the Court of
Suleiman the
Magnificent
and Beyond

.....
ISAAC AMON

It is said we are only remembered for three generations. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon us to bear witness to the lives of our ancestors throughout the



*Abraham contemplating the multitude of stars, by E.M. Lillien**

centuries so they may live on for posterity. As the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom and member of the House of Lords, memorably wrote, “I hear their call to write the next chapter... [and] continue their journey because... I may not let it and them fail. I cannot be the missing letter in the scroll.”

That said, for centuries members of the Amon family across three continents served as advisers and physicians to sultans, esteemed rabbis and businessmen. The family name first appears in the first book of the Torah. The Almighty — in bestowing a new name upon Abram — announces to him that “Your name will be Abraham, for I have made you the Father of Many [Av Hamon] nations.” The name Hamon thus translates as “multitude” or “many.”

Talmudic scholars moreover, have indicated that there exists a deeper meaning to

this name. Indeed, the commentators state that the very name Abraham is but an abbreviation of *Av Hamon*, (“Father of Many”), while each letter signifies a special attribute or character trait of Abraham, the progenitor of not only the Jewish people, but of monotheism itself. As a last name, it will variably be spelled Hamon or Amon.

ABRAHAM TO ISAAC

The first individual who bears this name in the historical record (and thus my family’s first appearance) seems to be Isaac Amon of Granada, Spain in the late 15th century. Private physician to Muhammad XII (or Boabdil) the last Nasrid sultan of Granada, Isaac Amon witnessed the surrender of the last Muslim-ruled city

** From the Center for Jewish Art at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; available via the National Library of Israel Digital Collection*





*A patio in the Alhambra illustrated in the 19th-century book Reino de Granada.**



*Alhambra design details illustrated in the 19th-century book Reino de Granada.**



*Depiction of Jews fleeing Spain, from a 19th-century book on the Inquisition.**

to Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic monarchs, in January 1492. Besides some speculation, history tragically reveals no more of this forebear of the Amon family. It does however record the existence of another Amon named Joseph, a younger relative who was also in Granada at that time. One historian believed that Joseph was born in Italy, scion of the famous family of Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura, although the consensus is that the Amon family is of Iberian origin.

Three months after the capture of Granada, and with it the end of the *Reconquista* (the Christian reconquest of Muslim Spain), Ferdinand and Isabella levied the infamous Edict of Expulsion from the Alhambra, ordering all professing Jews to convert or leave on pain of death by July 31, 1492. Following Tisha B'Av of that year, the last Jews left Spain, on the same day Christopher Columbus departed on his voyage of exploration.

AT THE SULTAN'S COURT

Joseph and his infant son Moses, fled to the safety of the Ottoman Empire along with multitudes of their co-religionists. As countless Jews arrived in Constantinople, Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) famously declared "that by expelling their country's Jews, Ferdinand and Isabella had impoverished their own country and enriched his own."

Notwithstanding this venerable story, Amon family lore holds that Sultan Bayezid ordered Joseph to declare the *Shahada* and convert to Islam. He was given three days to decide. Joseph refused and defiantly proclaimed that he, his family and brethren had fled their ancestral homeland in search of religious liberty. He offered up his life but declared that he would not betray his faith.



Bayezid II



Etching of Doctor Moses Amon by 16th-century French diplomat Nicolas de Nicolay

Impressed by his staunch conviction, Bayezid invited Joseph to become his physician and advisor. Consequently, Joseph loyally served Bayezid and his son Selim I (r. 1512-1520), often accompanying them on military expeditions to Egypt and Syria, as the Ottoman Empire continued to increase its vast territorial holdings.

Joseph's son Moses who had left Spain as an infant, rose even higher than his father in the esteem and service of the sultan and his Jewish brethren. He served as physician, advisor and diplomat to Suleiman the Magnificent (r. 1520-1566), the longest reigning Ottoman sultan, throughout much of his 46 years in power. Moses funded a *yeshiva*, paid Jewish scholars to translate great works, and valiantly defended Jews from infamous blood libel allegations. Most significantly, he persuaded Suleiman to intervene on the legendary Doña Gracia Nasi's behalf with Venetian authorities, thus allowing her to immigrate to Constantinople. Although other Amons may be mentioned in various encyclopedias and resources, none of them merited receiving the historic stature or station of these three forefathers, all of them medieval physicians.

THE AMONS OF LATE-OTTOMAN ISTANBUL

Closer to our own time, my great-great grandfather Ishak Amon Effendi, is the earliest known member of my directly-traceable family branch. Born and raised in Istanbul, he was a teacher of mathematics, a rabbi and a member of the Communal Council. His grandson (my grandfather) told me that as a sign of his prestige, Rabbi Ishak was even offered the position of Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire following the Turkish War for Independence.

Unwilling to become involved in political machinations, he declined the offer to succeed Rabbi Haim Nahum Effendi, who had left to become Chief Rabbi of Egypt. Nonetheless, the Ottoman government bestowed *Effendi* (a title of nobility equivalent to being knighted in England and rarely given to Jews) upon him as a sign of the esteem in which he was held. In an article published in the Eliezer Ben-Yehuda publication *Hashkafa* on November 9, 2021, Ishak Amon (in Hebrew, יצחק המון) is mentioned as one of the notable residents of Istanbul (in Hebrew, קושטא) who voted for the new Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire. With help from the National Library of Israel Digital Collection in August 2019, and with the assistance of the Turkish Chief Rabbinate, the Neve Sha Synagogue, a good friend named Ismail Baran Can Yildirim, and several cemetery employees (who barely spoke English), Rabbi Ishak's grave was finally found in the Sephardic cemetery of Istanbul, located in the Arnavutköy neighborhood.

*Wedding photo of
Denis and Rene Isaac Amon*



*Isaac at the grave of Ishak Amon Effendi
in Istanbul.*
isaac@jewishheritagealliance.com



** From the Center for Jewish Art at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; available via the National Library of Israel Digital Collection*



Rabbi Ishak's son Davit, was my great-grandfather. Born in 1881, the same year as Ataturk, he owned and operated his own import-export business in Istanbul. Married by Rabbi Raphael David Saban, the future Chief Rabbi of Turkey, Davit had two brothers and a sister. He died in 1977, the year after my father started medical school, and a dozen years before I was born in the United States.

THE MIDWEST VIA MODERN TURKEY

Davit's son – my grandfather Rene Isaac Amon, was a formative influence in my own life. Born in December 1923, a month and a half after Ataturk proclaimed the Turkish Republic, he grew up in a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, multi-national neighborhood of Istanbul. He was a polyglot, who spoke French with his parents, Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) with his grandparents, Greek with his friends, Turkish in the streets, and Hebrew in school. He later learned German and Russian for study purposes and perfected his English as an attaché between the Turkish army and the British military during the Korean War.

As a teenager, Rene met Ataturk a few months before the latter's death. He married my grandmother, Denise Nehmad from Beirut, in Istanbul's Neve Shalom Synagogue in December 1952. Then-Chief Rabbi Raphael David Saban presided over the ceremony. Shortly thereafter, my grandparents made the decision to move to America with their young child – my father Erol – in tow. Arriving in Chicago during Fall 1957 (when my father was three years old), my grandparents had to reorient themselves to a new culture. My grandfather's Master's in Engineering from Istanbul Technical University was insufficient for career advancement. As such, despite 15 years of practice, he attended Northwestern University to obtain his PhD (and thus earn "his union card"

“The Amon Diaspora spans the globe; members live in the United States (such as Cleveland, Seattle, New York, Boston, and St. Louis), Costa Rica, Turkey, Israel, France, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Even more significantly, my Amon ancestors hail from Egypt, Iraq, Italy, Turkey, Lebanon, Spain and Portugal. Though great expanses of space and time separate us, they live on within us.”

as he put it). In his early 40s, he was thus writing his dissertation, teaching full time at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and raising my father.

Living in St. Louis, I visited my grandparents every summer while growing up. During the High Holidays, they would take the train or get a ride from Chicago to St. Louis and stay with us for a few months. My grandfather's interests were numerous and his curiosity insatiable. He continued to read works in multiple languages, discuss religion, history, literature, engage with mathematical problems, and watch movies with us at night.

INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

My grandmother (of Nahmad and Safra family origins), passed on in September 2013, while my grandfather passed on in October 2018, two months shy of his 95th birthday. Mentally lucid and cognizant until the end, (speaking in French and Ladino with friends in person and on the phone even just a few days before his passing), he impressed upon our family the importance of remembering our history and passing it on to future descendants, to those who will unfortunately not know him except through our indelible recollections and memories. In this final enterprise, he followed the notable example of our lawgiver and prophet Moses, who near the end of his own life exhorted the Nation of Israel to “remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past. Ask your father and he will inform you; your elders, and they will tell you.”

My genetic story (from 23&Me) reveals that I have relatives on five continents. Indeed, the Amon Diaspora spans the globe; members live in the United States (such as Cleveland, Seattle, New York, Boston, and St. Louis), Costa Rica, Turkey, Israel, France, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Even more significantly, my Amon ancestors hail from Egypt, Iraq, Italy, Turkey, Lebanon, Spain, and Portugal. Though great expanses of space and time separate us, they live on within us. Our DNA is the living embodiment of our chronicle in the scroll of family, Jewish, and human history. Ultimately, from the 15th-century Isaac Amon to the 21st-century Isaac Amon, the story and legacy continue. 🔥

This article originally appeared on The Librarians, <https://blog.nli.org.il/en>, the official online publication of the National Library of Israel, as part of Gesher L'Europa, its initiative to share stories and connect with people, institutions and communities in Europe and beyond.





South Texas Lower Rio Grande Cryptos and Curanderos in My Family: The Esparza Line

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CARLOS MONTALVO LARRALDE



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Carlos Larralde is a past-presenter at SCJS conferences and a retired professor of Chicano studies and Latino culture with a focus the borderlands of Texas. His PhD dissertation was on Chicano Jews in South Texas. A former professor of ethnic studies and sociology at California Community College, he taught at Golden West College and Cal-State, as well as an instructor of Chicano and Latino studies, Mexican American studies and sociology of the Southwest at other universities. He is the author and widely published contributor of articles related to the Latino and crypto-Judaic communities of California and the Southwest, as well as Colonial Mexico. Published works include *McCarthyism: Memories of a Blacklisted Bert Corona*, with Michael Lynch, and *Judge J.T. Canales, Latino Civil Rights Leader: An Intimate Portrait*.

*Continued in part from the article "From Curanderas to Official Records,"
HaLapid, Autumn/Winter 2021*

When Sephardic Jews vacated the Monterrey area in northern Mexico in the 1500s due to the Inquisition, they ventured along the Lower Rio Grande believing in a better future for their children. They constructed sturdy adobe homes that lasted literally until the Falcon Dam was built in 1950 on the Rio Grande River straddling Texas and Mexico which "inundated ranches, farms... rural homes and in fact, entire towns on both sides of the border," according to historian E. Dan Klepper.

In the 1630s during the Colonial era, Señor Blanca Enriquez, a famous *converso* rabbi persecuted by the Spanish Inquisition, fled to Mexico to serve the community of New Christians. He died in 1642. "During this time Spanish Jewry attained its greatest degree of importance, both to the colony and as a religious community," according to historian Seymour Liebman. Ready to tend to body and soul, the respected *curanderos* (or rabbinic spiritual healers) understood the psychological forces that Sephardic Jews faced along the Lower Rio Grande, an area dominated by warlike

Comanches, Apaches and other Indian nations. These "therapists" also boosted self-reliance among converted Jews who might otherwise have perished without hope or disappeared without a trace. They also discovered how isolation marginalized or disenfranchised individuals and how prolonged loneliness increased heart attacks, cancer and other diseases.

"Loneliness does not just stay in your head," said a researcher at UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine. Another expert, Steven Cole declared, "Its physiological effects go out into your body as fight-or-flight stress responses... the human brain is built to coordinate with other human beings."

These *curanderos* used Pre-Columbian or native medical treatments, especially herbs and plants. With a kind heart and sympathetic ear, plus bags of medicinal herbs, one of the local healers, Gertrudes Villarreal, who lived during the late 1700s and early 1800s, is reported to have attended to these isolated Jews. With a firm and authoritative voice, this frank and



forthright lady counseled and attended those in mental turmoil, providing treatment in adobes filled with clouds of incense from burners diffused with hallucinogenic mushrooms. Another favorite treatment was the use of morning glory seeds and peyote used to open the mind, aid breathing disorders and assist heart problems.

Following the treatment, excerpts from the Old Testament were said with prayer shawls. A perfectionist, Gertrudes also treated fevers, digestive disorders and bound broken bones. Furrowed brows revealed signs of painful arthritis, to be treated with fermented concoctions. Avoiding pork, Gertrudes attended only to her goats, chickens and herbs.

One of Gertrudes relatives was the (reported) frugal Filicidad Villarreal Esparza, active during the 1820s through the 1840s. She labored tirelessly and was irritable when her patients neglected their medicines or her spiritual advice. With piercing eyes, it was said



Roman Garcia Esparza



Alberto Garcia Esparza

she scowled and spoke sharply, crushing any arguments or excuses. To solve such conflicts, bitter medicines were wrapped in chocolate paste.

Filicidad's grandson, Alberto Garcia Esparza (1858-1944), focused on genealogy thanks to his grandfather, Roman Garcia, an elderly Confederate merchant

with a cascading gray beard. Providing free passage to *curanderos*, he owned commercial steamboats that went up and down the Rio Grande River from the 1840s to the 1870s and kept excellent records. Garcia instructed Esparza that these family genealogies recorded "the roots of the true faith." With dedication and passion, Esparza preserved these records in local country courthouses and even in Federal archives. Government officials encouraged him since these family trees were useful for questions of land ownerships and other legal issues. Records indicate that the much esteemed, gray-haired Esparza died on July 23, 1944. He has been long remembered. 🍂

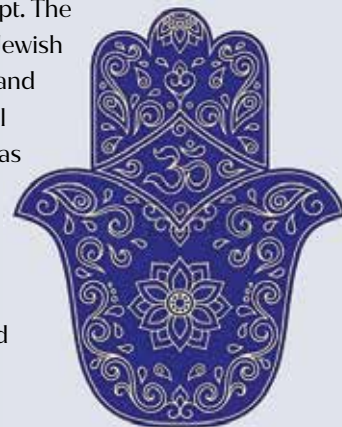
PORTO, PORTUGAL CLOSES ITS DOORS

According to international news sources, the Jewish community of Porto, Portugal's second largest city, announced in mid-March 2022 that it is "no longer interested in cooperating with the state in the certification of Sephardic Jews," according to a statement by the Lusa News Agency.

Allegations of fraud have recently beleaguered the community's processing of citizenship applications. The city of Lisbon continues to naturalize the descendants of Sephardic Jews however. Since the flow of returnees, the past few years have seen the production of a film about Porto's history and the opening of a museum dedicated to the Holocaust.

Beauty and Protection

Looking for beauty and protection? The Hamsa is an ancient symbol, sacred to Jews and Muslims, with origins in ancient Egypt. The Hamsa made its way into Jewish culture through Sephardi and Mizrahi traditions, who call upon the Hand of Miriam as an amulet of protection and healing. These beautiful objects adorn doorways of homes, children's spaces, are used as personal adornments like necklaces, and more.





Sephardic DNA Shared by Mexicans and Jews

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CARY AUFSEESER

When Cary Aufseeser first began researching his family in 2002, he did not even know the names of all his great-grandparents. Today he can trace his roots back to the Middle Ages and has found hundreds of distant relatives all over the world (and perhaps some new Mexican Americans too).

The Jews that originally came from Spain and Portugal are Sephardic Jews. In 1492 the Catholic Church offered the Jews of Spain two choices: convert to Catholicism or leave the country. Those that converted were known as *conversos*.



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Cary Aufseeser has served on the Board of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston (JGSGB) for six years. He also served as Program Planning Chair and directed the Society's Special Interest Groups (SIGs). Cary has traveled to Germany and Austria and has written several articles on his family research for the Society's genealogy journal, *Mass-Pocha*. When Cary first began researching his family in 2002 he didn't even know the names of his great-grandparents. Today through extensive use of the internet and DNA testing, he can trace his roots back to the Middle Ages, and has uncovered thousands of distant relatives all over the world. Before Cary retired, he was a statistical analyst and programmer.

March 2016 • www.jewishboston.com/sephardic-dna-shared-by-mexicans-and-jews/#comments

There are no records to verify the numbers but it is believed that 200,000 to 800,000 Jews were expelled from Spain and those that converted were 50,000 or more. Some Jews that chose conversion continued their Jewish traditions in secret. If they were discovered practicing Jewish traditions, they were tortured until they confessed and then burned at the stake by the Inquisition.

My Family Research

I wanted to discover if I was descended from Sephardic Jews on my mother's side of the family. My mother had often said that her father's family was expelled from Spain, went to Scotland and then to Germany. Genealogical records that far back are difficult to find and many that would help to trace a family may not exist. Family stories that have been passed down may be all that descendants have. DNA testing may be one option to discover deeper ancestry.

I had my autosomal DNA tested through the Family Finder at FamilyTreeDNA. A large number of Jews use this site, so it was the most logical choice for testing.

Within one month of submitting my DNA sample, I was contacted by Crispin



Rendon, a Mexican genealogist who matched my results on certain DNA segments. Crispin has documentation for his family back to the 14th century and some of his ancestors were known *conversos*. Later I was contacted by Kevin Brook, author of *The Jews of Khazaria*, because of DNA matches Kevin found in common with both Crispin and me.

Kevin is conducting a study of Mexican Americans with DNA matches to Jews that have Sephardic heritage. Kevin, Crispin and I all found a match in a very specific sequence on Chromosome 10 of our DNA. We think this may be the Sephardic link we are looking for but at this stage, it is only a hypothesis.

We have currently found over 100 Jews and Mexican Americans with this matching sequence. The link may be through the ancestors of *conversos* with Jewish roots that originally came with the Conquistadors to the New World and others that settled there afterward. Needless to say, many present-day Mexican-Americans finding this DNA match had no idea they had Jewish ancestors.

A Work in Progress

I hope to find a specific common ancestor through the results in this ongoing study. That common ancestor may be from 10 to 20 generations back. Following written records is critical, though many of the links have led to dead ends. The hope is to find others through this DNA segment match who have been able to trace their families through other records. At this point only Crispin and a few others have found a paper trail.

Since each human being inherits only half of their DNA from each parent, not everyone who is descended from the Sephardic Jews would have this match on Chromosome 10. On the other hand, Jews are endogamous, like a number of other groups (including descendants of Mexicans in the Southwest). Jews like other endogamous groups, married other Jews who lived in the same area. This may help strengthen the transmission of certain shared DNA segments between both groups.


My maternal grandfather's ancestors settled in Silesia which was then in Germany and today in Poland. This is not an area known to be a place where Sephardic Jews settled. The surname of Kevin's Sephardic family was Maimon. Kevin knows they were Sephardic because he has documentation that they came from Turkey, a place where many Sephardic Jews from Spain arrived before they settled as merchants in Galicia (today Poland/Ukraine) where Kevin's ancestors came from.

Postscript

Since this article was first published in 2016, I discovered a Sephardic ancestor on my maternal grandmother's side. I am a Deschere descendant from Hamburg and have traced my Deschere line back to Judah (Arye Loeb) Deschere born in Hamburg about 1750. Deschere is the German spelling for

Teixeira. Diogo Teixeira Sampayo de Mattos was one of those *conversos* from Portugal who returned to Judaism in 1647 in Hamburg. This may be the link I am looking for.

Additional Note

The Ashkenazi Jews were those that eventually settled in Germany and Eastern Europe many generations after the dispersal of the Jews from Jerusalem in 70 AD. People think of Ashkenazi Jews as those who lived in Eastern Europe and Sephardic Jews as those of the Spanish Diaspora. However, some Jews of Sephardic descent also came to settle in Eastern Europe as well as the Western European ports of Amsterdam, London and Hamburg. 

The Khazars

Excerpted from Wikipedia

The Khazars were a semi-nomadic Turkish people that, in the late 6th-century AD, established a major commercial empire covering the southeastern section of modern Europe, Russia, southern Ukraine, Crimea and Kazakhstan. Its reign, created the most powerful political group to emerge from the breakup of the Western Turkic Khaganate. Astride a major artery of commerce between Eastern Europe and Southwestern Asia, Khazaria became one of the foremost trading empires of the early medieval world, commanding the western Silk Road and playing a key commercial role as a crossroad between China, the Middle East and Russia. For three centuries (c. 650–965) the Khazars dominated the vast area extending from the Volga-Don steppes to eastern Crimea and northern Caucasus.

The origins and nature of the Khazars is closely tied to theories of their languages, but is intricately difficult as no indigenous records in the Khazar language survive, and the state was polyglot and polyethnic. Their religion is thought to have been Tengrism, similar to the North Caucasian Huns and other Turkic peoples. The polyethnic populace of the Khazar Khaganate appears to have been a mosaic of pagan, Tengrist, Jewish, Christian and Muslim worshippers. Some of the Khazars joined the ancient Hungarians in the 9th century. The ruling elite of the Khazars was said by Judah Halevi and Abraham ibn Daud to have converted to Rabbinic Judaism in the 8th century, but the scope of this conversion within the Khazar Khanate remains uncertain.

Where the Khazars dispersed after the fall of the Empire is subject to many conjectures. Proposals exist regarding the possibility of a Khazar factor in the ethnogenesis of numerous peoples, such as the Hazaras, Hungarians, Kazakhs, Cossacks of the Don region and of Ukraine, Bukharan Jews, the Muslim Kumyks, the Turkic-speaking Krymchaks and the Crimean Karaites, the Moldavian Csángós, the Mountain Jews, even some Subbotniks (on the basis of their Ukrainian and Cossack origin) and others.

In the late 1800s, the theory emerged that the core of today's Ashkenazi Jews are descended from a hypothetical Khazarian Jewish Diaspora which migrated westward from modern-day Russia and Ukraine into France and Germany. Linguistic and genetic studies have not supported the theory of a Khazar connection to Ashkenazi Jewry. The theory still finds occasional support, but most scholars view it with much skepticism. The theory is sometimes associated with anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism.





In the Dress-Up Barn with Linda

She hugs the petticoats & they sing in raspy voices
finds the cashmere sweater mama wore to the drive-in
& white dress-up gloves remember fingers 'round pussy willows
& a ticking feather boa

Linda strokes a tattered veil jumps on a squeaky plank
The music invites the turtle doves

Chickadees eye the yellow slicker but that's okay
my girl loves crinoline sunbonnet garter stockings

Aunt Lucy's parrot squawks for the Mexican skirt cotton blouses
with pansy embroidery

Barn owl hankers for fur collars Davy Crockett beaver hats
& crow demands the baseball hat Papa's boxing gloves
red ear-muffs & a swallow-tailed coat

I press Grandma's doily to my face & smell Texas dream
of red mesquite a rooster hullabaloo foxes in the chicken coop

Linda sings about 'skeeters
hummin' on the honeysuckle vine Mamma hollers
come 'n eat
& a nightgown billows
in the head
wind



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AT THE CROSSROADS OF SEFARAD IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE CRYPTO-JEWS

Over 300 guests attended the inaugural in-person opening of this notable exhibit. Created by ANU-Museum of the Jewish People in partnership with the Jewish Heritage Alliance, the exhibit explores the history of the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula and the descendants of Jews who fled, those who were forcibly converted, and those who pretended to be converted.

The exhibition travels across time from the Golden Age of Iberian Jewry under the Muslim Moors; to their Christian persecution; to their flight to Europe, North Africa, the Balkans and the New World. It explores the unique customs this population developed to retain their Jewish heritage.

From the earliest days of Spanish and Portuguese conquest and colonization, many *conversos* migrated to the ports and major centers of the Americas. The Inquisition followed closely in their footsteps, establishing branches in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Brazil. Although several generations removed from normative Judaism, many *conversos* were persecuted, tortured and executed for practicing Jewish rituals in secret.

The drama that truly captures the tragedy and courage of secret Jews vividly unfolds in the remarkable saga of Luis de Carvajal the Younger, who passionately maintained his attachment to his






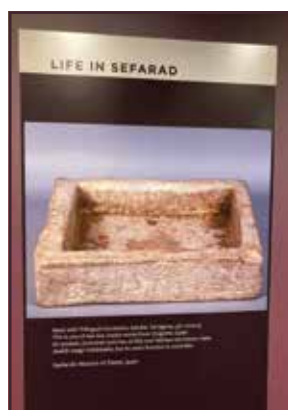
EXHIBITION • MARCH 24 - AUGUST 28, 2022
BERNARD MUSEUM OF JUDAICA
TEMPLE EMANU-EL • STREICKER CENTER • NEW YORK

ancestral faith as detailed in his diary. In 1596 Carvajal, along with his mother and sisters, were condemned to the flames of an *auto da fé* for their secret adherence to Judaism. His diary was stolen and discovered years after it disappeared and was returned to the Mexican authorities. Luis de Carvajal's other writings are preserved as well and are housed in the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City.

For centuries, the clues should have been obvious, hinting at secret histories, but the traditions and coping mechanisms of the descendants of crypto-Jews who fled or survived the Inquisition remain mysterious.

The exhibit will also serve as an educational tool in schools and other types of learning institutions, community centers, synagogues, and churches as well as other museums around the world. The exhibit was first announced on November 12, 2019, at the ANU Museum (then called *Bet Hatfutsot*) in Tel Aviv. The formal launch was delayed due to Covid-19 and has finally made its US debut at the Bernard Museum of Judaica at the Temple Emanu-El Streicker Center in New York.

Beyond the scope of the artistic exhibit, IHA will soon launch an in-depth 44-segment educational webinar to detail the story. www.jewishheritagealliance.com 



Top, l to r: Diaspora panel; Wall of panels, Panels and artifacts; Women in Sefarad panel.

Bottom, l to r: Entrance to Temple Emmanuel, New York; Dr. Issac Amon presents program; An attentive audience; The Edict of Expulsion; A stone basin; Credits panel.

BOOKS

FILM



Loaded Blessings

By Faith Quintero
Chaiwright LLC, 2019

Written in split timelines, this book weaves the stories of Sancia in Seville beginning in 1478, and of archaeologist Abi in modern-day Israel.

Loaded Blessings draws a familial line between the protagonists, as Abi possesses one of two candlesticks allegedly given to Sancia when she fled Spain for Portugal.

Sancia loses family member after family member to the horrors of the Inquisition. With only a pair of beautiful candlesticks, she eventually flees with her young son to Lisbon. There she experiences a brief respite before her son Ruben, is stolen from her and given to a Catholic family to raise. Fortunately, the woman who “fosters” her boy is benevolent, but ultimately Sancia must convert in order to see him again. Ruben eventually joins Christopher Columbus on a voyage of exploration, leading him to be shipwrecked in what we will know as Jamaica.

In modern times, American archaeologist Abi flies to Israel hoping to find a mate to the candlestick given to her when she became a bat mitzvah. She is certain she will find it in the excavation of a pirate vessel shipwrecked off the coast of Israel in early 1500s. Abi spends her time equally exploring her new friend Ari, and discussing the current political split between anti-Israel BDS (Boycott/Divest/Sanction) and other movements, and organizations such as IsraAID and Peres Center for Peace.

The topic of this book is clearly of interest to SCJS members no matter how many times the story is told. This book contains two unusual facets: First, that there were pirates who

“*Loaded Blessings...* contains the brief history of Spanish and Portuguese Jews who settled... in Jamaica... This is a topic not often explored in our historical fiction. It would be interesting to learn more about that settlement.”

skulked along the coast of now-Israel, and who may or may not have been Jewish or spoke some Hebrew. Second, it contains the brief history of Spanish and Portuguese Jews who settled (or remained after maritime disasters) in Jamaica, and the relative tolerance of Columbus’ son Diego, who became the regent of the island and kept the Inquisition away from Jamaica. This is a topic not often explored in our historical fiction. It would be interesting to learn more about that settlement.

CLAUDIA HAGADUS LONG

Claudia Hagadus Long is a former SCJS board member and the author of several novels about *conversos*, crypto-Jews and later, the inherited trauma of the Holocaust. Her most recent book is *Nine Tenths of the Law*.
www.claudiahlong.com





Mi Abuela Era Flaca and Crypto

David Maldonado, Jr.
Independently Published, 2021

One never knows what lies ahead when picking up a book or in this case, two books packaged as one. It is always a pleasant surprise when the pages reveal a true understanding of the human psyche and a deep insight into matters spiritual and material, and how clearly they shape a life. The first half of this charming compilation is a collection of original short stories depicting the lives of Hispanic people of the barrio. Lest you be concerned which barrio and where, it does not matter since the attempt is to portray life in any one of the many Hispanic neighborhoods that abound across the West — places where people are joined by culture and language.

Said author David Maldonado Jr. in a recent exchange, “Regarding the short stories, I myself was born and raised in a barrio of a Texas town during the pre-civil rights era. Like many towns in New Mexico, Arizona, and California, barrios were the result of segregation and poverty. The stories were inspired by many of my experiences, by persons I remember, and by observations. However they are not meant to be historical narratives of particular individuals. They are storytelling — to teach and illustrate life in the barrio.”

Maldonado is a past president of the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. After an academic career in social work education and theological education, he and his wife retired to Albuquerque, New Mexico. A scholar who has published extensively on Hispanic elderly and Hispanic religion, he gives the reader a true sense of the connections that existed in these segregated communities and the values that held them together. Much like Thornton Wilder’s famous play *Our Town*, these characters, so fully drawn, appear so genuine that this reviewer was prompted to write the author and ask, “Did they really exist?” The answer is no, but they will hopefully live in your mind as they do in mine. They might even remind you of someone you know.

Maldonado writes with a quiet, unassuming style, laced with the folk wisdom, humor and sentimentality that prevail in these close knit neighborhoods across the Southwest. The stories are tender and warm and deal with universal issues like aging, adapting to technology, friendship, loss and more. For those who are unaware, the art of the short story is much more challenging than a novel, and this writer is to be applauded for his mastery. Empathy, pathos, and respect for their children, their pets and the people they love shine through the lives of these characters. The remarkable events that give each story shape are often hilarious and/or moving. I suggest reading these stories either with abandon, perhaps with a good cup of coffee or glass of wine, or savored one at a time. You might consider them thought-provoking parables from which we all can still learn and connect with each other.



Crypto, the second book in the work is a powerful novella about the Anaya family who lived in Northern New Mexico in the 19th century and who struggled to maintain a hidden identity as they grappled with two faiths; observing Judaism inwardly but identifying as Protestants to the public.

Again, according to Maldonado, “the Anaya story is not of a particular family. It was inspired by the late Tomás Atencio, a sociology alumnus of the University of New Mexico Department of Sociology, who told of conversations with Hispanic Protestants and their Jewish roots. Since there is no sociological data on the topic, I did some research on conversion among Northern New Mexicans, interviewing various individuals. The Anaya story contains information from those interviews regarding the role of the Bible and the Catholic Church. In addition to my career in theological education, I was the founder of The Center for the Study of Hispanic Christianity and Religions at Southern Methodist University, Taos, New Mexico. I remember conducting a public workshop on Hispanic crypto-Jews. Stanley Hordes was our keynoter and certainly brought this topic to my attention.”

These credentials are important mainly because the family’s conflict in the story stems from choices made about faith by an elder son and the yearnings of a younger one who is afflicted with a growing blindness due to a fever. Such choices are something Maldonado understands well. The family moves from a village in Northern New Mexico to one where medical help and less criticism by the Catholic Church will make their life easier. This special tale is a fresh approach to a story familiar to many of us but perhaps not fully understood, written with care and sensitivity toward all faiths concerned.

— CORINNE BROWN





Xueta Island The Catholic Descendants of the Crypto-Jews of Mallorca

A film by Limud Mallorca • Dani Rotstein, Producer & Co-director
www.xuetaislandthemovie.com • info@xuetaislandthemovie.com

For most globe trotters, the picturesque, ancient island of Mallorca (Majorca), an exotic retreat off the coast of Spain and one of the Balearic Islands, is a place of great beauty with azure waters and memorable seafood, a playground for the rich and famous, drawing tourists of every nationality.

But it has never been a magnet for Jewish tourism. Fortunately, that is about to change.

Dani Rotstein, founder of Jewish Majorca Historical Tours, and an American transplant who has made this island his home, has helped unearth, confirm and rebuild a once-lost Jewish community. With dedication and passion, he has helped rescue the history of the island's Jewish life from Inquisition times and beyond through the power of film.

According to Rotstein, some Catholics on the island have been discriminated against for centuries because their surnames have a connection to a Jewish heritage. They not only endured stigma and humiliation, they were also deprived of fundamental rights as citizens.

In this in-depth story of these *Xuetas* (pronounced *chu-et-as*), a Catalan name for Catholic descendants of crypto-Jews, individual interviews and careful research help tell another story, one of survival and resilience. History confirms that when the Inquisition decreed the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, no Jews officially remained on this Mediterranean island. Previously, in 1435 the entire Jewish community

underwent a mass-baptism in order to save them from persecution. But many converts — crypto-Jews — still preserved the Laws of Moses. They lived secretly until 1691 when the horrific *autos da fé* saw many exposed and publicly burned at the stake in front of the larger Mallorquin society.

Many of their modern descendants today are bearers of 15 surnames harshly stigmatized by the Church due to their Jewish past. Marginalized and subjugated, these families were forced to marry among themselves over the centuries, a dangerous practice. The trauma they suffered was silenced by an ironclad social taboo as they tried to permanently erase their dark past.

Nonetheless, traces of Jewish culture, for example via gastronomy, can be seen in popular Mallorquin food, including the world-famous exported products such as the *ensaimada*, a meat product which may have Jewish roots. The *chueta* used lard or *sobrasada* (pork sausage) in their preparation to signify their fervent Catholicism and show that they had left behind the customs of their ancestors.


Rotstein discovered a robust legacy not yet widely known by the rest of the world. His own transformation seems a secondary theme in this touching story, as his self-identification and passion for history grow stronger over time. First a tourist, then a citizen who becomes a husband and a father, he is no outsider looking in. He is changing perceptions and making a difference, part of a new generation dedicated to preserving and illuminating the past. As Rotstein established his family's roots in this magical place and grew more fascinated by his discoveries, he began to offer guided tours through the alleys of the Jewish quarters of Palma. In a story still unfolding, he has met colleagues like the *chueta* writer Miquel Segura, the chef Toni Pinya, and the young *chueta* historian Laura Miró, all motivated to recover their history and pass it on.

Walking the cobblestone streets of Palma, the country's capital, seeking clues to the city's Jewish past, Rotstein helps us see that much is also revealed in the street names and plazas. But the general denial by the greater population of any Jewish past is proof that the Inquisition did its job, further reinforced by examples of heinous propaganda inscribed in books written and published in Palma in the 17th century. These volumes humiliated and debased the city's crypto-Jews. In a remarkable and poignant scene in the film, Rotstein, who earlier refers to a 2nd edition he had acquired of one of these blasphemous works, comes face-to-face with the original manuscript, a rare volume in the library of antiquarian bookseller, Manuel Ripoll. That heinous book, which Rotstein equates to the island's own version of *Mein Kampf*, is titled *La Fe Triunfante (The Triumphant Faith)*, is dated 1691, written by a Jesuit priest, and is concrete evidence of a shocking reality.

to lead Mallorquin Judaism, despite not having practiced their faith for centuries?

In the only synagogue on the island, discrepancies have already arisen due to different degrees of religious observation, the absence of a rabbi, and the diverse ethnicities of its members. The arrival of the *chuetas* to community leadership has opened new dilemmas.

The film, *Xueta Island*, is conducted in Catalan and Spanish with easy-to-read subtitles, and narrated in English by Rotstein. A 60-minute documentary, the visual experience flies by

thanks to stunning photography, an excellent musical score, and a deep sense of connection established with the subjects profiled. The documentary interrogates fundamental questions of human nature such as historical memory, identity and belonging, generational clashes, and the preservation of tradition. It fully draws the viewer into the beauty of this history and the many storytellers, not only as it is happening in Mallorca, but in the concept of return that is currently represented in other places of the world as well. Consider bringing this film to your community soon. — CJB 



On-set with Dani Rotstein, producer and co-director

The many intimate interviews with townsfolk who have learned about their history and dared to come forward and announce *no somos Judía* ("we are not Jewish") are endearing and sincere. The members of those who have returned are individuals who hail from every walk of life — jewelers, archaeologists, chefs and cooks, police chiefs and teachers of philosophy. Yet the question has arisen that while a few have been inspired to return to the faith of their ancestors, the recent entry by these *chuetas* into local Jewish community leadership has also caused unforeseen controversy among its members. Are they the best suited



Xueta Island



New Films on Sephardic Life at the Jewish Learning Channel

The goal of the Jewish Learning Channel is to increase the knowledge of the richness and diversity of Jewish life. The channel has over 100,000 views, featuring 50 documentary films on Sephardic life in Spain and Morocco and crypto-Jewish life in the Americas. All films are free and open to the public for non-commercial use. Here are four new, recently-added titles.

Jewish Cordoba

A thousand years ago Cordoba, Spain was the largest city in Europe and the most important center for Jewish life and learning. It had the best libraries in Europe and leading yeshivas. Maimonides was born there. In Cordoba today, you can still catch glimpses of how that life might have been. 7:05 minutes.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVfbca5-qxA

US Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez on Sephardic Jews and Social Justice

Representative Teresa Leger Fernandez talks about her background from a *converso* family and the Jewish heritage in New Mexico. She discusses the need for social justice for descendants of Spanish Jews and all people. 5:06 minutes.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUOnTGYwBjU



www.jewishlearningchannel.com

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The Alhambra Decree

...Also known as the Edict of Expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492. Do you know what the Alhambra Decree actually says? In this video, Gloria Abella Ballen and Ron Duncan Hart read the English translation of the Decree. A reading of the Spanish language original will be available soon.

15:40 minutes.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=leIRITZ3BH0

Maimonides - From Cordoba to Fez

Maimonides, the great medieval Jewish philosopher, theologian and scientist was born in Cordoba, Spain and lived his early life there and in Fez, Morocco. He lived in Arab societies his entire life from Spain to Morocco and eventually Egypt. His philosophical and theological writings were a rational statement of Jewish life and religious thought. 9:21 minutes.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7qrxlepcq0



Almond Orange Cake

This recipe is a modern version of the typical Sephardic Sabbath cake known as *Torta de Reyes* or King's Cake as found in the remarkable cookbook, *The Sephardic Kitchen* by Rabbi Robert Sternberg and others. Credit for this version goes to Alida Ryder from her website "Simply Delicious." It makes a wonderful Passover dessert. Photo credit- Corinne Brown (with apologies — we ate it before I had the smarts to take a picture of the whole thing!)



INGREDIENTS

2 oranges
6 eggs
1¼ cup sugar
2½ cups ground almonds / almond flour
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp vanilla extract
pinch of salt
½ cup sliced almonds

PREP THE ORANGES. This cake uses whole oranges, which might sound strange but results in an incredibly moist, flavorful cake. Wash the oranges then place them in a pot and fill with water. Allow the oranges to boil for 2 hours or until very soft. Remove from the water and allow to cool, then cut into chunks and remove the seeds. Transfer to a blender and blend until smooth.

MAKE THE CAKE. Preheat oven to 350°. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whip eggs and sugar for 3-5 minute or until pale and voluminous. Add the orange puree, ground almonds, vanilla, baking powder and salt and whip for another 1-2 minutes or until all the ingredients are combined.

Line a 9-inch springform cake pan with parchment paper. Pour in the batter and scatter the sliced almonds on top, then bake in preheated oven for 40-50 minutes or until the cake is golden brown and a skewer inserted comes out clean. Remove from the oven and allow to cool completely. Slice and serve. Raspberries and whipped cream optional. (Yeah, right!)

CONFERENCE
NEWS

SAVE THE DATE

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Join Us in El Paso!

We're Back — Live and In-Person!

Informative Speakers • Moving Stories
Fabulous Entertainment (including the film *Xuerta Island*)
Great Food • Long-Awaited Connection



Stay tuned to *La Granada*,
our online newsletter,
for more details and
registration information.
Hope to see you
in November!



EL PASO

TEXAS



Understanding EL PASO

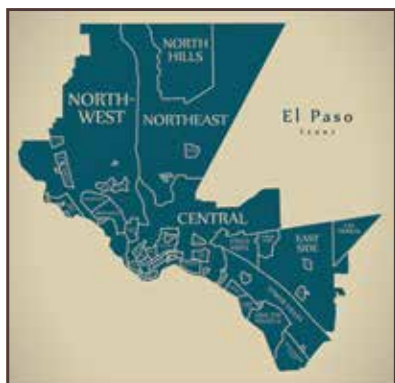


RABBI PETER TARLOW, PhD

Leaving the wide-open arid plains of West Texas for the narrow mountain pass that is El Paso is a reminder of the vastness of Texas. The geographical diversity serves as a metaphor for the diverse populations there.

Amarillo, further to the south, is a city meant for walking. The land is flat, the cars are few, and the streets are wide. Its population reflects its geography. In many ways, El Paso is Amarillo's opposite. El Paso is a land of the "in-betweens." Set in the desert and surrounded by mountains, the city is consistently thirsty and shaped by mountain making.

El Paso is a city of halves: half-Anglo and half-Latino, half-civilian and half-military (home to Fort Bliss). It is geographically in Texas, but culturally more in Mexico. The mountain in its center forces the city to be shaped in the form of a large V, with its eastern wing



dominated by the military, its western wing reminiscent of suburban America, and in the city's downtown, at the bottom of the V, where the poor are caught, as is too often the case.

Sociologically, El Paso lives in a constant state of being half-hidden. Its two sides are hidden from each other, its populations live parallel but unconnected lives, and situated on the border, it is neither Mexican nor American but a bit of both, and yet unique unto itself. Thus, this is the land of the *anusim*, home to the hidden Jews of 16th-century Spain, people who never really blended in, but found a home in a mountain pass representing two halves of a culture still very much alive today.

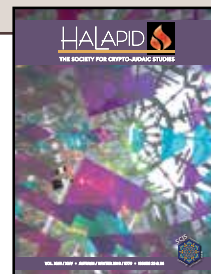
El Paso has still another half, one part caught in the horrors of history and the other, with its mountains reaching to the sky, reminding us that to live is to hope for a better future. 🔥



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A long-time SCJS member and regular contributor to *HaLapid*, Rabbi Dr. Peter E. Tarlow is a world-renowned expert on the impact of crime and terrorism on the tourism industry, plus event and tourism risk management and economic development. Fluent in many languages, he speaks throughout the world including Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Eastern Pacific, and Asia, lecturing on a wide range of current and future trends in the tourism industry, rural tourism economic development, crime and terrorism, and more. As an expert on Sephardic and crypto-Jewish history, Tarlow speaks and writes about the crypto-Jewish experience in the Americas, and the history of Jewish life on the Iberian Peninsula.

Reprinted
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Autumn/Winter
2018



CARRYING THE TORCH

RS ROAD SCHOLAR

Rabbi Jordi Gendra Molina and Maria Apodaca lecture for Road Scholar. The organization has a crypto-Jewish tour based in Albuquerque and another based in Santa Fe. Both focus on personal experiences: Maria talks about her family and presents her genealogy; she also serves as an ambassador for SCIS. Over the years she has developed a folder with resources that includes the SCIS brochure.



MARIA APODACAC
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Rabbi Jordi's presentation focuses on *converso* identity and decolonizing history.



These trips started several years ago under the guidance of Norma Libman. They normally take about a week/5 days. Some of the lecturers include Dr. Ron Duncan Hart, Schelly Talalay Dardashti and a new addition, Rabbi Min Kantrowitz.

The common expectation is "show me where they live" and "show me artifacts." Our goal is to educate participants, teaching that crypto-Jews are not something from the past or objects of study but that we are alive and well today. 🔥

HaLapid — A Teaching Tool

Corinne Brown recently taught a successful four-week (8-hour) course on the Crypto-Judaic Experience to 12 adult students during the winter 2021 semester at Denver's Academy of Lifelong Learning. In addition to a carefully-developed PowerPoint viewable curriculum with images, she used 12



different issues of *HaLapid* as research tools. After watching the trailer for the film *Children of the Inquisition* (4 minutes), she asked the class to identify key words used in the dialogue and narrative of that preview. Those words became the basis for a subject search in the SCIS journals, be it an article, book review, essay or news

bit. That way, the students had to read the material thoroughly before deciding which article to share and why. During the second hour of the second week, each shared a five-minute class presentation thereby covering a great variety of material in a highly personalized way.

Each week Corinne also introduced three or four relevant books related to that week's topics, introducing the class to the wealth of literature, both academic and commercial. During the fourth week, students watched *A Long Journey Home* and discussed the many issues raised in this film. In the final hour, the class discussed the lives of famous descendants of crypto-Jews, also researched from a long list of sages, celebrities and cultural icons. 🔥

A Walk in the Footsteps

Dr. Isaac Amon, Director of Academic Research & Program Development at the Jewish Heritage



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Alliance, was a guest speaker at the opening of the new exhibition, "At the Crossroads of Sefarad — In the Footsteps of the Crypto-Jews" at the Bernard Museum of Judaica, Temple Emanu-El Streiker Center, New York City.

Created by ANU – Museum of the Jewish People in partnership with the Jewish Heritage Alliance, the



exhibition explores the history of the descendants of crypto-Jews. See page 30 for more about this exciting journey across time from the Golden Age of Iberian Jewry under the Muslim Moors to their Christian persecution; their flight to Europe, North Africa, the Balkans and the New World, and the unique customs they developed to retain their heritage. 🔥



New Mexico Members Share Crypto-Judaic History

Kudos to two distinguished speakers and SCIS members, Isabelle Sandoval and Norma Libman who brought their shared experience and wisdom to audiences in April, courtesy of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society (NMIHS).

Co-recipients of the 2021 Hurst Award, Isabelle and Norma presented "Sharing the Story: the Descendants of the Crypto-Jews," addressing issues surrounding the crypto-Jewish community today. Libman spoke about her 25 years of learning and teaching about



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the crypto-Jewish/*converso* experience, how the response to the story evolved, and how her presentations are received in various areas of our country.

Sandoval, grounded in her New Mexico ancestry and experience, voiced her perception of key groups and persons; the impact of the internet and social media, listening to the voices of descendants of crypto-Jews, and confronting pandemic and Portuguese/Spanish citizenship challenges. Visit

www.NMIHS.org or Facebook to view the recording. 🔥

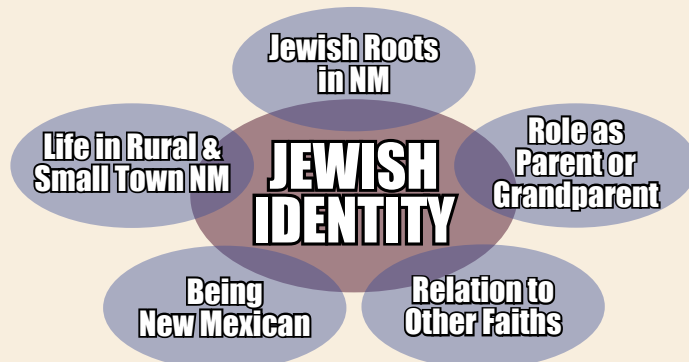


New Mexico Jewish Historical Society 2022 Conference • October 28-30 • Santa Fe Marriott

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Presentations around the globe

Dr. Isaac Amon, the Director of Academic Research and Program Development at Jewish Heritage Alliance, recently presented at the National Library of Israel, Okanagan Jewish Community (Kelowna, BC, Canada), Temple Emanu-El Streiker Center (New York City), and Washington University School of Law (St. Louis, Missouri). He will also speak at the International Symposium of Inquisition Studies at the University of Porto, Portugal.

Isaac's articles on comparative legal history and criminal procedure have recently been published by the Adam Mickiewicz University School of Law (Poznan, Poland); University of Trento School of Law (Trento, Italy); the *Journal of the Missouri Bar*; and the *North Carolina Central Law Review*. This summer, he will be an invited speaker at the 2022 conferences of the Association for the Study of Law, Culture and the Humanities, and the European Society for Comparative Legal History. 📖

Newest members?

Corinne and Avi Brown welcomed their first grandchild, a girl, Margaux Omen Brown, on April 20, 2022!



Cynthia Seton-Rogers also welcomed her first grandchild, a boy, Jaxon Calhoun on April 22, 2022.



Condolences

The board of SCIS send their deepest sympathies to former board member Ellen Premack of Santa Fe, New Mexico, on the recent loss of her beloved partner, Charles Greenfield Hauber who passed away February 17, 2022. Together for 22 years, Charlie and Ellen exemplified the creative life. Charlie's passing leaves behind family and friends who will miss him immensely.



Charlie Hauber and Ellen Premack, c. 2001

A generous contribution

Many thanks to Andrée Aelion Brooks, journalist, author and philanthropist who generously donated to SCIS in early 2022.



ANDRÉE AELION
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Connecticut

We are honored and grateful for your ongoing support.

Sefarad honored during Women's History Month

Doña Gracia Nasi, the 16th-century *conversa* leader who ran an escape network that saved hundreds of other *conversos* from the ravages of the Inquisition, was honored in a program about her on March 31, 2022 as part of the programming for Women's History Month, hosted and organized by the Museum of Jewish Heritage in Lower Manhattan.

A stimulating conversation held between noted journalist and author Andrée Aelion Brooks and Joshua Nathan-Kazis, a descendent of Luis Moses Gomez — the Portuguese Jew who immigrated to America and built the Gomez Mill House in Marlboro, New York in the 1700s, enthralled the audience. Almost 400 participants registered and attended the session. Additional audience members signed up and heard the recording.

About Doña Gracia Nasi

The richest non-royal woman in Renaissance Europe continues to fascinate modern businesswomen for her tenacity and leadership, despite family difficulties and many other setbacks. The hundreds of *conversos* returning to the Jewish world today may have indeed had ancestors saved by the courageous actions of this woman. More information can be found in *The Woman who Defied Kings*, by Andrée Aelion Brooks, a comprehensive biography of Nasi taken from original 16th-century documents. 📖

Two opportunities to share a passion

Colorado Society of Hispanic Genealogy

On March 19, I presented *Love & Legacy: Amor Eterno* at the Colorado Society of Hispanic Genealogy. I am grateful to Joe Gallegos and Denise Lovato Duran for reaching out to reschedule the presentation. I was originally booked to present in 2020, but COVID postponed it until this year.

I began with a bit of genealogy on both sides of my family and the photos I have of my great-great grandparents on both sides. I moved forward focusing on how my family is descended from Bartolomé Romero and Maria de Adeva of Corral de Almaguer of Toledo, Spain, who have been linked to Sephardic Judaism. I was inspired to write the book based on this connection and in my further research, found more of the already-extensive studies about the Sephardic Jewish heritage in New Mexico and Southern Colorado. I learned about Stanley Hordes book, *To the End of the Earth*, the BRCA-1 gene, and many of the secret traditions that families kept passing down through the generations.

The audience asked great questions about the traditions I shared and other comments about how my ancestors were in their family lines as well. I found several new cousins from this event! I read some excerpts from the book and then provided a sneak peek into *Voyage to Destiny* and *Journey to the Stars*, the second and third



Colorado Society of Hispanic Genealogy



Kimberly (front, second from right) with Las Comadres book club at the Denver Woman's Press Club

books in my trilogy. The group seemed enthralled with the stories and thought my characters compelling. The best part was engaging with the people afterwards. The group was very welcoming and had great things to say about the presentation. Some talked about how they had relatives from San Luis where I grew up. Those that had already read the book made comments about how they loved reading the dialect of Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado and how it reminded them of their childhood. This sparked a discussion

about whether or not Ladino was related to this dialect at all.

I was pleased that several people were intrigued enough by the presentation to purchase a copy of the book as well. I had to let this group in particular know, with much appreciation, that it is because of their tireless work as historians and genealogists, that my books are even possible.

Denver Woman's Press Club

On March 26, I attended the Las Comadres book club meeting held at the historic and prestigious Denver Woman's Press Club. The members of Las Comadres read *Love & Legacy: Amor Eterno* in February and invited me to their meeting to answer questions and discuss the ideas presented in the book. I was honored and humbled to sit at the table with so many powerhouse women who are authors, community activists, and established leaders in the Denver Metro community. For example,

Flor Lovato went to college for the first time at age 27 in the 1960s as a married woman with four children and created the first Chicana studies curriculum at her university. Community activist, Juana Bordas is founder of the Circle of Latina Leadership, among other things. Also present was Judy Kawamoto, author of *Forced Out: A Nikkei Woman's Search for a Home in America*. I was also pleasantly surprised to see Bea Montoya, author of the *DB&G Bed & Breakfast*, who worked with me at Clínica

Tepeyac as a *promotora de salud* or women's health promoter, when I first moved to Denver in the early 2000s.

Marcia Goldstein, past president of the Denver Woman's Press Club, gave a wonderful history of DWPC and the building where it is housed. It was a treat to share a bit of my background and *Love & Legacy: Amor Eterno* in this space. The book was very well-received by the group. Those with a similar background from Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado appreciated that the book highlighted the heritage and culture of the area. One lady said she loved it and had to share it with her granddaughter immediately after reading it. She also mentioned that in the village of Northern New Mexico where her family is originally from, there were many families of Sephardic Jewish heritage. Similarly to the Colorado Society of Hispanic Genealogy, the language or variants of Spanish dialect written in the book was also a curiosity. I am happy to say that my mother and children attended the event and I was excited that they were able to hear the inspirational stories, wealth of knowledge, and breadth of experience from all the women around the room.

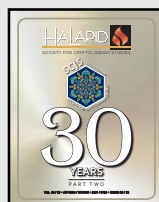
Both events were incredible experiences, and I came away with so much energy, inspiration, and enthusiasm afterwards. The connections, discussions, conversations, and positive remarks about my book are a heartfelt confirmation that the work I am doing is important and that I am on the right path. 🔥

You
recognize
the truth
by its sound
in your
heart.

(Jewish Proverb)

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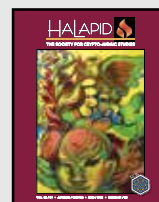
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Spring/Summer 2020



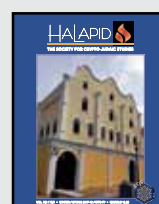
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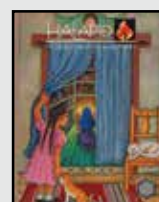
Spring/Summer 2019



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

Great News!

All back issues now available ONLINE. Current issue posted after next publication. Just one more benefit of membership - so join or renew now!
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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 continues 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 worldwide, with enriching 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 and 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 contributions supports our mailing and publication expenses.

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

Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies

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TEMPLE AARON

Trinidad, Colorado

A testament to 19th-century Jewish lives seeking freedom from oppression and a new beginning in a world of opportunity, Temple Aaron is a lasting symbol of a new community established in the American Southwest.

Standing firm for well-over a century, this synagogue was recently nominated as a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service, an honor befitting its history and its existence.

Temple Aaron is located in scenic Trinidad, Colorado, once an important stop on the famed Santa Fe Trail, east of the San Luis Valley, and is an early Spanish Colonial settlement of hidden Jews. Now undergoing an active renaissance with growing membership, events and services, and major restoration work, it is a local treasure worthy of preservation.

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